The Family Motif in Thomas Wolfe's Drama and Fiction.

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THE FAMILY MOTIF IN THOMAS WOLFE'S
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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
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in partial fulfillment of the
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in

The Department of English

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ABSTRACT

The career of Thomas Wolfe's epic persona is often interpreted as a progressive rejection of his provincial origins, culminating in the last novel, *You Can't Go Home Again*. Wolfe, in fact, reaffirmed ties with his Asheville family after publication of his first novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*. Furthermore, from his early plays to his posthumous novels, family settings and conflicts provide a shaping milieu for the Wolfeian protagonist. This family motif not only reflects the author's changing relationship with his own family; it also serves as a literary device by which Wolfe recorded his growth as an artist.

The primary psychological influences on Wolfe from his early family life were his prolonged dependency on his mother and the family rupture caused by Mrs. Wolfe's management of a boarding house. Those experiences help to explain the conflict in Wolfe's life between his need for a strong parental figure and, at the same time, his desire to escape the constrictions of such a relationship. Wolfe reflected these ambiguous feelings for his family in letters to relatives during the 1920's. Although he felt estranged from his kinsmen, in his memory he continually recalled scenes from his childhood.
Wolfe carried those family obsessions into his literary career. In his plays written at Harvard University, he created dramatic heroes who are pulled between isolation from and union with their families. From the romantic consciousness of those dramatic personae emerged Eugene Gant, whose career in Look Homeward, Angel paralleled the first twenty years of Wolfe's life. Eugene resembles his dramatic predecessors in his desire to escape the suffocation of family ties; yet his constant reconstruction of the past and his strong feeling for blood kin assure the reader that his escape will be geographical, not mental.

A recurring image throughout Wolfe's fiction is that of the "unfound door," a symbol rich in implications. In Look Homeward, Angel, Eugene Gant's door signifies an escape from his tangled heredity into a subjective world of imagination. When the Wolfean hero moves beyond home boundaries, however, the door image assumes universal rather than personal significance.

From 1929 to 1935, Wolfe continued the quest of his romantic-epic hero for personal and national identity. During the same period Wolfe solidified relations with his Asheville family, a change reflected in his treatment of Eugene Gant's family in Of Time and the River. In addition, the narrator of short stories in From Death to Morning and Eugene Gant in Of Time and the River extend their sense of kinship to include "the family of earth." The search for a
door to communal identity is then seen as a universal quest, especially among Americans. Nevertheless, during this middle phase of Wolfe's career, his persona frequently escapes his rootless environment by retreating into a private past, often with overtones of ethnocentrism.

From 1935 to 1938, the last three years of his life, Thomas Wolfe replaced his romantic hero Eugene Gant with George Webber, a more self-effacing spokesman who sympathetically and objectively observes human relationships. Like Eugene Gant, Webber is also provided an extensive genealogy. But in The Hills Beyond and The Web and the Rock, he is identified with the progressive members of his maternal ancestors, the Joyners, and with his progressive father, John Webber. Thus, at the end of his career, Wolfe opened a door to the future instead of the past for his hero. The title of his last novel, You Can't Go Home Again, does not imply a rejection of the past or a rejection of kinship. Instead, it implies a rejection of artistic escape from social responsibility.
CHAPTER I

THOMAS WOLFE'S FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

In The Eclipse of Community Maurice R. Stein writes about the artist's alienation in a disorganized society:

But the modern artist, mystic, or philosopher rarely breaks through to community experience, nor does he help to authenticate communal symbols. Modern men of thought are segregated from the everyday world and the people who live in it by barriers of sensibility and language. Our artists are therefore forced to record their private responses to the strains of civilization without any assurance that the meaning of their expression will carry much beyond a small group of similarly inclined creators and critics.¹

That Thomas Wolfe succeeded in penetrating those "barriers of sensibility and language" is attested to by his continuing popularity with the common reader, as well as by a steady accumulation of biographical and critical scholarship. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., in Thomas Wolfe: The Weather of His Youth, (1955), reports that, at least as late as the mid-1950's, Wolfe's novels circulated in a Baltimore public library in three times the quantity of William Faulkner's.²


Rubin attributes Wolfe's success, especially in *Look Homeward, Angel*, to the author's powerful recall which allowed him to recreate the tone and atmosphere of his boyhood experience in Asheville, North Carolina. Sam I. Belman, however, in a 1968 issue of *The Southern Review*, offers a different explanation for Wolfe's lasting "gut" appeal to the average reader. For Belman, the element which most allows for empathy by the modern reader is the pervasive sense of loneliness expressed by the Wolfeian protagonist. These two apparently dissimilar explanations for Wolfe's importance as a writer, his ability to recapture the past and his communication of a cosmic loneliness, are nevertheless related to a persistent problem faced by Wolfe's autobiographical hero: that is, the distance represented, both in space and mind, between the hero and his immediate family.

Thomas Wolfe's long journey outward from the provincial confines of Asheville to the literary and cultural capitals of America and Europe has been generally viewed as an archetypal example, sociologically, of the migration from rural to urban areas in the 1920's, and, from a literary viewpoint, of the shift from provincial to cosmopolitan standards during the same decade. Wolfe scholars are also

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3 Sam I. Belman, "Hemingway, Faulkner, and Wolfe and the Common Reader," *Southern Review*, 4, No. 3 (Summer, 1968), 334-349.

4 See, for example, Richard Walser, "In Conclusion,"
in general agreement that, during the decade of the 1930's, the author's aesthetic sensibility changed from romantic to realistic as he and a growing number of American writers felt an awakened social responsibility. This artistic and philosophical growth of Wolfe has been thoroughly documented by examinations of changes in his themes, imagery, and style over his two-decade career. In addition, the conflicts and tensions within the author's own family have been cited as a


source of his fiction, especially in *Look Homeward, Angel*. More specifically, the opposite temperaments of the fictional hero's parents have been identified as the ultimate cause for their son's dualistic division of life into North-South, male-female, urban-rural, and success-failure.\(^7\)

What has not been thoroughly treated, however, and therefore justifies this study is the recurrence throughout Wolfe's drama and fiction of a family motif which serves as a reliable barometer of the narrator's changing sensibilities and expanding sympathies.

As one might expect from a writer who, in his private notebooks, cited Thomas DeQuincey as the best prose stylist to emulate\(^8\) and who, in his first two novels, named Samuel Taylor Coleridge as the supreme poet,\(^9\) a major purpose throughout most of Wolfe's literary career was romantic self-definition. A hint of this artistic goal is found as early as 1917 in a letter to his mother from the University of North Carolina: "I am changing so rapidly that I find


myself an evergrowing source of interest. Sounds egotistical, doesn't it?"10 A fuller statement of this romantic impulse, now combined with an epic ambition, is found in another letter to his mother, possibly unmailed, from Harvard in 1923. After a passionate avowal to expose both the beauty and ugliness of America, Wolfe continues: ". . . I know there is nothing so commonplace, so dull, that is not touched with nobility and dignity. And I intend to wreak out my soul on paper and express it all. This is what my life means to me: I am at the mercy of this thing and I will do it or die. I never forget; I have never forgotten."11 Throughout most of his literary career, Wolfe was sustained by this romantic-epic impulse and this Whitmanesque faith that the spirit of America could be captured through his generic hero's quest for meaning and purpose in his own life.

Combined with this romantic faith in the transcendent effects of self-definition, achieved by wreaking out one's soul on paper, is another, more naturalistic belief held by Wolfe that the individual is a product of his heredity, the sum of all his past moments. This belief he expressed within the first few paragraphs of Look Homeward, Angel:


11 Ibid., p. 43.
Each of us is all the sums he has not counted: subtract us into nakedness and night again, and you shall see begin in Crete four thousand years ago the love that ended yesterday in Texas. The seed of our destruction will blossom in the desert, the alexin of our cure grows by a mountain rock, and our lives are haunted by a Georgia slattern, because a London cutpurse went unhung.\footnote{12
Wolfe, Look Homeward, Angel, p. 3.}

Wolfe's excavations, therefore, into the family histories of his protagonists were motivated by two theories. On one hand, he felt the Wordsworthian intuition that the individual is part of a timeless, ideal world, and that his relationship to this world can be glimpsed through the process of memory, by backward glances into his past.\footnote{13
For a detailed comparison of Wolfe and Wordsworth, see Chapter 3, "Intimations of Immortality," in Rubin, Thomas Wolfe: The Weather of His Youth, pp. 54-75.} On the other hand, these genealogical introductions to his narratives provide historical and dramatic weight as they establish a mold for his main characters. As these characters mature, they will continually reassess their growth against the background of their family histories. C. Hugh Holman summarizes clearly Wolfe's literary purpose and, by implication, also explains the reason for the extensive amount of family material in Wolfe's works: "It is in the spirit of this generic man that Wolfe defines the lonely search of his characters, the search for communion, the search for meaning, the search for the deepest nature of the self; the old Wordsworthian search backward into the
individual's origins in order to find the nature and meaning of the self."14

Thomas Wolfe's preoccupation with the origins of his characters and his desire to lend historical perspective to his narrative were the impetus which provided his two fictional heroes, Eugene Gant and George Webber, with elaborate familial backgrounds. Richard S. Kennedy reports that, from the original manuscript of Look Homeward, Angel, the first fifty pages concerning the ancestry and early life of W. O. Gant were reduced to three and that numerous pages scattered throughout the novel pertaining to Eugene Gant's maternal forebears, the Pentlands, were deleted on the advice of Maxwell Perkins.15 That Wolfe never abandoned his desire to provide a full genealogy for his hero is proved by the truncated novel, The Hills Beyond. This last posthumous publication, a lengthy chronicle of George Webber's maternal ancestors, the Joyners, was originally intended as the introductory chapters in the manuscript of Wolfe's last book, from which came The Web and the Rock and You Can't Go Home Again.16

The underlying assumption of this investigation is that there are two distinct and recognizable cycles in


Wolfe's literary career: the Eugene Gant-romantic-subjective cycle and the George Webber-realistic-objective phase. Confirmation of this premise can be found in two of Thomas Wolfe's statements which define the purposes of his early and later fiction. The first statement is found in a letter to Mrs. Margaret Roberts dated February 2, 1930, soon after publication of *Look Homeward, Angel*. Wolfe's main purpose in this letter was to defend himself against Mrs. Roberts' complaint regarding the unsympathetic treatment of her husband as a pedantic schoolmaster in the first novel; nevertheless, Wolfe's concept of himself as a writer, though somewhat exaggerated, emerges clearly:

The other thing I want to say is longer and more difficult, and I must write you about it later at length, but here it is indicated in outline: that all creation is to me fabulous, that the world of my creation is a fabulous world, that experience comes into me from all points, is digested and absorbed into me until it becomes a part of me, and that the world I create is always inside me, and never outside me, and that what reality I can give to what I create comes only from within. Its relation to actual experience I have never denied, but every thinking person knows that such a relation is inevitable, and could not be avoided unless men lived in a vacuum . . . . (Wolfe's italics). 17

The second statement is found in a long essay, "Statement of Purpose," that Wolfe wrote in February, 1938, and included with the manuscript from which Edward Aswell published the last three posthumous works. The portion quoted here defines the role of Wolfe's central protagonist,

and, although the description is lengthy, it is important as an almost complete refutation of the aesthetic viewpoint described for Mrs. Roberts:

The protagonist — the central character, the Wilhelm Meister kind of figure — really the most autobiographical character the author has ever written about because he wants to put everything he has or knows into him — is important now because the author hopes he will be, or illustrate, in his own experience every one of us — not merely the sensitive young fellow in conflict with his town, his family, the little world around him — not merely the sensitive young fellow in love, and so concerned with his little universe of love that he thinks it is the whole universe — but all of these things and much more insofar as they illustrate essential elements of any man's progress and discovery of life and as they illustrate the world itself, not in terms of personal and self-centered conflict with the world, but in terms of ever-increasing discovery of life and the world, with a consequent diminution of the more personal and self-centered vision of the world which a young man has.

In other words, the author has thought of the book as a series of concentric circles — that is, one drops the pebble in the pool — the Wilhelm Meister pebble, or whatever we shall ultimately call him — but instead of pebble and pool simply in personal terms of pebble and pool, one gets a widening, ever-enlarging picture of the whole thing — the pebble becomes important, if important at all, only in terms of this general and constant pattern of which it is the temporary and accidental stimulus: in other words, any other pebble would produce the same effect — the important thing is to tell about the thing itself, the thing that happens — the pebble, if you like, is only a means to this end.18

Whether or not the pebble metaphor could ever be aptly applied to Thomas Wolfe is problematic, but the significance of this final artistic credo is that within an eight-year period the writer's sympathetic identification

with the world around him had expanded from pebble-size to at least boulder-size. The causes of this broadened sympathy are several: the author's personal growth and maturity, his involvement with the Great Depression, and his recognition in Nazi Germany of the dangers inherent in romantic nationalism. The fictional results of this transformation are clearly discernible in the changing relationship between the autobiographical persona and his family. Whereas in Wolfe's early works the family represents an obstacle to the hero's artistic fulfillment, in later works the protagonist not only accepts this web of kinship but extends its metaphorical significance to the entire family of man.

In Wolfe's fiction, the tortured quest of the hero for a value system with which he can identify has its logical origin in the conflicts Wolfe himself experienced as a boy. C. Hugh Holman offers these explanations for the author's simultaneous attraction to and revulsion from the values of his native South:

That his vision of his native region was both obsessive and ambiguous was not surprising. Wolfe was born to a Northern father and a Southern mother, and the division of life into male and female, North and South, wanderer and homebound, was a simple extension of what he saw daily as a boy. He grew up in a Southern mountain town, but at a time when it was changing into a resort city, flourishing in the shadow of the baronial estate of the Vanderbilts, the pseudo-French chateau, "Biltmore," and literally mad for money. He went to college at Chapel Hill, a Southern state university, but at the time when that school was beginning the pattern of New South progressivism, completely opposite to the agrarianism of Vanderbilt University. Furthermore, at the feet of a locally famed teacher of philosophy, Horace
Williams, he imbibed a form of Hegelian dialectic that made him see all life in terms of opposites and gave his work the fundamental structure of thesis and antithesis in sentence, paragraph, and scene as well as in its more obvious oppositions, such as South and North, female and male, Jew and gentile, mother and father, the web and the rock.\(^\text{19}\)

As Holman goes on to say, "He seemed to need to define a thing's opposite before he could comprehend the thing, and to have a naive faith that somehow the meaning was manifest if the opposites were stated."\(^\text{20}\)

Because the "thing" that Wolfe primarily wanted to define was his autobiographical-epic hero and because his hero's family always provided a basis for that definition, Wolfe's relationships with his own family are instructive to this study.

Thomas Clayton Wolfe was born October 3, 1900, in Asheville, North Carolina, the last of William Oliver and Julia Westall Wolfe's eight children. The complex and contradictory nature of the author himself can be explained largely by the conflicting temperaments of his parents, whose marriage Andrew Turnbull calls "an epic misalliance."\(^\text{21}\)

\(^\text{19}\) Holman, "The Dark, Ruined Helen of His Blood," p. 179.

\(^\text{20}\) Ibid., p. 189.

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in 1851, the Dutch-German stone-cutter had meandered through three cities and two marriages before establishing himself in Asheville. Although he was a loving father and good provider, his promiscuous relations with women and his frequent drinking bouts had become a source of family embarrassment by the time of his youngest son's birth. Nevertheless, Thomas Wolfe's earliest recollections of his father were those of a kind and generous figure who obviously felt affection for the last of his offspring. He would wake his family with roaring fires in the hearth, ply Thomas with food, buy him books, and defend him from slights by neighbors.  

Although Thomas Wolfe fell under the spirit of his father and shared many of his character traits, one must turn to Julia Wolfe for some of the sharpest clues to her son's personality and to his attitude towards his family. As Vardis Fisher, a colleague of Thomas Wolfe's at New York University, said, "Anyone who would understand Wolfe must understand his relationship with his mother."  

Julia Westall Wolfe, born to a large mountain clan, taught school and sold books before her marriage. Because Thomas was her last child, she developed an overprotective attitude toward her son, breast-feeding him until he was

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three and a half years old and keeping him in curls until he was eight. Such circumstances helped develop Wolfe's sense of dependence on his mother. Later his attitude toward her changed to resentment or confusion.

In 1906 Mrs. Wolfe bought a large house on Spruce Street, two blocks from the Woodfin Street home, and named it The Old Kentucky Home. In 1908 she opened the doors of this rooming house to an odd assortment of boarders and to the rest of her family, except for the daughter, Mabel, and Mr. Wolfe, who remained on Woodfin Street. Thus, at the age of eight, Wolfe suffered a physical and spiritual rupture in the family structure and spent the rest of his boyhood in a house full of strangers, dominated by a parsimonious mother.

Thomas Wolfe's relationships with his siblings also provide important clues to his personal growth. As the youngest child of his family, he viewed his older brothers and sisters not only as behavior models but also, at times, as parental substitutes. In later life, his closest associates would also be regarded as mother and father figures, and this tendency became one of the main obstacles to his maturity.

His oldest sibling by thirteen years, Effie Wolfe, had little direct impact on her youngest brother. She is described by Andrew Turnbull as "a sweet, pliable, ladylike person"24 who married in 1909 a somewhat unsuccessful

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24 Turnbull, p. 8.
husband. The next oldest sibling, Frank, influenced Tom more directly but left a decidedly negative impression. Of all the Wolfe children he is remembered as the most dissolute. In a letter to his mother in 1924, Thomas described Frank as "'diseased -- as diseased as any child who comes into the world with a tubercular spine. . . .'"25

Wolfe's feeling for his sister Mabel, ten years his senior, was more complex. According to William U. Snyder, Mabel's role towards Tom alternated between that of a mother substitute and a jealous peer.26 After Julia's move to The Old Kentucky Home, Mabel remained with her father on Woodfin Street, where she competed with Julia for the affections of both W. O. and Tom. But despite her motherly treatment of her young brother, she frequently abused him, physically and verbally, taunting him as a queer "Westall" who shared few of the better Wolfe family traits. This ridicule from Mabel undoubtedly left a lasting scar on Wolfe, who, as late as July 1927, wrote defensively to his sister:

If I have been different from the rest of you, and you thought me "queer" and a "freak," please remember that my fundamental nature is something I could neither help nor change, and that I have never lifted a finger to injure or molest any of you. I am older now, and perhaps not so unpleasant as you thought me when I was a child.27

Tom's relationship with Fred Wolfe, six years his senior, was also ambiguous. Although Fred adopted a

25Ibid.  
26Snyder, pp. 128-29.  
protective attitude towards his brother, they also quarreled frequently. Basically, the two brothers possessed opposite personalities; Fred was the extroverted sales agent for the *Saturday Evening Post*, and Tom was his introverted employee, more interested in reading than in selling literature. Their affection for each other deepened as the brothers reached maturity, but, as Tom confessed in a letter to Mabel in 1923, he never fully appreciated Fred or the rest of his family until they were separated:

Families are strange and wonderful things and one never sees the mystery and the beauty in them until one is absent from them. When one is present, the larger values are obscured sometimes by the little friction of daily events. I sometimes wonder for instance, if two people constituted as differently as are Fred and I could ever live together in perfect harmony? Fred's generosity and his many acts of kindness to his younger brother are often remembered with deep emotion, but if ever we've lived together so much as a week without friction, I can't remember it.28

Of all his siblings, Benjamin Harrison Wolfe, eight years older than Tom, left the most indelible impression on the novelist. Temperamentally, Ben shared his youngest brother's tendency towards introversion. Snyder theorizes that this tendency may have resulted from the parents' unfavorable comparison of Ben with his fraternal twin, Grover. Another theory is that Ben experienced guilt from having directed hostility towards Grover.29 But whatever the reason, Tom and Ben were kindred spirits. More so than

28 Ibid., pp. 41-42. 29 Snyder, p. 38.
Fred, Ben acted as a father surrogate for Tom during their brief years together. Wolfe's biographies are replete with incidents of Ben's providing money and clothes, as well as moral support, to his brother Tom. The result of this short-lived but intense affection between these two outsiders in the family was that the memory of Ben became permanently enshrined in Wolfe's imagination after Ben's death at the age of twenty-six.

The key psychological event in Wolfe's childhood was the division of his family into two households. One can easily imagine the acute sense of homelessness experienced by the young Wolfe, who, at the age of six, was separated more or less permanently from the warmth of his father's home to be shunted about the small rooms of The Old Kentucky Home and to be dominated by a mother who frustrated his masculine development. To explain the author's entire complex personality by a single event, even of this magnitude, is an oversimplification. But the break-up of the family unit can be used in this chapter as a starting point from which we follow Wolfe's life under the influence of two strong but conflicting drives: a desire to escape the confinement of his family environment but, at the same time, a desire to be protected by a strong parental figure.

During Wolfe's adolescence in Asheville, Mrs. Margaret Roberts, his private teacher at the North State Fitting School, exerted the strongest influence on his
development. This "fairy godmother of Tom's youth,"\textsuperscript{30} as Turnbull calls her, by encouraging his interest in literature afforded him the first genuine escape from his quarrelsome family. Significant also was the effect of this private school in further alienating him from his jealous siblings, who felt that he was receiving favored treatment, and in fostering Wolfe's sense of his own uniqueness.

Wolfe's relationship with Mrs. Roberts continued very close until publication of \textit{Look Homeward, Angel}, in which his portrayal of her husband as a dull pedant was never fully forgiven. But the teacher and pupil did correspond until the year of his death. Two excerpts from his letters to Mrs. Roberts, written during his twenties, reveal the extent to which he considered her the mother of his soul:

Mrs. Roberts, there's no estimating the influence you've had on me and the whole course of my life; what's done is done, each day causes me to see more plainly how tremendous an influence that was, and I know I shall be even more emphatic on this score the last day of my life than I am now.\textsuperscript{31}

In a letter of 1927 describing her role in his first novel, Wolfe became more than hyperbolic: "... I was strangling, without speech, without articulation, in my own secretions -- mooring like a blind sea-thing with no eyes and a thousand feelers toward light, toward life, toward beauty and order, out of that hell of chaos, greed, and cheap ugliness -- and

\textsuperscript{30}Turnbull, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{31}Wolfe, \textit{The Letters of Thomas Wolfe}, pp. 16-17.
then I found you, when else I should have died, you mother of my spirit who fed me with light."

The non-fictional record of Wolfe's adolescence is fairly slight, but one can surmise that Mrs. Roberts' influence, working counter to the repressive atmosphere of The Old Kentucky Home, intensified his desire to escape. This desire surfaced clearly during the family argument over Tom's future alma mater. Encouraged by his teacher, Tom tried to persuade his parents to send him to the University of Virginia. But W. O. Wolfe refused, arguing that if Tom entered law and politics, as he hoped, his son would benefit from contact with state citizens. Wolfe's desire to study beyond the borders of his state persisted through his sophomore year at the University of North Carolina, at which time he was enlisting the aid of his English professor, James Holly Hanford, to gain acceptance at Princeton University:

I received your letter yesterday and I can't begin to tell you how much your writing it is appreciated. . . . Have two letters from the registrar at Princeton and when I receive a third in a few days, I will make the attack. If I am repelled it will not be due to defective generalship. But if Father should refuse, nevertheless, a beginning will have been made and, I have no doubt, I will be able to finish my last two years at Princeton -- a proceeding upon which I am now decided.]

Despite these early attempts to hasten his odyssey from North Carolina, Thomas Wolfe spent four of his happiest years at Chapel Hill. Besides the liberating effect of the

32 Ibid., p. 123.
33 Ibid., pp. 4-5.
academic fare offered by the university, Wolfe must have also exulted in his first taste of independence. Nevertheless, his parents still controlled his purse strings, and his letters to them reflect some constraint. The tension between Wolfe and his mother, who embarrassed him before his friends by advertising The Old Kentucky Home on a visit to Chapel Hill, is apparent in his letters to her. These undergraduate letters begin with "My Dear Mother" or "Dear Mother" in contrast to the almost unvaried "Dear Mama" of his post-collegiate days. The tone of these letters is fairly artificial, and despite the fact that Wolfe belonged to the fortunate half of his classmates who did not have to work their way through college, the subject matter usually turned to money. The following excerpts, the first from his sophomore year and the second from his senior year, reflect a barely concealed resentment by Wolfe over his financial accountability to his parents:

Sometimes I wish I were a plutocrat and had money to burn. There are so many things you would like to do and can't. However, I'm as economical as possible. When Xmas comes I'm going to try to borrow or steal a bank account in order to spare myself the embarrassment of writing home. The majority of the boys settle their accounts this way and, on the whole, it works the best because a boy, feeling more responsible, is more careful.3

Do you want me home? If so, let me know immediately. I shall need money -- a considerable sum. Your last check -- $25 -- did not cover my debts as my room and board were $30 alone and I also had books equipment etc. So there is debt of approx.

3Wolfe, The Letters of Thomas Wolfe to His Mother, p. 4.
$15 on last month together with $30 for this month. I have signed up for a room on campus with another boy after Xmas -- He deposited $10 for me and I'm to pay him /sic/ Of Course /sic/ this is counted in on my room rent next term /sic/ I'll need $70. Sorry bill is this large. If you think best I stay here deduct expense home & send rest. Pardon my lack of enthusiasm but I'm all in . . . .

Wolfe's literary output during his Chapel Hill days was significant but contained no certain clues to his future greatness. The recognition given his patriotic war poems, by newspapers both in and beyond North Carolina, helped to turn his ambition permanently toward a writing career. But the principal outlets for his talents were journalistic work on the school newspaper and yearbook and homespun plays written for Professor Frederick Koch's drama class.

The main effects that can be recognized from Wolfe's undergraduate days are that he became fully conscious of his own artistic temperament and realized that he had crossed the point of no return in his centrifugal movement from Asheville. In describing Wolfe's performance in The Return of Buck Gavin, a folk play he had written for Professor Koch's Carolina Playmakers, Andrew Turnbull says that the audience felt a seething power about to erupt: "In the angular, mat-haired, wild-eyed outlaw they were suddenly conscious of a primitive force, an enraged rebellion that far exceeded the requirements of the trifling play."

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After his graduation in 1920, Wolfe found less incentive than ever to remain in Asheville, even though he had been offered a teaching position at a nearby Bingham Military School. His favorite brother, Ben, had died two years before, and the cancer which would take his father's life in two more years was spreading. As he wrote his mother seven years later, "Life at home practically ceased to be possible for me when Ben died." Besides this sense of loss, however, Wolfe also assessed his future realistically and realized that Asheville could not feed his growing ambition. The following excerpt from a letter to his mother, written during his first year of graduate school, reveals his self-confidence:

... You may think me very foolish, very unwise, if I do not accept the Bingham offer and come home -- to teach. But let me paint you a picture of the probable future. "You can write and teach, too," you will say. Yes, yes, how fine, how hopeful that all is. In ten, fifteen years, I will be a sour, dyspeptic, small-town pedant, the powers of my youth forgotten or repressed, -- bitter, morose, blaming Everybody but myself for what might have been. The awful thing about most people is their caution -- the crawling, abject bird-in-a-hand theory.

Obviously, Wolfe's appetite for learning and discovery had been only whetted at Chapel Hill, where his two favorite professors, Horace Williams and Frederick Koch, both encouraged him to further his studies at Harvard. Koch specifically hoped that Wolfe could study playwriting under

37Wolfe, The Letters of Thomas Wolfe to His Mother, p. 119.
38Ibid., p. 7.
his own former mentor, George Pierce Baker. The other members of the Wolfe family were skeptical, however, of the impractical, far-removed career of writing. But Julia finally consented to finance her son for one year, thus extending his dependency on her.

The three years Wolfe spent at Harvard provide illuminating glimpses of the budding writer's changing, complex attitude towards his family. The dual vision which would later haunt the author's fictional protagonist, his desire for new experience tempered by a longing for home, became apparent in Wolfe's letters from Cambridge. In fact, his first letter of September 1920 is significant in that his romanticized sense of proud isolation is defined against the background of familial solidarity:

... Be assured that I have you all ever in mind but I have chosen -- or God has chosen -- a lonely road for my travel -- a road, at least, that is pretty far removed from the highway and even the best of you -- those who love me and, I believe there a few, may have sympathy but little understanding. For all that you have done, I am ever mindful [sic] How can you doubt that I ever forgot it -- but don't remind me of it too much at this time. ... All of which I thought myself an indistinguishable part grows dim and faint upon the shores of a receding world -- I am alone on a perilous sea -- and yet, God knows, I do not cease to love and think of you all one whit the less. ... 39

This letter is also prophetic because it contains a detailed account of a lung congestion which is thought to have been the tubercular lesion that erupted eighteen years later to cause Wolfe's death.

39Ibid., p. 9.
Despite the sincerity of his complaint, Wolfe was not completely "alone on a perilous sea" during his Harvard years. For one thing, he was a frequent visitor at the home of his aunt and uncle, the Henry Westalls, at nearby Medford. Wolfe was impressed by the eccentricity of his mother's brother, a Unitarian minister turned real-estate salesman, who would later be caricatured in *A Portrait of Bascom Hawke*. Another *point d'appui* for the transplanted Southerner was the group of North Carolina students at Harvard, three of whom were law students and roommates of Wolfe. Finally, Wolfe made a home for himself in "The 47 Workshop" and found a supporting father figure in the workshop director, George Pierce Baker.

Although initially enchanted by the glamor of the Harvard workshop, Wolfe's earthy heritage soon made itself felt. He was quick to perceive snobbishness and artificiality on the part of his colleagues, and in letters home he would lament the loss of the democratic spirit at Chapel Hill. His gradual disillusionment with his friend Kenneth Raisbeck, Professor Baker's assistant, coincided with his final rejection of the Harvard aesthetes. He expressed his feelings emphatically in a 1925 letter to Homer Watt, chairman of the English Department at New York University:

At the same time there is another impulse in me which makes me rather fiercely independent: 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,"^0

Wolfe's association with his parents underwent a significant change while he was a graduate student. His mother assumed a more dominant role as W. O. Wolfe approached death. As Andrew Turnbull says, she became "his mainstay, moral as well as financial . . . ."^1 It was she who agreed to finance her son's studies beyond his first year, against W. O.'s objections, and it was she who offered the scant encouragement he did receive from his family. More significant than his growing appreciation of Mrs. Wolfe, however, was the fact that Wolfe's thoughts during his Harvard years turned more frequently than ever to family memories. His letters to Julia Wolfe reflect this preoccupation, as seen in the excerpts that follow:

There is something sad and terrifying about big families. I think often of my childhood lately; of those warm hours in bed of winter mornings; of the first ringing of the Orange St. bell; of papa's big voice shouting from the foot of the stair "Get up, boy," then of the rush down stair like a cold rabbit with all my clothes and underwear in my arms. As I go through the cold dining room I can hear the cheerful roar of the big fire he always had kindled in the sitting room. And we dressed by the warmth of that fire . . . .

There is great sadness in knowing you can never recall the scene except the memory; even if all were here you could not bring it back.

Sometimes Ben and Papa seem so far away, one wonders if it were a dream. Again, they come back as vividly as if I had seen them yesterday. . . .^2

^0Wolfe, The Letters of Thomas Wolfe, p. 98.
^1Turnbull, p. 51.
^2Wolfe, The Letters of Thomas Wolfe to His Mother, pp. 35-36.
In 1923, the year after his father's death, Wolfe wrote urgently:

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. . . . 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 expressions of "merciful God" -- his habit of talking to himself at or against an imaginary opponent. . . . I won't have to create imaginary language out of my own brain -- I verily believe I can re-create a character that will knock the hearts out of people by its reality.43

Wolfe's dramatic efforts at Harvard also reveal an inverse ratio between the writer's physical and mental distance from home. Encouraged by Professor Baker, Wolfe continued to write plays in the folk vein begun under Frederick Koch at North Carolina. As he wrote his brother Frank in 1921, "There's a good play in Ashville -- . . . . There's a play in everything that lives if we only had the power to extract it. . . ."44 Not surprisingly then, his first play, The Mountains, concerned a hill-born but city-educated doctor who becomes irrevocably involved in a family feud. His later play, Welcome to Our City, employed familiar scenes and characters from Asheville while satirizing real-estate speculation and racial prejudice. Although this play was favorably received at Harvard, it was too unwieldy

43Ibid., pp. 39-40.

for acceptance by the New York Theatre Guild. Frustrated in this first attempt at commercial success, Wolfe, who had remained at Harvard a year after receiving his M.A. degree in 1922, accepted an instructorship in English at New York University in January 1924.

From 1924 to 1930, Wolfe taught at New York University, made three prolonged tours of Europe, and saw the publication of his first novel, *Look Homeward, Angel*. During these years, his relations with family members continued to be ambivalent -- with the main tension revolving around their disparate attitudes toward money and property. His letters to his mother and his sister Mabel Wheaton were frequent, but their content and tone continued to reveal the writer as a self-conscious romantic, considering himself generally aloof from the mundane concerns of family and town:

... As you know, I am a poor economist. It is not that I am given to foolish extravagance. It is merely that money never has, or never will, I fear, have any intrinsic value for me. Its ownership means nothing; its only value, so far as I'm concerned, is to make me forget the fact I ever wanted it; to allow me to buy a few of the beautiful, mind and body satisfying things I want, -- as pictures, books in hand-tooled bindings, -- and good food and wine for the belly.

How or why this is, I can not tell. I only know that one Tom Wolfe, a queer looking person, some six and a half feet high -- by which I mean he does not look like the average good Presbyterian, Rotarian, Kiwanian, Booster, or Realtor -- that is to say, he is not commonplace -- was born some 23 years ago in a community which bought and sold real-estate, and which was convinced that it was the finest, the purest, the cleanest, the greatest place upon the top of the earth, on which to live. Of course the town had no literature; it had no art; it had never heard of Ibsen; Keats and Shelly were vague names to
it; and Shakespeare was a fellow they dosed you on in high-school. . . .^5

A long letter to his sister Mabel in May 1926, concerning recent real-estate losses by Julia Wolfe, is revealing. In view of the impending depression, the letter contains a prophetic diatribe against false values associated with real-estate speculation, but its conclusion also reveals a candid estimate by the author of his mother, who would soon be immortalized in his first novel:

. . . Mama is old; she has had a hard bitter life, and her sense of values has become distorted. But she, too, I have always believed, has our welfare at heart. In short, I believe she would do almost anything for any one of us, if she realized the necessity; but, as you know, it has been her tragic fate to realize that necessity sometimes too late -- sometimes to the tune of clods of frozen earth upon a wooden board -- the last venture in real estate, I might add, any of us will ever make. There's nothing to be done about that. She's too old; but she too is fundamentally a decent person.^6

A letter to his mother in June 1927 reaffirms Wolfe's simultaneous isolation from but preoccupation with his Asheville family:

. . . Life dropped one of its big shells on us, and blew us apart. Life at home practically ceased to be possible for me when Ben died. And I have sweated too much blood since. Yet I doubt that I am in the mind and heart of any of you as much as you are in mine. I think of my past life sometimes -- my childhood most of all -- as a man thinks of a dream full of pain, ugliness, misunderstanding, and terror. But I know that none of us is to be blamed very much for anything. Strangers we are born alone into a

^5Wolfe, The Letters of Thomas Wolfe to His Mother, p. 59.

strange world -- we live in it, as Ben did, alone and strange, and we die without ever knowing anyone. . . . \(^{47}\)

A letter dated January 28, 1928, contains apologies from Wolfe for not visiting Asheville during the semester break at New York University. It also supplies further evidence of Wolfe's combined aloofness from and poignant longing for his family:

... And, in spite of an ugly and rancorous feeling towards me which may exist in the family -- a dislike which most of us feel for anything that is strange to us, remote from our experience, and living on a separate level of thought and feeling -- I want to see you all very much. For I am loyal to you all, and still care for you very much -- no matter how much pain and ugliness I may have to remember. . . . \(^{48}\)

As these letters indicate, Wolfe's basic personality and aesthetic viewpoint did not change appreciably before the publication of his first novel in 1929.

Although he had gained a degree of financial independence as a college instructor, he remained dependent on others, receiving both emotional and financial support from his mother and from his mistress, Aline Bernstein. His lack of emotional maturity was painfully evident during his tumultuous affair with Mrs. Bernstein, a married woman eighteen years his senior. She did lend some stability to his life while he was writing \textit{Look Homeward, Angel}, but Wolfe could not adequately return her devotion. In one stormy

\(^{47}\text{Wolfe, The Letters of Thomas Wolfe to His Mother, p. 119.}\)

\(^{48}\text{Ibid., p. 127.}\)
scene during a visit by Mrs. Wolfe to her son’s apartment in 1932, Wolfe sided with his mother in her demand that Aline leave the premises.

The evidence is also clear that Wolfe's concept of his artistic role had not reached maturity during the twenties. Through frustrating trials and failures, he had discovered that his talents could best be developed in the novel rather than the drama. But his aesthetic vision was still personal, subjective, romantic. As his solitary ramblings in Europe during those years indicate, his quest was for strange lands and experience that would transcend present reality. This search is metaphorically stated in a letter of April 1924 to his Harvard classmate, Frederick L. Day:

... For me the wine dark seas send coiling enticements; my bark puts out and as Columbus I shall find a green new world, where my spirits shall quicken, 
and like Odysseus, I shall come upon the enchanted isles — perhaps to eat the Lotus and sink Lethewards into a drowsy obliviousness of this present actual existence ... .49

On October 18, 1929, eight days before the stock market crash, Look Homeward, Angel was published. For a first novel, the book was met with warm praise by reviewers across the country, but Wolfe himself was virtually ostracized from his home town and state. His Chapel Hill classmate, Jonathan Daniels, wrote in the Raleigh News and

Observer that "'In Look Homeward, Angel, North Carolina and the South are spat upon.'"50

Even though his immediate family remained loyal to him, Wolfe felt his home ties severed and would wait eight years before returning to Asheville. In an important speech delivered at Purdue University on May 19, 1938, four months before his death, Wolfe looked back on the reception of his first novel. After commenting on his early "error" of believing in the all-sufficiency of art and beauty, he described his reaction to Asheville's outrage:

Moreover, it did do something to strengthen me in a further belief in what was perhaps the fundamental theme of the whole book -- the story of the sensitive young man in conflict with his environment, driven out at last, forced to flee and escape from his own town. For now that had happened to me, and if that had been all that had happened, it might have embittered me into further belief and confirmation of my earlier error. Fortunately, there were other compensations: if I had been driven out at home, I had been accepted elsewhere; if my own townspeople had read my book with outrage and indignation, the larger public had read it as I had intended it to be read, as a book, as a work of fiction, as a product of the creative imagination which, if it had any value at all, had value because it was just as true of Portland, or Des Moines, of people everywhere, as it was of my own town.51

Wolfe's statement, "... and if that had been all that had happened ..." is a weighty clause when one considers the events of Wolfe's life after 1929. Besides


acquiring a larger reading public, Wolfe also acquired a larger and deeper understanding of his world. He lived in New York and witnessed the human calamity of The Great Depression, which, in his own words, "left a scar upon my life, a conviction in my soul which I shall never lose." He traveled to Nazi Germany in 1935 and 1936 and witnessed the extreme example of man's inhumanity to man, an experience which forced him to re-evaluate his own provincial reactions to ethnic minorities. And, equally significant, he began to view his own family in a new light, not as the "strange, wild family" of his youth but as representatives of a common human destiny.

From 1929 to 1938, Wolfe wrote a second novel, Of Time and the River; a collection of short stories, From Death to Morning; and a large manuscript from which were published his posthumous works, --The Web and the Rock, You Can't Go Home Again, and The Hills Beyond. Even though he felt "driven out at home," Wolfe returned continually to his family history for subject matter and inspiration. Furthermore, his treatment of that particular family parallels a deepening insight by Wolfe into the family of man.

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CHAPTER II

THE ROMANTIC HERO AND HIS FAMILY:
THE EARLY PLAYS OF THOMAS WOLFE

As shown in the first chapter, Thomas Wolfe's migration from Asheville to Boston in 1920 was followed by an intense homesickness for and preoccupation with his family. Wolfe was not completely bereft of family and friends in this new setting; as will be recalled, he made frequent visits to his maternal aunt and uncle, the Westalls, and he roomed at Harvard with fellow North Carolinians. Nevertheless, a sense of isolation was a natural reaction for this product of a large Southern family and a small town. The letters that he wrote to his Asheville relatives reveal a pattern that Wolfe followed for most of his life. That is, the farther he was removed in space from his native roots, the more often he would rely on memories to reconstruct his past and thus bring order to his existence. He needed an image of permanence through which to filter the multifarious scenes of Boston, and later, those of New York and European capitals. More than any other sources available to him, his family provided such an image.

According to Andrew Turnbull, "Tom stopped believing in the God of his fathers at fourteen or thereabouts. His
attention shifting from God the Creator to man the creator, he dreamed of becoming a god himself.\(^1\) Although Wolfe did reject the orthodoxy of his Presbyterian heritage, his treatment of death and loneliness in later works, such as the short story "God's Lonely Man," do reveal a drift toward religious attitudes. Hans Helmcke, in fact, considers the primary significance of Wolfe's search for a father in *Of Time and the River* to be the Christian overtones implicit in that motif.\(^2\) But in the 1920's Thomas Wolfe, cultivating his literary art in Boston, New York, and Europe, was indeed far removed from the God of his fathers.

Another possible frame of reference for Wolfe was his Southern heritage. Several attempts have been made to identify Wolfe with his Southern contemporaries, the Nash­ville Agrarians, who, in their manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*, proclaimed the agrarian order of their homeland as a way of life to stand against the accelerating growth of industrialism.\(^3\) The conclusion of these studies is that while Wolfe


\(^3\)*I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition, By Twelver Southerners*, The Harper Torchbook Edition (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962); Wolfe's relationship to the Agrarians has been analyzed perceptively by the following scholars: C. Hugh Holman, "The Dark Ruined Helen of His Blood": Thomas Wolfe and the South," in *South: Modern Southern Literature in Its Cultural Setting*, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and Robert D. Jacobs (Garden City,
and the Agrarians attacked the same enemy, crass commercialism with its attendant dehumanizing and fragmenting effects, they could not agree on remedies. C. Hugh Holman theorizes that the independent streak Wolfe inherited from his mountaineer ancestors, combined with the democratic atmosphere of western North Carolina, set him apart from the more tradition-oriented writers of the Eastern tidelands, such as Ellen Glasgow, and those of the Gulf Coast region, such as William Faulkner. The Vanderbilt Agrarians could be included in Holman's list. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., on the other hand, explains Wolfe's lack of cultural orientation toward the South by making reference to his lower-middle-class family origins.

Whatever the cause, Wolfe's feelings toward the South were indeed mixed. In his works he could appreciate individual Southerners and evoke the beauty of Southern landscapes, but Southern society is more often than not identified with the sins of greed, bigotry, hypocrisy, snobbery, and sham. In *Look Homeward, Angel*, Eugene Gant


castigates the "barren spiritual wilderness" of the South, "the hostile and murderous intrenchment against all new life . . . their cheap mythology, their legend of the charm of their manner, the aristocratic culture of their lives, the quaint sweetness of their drawl." Later George Webber, in The Web and the Rock, identifies the Agrarians as "the refined young gentlemen of the New Confederacy" and "lily-handed intellectuals of a Southern university.".

One literary characteristic that Wolfe did share with his Southern contemporaries was a willingness, indeed a necessity felt, to explain the present in terms of the past. In Wolfe's case, this trait revealed itself in his undeviating use of family history as the setting and source of thematic conflict for his plays and novels. As seen in Chapter One, Wolfe's letters during the 1920's reflect a growing preoccupation with family memories which, despite their frequently bitter quality, served the writer as both psychological support and literary source. In a letter to his brother Fred in June, 1930, Wolfe states his feelings unequivocally: "My feeling is for the land, my blood kin, and a few people -- beyond that, I care very little."
Wolfe's dramatic apprenticeship at Harvard was largely a frustrating period, for during this time he learned that his style and literary purpose were too expansive for dramatic limits. Professor George Pierce Baker recognized this problem in Wolfe's first play for the Harvard "Workshop," The Mountains, and made this prophetic remark in a criticism of Wolfe's lengthy stage directions: "'Aren't you anticipating your text and writing as a novelist?'" Nevertheless, a review of Wolfe's dramatic efforts does provide important glimpses of the developing sensibility of his persona within a family milieu.

Among his unpublished papers from the Harvard years are several attempts, in both narrative and dramatic form, to portray a family similar to the Wolfes. The only title given these sketches was "The House of Bateson," although the family is variously named Broody, Groody, Breen, Benton, and Whitby. The dominant impression of one fragment, found in the back of an academic notebook, is that of a large, factious family whose quarrels are observed by a sensitive younger member. One of the sons is named Eugene, and thus the material prefigures Look Homeward, Angel:

The Broody's were a strange family. They never saw each other's good points till one of their number died. . . . They were a passionate, tempestuous, erratic, irascible family and yet it is doubtful if

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they were capable of any real profundity of thought or feeling. They were always quarreling and cursing one another with varying degrees of intensity, and what is worse, in large unhappy families of this sort, they were continually splitting up into parties among themselves. Factionalism reigned supreme. This was the rotten spot, this destroyed them. . . . 10

Later in the same notebook, the family name changes to Benton and this passage occurs:

Benton grew more sullen and more silent day by day. About him the family emotion seethed and surged. Their raw nerves cut him more deeply than he cared to admit — even to himself. 11

A later dramatic sketch, probably written after the death of W. O. Wolfe in June, 1922, portrays a dominant father figure named "William Breen, contractor and dealer in monument and stone." 12 A scene from this experiment describes the father's lighting the morning fire and waking his family, in Wolfe's fiction a recurring scene which symbolizes the ritual and warmth of the author's early family life:

Presently there is the sound of feet hitting the floor above, rapid movements and sudden footfalls down the stairs and through the hall. The two older boys, 16 and 14, rush in in their underwear with their clothes in their arms. They rush for the best places in front of the fire and dress. Presently there is the scudding of smaller feet, and a little boy of eight years, naked and with his clothes before him, scuttles in. Breen slaps him smartly on his little heeny as he scuttles past to the fire. 13

11 Ibid., p. 25.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., p. 27.
The significance of these fragments, besides revealing the bitter and sweet of Wolfe's family memories, is well stated by Andrew Turnbull: "Although in his plays he sought to write objectively about large, impersonal issues, memory and imagination kept perversely dragging him back to his own, most private past."^14

The three plays that Wolfe did see to completion, — The Mountains, Welcome to Our City, and Mannerhouse — contain material particularly relevant to this study. All three plays do engage "large, impersonal issues," as Turnbull says, and partly for that reason, they have never been highly praised as dramatic productions.^15 In retrospect one may conclude that Wolfe needed some fifteen more years of writing autobiographical prose fiction before his social and philosophical ideas would be clarified and effectively expressed. Yet these plays, involving as they do a romantic protagonist in conflict with his family and society, may be viewed as an incubation period for Wolfe's fictional hero Eugene Gant.

The Mountains, begun as a folk play by Wolfe at Chapel Hill, was presented in trial performance at Harvard in January, 1921, and revised for a three-act production in

^14 Turnbull, p. 64.

October of that year. The central character in both versions is Richard Weaver, an idealistic young doctor who returns to his mountain home after eight years "in the city." In the final scene, he must decide between ministering to the sick daughter of a rival family, the Gudgers, and taking up arms in a feud against that same clan. In both plays Richard chooses the latter course of action but with shifts in motivation. In the one-act play, a deterministic theme is emphasized by posing the rational-idealistic Richard against the irrational, naturalistic force of the mountains. Their active malevolence is symbolized by the background setting of "Old Bald Pate," a mountain crag which "resembles strikingly the profile of an old, hook-nosed, sardonically grinning man,"\(^\text{16}\) and by the perennial destruction of Uncle Tom Weaver's crops from mud and rock slides. Richard's decision to avenge the murder of a cousin, therefore, is inevitable. As he tells his sister Laura in the last scene: "It's not the family. It's those accursed mountains."\(^\text{17}\)

In the expanded three-act play, Wolfe tried to change the play's theme from naturalistic to tragic by emphasizing the ethical dilemma of Richard. He effected this change primarily by means of a new symbol -- the dynamic, recurring sound of a train whistle, suggesting escape from family ties


\(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 83.
as well as from the land. Thus the tragic dilemma is defined as bondage versus freedom, or, in Richard's case specifically, community versus conscience. Richard's loyalty is divided between blood ties to his quarreling family and his Hippocratic oath to practice medicine impartially. His final decision to side with his family is counterpointed symbolically by the freeing of a train which had been halted by a rock slide. After Richard leaves his father's cabin, rifle in hand, his Aunt Mag's remark, "The train got through," is followed by his sister Laura's final statement, "The world went by." 18

Although The Mountains is justly criticized for its episodic quality and lack of dramatic focus on Richard Weaver, the play does have interest for two reasons: it offers the first full portrait of Wolfe's romantic hero, and it illustrates Wolfe's early view of the family as a constraining force on the talented individual. Wolfe's lengthy description of Richard Weaver in the setting for the one-act production provides a clear foreshadowing of Eugene Gant in the author's first two novels, as well as an eerie prophecy of Wolfe's later career:

His face is thin, but its features are strong and finely drawn, his eyes are dark and brooding and set far back in his head, his movements are quick and nervous, and when he talks he uses his whole body. . . . Restraint, compromise, or the path generally called

"the middle way" are held in contempt and disdain by Richard. He would tell you that on the level of a principle there can be no compromise, . . . he can visualize only two forces in life; -- a Spirit that seeks truth and one that denies it. Life to him means a conflict between these two. This is dualism, if you like . . . . He could take fire at an idea and burn with such a steady flame that it might consume him. He can visualize evil or good as forces in as intense and tangible a form as a mystic of the middle ages; this requires imagination, and its fusing spirit runs like a flame through all the processes of his inner life. . . .

He will tell you that he can see God through a microscope and, without his telling you, you would know he can see beauty and unity in the vast things of Nature, -- or perhaps, something malignant and evil there. He has the capacity for work and yet, time and again, the things his classmates sweated to know came to him in one blinding flash of light. As he grows older and wiser he will use this same quality on men, and much of the beauty and tragedy and the mystery in the hearts of men will be revealed to his deeper insight, to thrill and exalt him. It has been his fate, and it will continue to be his lot to struggle with the Angel of Vision, but from that uneven contest may emerge, if nothing destructive happens, a spirit that can look serenely through the rags of the world about him and still see that which is real and eternal. . . .

Of further significance for this study is that The Mountains portrays family ties as a frustrating obstacle to individual fulfillment. The prologue and each act in the expanded play develop consistently the theme of escape from a mountain family's provincial values.

In the brief prologue, Richard's uncle, Tom Weaver, witnesses the murder of his grandfather by one of the Gudger clan over a land dispute, a killing which initiates the Weaver-Gudger feud. Before the murder, Tom questions his

grandfather about the destination of the trains they hear in the distance and announces that he would "like to ride on the cyars." Ben Weaver, Tom's father, discourages these longings, but the grandfather is sympathetic: "Don't plague him, Ben. He's at the p'int when he hankers to know things. The sap's risin' in him, I reckon." But Tom Weaver's adolescent curiosity about life beyond the mountains is thwarted by his desire for vengeance, and he later becomes a violent leader of the Weaver clan.

The escape motif is developed in Act I through a lengthy debate between Dr. Weaver, Richard's father, and Dr. Davis, Dr. Weaver's father-in-law. Dr. Davis tries to convince his son-in-law to move his family and medical practice to the city, where opportunities and comforts are more plentiful. Most of their conversation consists of a distracting epistemological debate, with Dr. Davis's belief in factual reality opposed to Dr. Weaver's faith that he is part of a beneficent and healing order in the universe. Neither character can be identified as a philosophical spokesman for Wolfe, but one of Dr. Davis's arguments for breaking family bonds is self-revealing of the author:

In the first place it's a wise idea for a young fellow to strike out for himself in a new place. I never thought of going back to my home when I got through the Medical School. Get away from your family. Let them admire you from a distance; the greater the distance, the more will they admire you.

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20Wolfe, The Mountains, A Drama in Three Acts and a Prologue, p. 89.
I have noticed one thing up here. The family tie seems to be extraordinarily strong. A man is apt to lose his individuality in that kind of a connection, if he doesn't mind. . . .21

Dr. Weaver momentarily resolves to move his family to the city in the spring; but the appearance of a mountain woman, holding her dead child, reverses his decision. As Weaver and his wife face their mountain destiny at the end of Act I, the sound of a train rushing out of the mountains again signals a lost chance for escape.

The dramatic focus of Act II shifts to Tom Weaver's teen-age son, Sam, whose bleak future is contrasted with Dr. Weaver's son, Richard, now preparing to leave for college. During the first half of the act, Sam's interest in books and his overtures of friendship with the Gudgers are harshly discouraged by his narrow-minded, clannish father. Tom Weaver, now devoid of his own adolescent fantasies, would restrict his son's life to farm chores and feuding. Dramatic interest quickens upon the arrival of Dr. Weaver and Richard, who comes to say farewell and to bequeath Sam his dog and Ridpath's four-volume History of the World.

Sam's future becomes the subject of controversy when Dr. Weaver offers to finance his nephew's preparatory and collegiate education. Sam's mother, Mag, is enthusiastic over this chance for her son, and Tom Weaver is almost persuaded. But Sam's escape route is symbolically closed

21Ibid., p. 100.
by the sound of a rock slide which threatens the family's crops. Act II ends with Sam joining his father to build a log barrier and thus rejecting his uncle's offer. Dr. Weaver concludes that perhaps Sam's decision is correct: "Knowledge is sometimes a fearful, and awful thing. To take this boy away from his people." His speech implies, then, that only the gifted individual can live successfully beyond family limits.

The Weaver-Gudger feud builds to a violent conclusion in Act III. The news that Sam Weaver has been murdered precipitates Richard's final choice of clan over conscience. Once again, however, the escape theme is presented, this time through the star-crossed lovers: Richard's sister, Laura, and Will Gudger. Will, a genial apple grower who rejects his family's violence, tries to persuade Laura to elope with him to California, where he has been offered the chance to manage a large apple orchard. Laura, therefore, is torn between her love for Will and her sense of obligation to her aging father. Richard persuades Will to postpone his suit before Dr. Weaver for Laura's hand until the following day; but when Laura hears of Sam's murder and the impending violence, she realizes that for her there will be no tomorrow beyond her mountain home.

The lesson, then, for all the Weavers — Uncle Tom, Dr. Weaver, Sam, Laura, and Richard — has been the same:

22Ibid., p. 145.
noble ambitions and a fulfilling life for the individual cannot be realized within the confines of unswerving family loyalty. Eugene Gant would learn much the same lesson in *Look Homeward, Angel*. But when Eugene, in *Of Time and the River*, and George Webber in the later novels discover more directly that new world beyond the mountains, they will re-examine some of their discarded family values.

*Welcome to Our City*, produced at Harvard in May, 1923, was a spectacular production of ten scenes and thirty-one speaking parts. Inspired by a visit to Asheville the year before when Wolfe witnessed the real-estate boom mushrooming in his home town, the play describes a conspiracy by a real-estate group and town authorities to replace the Negro district of town with a white residential section. The result is a race riot which must be quelled by the local militia. Although small-town politics and boosterism are effectively satirized, *Welcome to Our City* was not accepted for commercial production, primarily because of its length and lack of plot unity. Richard S. Kennedy identifies another fault, however, which reveals Wolfe's undeveloped social consciousness at this stage of his career: "The chief fault, however, was that the moral positions of the antagonists -- Rutledge, the white leader, and Johnson, the Negro leader -- were not clear, probably because Wolfe's views on the race question were not clear in his own mind."  

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Although the play uncovers the hypocrisies of white racial bigotry, much of the dialogue, as well as the subhuman descriptions of Negroes, suggests that Wolfe was equally fearful of black political power. For example, in Scene Eight, Sykes, the black leader from Boston, urges Altamont Negroes to resist white attempts to displace their residential section. His vision of a future "when black men and white men will live together as brothers . . ." is undercut in his next speech: "... our dream of brotherhood must be realized and realized it will be, if we have to shoot down the first white man that gets in our way."²⁴

Another suggestion of Wolfe's racial viewpoint occurs in Scene Nine, when Professor Hutchins, head of the Department of Social Welfare at the State University, assures Governor Preston Carr that Sykes' argument for black equality can be effectively countered with empirical evidence. Whereas Sykes can cite only thirteen authorities for his viewpoint, Hutchins claims support from nineteen authorities, "all tending to show that the Negro is racially, morally, intellectually, and physically inferior" (p. 79). Governor Carr congratulates Hutchins on his "invaluable service for science," and the Professor replies: "The whole history of modern progress is bound up in the history of modern science" (p. 79). Thus Wolfe quickly shifts the object of his satire

²⁴Thomas Wolfe, Welcome to Our City, Esquire, 48, No. 4 (October, 1957), 77. All subsequent references to Welcome to Our City will be cited in parentheses within the text.
from white bigotry to modern science, but he has nevertheless left Professor Hutchins with the strongest empirical argument for white supremacy. Wolfe would not seriously question his racial views until his last trip to Germany in 1936.

The primary object of satire in Welcome to Our City, one closer to Wolfe's heart than racial bigotry and also more relevant to his family theme, is the mania for real estate in Altamont. Two characters can be considered as spokesmen for Wolfe's attitudes toward property values and family ties: Rutledge, the lawyer who seeks to reclaim his father's home from the Negro leader, Johnson; and Jordan, a tubercular writer who has come to Altamont with thoughts of permanent retirement. Both Rutledge and Jordan are disillusioned idealists, neither one particularly interested in reform. Both men view the city's corruption and dedication to material progress from an aloof philosophical perspective which despairs of improvement in human nature. Rutledge, for instance, refuses to aid his former schoolmaster, McIntyre, who has been forced to resign his teaching position because he espouses Darwin's theory of evolution. In justifying his disdain for causes, Rutledge calls himself "a far and lonely man; an exile in strange lands" (p. 66).

What links Jordan and Rutledge to later Wolfeian heroes is their mutual homelessness. They are both searching for a "door," an image which would first appear in Look Homeward, Angel and recur throughout Wolfe's later works. In the first scene, Miss Nealy, secretary for the Altamont
Development Company, tells Jordan that he can expect good "turnovers" from local real estate. Jordan replies: "Unfortunately, I am not interested in making a good turnover. What I am after is a home to live in. (With a certain waspish good humor) I realize this puts me under suspicion here, but I assure you my species is not entirely extinct yet" (p. 60). At the end of the play, Jordan leaves Altamont for Paris to die amid beauty. Instead of buying a house, he has bought two gravesites which have doubled in price and thus enabled him to travel. At their parting Rutledge tells Jordan, "We are weary for an ancient earth" (p. 78).

The play's protagonist, Rutledge, is involved in more than a search for a home. By trying to regain his ancestral estate, he is also trying to recapture the past; and by trying to improve his relationship with his son, he seeks a human bond that will withstand change.

Rutledge tells the realtor Sorrell in Scene Three:

Yes, Sorrell, for we are buying back a kingdom today, my friend. We are buying back a treasure of memories and romance, so delicate, so rare, so far removed from this obscene push, that I almost hold my breath whenever I think of it. It's not dead! It's not dead! It sleeps -- the one thing I yet dream of (p. 65).

In Scene Nine Rutledge gives up his dream when he recognizes the conspiracy among the town's leaders to burn the Negro settlement and declare martial law. When Webster, the newspaper publisher, tells Rutledge to "stop living in the past" because "that day is done," Rutledge answers: "No. A day I have never seen. Moneychangers, I am no part of
your scheme. I wanted a house -- I wanted a house, but now I want nothing" (p. 80).

Equally significant to Wolfe's concept of family is the relationship between Rutledge and his son, Lee. Anticipating the character of Eugene Ramsey in Mannerhouse, Lee is a reprobate son who has rejected his father's law career, presumably because of his father's cynical advice that, in Altamont, a lawyer succeeds more readily by knowing the jury than knowing the law. In the first interview between father and son in Scene Three, Rutledge longs for a bond with his son, whether that bond "be loyalty or dishonor." In the following remarks, he looks forward to the father-search motif in Of Time and the River:

The first god was a man; the first thing he created was a son; but the kings of the earth have lost their language -- we face each other, shame and stricken like dumb mutes -- and Fatherhood, the one true parent of the spirit, has no speech (pp. 65-66).

In Scene Six, Rutledge is given the chance to establish a bond of dishonor with his son. Lee is caught by the Negro leader, Johnson, in the act of trying to seduce his daughter, Annie. This action precipitates Johnson's refusal to sell the Rutledge home and thus leads to the white conspiracy. After Johnson has confronted Rutledge with Lee's trespass, father and son bind themselves in an oath of silence:

Rutledge: You have given me something to guard between us. I wish it were a better thing; but men should enter somewhere together -- hell or heaven.
Now, since there can be no speech between us, promise me that you will keep this silence (p. 73) --

In the final scene of *Welcome to Our City*, Lee, as a member of the state militia, kills Johnson and thus ends the brief Negro rebellion. After learning that their ancestral home has been destroyed in the fire which swept the Negro quarters, father and son have their last conversation in the darkness of a Negro shoe store:

Lee: It is getting dark here, father. Shall I light the lamp?
Rutledge: No. We are cast out in darkness -- this barren and most weary earth has given us no light. But there is yet a better thing than light, though we go damned for it.
Lee: I do not understand you, father. (A pause) You want me to go?
Rutledge: No, boy. We are partners in secret and unspeakable woe. I have no language for a curse. We are joined in this blasted and deserted place -- but we are joined.
Lee: Is that all?
Rutledge: That is all. There is only the distance and the pain.
Lee: I will remember. Good night (p. 82).

The significance of *Welcome to Our City*, as an indication of Wolfe's artistic and intellectual growth, lies in the characterization of Jordan and Rutledge, who represent parallel developments in Wolfe's romantic persona. In the face of genuine social evil, such as that of Altamont, the romantic hero can follow one of two alternatives. Like the Northerner Jordan, he can move outward, seeking an idyllic place to practice his art. Or, like the Southerner Rutledge, he can retreat into the memories of his own past. These two movements prefigure the directions Eugene Gant will follow
in *Look Homeward, Angel*: an outward movement into spiritual freedom and a downward movement into bondage as he excavates his family's history.

In relation to Wolfe's family theme, the conflict between father and son in this play is important. The recognition by Rutledge that an idyllic past cannot be recaptured coincides with his admission of a flawed relationship with his son, that "Fatherhood, the one true parent of the spirit, has no speech." In addition to his own compromises with the law and to his son's misbehavior with Johnson's daughter, there are hints that Rutledge's father had been guilty of miscegenation. In spite of this flawed ancestry, however, Rutledge says: "The claims of the past are inexorable, inexorable! They cannot be forgotten or denied" (p. 65). Just as the past cannot be denied, so must blood relations be affirmed. As Rutledge says in the last scene, in the darkness of the present world his secret bond of loyalty with Lee "is yet a better thing than light, though we go damned for it."

Wolfe's last attempt at drama, *Mannerhouse*, deserves close attention in this study for two reasons. First, it provides a later view of Wolfe's romantic persona, now named Eugene; and secondly, it illustrates Wolfe's first extensive use of family history as a reflection of social history. The epic scope of Wolfe's dramatic intentions was made clear in a letter to George Pierce Baker which accompanied the manuscript of *Welcome to Our City*: "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." Wolfe would never successfully achieve this ambition. But his last manuscript, which traces the two-hundred-year history of George Webber's maternal ancestors, the Joyners, proves that he never completely lost sight of his epic plan. Mannerhouse, the drama of an aristocratic Southern family before and after the Civil War, was his first experiment to fulfill this grand design.

Never produced during Wolfe's lifetime, Mannerhouse was begun during his first year at Harvard, re-worked over the next few years, and finally re-written in its entirety in December 1924, after the manuscript had been stolen with Wolfe's luggage from a Paris hotel. The play was based on a story told by W. O. Wolfe about an aristocratic North Carolina family who, impoverished after the Civil War, sold 500,000 acres of land to lumber dealers for twenty cents an acre. In Mannerhouse, General Ramsey, the family patriarch, sells his land and house after the war to the encroaching poor white, Porter. In the final catastrophic scene, Eugene, the General's son, like Samson, seizes the decayed columns of the house and brings destruction on himself, Porter, and the faithful Negro servant, Tod. This conflict, then, between the old and new social orders in the South, represented by Porter and the Ramseys, parallels William Faulkner's later

treatment of the same theme through Flem Snopes and the aristocratic de Spain family of Yoknapatawpha County. Therefore, as Richard Kennedy points out, "it offers another criticism of urban and industrial civilization, a theme which recurs continually in Wolfe's work."\(^{26}\)

Of central interest, however, is the character of Eugene Ramsey, whose personality and philosophical viewpoint were fast approaching those of Eugene Gant. Nevertheless, the principal shortcoming of the play, even more serious than its length, is that Eugene's character and his attitudes toward the Southern cause are inconsistent. This inconsistency would later be explained in *Of Time and the River* when Eugene Gant describes the play to his friend Joel Pierce:

> It was a play called "Mannerhouse," a title which itself might reveal the whole nature of his error -- and its subject was the decline and fall and ultimate extinction of a proud old family of the Southern aristocracy in the years that followed the Civil War, the ultimate decay of all its fortunes and the final acquisition of its proud estate, the grand old columned house that gave the play its name, by a vulgar, coarse and mean, but immensely able member of the rising "lower class."

> This theme -- which, in its general form and implications, was probably influenced a good deal by *The Cherry Orchard* of Chekhov -- was written in a somewhat mixed mood of romantic sentiment, Byronic irony, and sardonic realism. . . .\(^{27}\)

The "somewhat mixed mood" of the hero becomes apparent early in Act I of the play. As the Ramseys and the

\(^{26}\)Kennedy, p. 93.

South are preparing for war, Eugene plays the role of a carousing, reprobate son (similar to Prince Hal in *Henry IV, Part I*), who undermines the chivalric code of his family with puns on their "manners" and "mannerisms," as well as with some genuine humor. In this scene, Eugene's mother is trying to persuade him to join his father, General Ramsey, and his brother, Ralph, in defense of the Southern cause and family honor:

Eugene: Am I to understand that I am one of the sons you are giving?

Mrs. Ramsey: Gene! What are you saying? I have only two sons. (A pause)

Eugene: (Thoughtfully) Yes, I think I see. Then you feel you are giving me, Mother?

Mrs. Ramsey: Yes. (Very proudly) But I give you gladly, Gene. I thank God it is in my power to make this gift to our cause. (A pause)

Eugene: Pardon me, Mother, but aren't you being a little too generous -- shall I say extravagant -- with your gifts?

Mrs. Ramsey: (With a wounded cry) Gene!

Eugene: Yes, Mother. But after all, it is my life you are giving, isn't it?

Mrs. Ramsey: Ah, Gene, I would offer my own gladly, but we women can only wait.

Eugene: Very trying, I'll admit, Mother, but comparatively safe. To be quite frank, Mother, I have a sort of proprietary interest in my own hide which you so generously are offering up to the careful inspection of an enemy who will not hesitate to shoot it full of holes.28

Eugene's mood in the same act, however, changes from ironic to somber during a lengthy interview with his father, General Ramsey, who urges his son to be true to his family and the South. In this scene, Eugene's feeling of isolation

from his family echoes that of Richard Weaver in *The Mountains* and foreshadows Eugene Gant's in *Look Homeward, Angel*:

General: And you do not know me.
Eugene: I have lost my way -- I cannot find you.
General: And you pity the old man who cannot see?
Eugene: I have never said that, General.
General: Where blows the wind, Eugene? (There is a pause)
Eugene: (In a low tone) I cannot tell you that. But this I know: the wind is up; one ship is sailing to a far, strange port.
General: (With infinite sadness and tenderness) And you believe in harbors at the end?
Eugene: With all my heart. With all my heart.
General: Poor boy! Your harbor is around you, here and now.
Eugene: (Quietly) You are mistaken, General. Not now, not here; not mine.  

Despite these avowals of a separate destiny, Eugene is finally won over to his father's belief in the established order of Southern paternalism. General Ramsey's statements in the following scene probably reflect Wolfe's own flirtation at that time with the anti-democratic ideas of Thomas Carlyle and H. L. Mencken:

General: You shall have it -- the creed of an ancient. (There is a pause; then he begins in a low clear voice.) I believe in God, in Hell and Heaven; and, in my House; in a great ladder of things on which it rests. I believe in heroes and hero worship; in men and masters; in the inequality of all things and all people! I believe in the value of men and in the beauty and virtue of women, in gallantry, grace, and a sensitive personal honor! I believe in truth, goodness, and beauty; in

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29 Ibid., pp. 58-59.

30 For a full treatment of Wolfe's changing attitudes while he was writing *Mannerhouse*, see Kennedy, *The Window of Memory*, pp. 89-94.
the preservation of my order of things, and in a society which has for its purpose the preservation of ladies and gentlemen, whom God ever cherishes, loves, and protects. Amen.31

Later, with less pomposity, he answers Eugene's criticism of slavery:

... But slavery is eternal, slavery of field and house may go down to slavery of mill and wheel. And that in turn may go down to slavery of another baser sort -- the slavery of a mob to itself -- to Rebellion, Rebellion, Rebellion.32

That the dramatist's view of history was still ambivalent, however, is evident in Act II when Eugene and Major Patton, the father of Eugene's sweetheart, Margaret, discuss at length the role of old men in causing wars which young men must fight. Most of their conversation consists of Eugene's baiting the comically chauvinistic Major into admissions of his generation's blind responsibility for the war and, finally, into defending the same youthful ideals that Eugene criticizes. (Eugene Gant, in Of Time and the River, would cite the Hamlet-Polonius dialogues as the source for this scene.)33 Obviously, the ironies and inconsistencies of Eugene's speeches in this scene invalidate the hero as a reliable spokesman for Thomas Wolfe. Nevertheless, one of his statements makes a prophetic forecast of the literary credo given to Wolfe's last fictional hero, George

31Wolfe, Mannerhouse, pp. 61-62.
32Ibid., p. 63.
33Wolfe, Of Time and the River, pp. 545-46.
Webber, as well as that of a generation of American writers in the 1920's and 30's:

... But we are not done with you old fellows, Major. We are going to have something to say about all this before we're through. We shall say, perhaps, that all the men in the world are brothers -- all the young men. We are going to write some books and poems about all this. Perhaps we shall even write some plays. I make no promises. We shall burst all old hypocrisies. We shall give traditions a handsome stiff kick in the rump. We shall tell about things exactly as they are. We shall be free.34

The remainder of Act II and Act III of Mannerhouse unravels the two thinly related plot threads of Porter's acquisition of the Ramsey estate and Eugene's unsuccessful love affair with Margaret Patton. When General Ramsey signs over his property to Porter in Act II, Wolfe uses the occasion to criticize the slogan of "progress," a word which he would continue to identify as a mask for greed:

Porter: Funny, mebbe, 'bout all this. But hit's got to be. Hit's Progress!
General: (Waving a transparent hand gently) And now the man has learned another word. Not only the world gets better, but all the people in it. In its essence it is the cult of pity for one's grandfather. (In the same tone as before; inflexible, unyielding) The pen, the pen, Eugene. Give me the pen.35

The unconvincing love affair between Eugene and Margaret is best described by Eugene Gant in Of Time and the River: "But the scenes between the hero and the girl were less successful: the character of the girl was shadowy and

34Wolfe, Mannerhouse, p. 116.
35Ibid., p. 150.
uncertain — a kind of phantasmal combination of the characters of Roxane in Cyrano, and Ophelia — . . . ." Margaret, who is called "ghost" by Eugene, essentially fulfills a symbolic role as Eugene's lost spirit and also, perhaps, as the lost South. In the last scene her ghostly voice is heard from within Mannerhouse, beckoning the hero to enter. Most of their conversations focus on the philosophical problem of appearance versus reality, a problem which would be further developed through the ghost images of Wolfe's first novel. The following exchange occurs after General Ramsey signs away his estate and the lovers realize that their future is also cancelled:

Eugene: Some day. Who knows? The roads lead back if we go far enough.
Margaret: (Going) Some day -- please waken me.
Eugene: (Starting) Margaret! You believe that!
Margaret: With all my heart. (A pause)
Eugene: (Quietly) Then, which of us is the ghost?
Perhaps we live when we believe, we dream.
I no longer doubt the reality of my life.
I no longer expect awakening. Perhaps it is I who have died.37

When Act III begins, a reversal of roles has occurred. Eugene now serves, perhaps with allegorical significance, as one of Porter's carpenters in the rebuilding of Mannerhouse. Again, however, no consistent social interpretation emerges from Act III because none of the principals -- Eugene, Porter, or the Negro servant Tod -- survives the collapse of Mannerhouse to build a new order. In fact, throughout the play

36Wolfe, Of Time and the River, p. 546.
37Wolfe, Mannerhouse, p. 134.
Eugene insists on his belief in "endings" or "harbors," suggesting thereby that history is not an unfolding, meaningful process. Just before he seizes the rotted column of Mannerhouse, Eugene reminds Porter: "But remember that there are endings for us both, good master." This statement is a far cry from the one George Webber would make in a farewell letter to his editor, Foxhall Edwards, at the end of You Can't Go Home Again: "I believe that we are lost here in America, but I believe we shall be found." In his re-telling of "Mannerhouse" in Of Time and the River, Thomas Wolfe-Eugene Gant made two changes which could possibly be interpreted as signs of developing social consciousness. The prologue of the actual play describes the construction of Mannerhouse by the original patriarch's slaves, with Ramsey having to forcefully quell a brief rebellion. This rebellion is precipitated by a slave leader's urging his comrades not to kneel and pray before a white minister, who supports Ramsey with quotes from Ephesians: "'Servants, be obedient to thy masters, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward.'" In the novel's version of the prologue, however, the minister is described with "low persuasive voice urging the man to see the crime

38 Ibid., p. 180.
40 Wolfe, Mannerhouse, p. 7.
of slavery, quoting the Scriptures with a telling aptness, urging him to repent, to join the life of town and church, to 'come to God' . . . . And the quiet and inflexible voice of the master: 'I must build my house.'\(^1\) The second change is that the novel has Tod, "the gigantic faithful negro slave," performing Samson's role of destroying the mansion, whereas the play gives the duty to Eugene. In the play Eugene calls for Tod's help, but Tod and Porter engage in a death struggle, with Porter stabbing Tod repeatedly before the black man breaks the white's body with his bare hands.

Floyd C. Watkins argues that neither change in the novel is particularly significant, racially or sociologically. Regarding the first change, he says that the minister's sermon against slavery merely strengthens the character of the slaveholder; and in the last scene Tod is still "faithful and loyal" since he acts at his master Eugene's behest.\(^2\) To complicate Wolfe's position even further, in the novel Eugene Gant attributes Porter's speech to "the plain, rich, pungent, earthly, strongly colored speech of his mother, of his uncle William Pentland, and of the Pentland tribe."\(^3\) Wolfe would not become fully conscious of racial persecution

\(^1\) Wolfe, Of Time and the River, p. 549.  
\(^3\) Wolfe, Of Time and the River, p. 545.
until his visits in 1935 and 1936 to Nazi Germany, where he witnessed racism at its most brutal level.

As social-historical commentary, then, the significance of *Mannerhouse* is marginal. Except for criticism of Porter's economic rapacity, the play's comments on social history are inconsistent and lack conviction. The play's real significance is that Wolfe's romantic protagonist, given embryonic form as Richard Weaver in *The Mountains*, was now a fully developed infant, ready to burst from the author's literary womb as Eugene Gant in *Look Homeward, Angel*.

A full statement of what *Mannerhouse* meant to Wolfe is found in a letter he wrote in January 1926 to Alice Lewishohn, a director of The Neighborhood Playhouse in New York, where Wolfe tried unsuccessfully to market his play:

"This is what the play means to me: -- one, three or four years ago, when I was twenty-one or twenty-two, and wanted to prove things in plays, I wanted to write a play that should describe a cycle in our native history -- I should show by it the rise and fall of a powerful Southern family. I was going to call it "The Wasters." I made a draught of it and destroyed it. Later, still significant, I called it "The House" -- my house was to be the symbol of the family's fortunes -- you saw it put up and torn down.

Finally in Paris, after that script had been stolen, and I was alone, I knew that I cared little for that, and beginning anew, I created this play -- which has no relation to problem, none to history -- save that any one may guess when it is supposed to occur, but no one, I think, will confuse it with realism. It became the mould for an expression of my secret life, of my own dark faith, chiefly through the young man Eugene. If you would know what that faith is, distilled, my play tries to express my passionate belief in all myth, in the necessity of defending and living not for truth -- but for divine falsehood."
I have not tried to be smart or wise, nor have I adopted a cheap easy obscurity. I tell you again, this thing came out of me -- even in its fierce burlesquing of old romanticism, it defends the thing it attacks.

Finally, of course, it contains the first complete expression of that thing that has fascinated and terrified me since I was a child. Are we alive or dead? Who shall tell us? Which of the people in this play are ghosts, and which are living?44

Clearly Wolfe, alone in Paris during its final revision, had shifted the play's focus from social history to his own "secret life." This intention would continue through his first novel, subtitled "A Story of the Buried Life."

Willingly or not, however, Eugene Gant, like his early counterparts Richard Weaver and Eugene Ramsey, was involved in both literary and social history. Also like his dramatic predecessors, Gant's involvement can be measured to a significant degree by the distance which separated him from his immediate family. Unlike Weaver and Ramsey's families, however, Eugene Gant's family was a nearly exact replica of Thomas Wolfe's. For that reason, Eugene Gant's outward journey from home to society can serve as a more reliable index of the author's own expanding sensibility. That journey, recorded in Look Homeward, Angel and Of Time and the River, will be the subject of the next two chapters.

44Wolfe, The Letters of Thomas Wolfe, pp. 103-04. According to Richard Kennedy in The Window of Memory, p. 96, n., the only performance of Mannerhouse was "endured politely by small audiences" on May 5, 6, and 7, 1949, before the Yale Dramatic Association.
CHAPTER III

LOOK HOMeward, ANGEL: EUGENE GANT'S
ESCAPE FROM FAMILY

Throughout the adolescence and young manhood of Thomas Wolfe, one of his primary drives, as seen in Chapter I, was to escape the constrictions of his frequently quarrelsome, sometimes narrow-minded family. Before his graduation from Asheville's North State Fitting School, he wanted to attend college at the University of Virginia but was persuaded by his father to patronize his state school. And even during his relatively happy undergraduate years at Chapel Hill, he tried to transfer to Princeton and hasten his odyssey from North Carolina. Nevertheless, after he arrived in Boston in 1920 to begin graduate study at Harvard, his letters and notebooks clearly show a growing preoccupation with his Asheville family, both as tonic for homesickness and as literary inspiration.

Those personal records also reveal ambivalent attitudes held by Wolfe toward his parents and siblings. His letters home, which are quoted from in Chapter I, combine feelings of nostalgia with bitter defensiveness over his financial dependency and his unique position among the Wolfes. Also Wolfe's early dramatic sketches, referred to
in Chapter II, contain diverse scenes from the author's early home life. Those sketches, entitled "The House of Bateson," portray the family group at one time as quarreling and factious; in another sketch, that of the morning fireside ritual, the impression given is one of warmth and unity.

Thus early in his career Wolfe seized upon family discord as the initial conflict in his fictional hero's struggle to achieve selfhood. Unlike one of Ernest Hemingway's heroes, whose ancestry is irrelevant to his character development, the Wolfeian protagonist can be fully understood only against an elaborate background of familial influences. This fact emerged clearly from Wolfe's early dramatic efforts. As explained in Chapter II, Richard Weaver's tragic dilemma in The Mountains was his choice between clan and conscience. In Welcome to Our City, Rutledge will not join his towns- men's conspiracy to repossess his ancestral home; yet he will not compromise his vow to remain silent about his son's indiscretions. Likewise Eugene Ramsey, despite his avowals of a strange and separate destiny in Mannerhouse, is swayed by appeals to family honor in his decision to fight for the Southern cause.

The tension existing between those dramatic heroes and their families foreshadows a similar conflict between Eugene Gant and his family in Wolfe's first novel. The difference, however, between the dramatic heroes and their fictional counterpart is sizeable. For one thing, Weaver, Rutledge, and Ramsey are dramatic creations who share with
their creator only an idealistic viewpoint, whereas Eugene Gant's life history is a nearly exact repetition of Thomas Wolfe's. Of greater significance is the fact that Wolfe's dramatic heroes play out their roles within the confines of a family circle. None achieves a personal identity completely separate from his family identity. Eugene Gant, on the other hand, does not succumb to those environmental pressures and does manage to escape, although that escape is not unqualified.

Before Eugene Gant's rebellion in Look Homeward, Angel is examined, a brief summary of Wolfe's reputation as a family novelist should be useful for further clarification of the paradoxical treatment given to Eugene Gant's immediate kin. In general, the critics are divided into two schools. One group sees Wolfe, to borrow a phrase, as "the novelist of the normal," portraying his kinsmen as more or less prototypical members of a large American family. Maxwell Geismar perhaps best summarizes the viewpoint of this first school:

You might almost say, in fact, that in Wolfe's work the American people came back into the American novel. At least, for all his hyperbole, he is the first major novelist of the Thirties to depict American family life in relatively normal terms -- he may

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even be, coming on the heels of Fitzgerald, Hemmingway and Dos Passos, the first novelist to depict family life at all. To some degree Wolfe marks the return of the "invisible roof" that Sherwood Anderson felt had once extended over the Ohio towns at the turn of the century: A roof that has hardly spread itself over contemporary letters.2

The other group, which includes many of the formalist critics of Wolfe's emotional prose, sees the Gant-Pentland clan as Gargantuan and grotesque, distorted creations of a possibly distorted mind. Bernard DeVoto and W. M. Frohock's judgments are representative of that school. DeVoto, in his classic criticism of Of Time and the River, "Genius is Not Enough," complains of "the giantism of the characters" who "were all twenty feet tall, spoke with the voice of trumpets and the thunder, ate like Pantagruel, wept like Niobe, laughed like Falstaff, and bellowed like the bulls of Bashan."3 W. M. Frohock echoes the same complaint in a later essay, "Thomas Wolfe: Of Time and Neurosis": "His ability to make incredible things seem credible is itself almost incredible. It is only when one goes back to Look Homeward, Angel that the Aeschylean family of the early book


shows itself for what it is and the whole Pentland-Gant clan becomes implausible if not preposterous."\(^4\)

The fact that Wolfe's early works could produce such diverse reactions provides further evidence of the author's ambivalent feelings toward his relatives, even though he professed admiration for them as "great people" in a letter to his sister Mabel after publication of Look Homeward, Angel.\(^5\) Fundamentally, however, the criticism of Wolfe's main characters as Gargantuan caricatures reflects their creator's state of mind during composition of his first two novels, especially the first. That state of mind belonged to a young man in his late twenties and early thirties who was recreating his own life from a subjective, sometimes uncritical, point of view.

When one considers Wolfe's living habits during his adult years, the fact that even a few critics could consider him an important portrayer of family life seems ironic. Wolfe himself never formed a nuclear family, the closest he came being an unstable affair with a married woman nineteen years his senior. Moreover, Wolfe's perpetual restlessness, his constant moving from one apartment to another and his


traveling back and forth across the Atlantic, would seem to dispel from his works any values associated with home, stability, order, or continuity. Between 1925 and 1936 he made seven trips to Europe, and his apartments, according to friends, "always looked like the temporary headquarters of someone who was between trips." James H. Justus, in fact, has identified the restless Eugene Gant and George Webber as prominent exceptions to the stereotyped image of drawling, complacent characters in Southern literature.

Thus Wolfe's simultaneous attraction to and revulsion from his family presents a compelling paradox and a central clue to understanding his entire corpus. The psychological causes of his ambivalent attitudes have been referred to often, most recently and at greatest length by William U. Snyder in Thomas Wolfe: Ulysses and Narcissus. Among the causes emphasized by Snyder to explain Wolfe's homebound-wanderer or dependency-counter-dependency tendencies are, respectively, his Oedipal attachment to his mother and his poor body image. That Wolfe himself was aware of those motives is clearly evident from Eugene's relationship with Eliza Gant in Look Homeward, Angel and from his short story "Gulliver," which recounts the humiliations of an oversized

8Snyder, pp. 65-66, 101-25.
man. One of Snyder's theories is a useful starting point for understanding Wolfe's compulsion, while traveling in Europe in 1926, to begin a literary excavation of his own ancestral and personal history which resulted in *Look Home-ward, Angel*:

The Wolfes might be described as a symbiotic family unit. That is, almost all of the relationships of the members of the Wolfe family that were psychologically important were relationships with other family members. They did not easily establish independent relationships with outsiders; characteristically, their relationships with outsiders were carried out within the limits of the roles that had been assigned them by the family. For each family member felt that he could not survive apart from the family unit, nor it without him. Tom had the role of baby of the family; Fred that of the favorite boy. W. O. had the role of irresponsible philanderer, and Julia that of put-upon, long-suffering, hard-working, morally-upright woman. Frank became the bearer of the family's negative identity. This close identification with the family and the consequent difficulty in relating to outsiders was to have repercussions in the lives of all the Wolfes.9

As this statement suggests, the Wolfes saw their family as a communal base where their self-identities, both positive and negative, were largely shaped. Wolfe's preoccupation with hereditary influences has been elaborated upon in Chapter I. Some critics have even suggested that Wolfe was overly preoccupied with his childhood, to the point of sentimentality if not psychological regression. John Donald Wade referred to Wolfe as "a Mama-and-Papa-saying Presbyterian,"10 and Bernard DeVoto complained of the

9Ibid., pp. 107-08.
large amount of "placental" material and "infantilism" in Wolfe's first two novels. Again, however, Wolfe's contradictory nature asserts itself and proves the danger of categorizing him. In Look Homeward, Angel, Eugene's brother Luke, who is a "Mama-and-Papa-saying" favorite son, is satirized for his hominess: "He lived in a world of symbols, large, crude, and gaudily painted, labelled 'Father,' 'Mother,' 'Home,' 'Family,' 'Generosity,' 'Honor,' 'Unselfishness,' made of sugar and molasses, and gummed glutinously with tear-shaped syrup."  

In summary, then, Thomas Wolfe viewed his family as both a shaping influence as well as a constricting force, and most of his youth was spent trying to escape its limitations. Both before and after publication of Look Homeward, Angel, Wolfe stated clearly what the novel meant to him. On July 19, 1926, he described the book's purpose to his Asheville mentor, Margaret Roberts:

I have begun work on a book, a novel, to which I may give the title of "The Building of a Wall" -- perhaps not; but because I am a tall man, you know perhaps my fidelity to walls and to secret places. ... Its unity is simply this: I am telling the story of a powerful creative element trying to work its way toward an essential isolation; a creative solitude; a secret life -- its fierce struggles to wall this part of its life away from birth, first against the public and savage glare of an unbalanced, nervous brawling family group; later against school, society, all the barbarous invasions of the world.

11 DeVoto, p. 72 et passim.

In a way, the book marks a progression toward freedom; in a way toward bondage -- but this does not matter: to me one is as beautiful as the other. Just subordinate and leading up to this main theme is as desperate and bitter a story of a contest between two people as you ever knew -- a man and his wife -- the one with an inbred, and also an instinctive, terror and hatred of property; the other with a growing mounting lust for ownership that finally is tinged with mania -- a struggle that ends in decay, death, desolation.\(^{13}\)

Two years later, in March, 1928, Wolfe again summarized the book's structure in a letter to potential publishers of his manuscript, which at that time was labeled *O Lost*. The two-part movement he had sketched for Mrs. Roberts remained essentially unchanged:

The book may be lacking in plot but it is not lacking in plan. The plan is rigid and densely woven. There are two essential movements -- one outward and one downward. The outward movement describes the effort of a child, a boy, and a youth for release, freedom, and loneliness in new lands. The movement of experience is duplicated by a series of widening concentric circles, three of which are represented by the three parts of the book. The downward movement is represented by a constant excavation into the buried life of a group of people, and describes the cyclic curve of a family's life -- genesis, union, decay, and dissolution.\(^{14}\)

About two months after his novel was published, Wolfe wrote to his sister, Mabel Wheaton, defending his book's nobility of purpose against its home-town critics. Once again he defined the mood of alienation which he intended for the book to evoke: "Listen, Mabel: what my


\(^{14}\)Ibid., p. 129.
book says in the first paragraph and what it continues to say on every page to the end is that men are strangers, that they are lonely and foresaken, that they are in exile on this earth, that they are born, live, and die alone."¹⁵

Commentaries on the structure, or lack of it, and on the themes of *Look Homeward, Angel* have proliferated since the novel's publication in 1929. Richard S. Kennedy has effectively synthesized those criticisms in Chapter Nine, "Design of *Look Homeward, Angel*," of his critical biography, *The Window of Memory: The Literary Career of Thomas Wolfe*.¹⁶ In that chapter Kennedy places the two narrative threads of the novel, the "outward" and "downward" movements of Eugene and his family, within a double framework of competing philosophical ideas: naturalism and idealism. That dualistic universe confronting Eugene Gant is summarized by Kennedy:

To sum up, Wolfe views man as a creature not only with a body molded by Life Force, activated by Life Force, and bearing the seeds of Life Force but also with a spirit "trailing clouds of glory . . . from God who is our home." Man's physical life is subject to the determinism of Life Force, which threads its way through a world of chance, but his spirit represents a free will operating within these limitations,

¹⁵Ibid., p. 216.

an individuality which can respond intellectually and emotionally, make choices, and strive to achieve an understanding of life's complexities. This dualism of the physical and spiritual, of the ideas of creative evolution and of pre-existence, sets up an ideological conflict within the book. One group of ideas acknowledges a world of accumulation and change; the other assumes the existence of a timeless, ideal world. The human dilemma between what is and what ought to be, between two kinds of reality, is what Eugene Gant must face.17

As the foregoing interpretations by both Wolfe and his critics make clear, the structure of Look Homeward, Angel involves both an "outward" and a "downward" movement; that is, the omniscient narrator looks both forward and backward into the life of Eugene Gant. Some critics have emphasized the forward movement of the book; others have stressed its retrogressive tendency. Richard Walser, in his treatment of the angel-ghost symbolism, emphasizes the growth of Eugene's artistic sensibility. For Walser, the ghost references in the novel represent Eugene's memories, which are the raw material for his art; whereas his art, or his "angel," alone "will make it possible for Eugene to Discover 'the lost lane-end into heaven.'"18 Larry Rubin, in his essay "Thomas Wolfe and the Lost Paradise," stresses the Miltonic-Wordsworthian significance of the recurring symbols: "a stone, a leaf, an unfound door."19

17Ibid., p. 130.
then, in contrast to Walser's emphasis on Eugene's growth, makes prominent the powerful sense of loss felt by Eugene as he moves from innocence to experience.

Despite their different emphases, both Walser and Rubin recognize that Wolfe's poetic language, whether it concerns angels, ghosts, stones, or doors, seeks an ideal significance beyond the world of factual experience. Both critics also recognize the central motif of entrance suggested by Wolfe's symbols. Eugene's "Angel," for Walser, represents a creative act which allows the participant to transcend earthly limitations, whereas Rubin interprets Wolfe's symbolic language as suggesting a key to the timeless world of pre-existence. Richard S. Kennedy also recognizes the central significance and complexity of the "door" symbol in *Look Homeward, Angel* and suggests possible interpretations:

The unfound door is a complex symbol: it is the entrance to the former life; it is the escape into illusion, including the imaginative realm of literature and art; it is the avenue to one's own past life which exists only in memory; it is the way to life's ultimate secrets; in short it is the door to a world of spirit.\(^20\)

All of these interpretations suggest that the door symbol can be viewed as a two-way opening: as both exit and entrance, as an escape from frustration and a way to fulfillment. In regard to Eugene Gant's family relationships, the dual significance of the door image is also relevant.

\(^{20}\)Kennedy, pp. 132-33.
Specifically, the "unfound door" can be viewed both as an escape from the flawed Gant family and as an entrance into an ideal sense of community. That interpretation of *Look Homeward, Angel* will be pursued for the remainder of this chapter.

*Look Homeward, Angel* is fundamentally a family novel. Wolfe himself made his purpose explicit in early plans for the book: "'His connection with the family must not be broken completely at the beginning of the book; it must rather be shown as in a state of gradual severance throughout.'"21 John Peale Bishop, in "The Sorrows of Thomas Wolfe," an essay which emphasizes the solipsistic fallacy of Wolfe's art, acknowledges that Eugene's kinsfolk are his only enduring human tie: "The only human relationship which endures is that of the child to his family. And that is inescapable; once having been, it cannot cease to be. His father is still his father, though dying; and his brother Ben, though dead, remains his brother."22 The three-part division of *Look Homeward, Angel* traces the "gradual severance" of Eugene Gant from his family as he passes from childhood through adolescence to young manhood. Each of those divisions also reveals Wolfe's two-way door symbolism

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21Ibid., p. 120.

as Eugene seeks both escape from his divisive family and entrance into an ideal community, although finally that community narrows to a couple: Eugene and his creative spirit.

Part I of *Look Homeward, Angel* concentrates on the genesis, union, and initial rupture of the strange Gant family, a rupture which intensifies Eugene's search for an ideal community. The opening proem of the novel clearly sets the stage for the fractured human relations which follow:

Naked and alone we came into exile. In her dark womb we did not know our mother's face; from the prison of her flesh have we come into the unspeakable and incommunicable prison of this earth. Which of us has known his brother? Which of us has looked into his father's heart? Which of us has not remained forever prison-pent? Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone?23

In a semi-satirical tone, Wolfe recounts in the first chapter his divergent parental backgrounds and the unlikely marriage of W. O. Gant to Eliza Pentland. Eugene's natural affinity for his father's character traits is made clear by the description of his grandfather, Gilbert Gant, an improvident, nomadic Englishman whose "strange dark eyes" at death still revealed "a passionate and obscure hunger for voyages" (p. 4). Gilbert's rootlessness is transferred to his son Oliver, who, frustrated at his inability as a stonecutter's apprentice in Baltimore to carve an angel's head

23Wolfe, *Look Homeward, Angel*, p. 1. All subsequent references to *Look Homeward, Angel* in this chapter will be cited by page number in parentheses within the text.
and thus achieve a sense of permanence, "reeled down across the continent into the Reconstruction South -- a strange wild form of six feet four with cold uneasy eyes, a great blade of nose, and a rolling tide of rhetoric, . . . ."

(p. 5). Despite his transient life and his hunger for voy­ages, W. O. continues to seek his own "door," unsuccessfully with his first wife Cynthia in Sydney and likewise with Eliza in Altamont.

The contrast between Eliza's and W. O.'s concept of home, the ultimate cause of their marital discord, manifests itself during their first meeting. After Eliza "continued to talk about property with a strange meditative hunger," W. O. replies: "'I hope I never own another piece of prop­erty as long as I live -- save a house to live in. It is nothing but a curse and a care, and the tax-collector gets it all in the end.' Eliza looked at him with a startled expression, as if he had uttered a damnable heresy." (p. 10).

Wolfe describes Eliza's family, the Pentlands, in mixed tones of satire and admiration, not surprisingly when one remembers the author's ambivalent feelings toward his own maternal clan, the Westalls:

The Pentland family was as old as any in the community, but it had always been poor, and had made few pretenses to gentility. By marriage, and by intermarriage among its own kinsmen, it could boast of some connection with the great, of some insanity, and a modicum of idiocy. But because of its obvious superiority, in intelligence and fibre, to most of the mountain people it held a position of solid respect among them (p. 11).
The sprawling Pentland clan, then, allows for individual genius, but its dominant characteristics are earthiness and permanence in contrast to Gant's rootless and transient nature. When the clan gathers their conversation ultimately turns to death, over which they triumph by their progeny: "And as their talk wore on, and Gant heard the spectre moan of the wind, he was entombed in loss and darkness, and his soul plunged downward in the pit of night, for he saw that he must die a stranger -- that all, all but these triumphant Pentlands, who banqueted on death -- must die" (p. 13).

Chapters 2 and 3 recount the tumultuous marriage of W. O. and Eliza after his construction of their house, which to him was a "rich fortress of his soul," "the garment of his will," but to her "was a piece of property, whose value she shrewdly appraised, a beginning for her hoard" (p. 14). Wolfe makes clear, however, that Julia is not solely to blame for Eugene's discordant household:

And what Eliza endured in pain and fear and glory no one knew. He breathed over them all his hot lion-breath of desire and fury: when he was drunk, her white pursed face, and all the slow octopodal movements of her temper, stirred him to red madness. She was at such times in real danger from his assault: she had to lock herself away from him. For from the first, deeper than love, deeper than hate, as deep as the unfleshed bones of life, an obscure and final warfare was being waged between them. Eliza wept or was silent to his curse, nagged briefly in retort to his rhetoric, gave like a punched pillow to his lunging drive -- and slowly, implacably had her way. Year by year, above his howl of protest, he did not know how, they gathered in small bits of
earth, paid the hated taxes, and put the money that remained into more land. Over the wife, over the mother, the woman of property, who was like a man, walked slowly forth (pp. 15-16).

Thus when Eugene Gant makes his appearance in the first year of the twentieth century, his parents have almost adopted surrogate homes or objects of affection. W. O. discovers his "door" or refuge in the bars and brothels of Altamont, whereas Eliza seeks the same kind of haven in her real-estate accounts. Wolfe therefore gives an ironic significance to the birth of Eugene in 1900, a child of the new century whose home is already infected with the twentieth-century cancer, materialism: "... the child of progress, the darling of the budding Golden Age and, what's more, Fortune and her Fairies, not content with well-nigh smothering him with these blessings of time and family, saved him up carefully until Progress was rotten-ripe with glory" (p. 28).

The remaining chapters of Part I serve the following purposes. First, they describe Eugene's growing alienation from his family as he escapes into his private, imaginative world. Second, Eugene's brothers and sisters are introduced with varying degrees of sympathy as they, like their youngest brother, seek their own doors to happiness. Finally, the entire first section of Look Homeward, Angel is unified by the growth and decay of a vague harmony within the Gant household. The climax of that drama occurs with Eliza's purchase of the "Dixieland" boarding house.
Eugene follows several escape routes from his oppressive environment during the course of the novel, such as books, fantasies, school, love, and travel. His primary escape, however, is through language. In fact, references to his verbal imagination at the beginning and end of the novel serve to unify the action. As a babe in his crib, Eugene is "poverty-stricken in symbols: his mind was caught in a net because he had no words to work with . . . ."; and he realizes "that his first escape must come through language" (p. 30). In the last chapter, during his dream vision in the Altamont square, Eugene speaks symbolically of his future as a writer, his final escape: "And no leaf hangs for me in the forest; I shall lift no stone upon the hills; I shall find no door in any city. But in the city of myself, upon the continent of my soul, I shall find the forgotten language, the lost world, a door where I may enter, . . . ." (p. 521).

This verbal intensity, therefore, sets Eugene apart from his kindred. Furthermore, his instinctive feeling for the relationship between words and their meanings makes him a perceptive observer of the corrupted language and selfish motives of those around him. Again, in his crib, the babe perceives the fundamental lack of communication among his closest of kin:

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He saw that the great figures that came and went about him, the huge leering heads that bent hideously into his crib, the great voices that rolled incoherently above him, had for one another not much greater understanding than they had for him: that even their speech, their entire fluidity and ease of movement were but meager communicants of their thought or feeling, and served often not to promote understanding, but to deepen and widen strife, bitterness, and prejudice (p. 31).

As the early chapters unfold, revealing glimpses are provided of the other six Gant children. The two oldest children, Steve and Daisy, make the least impact on their youngest brother. Steve, who "had a piece of tough suet where his heart should have been" (p. 37), qualifies as the moral outcast of the family. Although his vices can be attributed to Gant's example, Steve has none of his father's redeeming virtues. Throughout the first thirteen chapters, then, Steve's activities include striking his teacher with his fist and his youngest brother with a shovel, forging checks on his father's bank account, boasting, drinking, and seducing women. Daisy, a year younger than Steve, is portrayed in an opposite light as a genteel, dutiful daughter and as an uninspired pianist, preparing for marriage to an equally unimaginative grocer.

Even though Steve and Daisy are not major figures in this family portrait, they do establish a pattern of behavior which applies to their parents and siblings. That is, each member of the Gant household is an alienated figure who seeks his own "door" to fulfillment. Each member also seeks to compensate for his alienation in one of two ways. He may
either disguise his loneliness through extroverted behavior, as do Gant, Steve, Helen, and Luke; or else he seeks communion with his private "ghost" by introverted withdrawal, as do Ben, Eugene, and, to a lesser extent, Eliza.

Helen, Luke, and Ben are the siblings who figure most prominently in Eugene's childhood. According to their personalities, Helen and Luke's outgoing behavior is paired against the introverted natures of Ben and Eugene. Helen and Luke also represent some of the worst traits of the Gant family, against which Ben and Eugene rebel.

Helen is a complex personality, alternately loving and cruel, generous and selfish. Because of her impulsive generosity, Helen, more than Eliza, ministers to Gant after his debauches, usually by spooning hot soup to him. The results of her devotion are an intensified rivalry between mother and daughter and a wider separation of husband and wife. The climax of this father-daughter relationship, with its incestuous overtones, occurs when Helen accompanies Gant to Hot Springs for a six-week rheumatism cure. Wolfe even refers to their "union" as having been "consummated" during that trip:

"I'd have died if it hadn't been for that girl," he said over and over. "She saved my life. I couldn't get along without her." And he boasted again and again of her devotion and loyalty, of the expenses of his journey, of the hotels, the wealth, the life they both had seen.

And, as the legend of Helen's goodness and devotion grew, and his dependence upon her got further advertisement, Eliza pursed her lips more and more thoughtfully, wept sometimes into the spitting grease of a pan,
smiled, beneath her wide red nose, a smile tremulous, bitter, terribly hurt.
"I'll show them," she wept. "I'll show them... ."
(p. 130).

Perhaps as a release from her unconscious guilt over this somewhat unnatural relationship, Helen occasionally vents her wrath on Eugene, especially when she becomes aware of his opposite personality. These attacks further weaken Eugene's strained feelings of kinship with his family and intensify his desire to escape:

Sometimes, frantic with some swift tangle of her nerves, she would attack him viciously, hating him for his dark brooding face, his full scalloped underlip, his deep absorption in a dream. Like Luke, and like Gant, she sought in the world ceaseless entertainment for her restless biting vitality: it infuriated her to see other people seek absorption within themselves -- . . . .
"You little freak -- wandering around with your queer dopey face. You're a regular little Pentland -- you funny little freak, you. Everybody's laughing at you. . . ."

Sometimes her sweltering and inchoate fury was so great that she threw him on the floor and stamped on him.

He did not mind the physical assault so much as he did the poisonous hatred of her tongue, insanely clever in fashioning the most wounding barbs. He went frantic with horror, jerked unexpectedly from Elfland into Hell, he bellowed madly, saw his bountiful angel change in a moment to a snake-haired fury, lost all his sublime faith in love and goodness. He rushed at the wall like an insane little goat, battered his head screaming again and again, wished desperately that his constricted and overloaded heart would burst, that something in him would break, that somehow, bloodily, he might escape the stifling prison-house of his life (p. 117).

As the foregoing episodes involving Helen suggest, all of the Gant children suffer, directly or indirectly, from the strained relations between Eliza and W. O. Luke,
Eugene's older brother by six years, is no exception.

Whereas Helen's maturity as a woman is somewhat frustrated by her adoration of Gant, Luke's value system is distorted by his parents', and especially Eliza's, overemphasis on thrift and industry. Wolfe summarizes the Gants' economic philosophy, by which they measure human success:

Eugene was initiated to the ethics of success. It was not enough that a man work, though work was fundamental; it was even more important that he make money -- a great deal if he was to be a great success -- but at least enough to "support himself." This was for both Gant and Eliza the base of worth. Of so and so, they might say:

"He's not worth powder enough to kill him. He's never been able to support himself," to which Eliza, but not Gant, might add:

"He hasn't a stick of property to his name."

This crowned him with infamy (p. 94).

Wolfe illustrates the clash between Eugene's and Luke's value systems in his account of their sales venture with The Saturday Evening Post. Luke is the local agent for the Post, which he and Eugene sell on Thursday afternoons. For Eugene, the commercial enterprise is revolting: "Eugene hated the work with a deadly sweltering hatred; he watched the approach of Thursday with sick horror" (p. 95). Luke, to the contrary, thrives on the public glare associated with selling: "... his reputation for salesmanship was sown through the town; he came with wide grin, exuberant vitality, wagging and witty tongue, hurling all his bursting energy into an insane extraversion. He lived absolutely in event: there was in him no secret place, nothing withheld and guarded -- he had an instinctive horror of all loneliness" (p. 95).
Luke's overall portrayal in Chapter 10 of *Look Homeward, Angel* is by no means sinister. His basic motivation, Wolfe emphasizes, is a simple desire for love and esteem: "He wanted above all else to be esteemed and liked by the world, and the need for the affection and esteem of his family was desperately essential" (p. 95). Luke's failure, then, is his blind acceptance of prevailing values. For example, "Luke parroted all of his father's sermons, but earnestly and witlessly, without Gant's humor, without his chicanery, only with his sentimentality" (p. 98). "And it was as the smiling hustler that he wanted to be known. He read piously all the circulars the Curtis Publishing Company sent to its agents: he posed himself in the various descriptive attitudes that were supposed to promote business -- . . . ." (p. 98).

This uncritical acceptance of the salesman's mores by Luke represents, then, only a semi-comic interlude in the family chronicle of *Look Homeward, Angel*. The ruthlessness to which salesmanship can be pursued, with its destructive effects on society as well as individuals, would not be fully exposed by Wolfe until some ten years later with his satire of The Federal Weight, Scales, and Computing Company in *You Can't Go Home Again*. During the early stage of Wolfe's career, however, Eugene Gant's first exposure to the business ethic only confirms his feelings of moral and aesthetic superiority: "... he found himself loathing that which bore the stamp of virtue, sick with weariness and horror at
what was considered noble. He was hurled, at eight years,
against the torturing paradox of the ungenerous-generous,
the selfish-unselfish, the noble-base, and unable to fathom
or define those deep springs of desire in the human spirit
that seek public gratification by virtuous pretension, he was
made wretched by the conviction of his own sinfulness" (p.
96).

In relation to this study, then, Wolfe's treatment of
Helen and Luke Gant offers further evidence of the cumulative,
destructive effects of a discordant family group. Both Helen
and Luke illustrate how a family, the primary social unit,
can frustrate the development of its members. In Helen's
case, her basic generosity is channeled into an unhealthy
servitude of her lonely father. Similarly, Luke's desire to
please and his exuberant personality are made subservient to
the profit motive.

Of all his immediate kindred, the only one besides
Eugene to retain his integrity of character is Ben Gant. For
that reason, and because they share similar temperaments, Ben
becomes more than a brother to Eugene -- he becomes his
guardian angel. Among Wolfe's superbly drawn portraiture,
his description of Ben, modeled after his own brother by the
same name, surpasses all in depth and poignancy. Like
Eugene, Ben too communes with his private ghost, and also
like Eugene, he seeks escape from his "brawling" family:
"He bore encysted in him the evidence of their tragic fault:
he walked alone in the darkness, death and the dark angels hovered, and no one saw him" (p. 93). For Ben economic freedom becomes his main escape route; but, with tragic irony, his newspaper work debilitates his health and leads to his early death, and final escape, when he is twenty-six:

By this time Ben, sullen, silent, alone, had withdrawn more closely than ever into his heart: in the brawling house he came and went, and was remembered, like a phantom. Each morning at three o'clock, when his fragile unfurnished body should have been soaked in sleep, he got up under the morning stars, departed silently from the sleeping house, and went down to the roaring morning presses and the inksmell that he loved, to begin the delivery of his route. Almost without consideration by Gant and Eliza he slipped quietly away from school after the eighth grade, took on extra duties at the paper's office and lived, in sufficient bitter pride, upon his earnings. . . ."

More than any other Gant, including Eugene, Ben possesses both the requirements and the desire for a harmonious family life. His thwarted efforts to find such a satisfying existence constitute the major tragedy of Look Homeward, Angel:

Perhaps, as pigeon-toed, well creased, brushed, white-collared, Ben loped through the streets, or prowled softly and restlessly about the house, his dark angel wept, but no one else saw, and no one knew. He was a stranger, and as he sought through the house, he was always a prowl to find some entrance into life, some secret undiscovered door -- a stone, a leaf, -- that might admit him into light and fellowship. His passion for home was fundamental, in that jangled and clamorous household his sullen and contained quiet was like some soothing opiate on their nerves: . . . . (pp. 93-94).

Because of Gant's waning vitality and increasing alienation from his family, Ben serves a double role as both brother and surrogate father to Eugene:
At home he spent hours quietly absorbed in his life with Eugene, playing with him, cuffing him with his white hard hands from time to time, establishing with him a secret communication to which the life of the family had neither access nor understanding. From his small wages he gave the boy sums of spending money, bought him expensive presents on his birthdays, at Christmas, or some special occasion, inwardly moved and pleased when he saw how like Maecenas he seemed to Eugene, . . . . (p. 93).

In summary, then, Ben Gant can be seen as the first perfect example of what Edwin Berry Burghum would consider to be Wolfe's primary discovery: "the principle of kinship as the fundamental directive in American life."²⁵

Binding together these family portraits and serving as earthy contrast to Eugene's ethereal flight outward in Part I, the Gant family grows, reaches an apex of harmony, and then declines. At the center of this group is Gant, who unifies its disparate members with his lavish provisions, his ritual, and his rhetoric:

Gant had the passion of the true wanderer, of him who wanders from a fixed point. He needed the order and the dependence of a home -- he was intensely a family man: their clustered warmth and strength about him was life. After his punctual morning tirade at Eliza, he went about the rousing of the slumbering children. Comically, he could not endure feeling, in the morning, that he was the only one awake and about. His waking cry, delivered by formula, with hugh comic gruffness from the foot of the stairs, took this form:


Despite his parents' quarrels and his own clashes with siblings, Eugene spends his first eight years in relative contentment within the confines of this large, vital family. Although his literary proclivity would later be ridiculed, his precocious reading during childhood is encouraged and praised: "Secure and conscious now in the guarded strength of home, he lay with well-lined belly before the roasting vitality of the fire, poring insatiably over great volumes in the bookcase, exulting in the musty odor of the leaves, and in the pungent smell of their hot hides" (p. 50). Furthermore, his father, whose strength is not yet lost to illness and dissipation, holds his family's affection: "The family was at the very core and ripeness of its life together. Gant lavished upon it his abuse, his affection, and his prodigal provisioning. They came to look forward eagerly to his entrance, for he brought with him the great gusto of living, of ritual" (p. 51).

In addition to Gant's fatherly strength, another possible cause for the Gants' cohesiveness is their sense of social inferiority, a feeling which particularly affects Ben and Eugene. An episode involving the Gants' next-door neighbors, the Hilliards, occurs during Eugene's third year and dramatizes his family's class standing. The Hilliards represent "the highest aristocracy of the town: they had come from South Carolina, 'near Charleston,' which in itself gave them at that time a commanding prestige" (p. 34).
Although "the neighborhood was middle-class, . . . the Hilliards carried on in the grand manner, lords of the castle who descended into the village, but did not mix with its people" (p. 35). Wolfe describes the Hilliards' afternoon ritual of being taken for a two-hour carriage drive into town: "This ritual, followed closely from his father's sitting-room window, fascinated Eugene for years after: the people and the life next door were crudely and symbolically above him" (p. 35).

Another ritual the Hilliards follow is to have a grocery wagon arrive at their house at 11 A.M. every morning. One particular morning three-year-old Eugene makes "his first escape," and nearly his last, into the driveway of the Hilliard establishment just before the wagon arrives. The Negro driver, following his usual routine, is asleep in the driver's seat. As a result, the horse "removed his hoof from what had recently been the face of a little boy" (p. 35). Eugene is bloodied but not permanently injured, and the driver is thoroughly castigated by Gant and Dr. McGuire. Years later Eugene would imagine the Hilliards themselves "standing superbly by a drawn curtain, not quite certain what had happened, but feeling that it was something unpleasant, with blood in it" (p. 36).

Recalling the autobiographical nature of Look Homeward, Angel, one suspects that the cause of the Gants' social inferiority is not their economic standing but rather
their eccentric behavior. Andrew Turnbull estimates that the Wolfes, despite their middle-class, democratic attitudes, belonged to Asheville's "top two percent economically." Nevertheless, in Wolfe's novel, Eugene and Ben are particularly conscious of their family's uncertain social status, a further cause for their feeling of alienation and their quest for an unfound door:

Both Ben and Eugene were by nature aristocrats. Eugene had just begun to feel his social status -- or rather his lack of one; Ben had felt it for years. The feeling at bottom might have resolved itself simply into a desire for the companionship of elegant and lovely women: neither was able, not would have dared, to confess this, and Eugene was unable to confess that he was susceptible to the social snub, or the pain of caste inferiority: any suggestion that the companionship of elegant people was preferable to the fellowship of a world of Tarkintons, and its blousy daughters, would have been hailed with heavy ridicule by the family, as another indication of false and undemocratic pride. He would have been called "Mr. Vanderbilt" or "the Prince of Wales" (p. 102).

The Gants' trip to the 1904 World Fair in St. Louis punctuates the first half of Part I and foreshadows later events. Eliza's plan to open a boarding house in St. Louis provokes Gant's ire and anticipates her later purchase of "Dixieland." For Gant, "to earn one's living by accepting the contempt, the scorn, and the money of what he called 'cheap boarders' was an almost unendurable ignominy" (p. 42). Eliza's viewpoint is diametrical: "She alone, in fact, of all the Pentlands was willing to relinquish the little

moated castle of home; the particular secrecy and privacy of
their walls she alone did not seem to value greatly" (p. 42).

The tragic climax to the St. Louis trip is the death
of Grover, Ben's twin brother. Eugene, who recalls this
first introduction to death only in flashes of memory, is
not affected as deeply as he would be later by Ben's death.
But the tragedy does awaken him to life's transience: "... like one who has been mad, and suddenly recovers reason, he
remembered that forgotten face he had not seen in weeks,
that strange bright loneliness that would not return. O
lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again"
(p. 47).

Grover's death is of further significance in that
the family members cushion each other against their loss.
When Ben dies fourteen years later, Eugene suffers almost in
solitary as his family is divided by recrimination. In St.
Louis, however, Eliza and Gant turn to each other:

Then presently each thought of the other; they
felt suddenly the horror and strangeness of their
surroundings. They thought of the vine-wound house
in the distant mountains, of the roaring fires, the
tumult, the cursing, the pain, of their blind and
tangled lives, and of blundering destiny which
brought them here now in this distant place, with
death, after the carnival's close.

Eliza wondered why she had come: she sought back
through the hot and desperate mazes for the answer:
"If I had known," she began presently, "if I had
known how it would turn out --"
"Never mind," he said, and he stroked her awk-
wardly... . . . (p. 48).

After the tragic episode in St. Louis, Gant and
Eliza return to their pattern of conflict, he with his
drunken sprees and she with her property accounts. An occasional, clumsy attempt by Gant to show affection is usually repulsed by Eliza, to the embarrassment of their children, especially Eugene: "And he was never after able to see them touch each other with affection, without the same inchoate and choking humiliation: they were so used to the curse, the clamor, and the roughness, that any variation into tenderness came as a cruel affectation" (p. 53).

Eliza's purchase of her boarding house, "Dixieland," provides both the climax to Part I and the exciting force for the rest of the novel. This division of their home into two camps signifies, in effect, an unwritten divorce between Eliza and Gant. Except for Steve and Daisy, who have left home by this time, the Gant children also experience a traumatic uprooting from their parents' separation. Helen, "as if it had been known ancienly and forever," stays with Gant in the old home while Ben and Luke "were left floating in limbo..." (p. 107). Eliza takes Eugene with her to Dixieland as the last vestige of her motherhood: "He was the last tie that bound her to all the weary life of breast and cradle; he still slept with her of nights; she was like some swimmer who ventures out into a dark and desperate sea, not wholly trusting to her strength and destiny, but with a slender cord bound to her which stretches still to land" (p. 106).

Throughout the remainder of Part I, Wolfe elaborates on the pain and humiliation suffered by Eugene from this
upheaval: "Thus, before he was eight, Eugene gained another roof and lost forever the tumultuous, unhappy, warm centre of his home. He had from day to day no clear idea where the day's food, shelter, lodging was to come from, although he was reasonably sure it would be given: he ate wherever he happened to hang his hat, either at Gant's or at his mother's; ..." (p. 107). The number and intensity of these descriptions suggest that the family split significantly determines the course of Eugene's career for the remainder of the novel. Specifically, his loss of the "warm centre of his home" gives major impetus to the search for a door that offers both escape from Eliza's grasp and entrance into a spiritual community.

That pattern of escape and entrance is illustrated by Wolfe shortly after Eliza's purchase of Dixieland. A lengthy description of Eugene's revulsion against the disorder of his new life is followed by an account of the solace he would feel on Sundays in the Presbyterian Church:

Eugene was ashamed of Dixieland. And he was again afraid to express his shame. As with The Post, he felt thwarted, netted, trapped. He hated the indecency of his life, the loss of dignity and seclusion, the surrender to the tumultous rabble of the four walls which shield us from them. He felt, rather than understood, the waste, the confusion, the blind cruelty of their lives -- his spirit was stretched out on the rack of despair and bafflement as there came to him more and more the conviction that their lives could not be more hopelessly distorted, wrecked, mutilated, and perverted away from all simple comfort, repose, happiness, if they set themselves deliberately to tangle the skein, twist the pattern (p. 112).
In contrast to this domestic disorder, Eugene finds temporary respite in his Sunday School ritual, although even there he suffers "the petty cruelty of village caste" (p. 113):

This starched and well brushed world of Sunday morning Presbyterianism, with its sober decency, its sense of restraint, its suggestion of quiet wealth, solid position, ordered ritual, seclusive establishment, moved him deeply with its tranquillity. He felt concretely his isolation from it, he entered it from the jangled disorder of his own life once a week, looking at it, and departing from it, for years, with the sad heart of a stranger (p. 115).

Significantly, however, this outcast sees beyond the mere ritual of religious ceremony: "And from the mellow gloom of the church, the rich distant organ, the quiet nasal voice of the Scotch minister, the interminable prayers, and the rich little pictures of Christian mythology which he had collected as a child under the instruction of the spinsters, he gathered something of the pain, the mystery, the sensuous beauty of religion, something deeper and greater than this austere decency" (p. 115).

As the foregoing episode illustrates, Eugene, after losing the "warm centre of his home," continually seeks escape from Dixieland. The pattern of his escape follows a fairly regular two-part sequence. First he seeks entrance into a surrogate familial or communal relationship; when that bond proves unsatisfactory, he escapes into his private imaginative world.

Following Wolfe's announced plan, Parts II and III of the novel show Eugene in a state of "gradual severance"
from his family. After the traumatic fracture of his household into two camps, the hero turns his vision outward to the town of Altamont. There his disillusionment continues as he observes the fractured relationships among his townsmen. Among Eugene's disenchantments in Part II are the society of Altamont, his educational experiences, and his sexual relations.

Throughout the novel a large cast of Altamont citizens is paraded before the reader. From the Parnassian viewpoint of young Gant, little sympathy is wasted on this grotesque collection of misfits: prostitutes, chorus girls, malaria victims, tuberculars, eccentric millionaires, village idiots, and small-town snobs. Eugene's connection with this motley assemblage is shown in Chapter Fourteen, the first of Part II, when Wolfe calls the roll of Dixieland. Among those sick, lost, and transient boarders are "Mrs. Marie Pert, forty-one, the wife of an itinerant and usually absent drug salesman," who "lay deep in the pit of alcoholic slumber . . . ," and several young women, "all members of the chorus of 'Molasses' Evans and His Broadway Beauties, booked out of Atlanta, Georgia, by the Piedmont Amusement Agency" (p. 153). In Of Time and the River, when Eugene is living at the Hotel Leopold in New York, Wolfe would express greater sympathy for transient city dwellers who try to make a home of a hotel.

As these adolescent years unfold, the narrative frequently shifts to the boy's growing artistic sensibility
and to his preoccupation with time. The cumulative effect of the past, a motif introduced at the beginning of the book, is reiterated: "— Cause flowed ceaselessly into cause" (p. 159). Eugene acknowledges this impact of the past on himself, especially in regard to his heredity: "The fusion of the two strong egotisms, Eliza's inbrooding and Gant's expanding outward, made of him a fanatical zealot in the religion of Chance" (p. 160).

Eugene's romantic sensibility is nowhere better illustrated than by his responses to time. On the one hand, he seeks to recapture past moments in his life by fixing them permanently in his imagination:

His life coiled back into the brown murk of the past like a twined filament of electric wire; he gave life, a pattern, and movement to these million sensations that Chance, the loss or gain of a moment, the turn of the head, the enormous and aimless impulsion of accident, had thrust into the blazing heat of him (p. 159).

Despite his preoccupation with the effects of Chance moments on his life, Eugene also believes that time is on his side. Perhaps as a reflex from his Presbyterian training, he thinks of himself as foreordained to live purposefully and to discover meaning and beauty in life:

He believed himself thus at the centre of life; he believed the mountains rimmed the heart of the

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world; he believed that from all the chaos of accident the inevitable event came at the inexorable moment to add to the sum of his life (p. 160).

Eugene, therefore, has learned to avoid the sordid realities of Dixieland by escaping into both the past and future. By suspending past moments of time, he can enter one door into a timeless, ideal world. Additionally, he can enter another door of fantasy regarding his future beyond Altamont: "Beyond the hills were the mines of King Solomon, the toy republics of Central America, and little tinkling fountains in a court; beyond, the moonlit roofs of Bagdad, the little grated blinds of Samarkand, . . ." (p. 161). In Wolfe's last-published novel, You Can't Go Home Again, George Webber would finally reject these "escapes of time and memory."

Eugene's first genuine escape from Eliza and her vagrant boarders occurs when he is recruited by Margaret Leonard away from his dull public school to her newly opened Altamont Fitting School. At the public school a farm-bred principal had assured his pupils every morning "that they were the leaders of tomorrow and the hope of the world. Then he quoted Longfellow" (p. 171). For the love- and beauty-starved young romantic, Margaret Leonard represents both a mother substitute and an angelic muse: "He turned his face up to her as a prisoner who recovers light, as a man long pent in darkness who bathes himself in the great pool of dawn, as a blind man who feels upon his eyes the
white core and essence of immutable brightness" (p. 178).

From her pedantic husband, however, the thirsty student receives only "a dry campaign over an arid waste of Latin prose . . . " (p. 180).

The lives of Eugene and his father, in this middle section of the novel, move in opposite directions. While the son achieves release from the past by his schooling and also through his paper route, Gant, now suffering from a malignant prostate, becomes ever more entrapped by time. After he sells his prized stone angel to mark the grave of a prostitute, Gant experiences one of Eugene's "time-stops" as he reviews the blind pattern of his life: "Gant felt himself alone move deathward in a world of seemings. . . . " (p. 223).

Eugene's schooling under the Leonards serves temporarily as a surrogate family, but it too reveals flaws which cast the hero on his own resources. Although Margaret Leonard has introduced her favorite pupil to poetry, "She saw always the dominant color, but she did not always see the shadings. She was an inspired sentimentalist" (p. 254). And while she is more solicitous than Eliza about Eugene's physical needs, she actually fails to understand boys: "She would have been stricken with horror if she could have known the wild confusion of adolescence, the sexual nightmares of puberty, the grief, the fear, the shame in which a boy broods over the dark world of his desire" (p. 254).
Eugene's paper route is another significant adolescent experience which further separates him from home and which awakens him to human sexuality. Wolfe's lyrical description of his hero's waking for his route suggests a rebirth from the dark womb of night: "Staggering blindly in the whitewashed glare, his eyes, sleepcorded, opened slowly as he was born anew, umbilically cut, from darkness" (p. 244). He also senses in this early morning ritual a premonition of his separate destiny: "He was free. He was alone. He heard the howl of a train-whistle, and it was not so far away" (p. 250). After this liberating experience, "He did not shrink so much beneath the menace of the family fist" (p. 250).

These pre-dawn prowlings also confront Eugene with the carnality of his race:

In this old witch-magic of the dark, he began to know the awful innocence of evil, the terrible youth of an ancient race; his lips slid back across his teeth, he prowled in darkness with loose swinging arms, and his eyes shone. Shame and terror, indefinable, surged through him. He could not face the question in his heart (p. 251).

Parts I and II of Look Homeward, Angel are replete with boardinghouse affairs and adulteries committed by Steve, Ben, and Gant. Eugene reacts to their affairs, respectively, with disgust, sympathy, and tolerant amusement. His own sex life, however, sets him apart from the other Gant males as well as from the other Altamont boys.

Jennings Ware, whose paper route Eugene takes over, assures his replacement that most female Negro customers are
willing to pay for their papers with their bodies. Yet when
the neophyte carrier is confronted by the prostitute Ella
Corpening, he flees in terror. On a trip to Charleston,
South Carolina, Eugene lies in bed with a waitress, Louise;
but he lies "scattered and witless with passion, unable to
collect and focus his heat" (pp. 300-01). Later at college,
the hero loses his innocence at a local brothel, after which
he vomits and soon discovers his loins "black with vermin"
(p. 343). He finally achieves a brief physical and spiritual
union during a summer romance with Laura James, a young
boarder at Dixieland. But that relationship also splinters
when Laura, five years older than her lover, returns home to
Virginia and marries another. To summarize, in Wolfe's first
novel the female, probably reflecting Eugene's ambiguous
feelings toward Eliza, represents an earthy reality foreign
to the hero's ethereal spirit. In Of Time and the River,
however, the female principle becomes nearly synonymous with
Eugene's search for his earthly roots and his discovery of
"the family of man."

At the end of Part II, Eugene has, in effect, said
goodbye to the provincial life of Altamont. The last chapter
of that section burlesques a pageant given by the Altamont
Fitting School honoring the tercentenary of Shakespeare's
birth. At one point in his satire, Wolfe removes the mask
from his persona completely and measures the distance sepa-
rating him from his home town:
The town, in its first white shirting of Spring, sat on the turfy banks, and looked down gravely upon the bosky little comedy of errors; the encircling mountains, and the gods thereon, looked down upon the slightly larger theatre of the town; and figuratively, from mountains that looked down on mountains, the last stronghold of philosophy, the author of this chronicle looked down on everything" (p. 311).

Eugene's four years at Pulpit Hill occupy the last section of *Look Homeward, Angel*, but they are interrupted by a summer's work in a naval yard at Norfolk, Virginia, and by the catastrophe of Ben's death. The Pulpit Hill years will be contrasted in some detail in Chapter Five with George Webber's career at Pine Rock College. Suffice it to say here that whereas young Gant is self-preoccupied -- "He was alone. He was desperately lonely" (p. 392) -- Webber observes and evaluates critically his fellow collegians: namely, Jim Randolph and Jerry Alsop. Also, Eugene is impressed by the remoteness of Pulpit Hill: "It had the fine authority of provincialism -- the provincialism of an older South" (p. 329). George, however, is critical of Pine Rock's aloofness from genuine social evils. Wolfe summarizes the effect of Eugene's college years:

He was a child when he went away: he was a child who had looked much on pain and evil, and remained a fantasist of the Ideal. Walled up in his great city of visions, his tongue had learned to mock, his lip to sneer, but the harsh rasp of the world had worn no grooving in the secret life.

Four years later, when he was graduated, he had passed his adolescence, the kiss of love and death burned on his lips, and he was still a child (p. 325).

The summer he spends in Norfolk during the war years accelerates his desire to be free of his family: "They are
a prelude to exile, and into their nightmare chaos no other purpose may be read than the blind groping of a soul toward freedom and isolation" (p. 431). Despite Wolfe's explanation, that summer in Norfolk prefigures the pattern of Eugene's experiences in *Of Time and the River*. For the first time completely alone and financially independent of his parents, the hero's thoughts turn frequently to his own past and to that of his family as he tries to ravel out the threads of his life:

There by the sea of the dark Virginias, he thought of the forgotten faces, of all the million patterns of himself, the ghost of his lost flesh. The child that heard Swain's cow, the lost boy in the Ozarks, the carrier of news among the blacks, and the boy who went in by the lattice with Jim Trivett. And the waitress, and Ben, and Laura? Dead, too? Where? How? Why? Why has the web been woven? Why do we die so many deaths? How came I here beside the sea? O lost, O far and lonely, where (p. 436)?

At the end of his sojourn in Norfolk, Eugene meditates on the conflict between freedom and bondage in his life. He thrills "to the glory of the secret life" and expresses horror at "all bonds that tied him to the terrible family of earth, . . ." (p. 440). Nevertheless, as he thinks of his father's impending death, he concludes that freedom from his own family is a near impossibility:

He thought of his own family with fear, almost with hatred. My God! Am I never to be free? he thought. What have I done to deserve this slavery? Suppose -- suppose I were in China, or in Africa, or at the South Pole. I should always be afraid of his dying while I was away. (He twisted his neck as he thought of it.) And how they would rub it in to me if I were not there! Enjoying yourself in China (they would say) while your father was dying.
Unnatural son! Yes, but curse them! Why should I be there? Can they not die alone? Alone! O God, is there no freedom on this earth?

With quick horror, he saw that such freedom lay a weary world away, and could be bought by such enduring courage as few men have (p. 441).

That freedom which Eugene longs for and which seems attainable only through death is most nearly realized through the death of Ben Gant. As Wolfe had indicated in a letter to his mother, Ben's death was like a "bombshell" that made life in Asheville virtually impossible for him. The death of his favorite sibling, who like himself had communed with a private ghost, brings to a climax the hero's love-hate relationship with his family. Ben's painful strangulation from pneumonia parallels his youngest brother's feeling of suffocation from the morbid, life-denying family:

The ugliness and discomfort of the death choked him; and the swarming family, whispering outside the door, pottering uselessly around, feeding with its terrible hunger for death on Ben's strangulation, made him mad with alternate fits of rage and pity (p. 453).

The mother-daughter feud erupts once more as Helen, blaming Eliza for neglecting Ben's health, tells Eugene: "Sometimes I think I hate her! I really think I hate her!" (p. 454). Her youngest brother, also "choked with exasperation" at Eliza, nevertheless tries to comfort his mother as she weeps "for the sad waste of the irrevocable years -- the immortal hours of love that might never be relived, the great evil of forgetfulness and indifference that could never be righted now" (p. 454). Gant, once the strong center
of the household, can only think of his own woes: "Merci­ful God! That I should have to bear this in my old age" (p. 460). Despite their recriminations, the Gant family is brought together in one last communion of love beside Ben's death bed:

And as they looked and saw his bright eyes already blurred with death, and saw the feeble beating flutter of his poor thin breast, the strange wonder, the dark rich miracle of his life surged over them its enormous loveliness.

After Ben's funeral, as the family reminisces before the fireplace at Dixieland, Eugene and his ghost debate once more whether he should, or can, leave his mother and home:

0 but I can't go now, said Eugene to it. (Why not? it whispered.) Because her face is so white, and her forehead is so broad and high, . . . and when she sat there at the bed she looked like a little child. I can't go now and leave her here alone. (She is alone, it said, and so are you.) And when she purses up her mouth and stares, so grave and thoughtful, she is like a little child. (You are alone now, it said. You must escape, or you will die.) It is all like death: she fed me at her breast, I slept in the same bed with her, she took me on her trips. All of that is over now, and each time it was like a death. (And like a life, it said to him. Each time that you die, you will be born again. And you will die a hundred times before you become a man) (p. 482).

When Eugene returns to Pulpit Hill, he has a new awareness of human mortality, not only from the loss of his brother, but also from a tetter that breaks out on his neck, "a sign of his kinship with the Pentlands -- a token of his kinship with the great malady of life" (p. 488). By rejecting the sterile optimism of his countrymen, with their "demand for white shiny plumbing, toothpaste, tiled lunch­rooms, hair-cuts, manicured dentistry, . . ." (p. 491),
Eugene anticipates his stronger sense of union with human nature that would be evident in *Of Time and the River*. He feels within him now "something fierce and cruelly wounded, but alive, that did not shrink away from the terrible sunken river of life; something desperate and merciless that looked steadily on the hidden and unspeakable passions that unify the tragic family of this earth" (p. 491).

Following his graduation from college, Eugene is "wild with the hunger for release . . ." (p. 504). His undergraduate days, like his boyhood in Altamont, are a "lost world," an "elfin door" that "had closed behind him, . . ." (p. 504). Now, as "the vast champaign of earth stretched out for him its limitless seduction" (p. 504), he is ready to make his final break with the Gants. In fact, the Gants have already been broken by Ben's death. Except for Eliza, who continues to thrive on her real-estate transactions, "The great wild pattern of the family had been broken forever. The partial discipline that had held them together had been destroyed by the death of their brother: the nightmare of waste and loss had destroyed their hope" (p. 505).

In spite of his haste to leave home for graduate study at Harvard, to be financed by his share of Gant's estate, the poignancy of Eugene's final parting with Eliza assures the reader that their separation will only be geographical. She reminds her son "to look up your Uncle Emerson and all your Boston kin" because "when you're a
stranger in a strange land it's mighty good sometimes to have some one you know" (p. 513). His last words are choked with torment:

His eyes were blind with tears; he tried to speak, to get into a word, a phrase, all the pain, the beauty, and the wonder of their lives — every step of that terrible voyage which his incredible memory and intuition took back to the dwelling of her womb. But no word came, no word could come; he kept crying hoarsely again and again, "Good-bye, good-bye" (p. 513).

Eliza's portrayal throughout Wolfe's first novel as a niggardly property dealer would be substantially modified in Of Time and the River, published six years later. In that book she would be elevated to the stature of an eternal earth mother whose vitality and endurance would serve as an anchor for her wandering son. As a hint of her later characterization, Eliza's last words in Look Homeward, Angel contain the tragic wisdom that she and her family had forgotten: "'We must try to love one another'" (p. 513):

The terrible and beautiful sentence, the last, the final wisdom that the earth can give, is remembered at the end, is spoken too late, wearily. It stands there, awful and untraduced, above the dusty racket of our lives. No forgetting, nor forgiving, no denying, no explaining, no hating.

O mortal and perishing love, born with this flesh and dying with this brain, your memory will haunt the earth forever (p. 513).

Against this narrative history of a family's decay, but with the hero's golden childhood forever imprinted in his mind, the last chapter of Look Homeward, Angel can be explained. Eugene's fantasy in the Altamont square, where he converses with Ben's ghost, serves both as a recapitulation
of and a temporary solution to the protagonist's search for the "unfound door."

The fantastic events of this last scene, the animated statues and the talking ghost, restate the philosophical basis of subjective idealism which has informed Eugene's actions and thoughts from his birth. When he asks Ben where his "unimprisoned soul" which "haunts through the million streets of life" may find the world, Ben replies: "'Nowhere. You are your world'" (p. 520). This personal search into one man's history, Wolfe implies, would also serve as a door into human history. Throughout the novel, Eugene's life has been viewed as a culmination of the ages. Besides revisiting the "forgotten names" and "forgotten faces" of his boyhood in the last chapter, Eugene extends his vision to "the fabulous lost cities" as he watches "the muttering, death-flared dusk of the completed gods" and "the fumbling march of races to extinction, . . ." (p. 519). This pessimistic view of human history is alleviated, however, by Nature's rejuvenation: ". . . the giant rhythms of the earth remained. The seasons passed in their majestic processionals, and germinal Spring returned forever on the land -- new crops, new men, new harvest, and new gods" (p. 519).

Thus, with this suggestion of an intelligent life force underlying man's chaotic history, the novel ends in a hopeful mood. As Eugene looks beyond his mountain-rimmed town, he prepares for his mysterious interior voyage:
And no leaf hangs for me in the forest; I shall
lift no stone upon the hills; I shall find no
door in any city. But in the city of myself,
upon the continent of my soul, I shall find the
forgotten language, the lost world, a door where
I may enter, and music strange as any ever
sounded; . . . (p. 521).

Look Homeward, Angel can be read, as Wolfe intended
it to be, as the story of a powerful creative element trying
to achieve a "creative solitude." It can also be read as a
novel of deaths, all culminating in Ben's death. As Eugene
says in the last chapter: "I have lost the blood that fed
me; I have died the hundred deaths that lead to life"
(p. 521). Wolfe's hero of twenty years had indeed achieved
a tragic vision of life, conditioned by the strong smell of
human mortality. The lesson that Wolfe intended for his
reader, as he explained to his sister Mabel, is that man is
born alone and dies alone. When Eugene Gant resumes his
outward journey away from his family in Of Time and the
River, he discovers that the search for a door is a univer-
sal, rather than a unique, experience. As a result, he will
feel a closer affinity for "the terrible family of man."
CHAPTER IV

FROM DEATH TO MORNING AND OF TIME AND THE RIVER:
THOMAS WOLFE'S REAPPRAISAL OF HIS FAMILY HISTORY

In Look Homeward, Angel and Of Time and the River, the values of Thomas Wolfe, the author, and Eugene Gant, his autobiographical persona, are remarkably coincident. The first novel, written from 1926 to 1928, while Wolfe was living in quasi-Byronic exile from family and society, follows the equally Byronic rebellion of Eugene Gant from family and society during the first twenty years of his life. Although Look Homeward, Angel is suffused with portraits and episodes of the vital Gant family, with its early unity and subsequent disintegration equivalent to a para­disaical loss, Eugene's primary motivation throughout the novel is to escape from his boardinghouse home. His attitude is summarized by this outburst to his mother during a quarrel over the financing of his college education:

By God, I shall spend the rest of my life getting my heart back, healing and forgetting every scar you put upon me when I was a child. The first move I ever made, after the cradle, was to crawl for the door, and every move I have made since has been an effort to escape. And now at last I am free from you all, although you may hold me for a few years more. If I am not free, I am at least locked up in my own prison, but I shall get me some beauty, I shall get me some
order out of this jungle of my life: I shall find my way out of it yet, though it takes me twenty years more -- alone (pp. 421-22).

Of Time and the River, written intermittently from 1929 to 1935, resumes the career of Eugene Gant from 1920 to 1925. Again, Wolfe's state of mind, particularly his familial attitudes, corresponds strikingly to that of Thomas Wolfe-Eugene Gant during the period covered by the book. Wolfe's graduate study at Harvard, his dramatic apprenticeship, and his college teaching represented a time of conflicting feelings about his family. He had finally achieved his long-sought independence from the Asheville clan, though he still received their financial support; but his new habitations -- Boston, New York, and Europe -- created an intensive homesickness in Wolfe that caused him to reflect constantly on his boyhood origins. Those reminiscences, both bitter and sweet, are recorded in his letters and early dramatic sketches from 1920 to 1925. The years 1929 to 1935, between publication of his first and second novels, also involved for Wolfe a re-evaluation of himself, his family, and his country.

In 1930 the novelist reached a significant turning point in his career. The widespread acclaim given to his first novel, particularly the praise it received from Nobel-Prize-winner Sinclair Lewis, elevated his self-esteem and caused him to think of himself as a national spokesman. According to Richard S. Kennedy, "The Smart Set attitude,
critical of his native culture, which had reached its satirical peak in his castigation of Asheville in Look Homeward, Angel, he now rejected completely. ¹ The nationalistic, sometimes chauvinistic, spirit of Wolfe's became apparent in his letters from Europe, while on a Guggenheim fellowship, in 1930. The following two excerpts, the first from a letter to Alfred Dashiel and the second to Maxwell Perkins, are representative:

... and also thank God for the great sounds that roar across America, the howl and sighing at the eaves, the lash and din of it at the corners, the bite and sparkle of the air, the sharp color of October, the baying of the great boats in the harbor, the thunder of the great trains in the night, the exulting and joy that grips your guts and makes you cry out -- and when you see some bastard who tells you lies about Europe, and worse lies about America, when you see some fool who wants to leave the most interesting and glorious place on earth to live here -- remember what I have told you: spit in his face -- ....

I have been shy and silent before these liars and fools far too long. I have eaten crow and swallowed my pride for ten years before the waste-landers, the lost generationers, the bitter-bitters, the futility people, and all other cheap literary fakes ... but now I will hold my tongue no longer ... .²

The people of North Carolina are like that wonderful earth -- they are not little, dull, dreary Babbits: I am going to tell the truth about these people and, by God, it is the truth about America. I don't care what any little worn-out waste-lander, European or American, or anyone else says: I know what I know. The people in North Carolina have these same


wonderful qualities as the tobacco, the great juicy peaches, melons, apples, the wonderful shad and oysters of the coast, the rich red clay, the haunting brooding quality of the earth.\(^3\)

Coincident with Wolfe's newly won fame and his new epic purpose was a different, more sympathetic attitude towards his family. No longer did he see them as monstrous Philistines, hostile to his art, as the Gants were often portrayed in *Look Homeward, Angel*. Instead, Wolfe developed a growing concern for their physical and financial welfare and began to see them as representative Americans rather than as atypical freaks. Elizabeth Nowell traces this change in Wolfe's feelings to a visit he made to Asheville in June, 1928, one of the last he would make for nine years. At that time the real-estate boom in Asheville had begun to decline, and Nowell describes Wolfe's family as "already frightened and bewildered to see their paper profits vanish in thin air. Wolfe could not resist the temptation to crow over them a little -- he had always been bitterly opposed to his mother's 'real-estate mania' -- but from this time forth the 'chip on his shoulder' toward his family began to disappear and to be replaced by real solicitude for them."\(^4\)

A letter that Wolfe wrote to Maxwell Perkins from London in December, 1930, clearly reveals this new solicitude

\(^3\)Ibid., pp. 283-84.

for his relations. Several weeks before, Wolfe had requested Perkins' aid in the settlement of two dental bills, which he justifiably found to be exorbitant. Now, however, Wolfe prefaced his letter to Perkins with a detailed account of the financial disaster suffered by his family from the depression and bank failures in Asheville. He was especially concerned over the plight of his brother Fred and the families of his two sisters, Effie Gambrell and Mabel Wheaton, whose husbands had either lost their jobs or were having difficulty finding work. Fred, who was trying to carry the family burdens alone, had reluctantly asked Tom for a $500 loan and had even offered to pay interest. In asking Perkins to make the loan to Fred from his own account at Scribners, Wolfe emphatically placed his family obligations over his personal concerns:

Mr. Perkins, I know it's a bad year for everyone, but if I've got it there at Scribners, or even if I haven't got it, for God's sake get that money for the boy, and I will work my fingers to the bone. If it comes to a question of these damned . . . dentists and my own people, I want my people to have the money. . . . if I am able to help these people now, it is a Godsend for me, and if I don't do it, I shall regret it bitterly as long as I live. I think you understand how much joy it gives me to think I may be of a little help now in time of trouble -- we have always stood together in trouble before, and I don't want to fail them now.5

Somewhat prophetically, this request to Perkins for family assistance preceded, in the same letter, an outline of Wolfe's second novel, then projected as "The October

Fair," an elaborate fable based on Greek myth with the search for a father as the controlling theme. Despite this outline of mythical and even fabulous material Wolfe supplied his editor, the realistic and sympathetic attitude toward his family's problems in that letter foreshadowed his fictional treatment of them in Of Time and the River and in subsequent works. As Floyd C. Watkins points out, "The family, and particularly Eliza, are portrayed more nobly throughout Of Time and the River."  

Not only is Wolfe's family treated more "nobly" after Look Homeward, Angel, but also their treatment acquires greater depth and significance. The roles of W. O. and Eliza Gant in the first novel are broadly symbolic of male-female principles and north-south regional differences, but their primary function is to dramatize the painfully divided heritage of their son, Eugene. This egocentric valuation of the hero's ancestry changed after 1930, a year which, says Richard Kennedy, witnessed "Wolfe's success in expanding his self-consciousness into national consciousness."  

Consistent with this new, heroic frame of mind, Wolfe also provided his hero and his hero's family with epic roles.

Wolfe made clear his epic plans for David Hawke, his new bardic hero, and Hawke's family in letters to Maxwell

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Perkins in 1930: "I want to construct my story on the model of the old folk epic: 'Beowulf,' for example. I want the character of David to be the epic minstrel who sings of the experience of his race, and I want to do this with eloquence, with passion and with simplicity. I want my book to be poetry -- that is, I want it to be drenched in a poetic vision of life." In the same letter, Wolfe also revealed his intention to deepen his story by including a chronicle of David's family: "In the chapter 'Pioneers, O Pioneers,' we understand that David is a member of an American family, two or three hundred of whose members are buried in different parts of the American earth, and we get the stories and wanderings of some of these people."  

The six-year struggle Wolfe painfully endured, from 1929 to 1935, to write his second novel is recorded in The Story of a Novel, published in 1936. The frequent outlines he submitted during those years to Scribners' editors Maxwell Perkins and John Hall Wheelock also attest to his difficulty in giving objective form to his personal experience. Those early plot outlines were based primarily on the myth of Antaeus, whose battles and whose need for earthly contact, Wolfe thought, would provide dramatic

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8Wolfe, The Letters of Thomas Wolfe, p. 244.  
9Ibid., pp. 242-43.  
conflict and psychological identity for David Hawke. After frustrating trials and errors, that scenario was finally abandoned in 1933, when Wolfe, following Perkins' advice, resumed the autobiographical adventures of Eugene Gant where he had left him in Look Homeward, Angel. The remnants of those early mythical and legendary formulas exist most noticeably as title headings for the eight sections of Of Time and the River and include — as counterparts for Eugene — Orestes, Faustus, Telemachus, Jason, Kronos, and Antaeus.

Wolfe intended for those mythical and legendary heroes to serve the ultimate end of dramatizing his bipolar theme for Of Time and the River, which he envisioned as the universal male-female urges to wander and to seek refuge, "of wandering forever and the earth again." Wolfe first announced this theme in his application to the Guggenheim Foundation for a fellowship to travel in 1930:

My new novel will be ready in the Spring or Autumn of 1931. Its title is "The October Fair." I cannot outline its plan and purpose so exactly as a scientist could his course of study: the book has a great many things in it but its dominant theme is again related to the theme of the first: it tries to find out why Americans are a nomad race (as this writer believes); why they are touched with a powerful and obscure homesickness wherever they go, both at home and abroad; why thousands of the young men, like this writer, have prowled over Europe, looking for a door, a happy land, a home, seeking for something they have lost, perhaps racial and forgotten; and why they return here; or if they do not, carry on them the mark of exile and obscure longing.11

A fuller statement of his desire to reconcile the male-female elements of the American spirit is found in these two paragraphs written to Perkins in July, 1930:

Now, if you will follow me a little farther in this, here is another development. I have said that wandering seems to me to be more of a male thing, and the fructification of the earth more a female thing -- I don't think there can be much argument about this, immediately we think of the pioneers, the explorers, the Crusaders, the Elizabethan mariners, etc. I am making extensive use of old myths in my book, although I never tell the reader this: you know already that I am using the Heracles (in my book the City is Heracles) and Antaeus myth; and you know that the lords of fructification and the earth are almost always women: Maya in the Eastern legends; Demeter in the Greek; Ceres in Latin, etc.

Now I hope you don't get dizzy in all this, or think I am carrying the thing to absurdity: all intense conviction has elements of the fanatic and the absurd in it, but they are saved by our beliefs and our passion. Contained in the book like a kernel from the beginning, but unrevealed until much later, is the idea of a man's quest for his father. The idea becomes very early apparent that when a man returns he returns always to the female principle -- he returns, (I hope this is not disgusting) to the womb of earthly creation, to the earth itself, to a woman, to fixity. But I dare go so far as to believe that the other pole -- the pole of wandering -- is not only a masculine thing, but that in some way it represents the quest of a man for his father. I dare mention to you the wandering of Christ upon this earth, the wanderings of Paul, the quests of the Crusaders, the wanderings of the Ancient Mariner . .

Wolfe's ambition, to represent the essential spirit, male and female, of the American people was exceeded only by his method. That method, simply put, entailed a chronicle of American history as seen by his hero and his hero's

12 Ibid., pp. 243-44.
ancestors. One recalls his earlier statement to George Pierce Baker that his ultimate plan was to dramatize "a whole town, a whole race, a whole epoch -- for my soul's ease and comfort." Also in *The Story of a Novel*, Wolfe described his despair at the scope of his initial plans:

"It was not until more than a year had passed, when 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, that I realized that even the pages of a book of 200,000 words were wholly inadequate for the purpose."¹³

The interpretation of *[Look Homeward, Angel]* in Chapter III focused on Wolfe's recurring image of the elusive, unfound door. The symbolic value of the door image was multiple, suggesting both return to a prelapsarian existence as well as entrance into an ideal human community. In its relation to Wolfe's family theme, however, and to the outward progress of Eugene's life, the door image was interpreted primarily as an exit. The protagonist spends his first twenty years escaping the horrors of Dixieland by retreating into his private dream world. Structurally, the novel points to the future, with Eugene's farewell to Altamont in the last scene suggesting a better life for him

beyond the mountains, even if that life is one of his own creation.

After Wolfe had purged himself of his boyhood traumas in Look Homeward, Angel and began creation of his new hero in an epic mould, he felt compelled to look back through that door from which Eugene Gant had emerged. This time, however, Wolfe's vision had become more realistic as he thought less of escaping from life than of facing the world directly. This changed perspective is expressed by the hero in Of Time and the River as he soberly re-evaluates his life after being arrested in South Carolina following a drunken spree:

And as all the strength and passion of his life turned more and more away from its childhood thoughts of aerial flight and escape into some magic and unvisited domain, it seemed to him that the magic and unvisited domain was the earth itself, and all the life around him — that he must escape not out of life but into it, looking through walls he never had seen before, exploring the palpable and golden substance of this earth as it had never been explored, finding, somehow, the word, the key, the door, to the glory of a life more fortunate and happy than any man has ever known, and which yet incredibly, palpably, is his, even as the earth beneath his feet is his, if he could only take it.14

Wolfe's motivation for looking backward in this second phase of his career had not changed essentially from that of the first phase. He still held to the vague belief that an individual represents all of his past inheritance, both racial and ancestral. As he said on the first page of

his first novel, "Each of us is all the sums he has not counted . . ." and "Each moment is the fruit of forty thousand years."¹⁵ Aline Bernstein reported that Wolfe had flirted with Jungian psychological theory in the 1920's and that he "believed that people knew more than they knew — that is, what their ancestors had known."¹⁶ In December, 1930, Wolfe wrote Maxwell Perkins: "My conviction is that a native has the whole consciousness of his people and nation in him; that he knows everything about it, every sight sound and memory of the people."¹⁷

One gathers from the foregoing statements that Wolfe's compulsion to look backward through the door of memory into his personal and family history was motivated by more than a simple desire to capsulize the nation's political or social history. Instead, he was in effect trying to define the soul of his race, to excavate beneath its skull. What he discovered in those excavations was seldom consoling. In all three of his plays written at Harvard, a thin veneer of rationality overlays a deep substratum of violence in his typical characters. Likewise in Look Homeward, Angel, most of the Gant family exhibit irrational drives and violent tendencies.

¹⁶Kennedy, p. 116.
In an early draft for the concluding scene of the first novel, when Eugene announces his artistic goal of subjective revelation, he describes a much darker source for the wellsprings of his creativity than he does in the published version. In this early draft, Eugene speaks in the first person plural instead of the singular and thus becomes a spokesman for the human race. More significantly, in the published version of this scene Eugene describes his inward journey in neo-Platonic images of "lost seas," "buried cities," "the forgotten language," and "music strange as any ever sounded; . . . ." In the original manuscript, however, this underworld of human consciousness is described in explicitly psychological terms with Freud, "the great wizard of Vienna," providing unappreciated insights:

We stand on the terrible shores of that dark sunken sea, hearing only its mighty and secret whisper, the terrible and insistent evil of its music beating, below the little sugar bank of our defenses, the awful rhythm that unites us to eternity. The sad family of this world is damned all together, and joined, from its birth in an unspoken and grievous kinship: in the incestuous loves of sons and mothers; in Lesbian hungers and parricidal hatreds; in the terrible shames of sons and fathers, and the uneasy shifting of their eyes; in the insatiate sexuality of infancy, in our wild hunger for ourself, the dear love of our excrement, the great obsession of Narcissus, and in the strange first love of every boy which is for a man.

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Which of us has not felt a secret unspeakable joy at the thought of this voyage into a newer stranger land than Magellan dreamed of, a world more golden than

Columbus thought to find? We stand upon the shore of the magic world, unable yet to see it save for the bare appalling flashes that the great wizard of Vienna has thrown upon it. But he has spoken a century too soon: we need tougher sinews, greater hearts. -- We will fight desperately yet awhile to save our fudge, we will dilute terror and beauty with milk and water, and as long as we can we will proclaim the idiot health of the animal, and deny the epic disease that makes us men.  

From the time of his earliest literary efforts, then, Thomas Wolfe willingly confronted the dark side of man's soul. As he confessed to Margaret Roberts before publication of Look Homeward, Angel, "... this book dredges up from the inwards of people pain, terror, cruelty, lust, ugliness, as well, I think, as beauty, tenderness, mercy." Furthermore, Wolfe never substantially altered this dualistic appraisal of man's nature, which is suggested by the quotation on the title page of Of Time and the River: "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" Also, proposed chapters and section titles for the manuscript of his last book included "The Book of the Night," "The Beast of the Night," and "The Hound of Darkness."

Although Wolfe's view of man's capacity for evil never changed, his view of himself in relation to mankind


changed significantly. In the first stage of his career, Wolfe's hero recognizes the human and social evil surrounding him but tries to remain aloof. Richard Weaver reluctantly and tragically joins his feuding family in the last scene of *The Mountains*. In *Welcome to Our City*, both Jordan and Rutledge recognize the greed and racism that surround them, but each retreats behind his own wall: for Jordan the wall of disillusioned idealism and for Rutledge that of antiquarian nostalgia for his lost home. Likewise in *Mannahouse*, Eugene Ramsey outwardly conforms to his family's chauvinistic code of honor but inwardly searches for strange and distant harbors. Finally, as was demonstrated in the last chapter, Eugene Gant spends his first twenty years in *Look Homeward, Angel* trying to achieve a "creative solitude" in the midst of a quarreling family and a shallow, hypocritical home town.

During the six-year period between his first two novels, which spanned the worst years of the Great Depression, Wolfe became more sharply aware of the violence and social injustice in America that were manifested daily in his New York and Brooklyn neighborhoods. In *The Story of a Novel* he recorded details of "this black picture of man's inhumanity to his fellow man" which, Wolfe says, "left a scar upon my life, a conviction in my soul which I shall never lose."\(^{21}\)

Nevertheless, *From Death to Morning* and *Of Time and the River*, both published in 1935 at the end of that six-year period, do not reflect a fully awakened social conscience. That point of view would not be crystalized until the third and last phase of Wolfe's career, 1936-1938, during which time he worked on the manuscript of his three posthumous publications. What did become evident during Wolfe's second period of creativity, however, was a new way of approaching the problem of time and the beginnings of a new moral vision.

In his attitude toward time, Wolfe retained the naturalistic viewpoint of *Look Homeward, Angel*. Specifically, in *Of Time and the River* W. O. and Eliza Gant are once more responsible for their son's divided attraction between the North and South and for his conflicting tendencies to wander and to return home. Thus Wolfe's deterministic view of past hereditary influences still prevailed. What began to disappear from Wolfe's fiction in the second period of his career, however, were the purely subjective, idealized visions of time that occurred in *Look Homeward, Angel*. Such visions include the momentary suspensions of time, as when Gant and Eugene each reviews his past life before the frozen fountains of the Altamont square. What appears more frequently after the first novel is a vision of time that illustrates cyclical patterns of human history. This new approach to the past is described by Wolfe in *The Story of a Novel* when he identifies the three time elements of *Of Time*
and the River. The "second time element" describes his naturalistic viewpoint, and the third time sequence describes his cyclical theory:

There were three time elements inherent in the material. The first and most obvious was an element of actual present time, an element which carried the narrative forward, which represented characters and events as living in the present and moving forward into an immediate future. The second time element was of past time, one which represented these same characters as acting and as being acted upon by all the accumulated impact of man's experience so that each moment of their lives was conditioned not only by what they experienced in that moment, but by all that they had experienced up to that moment. In addition to these two time elements, there was a third which I conceived as being time immutable, the time of rivers, mountains, oceans, and the earth; a kind of eternal and unchanging universe of time against which would be projected the transience of man's life, the bitter briefness of his day.22

Coincident with this new, more objective vision of time, Wolfe also began to develop a new moral vision. As Richard Kennedy says, while Wolfe was living in Brooklyn during the early 1930's, "he began to bring the common man into his vision of America."23 This new sympathy with his fellow man, however, did not take the form of active promotion of social programs. More precisely, it was a philosophical feeling of kinship with fellow sufferers and workers who had endured the Depression. Wolfe expressed his feelings this way:

And from it all, there has come as the final deposit, a burning memory, a certain evidence of the fortitude of man, his ability to suffer and

22Ibid., pp. 51-52.
23Kennedy, p. 231.
somehow to survive. And it is for this reason now that I think I shall always remember this black period with a kind of joy that I could not at that time have believed possible, for it was during this time that I lived my life through to a first completion, and through the suffering and labor of my own life came to share those qualities in the lives of people all around me.  

Those two developments in this transitional period of Wolfe's career, his more objective view of time and his growing sense of human kinship, are evidenced in his short-story collection, From Death to Morning, and in Of Time and the River. As in his earlier works, Wolfe continued to draw upon personal and family experiences, though not so exclusively as before. The significance of these experiences, however, began to extend beyond their impact upon the narrator. Wolfe's vision, in effect, had crossed personal and family barriers.

From Death to Morning

Wolfe's difficulties in organizing his second novel have been mentioned. Although he continued to plan his work for book-length form, his units of composition became more episodic. In August, 1930, he confessed in his personal notebook: "I am all broken up in fragments myself at present and all that I can write is fragments. The man is his work: if the work is whole, the man must be whole."  

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he wrote Maxwell Perkins: "I had an immense book and I wanted to say it all at once: it can't be done. Now I am doing it part by part, and hope and believe the part I am doing will be a complete story, a unity, and part of the whole plan." 26

Because Wolfe was pressed for money during those years, a fortunate result of his restricted method was that he wrote a series of marketable short stories and short novels. Some of those works were incorporated into Of Time and the River; others were published separately in magazines, especially in Scribner's. Most of them were finally arranged for publication in the short-story collection, From Death to Morning. The chronological arrangement of those pieces, as the title suggests, represents a progression towards the affirmative, vitalistic view of life that Wolfe described in The Story of a Novel. Moreover, these stories represent the second phase of Wolfe's family motif, a phase in which both individuals and family groups serve as representatives of a common human destiny. An examination of the selections in From Death to Morning should illustrate this increased awareness.

"No Door," the first selection in From Death to Morning, and "The Web of Earth," Eliza Gant's long family narrative at the end, serve as thematic counterpoints for the

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book. The first story, consisting of two episodes in the lonely life of a writer in Brooklyn, dramatizes the theme of insularity suggested by its title. In "The Web of Earth," Eliza Gant symbolizes earthly renewal and kinship as she weaves her digressive chronicle of mountain bloodshed, births, and prophecies.

The thematic distance between these two stories, however, does not reflect a chronological growth on Wolfe's part. No Door was written for magazine publication in early 1933, almost a year after The Web of Earth was published. In its original form, in fact, No Door carries just as hopeful a message as The Web of Earth. It begins with the same prose-poem which introduces Of Time and the River: "... of wandering forever and the earth again ... of seedtime, bloom, and the mellow-dropping harvest. ..."27 It concludes with a dream vision in which the narrator listens to an old man who counsels "patience and belief" with examples of eternal rebirth. His final statement epitomizes Wolfe's vitalistic belief in and preference for life over death, especially the death-in-life sterility which he associated with the city's literary sophisticates. The amorality of Wolfe's vitalism, which has been criticized by Bella Kussy,28 is

evident in the old man's speech by his reference to "the hoof of the beast" and by his ambiguous phrase, "... there will be something growing like a flower, ..." [Italics mine]: "Under the pavements trembling like a pulse, under the build­ ings trembling like a cry, under the waste of time, the hoof of the beast again above the broken bones of cities, there will be something growing like a flower, forever bursting from the earth, forever deathless, faithful, coming into life again like April."29

Interspersed between those two optimistic statements at the beginning and end of No Door are various episodes from Wolfe's life between 1925 and 1931. Most of that material was later incorporated into Of Time and the River and will be treated later in conjunction with that novel. As the title of the short novel indicates, with its subtitle "A Story of Time and the Wanderer," the episodes of No Door describe the narrator's unsuccessful attempts to find permanence and certainty in a temporal world, the same father-search he would pursue in his second novel. In June, 1933, a month before Scribner's magazine published No Door, Wolfe wrote his sister Mabel Wheaton: "There is another thing in life that is hard to bear that fortunately you do not know much about -- that is loneliness. If you have time and are interested in knowing anything about my own life for the last ten or fifteen years,

29 Wolfe, No Door, p. 231.
you might look at a piece I have written for the next number of Scribner's."^30

The first episode of the Scribner's novella version of No Door became the short story of the same title in From Death to Morning. Concerning as it does the loneliness of a sensitive writer in Brooklyn, the work establishes a mood of despair which is gradually alleviated in succeeding stories. The first of two scenes in "No Door" describes the narrator's visit to the luxurious apartment of a wealthy middle-aged friend and his well-kept wife. The writer's estrangement from the lives of this affluent couple is treated ironically by the husband's expressions of envy as his guest describes the sordid and brutal atmosphere of his Brooklyn neighborhood:

"To be free! To go about and see these things!" he cries. "To live among real people! To see life as it is, in the raw -- the real stuff, not like this!" he says with a weary look at all the suave furnishings of illusion that surround him. "And above all else to be alone!"^31

The narrator realizes that he has no reply for his host:

"For you are what you are, you know what you know, and there are no words for loneliness, black, bitter, aching loneliness, that knows the roots of silence in the night" (pp. 11-12).

The second and last episode of "No Door" again dramatizes man's inability to communicate. One Brooklynite, Wolfe, The Letters of Thomas Wolfe, p. 370.

^31 Thomas Wolfe, "No Door," in From Death to Morning, by Thomas Wolfe (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 11. All subsequent references to short stories from this collection will be cited by page number within parentheses in the text.
who has "been away," is informed by another of the death of a Father Grogan. Their inability to express or to appreciate the significance of his death is conveyed by the narrator's ironically genteel dialogue guides:

"I guess Father Grogan died since you was gone," a voice began.
"Oh, yeah?" the other voice replied with tranquil interest.
"Yeah."
And for a waiting moment there was silence.
"Say, dat's too bad, isn't it?" the quiet voice then said with comfortless regret.
"Yeah. He died on Saturday. When he went home on Friday night, he was O.K."
"Oh, yeah?"
"Yeah." (p. 13).

The final rhetorical statement by the narrator makes explicit the significance of these two Brooklyn scenes:

And now the red light fades swiftly from the old red brick of rusty houses, and there are voices in the air, and somewhere music, and we are lying there, blind atoms in our cellar-depths, gray voiceless atoms in the monswarm desolation of the earth, and our fame is lost, our names forgotten, our powers wasting from us like mined earth, while we lie here at evening and the river flows . . . and dark time is feeding like a vulture on our entrails, and we know that we are lost, and cannot stir . . . (p. 14).

As this first episode of the original No Door is presented in From Death to Morning, it serves as an effective transitional marker between Wolfe's first two periods of creativity. Living alone in Brooklyn and isolated from his fellow man by what Maurice Stein referred to on the first page of this study as "barriers of sensibility and language," the writer-narrator has indeed achieved that "creative solitude" earnestly sought by Eugene Gant in Look Homeward, Angel.
One remembers, however, that the original version of No Door was enclosed by optimistic pronouncements of eternal rebirth. The four stories that follow "No Door" in From Death to Morning -- "Death the Proud Brother," "The Face of War," "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn," and "Dark in the Forest, Strange as Time" -- continue, as their titles suggest, the mood of death, darkness, and despair established by "No Door." Nevertheless, those four stories, with their hints of universal kinship, provide a foundation for the more optimistic mood of the last stories in the collection. In effect, those stories provide a door out of despair.

"Death the Proud Brother," written by Wolfe in the fall of 1932, when he was depressed by monetary worries and fears of failure, draws from Wolfe's nighttime experiences and reflects his own somber mood. The opening lines express his knowledge of and preoccupation with the nighttime of America's soul: "The face of the night, the heart of the dark, the tongue of the flame -- I had known all things that lived or stirred or worked below her destiny. I was the child of night, a son among her mighty family, and I knew all that moved within the hearts of men who loved the night. I had seen them in a thousand places and nothing that they ever did or said was strange to me" (p. 15).

"Death the Proud Brother" describes four scenes of death in the city, introduced and concluded by apostrophic hymns to Death, Loneliness, and Sleep: "I had known all
things living on the earth by night, and finally, I had known by night the immortal fellowship of those three with whom the best part of my life was passed -- proud Death, and his stern brother, Loneliness, and their great sister, Sleep" (p. 17). Bella Kussy justifiably cites this story as confirming evidence of Wolfe's dangerous vitalistic philosophy, with its equal significance given to life and death in the physical world: "Thus is justified in vitalistic terms that abnormal intensity and excess of life which becomes destruction of life, and that susceptibility to the fascination of death and destruction which appears in the short story Death the Proud Brother, with its series of almost ecstatic descriptions of violent deaths on city streets, ... . The fascination of death becomes equal to and part of the fascination of life."32

The first three episodes describe violent, accidental deaths, but the narrator first refers to, and later fully develops, his witnessing of a natural death in a subway: "so peaceable and natural in its action, that we all stared at it with eyes of fascination and unbelief, recognizing the face of death at once with a terrible sense of recognition which told us we had always known him, and yet, frightened and bewildered as we were, unwilling to admit that he had come" (p. 18). Thus by his apostrophe to death and by this first example, 

Wolfe establishes his theme of death as the great leveler and binder of humanity.

Each of the three violent deaths in the city is characterized by callous indifference on the part of bystanders, a sharp contrast to the shared grief of the Gant family over their losses in the first novel. The first scene describes the mangling "beyond recognition" of an Italian street vendor when he is hit by a truck. A morbidly curious crowd gathers but is immediately dispersed by brutally efficient police using threats of violence. One of the policemen expresses typical remorse at such a scene: "The spaghetti, pieces of brain, and fragments of skull were mixed together on the pavement in a horrible bloody welter. One of the policemen looked at it for a moment, pushed the thick toe of his boot tentatively into it, and then turned away with a grimace of his brutal red face, as he said, 'Jesus!'" (p. 21).

For the narrator, however, the scattered debris of the vendor's belongings has universal significance:

For later it seemed these dingy and lifeless objects were able to evoke, with a huge pathos, the whole story of the man's life, his kindly warmth and smiling friendliness -- for I had seen him many times -- and his pitiful small enterprise, to eke out shabbily, but with constant hope and as best he could, beneath an alien sky, in the heart of the huge indifferent city, some little reward for all his bitter toil and patient steadfastness -- some modest but shining goal of security, freedom, escape, and repose, for which all men on this earth have worked and suffered (p. 22).

The second view of death in the city is that of a "professional bum" whose "features had a kind of epic
brutality in which a legend of lonely skies and terrible distances, of pounding wheel and shining rail, of rust and steel and bloody brawl, and of the wild and savage earth, was plainly written" (p. 23). As usual "None of the people who had gathered there about the man showed any emotion whatever" (p. 24). This time the narrator focuses attention on a young couple whom he identifies with Wolfe's personal enemies: "young college people, young city people, young Village, painting, writing, art-theatre people, young modern 'post-war generation' people -- were looking down at the man, observing him with the curiosity with which, and with less pity than, one would regard a dying animal, and laughing, talking, jesting with each other with a contemptible and nasty callousness that was horrible, and that made me want to smash them in the face" (p. 25). The contrast between this "secret, sweet, and precious" couple and the dead wanderer, who lay "as solid as a rock, . . ., with that great brutal face of power and fortitude, upthrust and rigid, bared with a terrible stillness, an awful dignity, . . .." (p. 28), clearly illustrates Wolfe's preference of physical death over a spiritual kind.

The third death, that of a construction worker whose clothes are ignited by a blazing rivet and who falls, "a blazing torch," from a steel girder, includes social criticism by Wolfe and anticipates his later satire of the monied class in *You Can't Go Home Again*. The horrible death occurs on Fifth Avenue and follows a portrayal of wealthy, chic,
chauffered women who would soon patronize the store under construction and "who would pay as they bought, and would plunk down the ransom of a king in thousand-dollar bills for a coat of chinchilla fur; . . . (p. 32).

The narrator is intoxicated by the vitality of the street scene and by thoughts of his mistress, whose sister is married to the department store owner: "And the image of that single face seemed to give a tongue to joy, a certitude to all the power and happiness I felt, to resume into its small circle, as into the petals of a flower, all of the glory, radiance, and variousness of life and of the street, until a feeling of such triumph and belief surged up in me that I thought I could eat and drink the city, and possess the earth" (p. 34).

After the gruesome death, the morbid crowds and brutal policemen appear again. This time the indifference of the city dweller to death is personified by a chauffered woman who is relieved when her driver maneuvers away from the accident: "The lady settled back in her seat with a look of relief. Thank Heeven, that was over! George was so smart. He got in ahead of every one: you never knew how he did it! He had done that beautifully" (p. 37).

After his third view of death, the speaker's image of his mistress and her city is reversed: "For where that radiant, good, and lovely face had just the moment before wrought for me its magic certitude and unity of exultant joy,
now all this magic world of health and life was shattered by this nameless death, was drowned out in the torrent of this man's nameless blood, and I could see her face no longer as it had looked at noon" (p. 38). Likewise her city becomes "a world of the infamous dead so powerful in the entrenchments of its obscene wealth, its corruption that was amorous of death and faithlessness, its insolence of a jaded satiety, and its appalling weight of number and amount that it crushed man's little life beneath its ramified assault and killed and mutilated every living thing it fed upon . . ." (p. 39).

The last scene, the natural death of a "pavement cipher" in a subway, is given the fullest detail. This natural passing, comparable to that of Ben and W. O. Gent, ironically makes the strongest impression on the city bystanders, many of whom cannot accept its reality: "But the fourth time that I saw death come, the city people were stunned, awed, bewildered, and frightened, as they had not been before; and yet the fourth death had come so quietly, easily, and naturally that it seemed as if even a child could have looked at it without terror or surprise" (p. 41).

The anonymous victim, "his number myriad," is identified as "unmistakably Irish," probably a patronage seeker from local politicians, the narrator speculates. After castigating this little "man-swarm atom" for his narrow vision, however, Wolfe eulogizes in the manner of John Donne as he avows kinship with this piece of clay:
Something of us all, the high, the low, the base, and the heroic, the rare, the common, and the glorious lies dead here in the heart of the unceasing city, and the destiny of all men living, yes, of the kings of the earth, the princes of the mind, the mightiest lords of language, and the deathless imaginers of verse, all the hope, hunger, and the earth-consuming thirst that can incredibly be held in the small prison of a skull, and that can rack and rend the little tenement in which it is confined, is written here upon this shabby image of corrupted clay (p. 46).

While the crowd surrounding the corpse awaits an ambulance, Wolfe presents a montage of portraits and vignettes typifying subway life in New York, both literally and metaphorically. Those scenes, while effectively demonstrating the abnormality of natural death in a crowded, public subway, also betray Wolfe's provincial biases toward the ethnic mixture of New York. The bystanders include, for example: "an assertive and knowing-looking Jew, with a large nose, an aggressive voice, and a vulturesque smile, and an Italian, smaller, with a vulpine face, . . ." (p. 54); two couples with "broad, blunted, smeared features of the Slavic races -- of Lithuanians or Czecs -- and for a while they stared stupidly and brutally at the figure of the dead man, . . ." (p. 58); and finally, a "young Negro prostitute" whose face, "originally of a light coppery color, had been so smeared over with rouge and powder that it was now a horrible, dusky yellow-and-purplish hue, . . . (p. 58). The prostitute's seduction of the "vulpine" Italian away from the crowd epitomizes the city's callous response to dying; nevertheless, the people who remain at the scene are stripped of their normal defenses.
as they stand before death "lonely, silent, and afraid" (p. 62).

The narrator, however, emerging from the subway tunnel, sees once more "the deathless sky, the huge starred visage of the night, . . ." (p. 67) and is filled once more with joy, hope, and belief in immortality. Before his final apostrophe to "proud Death, stern Loneliness, and Sleep," the unifying elements of mankind, he has a personal vision of immortality: "... I knew I should not die and strangle like a mad dog in the tunnel's dark. I knew I should see light once more and know new coasts and come into strange harbors, and see again, as I had once, new lands and morning" (p. 67).

Clearly the ambivalent viewpoints of "Death the Proud Brother" show Wolfe at a midway point in his philosophical growth. He welcomes death as a unifying force in men's lives that opens its "dark door for us who never yet found doors to enter, . . ." (p. 67). Nonetheless, his point of view is still essentially subjective, with the reference to his own "strange harbors" reminiscent of Eugene Ramsey in Mannerhouse. Equally significant is the strong note of racial and ethnic bias in this story, a holdover from his own clannish background. An element of social criticism emerges in his contrast of the kept women on Fifth Avenue with the bloody remains of a steelworker; full sympathy with the common man, however, would not be evident until the final stage of his career. Finally, his mystical, almost morbid fascination
with death and the underside of man's soul in this story reveals a dangerous, primitive side of Wolfe that he would not fully recognize until his last visit to Germany.

The three stories that follow "Death the Proud Brother" -- "The Face of War," "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn," and "Dark in the Forest, Strange as Time" -- continue the themes of death, violence, and isolation in a rootless world, relieved only by Wolfe's counter-theme of human kinship. The last of these stories, however, reflects a saner point of view by the narrator, who recognizes the irrationality of his Faustian quest for experience.

"The Face of War," taken from Wolfe's original manuscript of Look Homeward, Angel, was based on his summer work in the Norfolk, Virginia naval yard in 1918. Its "four moments from the face of war," in decreasing intensity, reveal the violent substratum of man's nature. The first and most brutal of the four scenes describes a Negro, "... white teeth bared in a horrible grimace of fear and hatred," cringing before a Southern white gang boss "who advances upon him brandishing a club in his meaty hand, screaming the high thick throat-scream of blood-lust and murder: 'I'll stomp the guts out of you, you God-damned black bastard! I'll beat his God-damn brains out!' -- and smashing brutally with his club, coming down across the Negro's skull with the sickening resilient thud ... of wood on living bone" (p. 71). The overseer is encouraged in his murder by the offer of a pistol from
"an office clerk, the little meager yes-man of the earth, a
rat in shirt-sleeves, quick as a rat to scamper to its hiding,
quick as a rat to come in to the kill when all is safe, with
rat's teeth bared -- . . ." (p. 71). With gruesome detail,
the Negro's destruction for talking back to a white man is
described.

The second war-time scene depicts the typically ex-
cessive use of authority in a military setting. An armed
soldier curses, slaps, and shoves one of three college boys
who, in their jubilant camaraderie, had carelessly wandered
too close to a guarded war-plane. Though not as violent as
the first scene, the second nevertheless illustrates "the
rat's salvation from the shipwreck of his self-esteem --
armed with a gun now, clothed in khaki, riding the horse of
his authority, . . ." (p. 73).

The third and longest of the episodes dramatizes
human tenderness within a crude brothel catering to the
flotsam of war, opening its door "to a need as savage and
insatiate as hunger, as old as life, the need of friendless,
unhoused men the world over" (p. 75). The narrator discovers
even within "these poor, brutally exhausted and fear-ridden
women . . . a kind of buried tenderness, a fearful, almost
timid desire to find some friendship, gentleness, even love
among the rabble-rout of lost and ruined men to whom they
ministered" (p. 73). The climax of this scene occurs when
the narrator recognizes Margaret, a young, exhausted
prostitute, as a girl from his college town, "of a family of humble decent people," who had probably been impregnated by a student. The paradox of this personal recognition in a place of anonymous, commercial lovemaking provides a poignant scene: "And yet, beneath this defiant scornfulness, the strange, husky tenderness of the girl's tone persisted, and as she spoke, she put her slender hand lightly on his arm, with the swift, unconscious tenderness of people in a world of strangers who suddenly meet some one they know from home" (p. 83). The concluding paragraph magnifies Margaret as a representative symbol of all homeless Americans who wander the earth:

He never saw her after that. She was engulfed into the great vortex of the war, the huge dark abyss and thronging chaos of America, the immense, the cruel, the indifferent and the magic land, where all of us have lived and walked as strangers, where all of us have been so small, so lonely, and forsaken, which has engulfed us all at length, and in whose dark and lonely breast so many lost and nameless men are buried and forgotten (p. 84).

The final scene of "The Face of the War" again involves racial conflict but serves as effective and humorous counterpoint to the first bloody scene. A slovenly regiment of Negro troops is seen boarding a ship for overseas duty, supervised by "an infuriated little bullock of a white man, a first lieutenant, their commander, who during the mountainous accumulations of that catastrophic morning has been driven completely out of his head" (p. 87). Almost every one of the black soldiers has an item of equipment missing and
childishly petitions his commander for relief with the inappropriate appellation of "Boss." The lieutenant's indelicate invectives, such as "sausage-brained gorrillas" and "ape-faced sons of bitches," are nevertheless humorous and non-malevolent in context.

The climax of this last scene occurs when the lieutenant arranges for six of his men, who have been suspected of carrying venereal disease, to board the troop ship, only after much child-like pleading on their part. Although Wolfe's treatment of blacks would be considered insensitive by contemporary standards, the troops and their ship become symbolic of humanity's confrontation with the unknown: "And at length that brown, enormous, apparently interminable column has filed into the ship's great side, and there is nothing on the pier now but far lost sounds and silence, the breath of coolness, evening, the on-coming, undulant stride of all-enfolding and deep-breasted night" (p. 90).

"Only the Dead Know Brooklyn" and "Dark in the Forest, Strange as Time" are appropriately juxtaposed in this collection because they both concern the Faustian sickness which haunted Wolfe most of his life. The first story again dramatizes the theme of individual suffocation before the immensity of a city, whereas the second reveals the necessity of selectivity in a world of mass and number.

Edward A. Bloom considers "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn" to be one of Wolfe's most objective and artistically
unified fictional works. By using the point of view of a naive narrator, a Brooklynite of limited perception, Wolfe allows the reader to realize the gulf separating the narrator from the inquisitive, searching stranger. According to the narrator, "Dere's no guy livin' dat knows Brooklyn t'roo an' t'roo, . . ." (p. 91). Nevertheless, as his friend learns, one tall, inebriated stranger was trying to achieve just that feat with the aid of a map. After the Brooklynite tries to convince the stranger of the impossibility of his quest, the stranger asks him if he can swim and if he has ever seen a man drowning in Brooklyn. The metaphorical implications of the questions are left to the reader, as well as the figurative sense of the narrator's final comment, implying as it does the impossibility of a fully realized individualism in Brooklyn: "It'd take a guy a lifetime to know Brooklyn t'roo and t'roo. An' even den, yuh wouldn't know it all" (p. 97).

In December, 1926, after riding a train from Munich to Zurich, Wolfe jotted in his personal notebook: "The consumptive who rode with me in the carriage — His rather young and handsome wife at Munich." Seven years later this observation became the basis for "Dark in the Forest, Strange

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as Time," one of his most artistically delicate yet philosophically ambiguous stories. The story is especially relevant to this study because it contains a full recognition, but not a rejection, of the atavistic urges in Wolfe that account in large part for his familial obsessions, specifically his father search. Allied with that primitive urge to look backward is Wolfe's Faustian quest for total experience. That quest is implicitly rejected in the story when the dying Jew counsels moderation to his young companion: "Vun life, vun place, vun time" (p. 109). What is not rejected but affirmed, however, is the narrator's compulsion to look into his personal and racial past for sources of strength. "Dark in the Forest," in fact, signifies a turning backward in From Death to Morning since most of the remaining stories are based on Wolfe's memories of North Carolina.

The plot line of "Dark in the Forest" provides a frame within which the narrator expounds on man's spirit, the Germanic spirit in particular. The contrast between the dying Jew and his voluptuous, deceitful wife whom he leaves on the train platform establishes a pattern of opposing forces: male and female, sickness and health, death and life, wanderer and homebound. While she is "at the flawless summit of a mature and radiant beauty" (p. 98), his face "was wasted almost to a fleshless integument of bone and skin, . . ." (p. 99). After the narrator watches the Jew's wife embrace her lover on the platform and thus return to life, he learns
from her husband that he is leaving his wife for the winter, in effect going to his death.

As the train crosses Bavaria, the Wolfeian spokesman comments explicitly on his dark feelings of racial kinship with Germany: "It is an overwhelming feeling of immediate and impending discovery, such as men might have who come for the first time to their father's country. It is like coming to that unknown land for which our spirits long so passionately in youth, which is the dark side of our soul, the strange brother and the complement of the land we have known in our childhood" (pp. 105-06).

For several paragraphs Wolfe's traveler analyzes the causes of his strange sensation of "instant recognition" in Germany by one of the "lost Americans" who have "ten thousand men marching in our blood" (p. 106). He even claims to have understood and spoken instantly the Germanic language in "a weird argot which was neither his nor theirs . . ." (p. 106). Finally, he identifies this knowledge of Germany, the land of "his father's people," as an intuitive, ancestral kinship with the soul of man, with its "terrible fusion of the brute and of the spirit" (p. 107). This "tragic and insoluble admixture of the race" includes "its rending, quenchless, and obscene desires" as well as "all that was magical, glorious, strange, and beautiful: the husky horn-notes sounding faint and elfin through the forests, the
infinite strange weavings, dense mutations of the old Germanic soul of man" (p. 107).

Following this meditation, the narrator resumes his conversation with the elderly Jew, who by his kindly, world-weary manner suggests a father figure. His advice serves as a resolution to the Faustian hunger, "the never-sated beast," within the young man:

"Eferyvere it iss ze same," he said wearily, looking out the window, with a dismissing gesture of his thin white hand. "Fields, hills, mountains, riffers, cities, peoples -- you wish to know about zem all. Vun field, vun hill, vun riffer," the man whispered, "zat iss enough!"

He closed his eyes for a moment: when he spoke again his whisper was almost inaudible -- "Vun life, vun place, vun time" (p. 109).

This speech, in effect, shifts the focus of "Dark in the Forest," as well as that of the remaining stories in From Death to Morning, to the narrator's personal past, to his own life, place, and time. Scenes from his boyhood in North Carolina become predominant settings, taking the place of sterile city locales or European scenes.

After his conversation with the dying man, who falls asleep, the young man goes to the dining car where "all was brilliance, movement, luxury, sensual warmth and gaiety" (p. 110). This scene leads him to speculate on the difference between train travel in Europe and that in America, or, in essence, the difference between European and American culture. Basically, the American train is characterized by expectation, "a wordless and unutterable hope as one thinks of the
enchanted city toward which he is speeding," whereas the European train represents fulfillment: "... the feeling of joy and pleasure is more actual, ever present" (p. 111).

Upon returning to his compartment, the narrator discovers that his traveling companion is dead, "a large vermillion stain upon the floor" (p. 112). After a brief hesitation, the American decides to leave the corpse without notifying anyone and justifies his action philosophically:

Was it not well to leave all things as he had found them, in silence, at the end? Might it not be that in this great dream of time in which we live and are the moving figures, there is no greater certitude than this: that, having met, spoken, known each other for a moment, as somewhere on this earth we were hurled onward through the darkness between two points of time, it is well to be content with this, to leave each other as we met, letting each one go alone to his appointed destination, sure of this only, needing only this -- that there will be silence for us all and silence only, nothing but silence, at the end (p. 113)?

Richard S. Kennedy suggests that "all the contrasts" in this story "are resolved in the conclusion" because the traveler becomes aware of this common destination of silence.\textsuperscript{35} Although the next-to-last paragraph quoted above does reaffirm Wolfe's theme of universal kinship, one may still question the thematic integrity of the entire conclusion. Besides the practical questions raised by leaving a corpse unreported in a train compartment, the moral soundness of the quoted paragraph is also debatable. Granted that a train serves well as microcosmic symbol of life's journey,

\textsuperscript{35}Kennedy, p. 284.
one may still challenge Wolfe's isolationist advice "to leave each other as we met, letting each one go alone to his appointed destination, . . . ."

Furthermore, the final paragraph in "Dark in the Forest" leaves in doubt the full value of the young traveler's experience. Stepping from the train and "breathing the vital and snow-laden air into his lungs, he was going down the quay with a hundred other people, all moving in the same direction, some toward certitude and home, some toward a new land, hope, and hunger, the swelling prescience of joy, the promise of a shining city. He knew that he was going home again" (p. 113). Presumably, the narrator's "home" refers to the "new land, hope, and hunger" of America and not the "certitude" of European tradition. Nevertheless, this looking backward at the end of the story still carries with it the atavistic associations described earlier by the narrator as "a spell, a magic, and a sorcery, . . . ." (p. 105). In sum, Wolfe, at this stage of his career, was still pursuing "the escapes of time and memory" that he would finally renounce in his Purdue speech of 1938.

The last line of "Dark in the Forest," "He knew that he was going home again," leads directly into the first line of the next story, "The Four Lost Men": "Suddenly, at the green heart of June, I heard my father's voice again" (p. 114). This story, taken from Wolfe's projected family chronicle, *The Hills Beyond Pentland*, provides an example of
the primary function his family narratives would serve for
the remainder of his career: that is, to open a window on
American and human history.

"The Four Lost Men" is set in the narrator's home
town, during his sixteenth year, when his country is at war.
The war-time atmosphere of eternal rejuvenation presents a
sharp contrast to the bleak, violent, waste-land atmosphere
of his earlier war story, "The Face of War." In "The Four
Lost Men" the war "gives life to men as well as death. It
fills the hearts of young men with wild song and jubilation";
one feels it "in the little towns at dawn" through the
"utterly familiar acts" of the paper boy and milkman; and "In
all these ancient, ever-new, unchanging, always magic acts of
life and light and morning one felt the huge impending
presence of the war" (pp. 114-15).

This amoral, vitalistic atmosphere continues as the
scene shifts to the narrator's front porch, where his
"father's great voice" brings the war to him even more in-
tensely "with a wild and intolerable loneliness of ecstasy
and desire . . ." (p. 116). Moreover, the "all-collected joy
and unity" produced by the national effort even gives new
life to his father, who has been "sick with a cancer that
flowered and fed forever at his entrails, . . ." (p. 117).
As further evidence of Wolfe's vitalistic theme, this re-
juvenation of his father "instantly" frees those around him
"from the evil spell of sorrowful time and memory that had
made his living death more horrible than his real one could ever be" (p. 117).

As his father, in typically Gantian fashion, castigates the nation's leaders and reflects sentimentally on his own memories of the Civil War and afterward, the recent American past is brought to life: "the lost, time-far, voiceless faces of Buchanan, Johnson, Douglas, Blaine -- the proud, vacant, time-strange and be-whiskered visages of Garfield, Arthur, Harrison, and Hayes" (p. 119). After his father's voice fades and grows weary, the son begins to reconstruct the lives of those lost men, demonstrating by a series of rhetorical questions and descriptive scenes that the emotions of his generation reflect the same patterns as those of the dead presidents: "Had all of them not walked down lonely roads at night in winter and seen a light and known it was theirs? Had all of them not known the wilderness" (p. 122)? In some of Wolfe's most Whitmanesque language, the prose-poet chants of the mysterious union of men and earth:

You plain, oh-most-familiar and most homely earth, proud earth of this huge land unutterable, proud nobly swelling earth, in all your delicacy, wildness, savagery, and terror -- grand earth in all your loneliness, beauty and wild joy, terrific earth in all your limitless fecundities, swelling with infinite fold and convolution into the reaches of the West forever -- American earth! -- bridge, hedge, and creek and dusty road -- you plain tremendous poetry of Wilson's Mill, where boys died in the wheat this morning -- you unutterable far-near, strange-familiar, homely earth of magic, for which a word would do that never can be spoken, that can never be forgotten, and that will never be revealed -- oh, proud, familiar, nobly swelling earth, it seems we must have known you before (pp. 125-26)!
Although this story succeeds as a poetic hymn to ever-returning earth, its principal flaw lies in Wolfe's projecting his own feelings into the four dead presidents. He suggests that they, like him, lurked furtively outside a brothel at night; that they, like him, sought fame and happiness "in the far shining, magic, golden city" (p. 132); and that they, like him, were "... lost, as all of us have been who have known youth and hunger in this land, and who have waited lean and mad and lonely in the night, and who have found no goal, no wall, no dwelling, and no door" (p. 132).

The remaining stories in From Death to Morning continue the same theme of human kinship, especially among Americans, through their common emotion of loneliness and their recurrent desire to return home. For that reason those stories, except for "The Web of Earth," deserve only brief review.

"Gulliver," one of the stories culled for sale from The October Fair manuscript in 1933 with Elizabeth Nowell's help, is an autobiographical digression concerning Wolfe's sensitivity about his height. The narrative establishes an initial mood of isolation as the narrator describes "the world of six feet six" as "the strangest and most lonely world there is" (p. 134). A feeling of commonality with mankind finally develops, however, as he recognizes the universal reactions to his size. This "undeviating formula,"
exemplified by a dialogue with an awed and naive Brooklynite, "the city's child," "showed the tall and lonely man the barren unity of life, and that finally, curiously, in a poignant and inexplicable fashion, gave him a faith in man, a belief in man's fundamental goodness, kindliness, and humanity, as nothing else on earth could do" (p. 149).

"The Bums at Sunset" derives from a long sequence about trains, "K-19," that Wolfe had originally planned for his second novel. This brief vignette of five hoboes, of their rootless but communal lives, epitomizes Wolfe's theme "of wandering forever and the earth again." Well-suited for the depression years, this story develops a brief conflict among the bums as to whether their youngest member, "a fresh-skinned country lad with bright wondering eyes" (p. 150), should be admitted to their fellowship. The youngster is admitted after he is defended by the group leader, Bull, another father figure on whose face and body is written "a legend of pounding wheel and thrumming rod, of bloody brawl and brutal shambles, of the savage wilderness, the wild, cruel and lonely distances of America" (p. 151).

"One of the Girls in Our Party" is a light satire of European tours for American schoolteachers, in which Miss Blake's epistolary remarks reveal her as a twentieth-century Daisy Miller. An amusing contrast of European and American culture is developed by Miss Blake's inane but innocent travelogue: "'In the morning we saw the Bank of England and
the Tower of London and the Crown Jewels and came back for lunch to an old inn where Doctor Johnson, who was a good friend of Shakespeare's, used to eat" (p. 157). The story deepens at the conclusion when Miss Blake's thoughts of returning home before autumn are taken over by the narrator: "... and of the summer's ending, nights of the frost and silence and the barking of a dog, of people listening, and of words unspoken and the quiet heart, and nights of the old October that must come again, must come again, while we are waiting, waiting, waiting in the darkness for all of our friends and brothers who will not return" (p. 163).

"The Far and the Near," another excerpt from Wolfe's "K-19" manuscript, describes the pathos engendered by a train engineer's yearning for home. For twenty years, the engineer has blown his whistle and waved at a woman and her daughter on the porch of a cottage beside his route. This homely scene has become so fixed in his heart that he decides, after his retirement, to visit the little family. His embarrassment and regret over the contrast between expectation and reality is vividly conveyed. Remembering only "the brave freedom, the warmth and the affection that he had read into her gesture," the engineer discovers a timid, suspicious woman whose "face was harsh and pinched and meager..." (p. 167). The concluding dictum echoes the recurring motif of Wolfe's lost door: "And he knew that all the magic of that bright lost way, the vista of that shining line, the
imagined corner of that small good universe of hope's desire, was gone forever, could never be got back again" (p. 168).

The four remaining stories in From Death to Morning — "In the Park," "The Men of Old Catawba," "Circus at Dawn," and "The Web of Earth" — bring the collection to a crescendo of affirmation and hope. The first of these last four stories is based on Aline Bernstein's family recollections while the last three come from Wolfe's own background. They all coincide with Wolfe's intensified drive, during the first half of the 1930's, to excavate his past. In 1932 he made a genealogical expedition to York, Pennsylvania, to research his father's history. A few months later, in 1933, he wrote the director of archives for Pennsylvania: "I want very much to know more about these people, to find out if possible who their parents were and where they lived and how long this branch of my family has been in America." Margaret Church connects this ancestral preoccupation with the prevailing theme of Wolfe's second novel, the father search: "This intense desire on Wolfe's part to reanimate things lost and dead is probably closely connected with his search for a father or an antecedent."36


"In the Park," based on a reminiscence by Aline Bernstein of life with her actor-father, Joseph Frankau, succeeds in capturing the flavor of late Victorian life in New York City. As such, it anticipates Eliza Gant's equally feminine but more earthy and detailed reminiscences in "The Web of Earth." According to Mrs. Bernstein's persona, "New York was awfully nice in those days" because "they didn't have all this noise and confusion; . . ." (p. 170). Nevertheless, her account of a wild ride in one of New York's first horseless carriages recreates the innocent beginning of that "noise and confusion." Her description of the smells from the car reflects Wolfe's own ambivalent attitudes toward industrial America:

... its wonderful and exciting smells -- the strong and comforting smell of its deep leather, and the smells of gasoline and oil and grease that were so strong and warm and pungent that they seemed to give a kind of thrilling life and ecstasy to everything in the whole world. They seemed to hold the unknown promise of something wonderful and strange that was about to happen and that belonged to the night, and to the mystery and joy of life, the ecstasy of the lilac dark, as all the smells of flowers and leaf and grass and earth belonged to them (p. 179).

Finally, the narrator's full description of her actor-father, whose ebullient nature, Shakesperian quotes, and imminent death are reminiscent of W. O. Gant, establishes once more the lost-father theme. The story concludes with a lyrical recording of bird songs in Central Park, suggesting a loss of innocence concurrent with her father's death: "'Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet with
charm of earliest birds,' and it was just like that, and the sun came up, and it was like the first day of the world, and that was the year before he died and I think we were staying at Bella's then, . . ." (p. 184).

"The Men of Old Catawba," a tribute to the character of his native state, can almost be read as a conciliatory gesture by Wolfe to heal the wounds caused by his first novel. Cut from the original manuscript of Of Time and the River, this story once again reveals Wolfe's desire to chronicle America through local and family history. It also contains the same nexus of family motifs developed in preceding stories: the father search, the natural kinship of man, and the generative rebirth of man's spirit.

Wolfe's identification of Old Catawba as a father illustrates the confusion that sometimes results from Wolfe's use of parental symbols. Morris Beja, in fact, argues that Wolfe's "... search for a mother ... often seems as central in his works as the father theme."\(^{38}\) This ambiguity manifests itself in the introduction to this story as the narrator tries to distinguish between the earth as female-mother and Old Catawba as male-father:

\[\text{The earth is a woman, but Old Catawba is a man. The earth is our mother and our nurse, and we can know her, but Old Catawba is our father, and although we know that he is there, we shall never find him. He}\]

\(^{38}\) Morris Beja, "Why You Can't Go Home Again: Thomas Wolfe and 'The Escapes of Time and Memory,'" Modern Fiction Studies, 11, No. 3 (Autumn, 1965), 303.
is there in the wilderness, and his brows are bowed with granite: he sees our lives and deaths and his stern compassion broods above us. Women love him, but only men can know him: only men who have cried out in their agony and their loneliness to their father, only men who have sought throughout the world to find him, can know Catawba: but this includes all the men who ever lived (p. 187).

Following this initial praise, Wolfe satirizes historical myth and legend with his amusing account of Old Catawba's discovery by a "one-eyed Spaniard." In his denunciation of the Spaniards for "taking possession" of primeval earth, he echoes William Faulkner's contempt in The Bear for "puny" men "gnawing" at the wilderness: "For what else can we feel for this handful of greedy adventurers 'taking possession' of the immortal wilderness in the name of another puny fellow four thousand miles away, who had never seen or heard of the place and could never have understood it any better than these men? For the earth is never 'taken possession of': it possesses" (p. 191). However, in his description of the Catawban temperament, Wolfe suggests a cause for his own more skeptical attitude toward Southern myth as opposed to Faulkner's defensive casuistry:

The Catawba people are great people for all manner of debate and reasoned argument. Where the more fiery South Carolinian or Mississippian will fly into a rage and want to fight the man who doubts his word or questions his opinion, the eye of the Catawban begins to glow with a fire of another sort -- the lust for debate, a Scotch love of argument (p. 195).

An example of this Catawban love for reasoned argument follows, involving a lengthy debate in earthy dialogue over conflicting moral and legal rights in owning a mule.
Combined with this pride in the Catawban's character traits, however, there exists also a strong element of provincial bias toward foreign ethnic strains. The narrator is proud that, "although America is supposed by many of her cities to be a confusion of races, tongues, and peoples, as yet unwelded, there is perhaps nowhere in the world a more homogeneous population than that of Old Catawba" (p. 185). Later he is more explicit: "Until very recent years these people were touched scarcely at all by 'foreign' migration, whether from any of the other States, or from Europe: even today the number of 'foreign-born' citizens is almost negligible, the State has the largest percentage of native-born inhabitants in the country" (p. 202).

In summary, Wolfe's view of the past, as illustrated by this story, had not reached full maturity. The description of his Catawban ancestors, undoubtedly based on his mother's vast Westall family, is informed by a strong ethnocentric bias. In addition, Wolfe transfers much of his own character to his pioneer forebears, especially his solitary and lonely habits. His final summary of their "real" history, which exists outside of printed pages, is touched with the same vitalism and atavistic mysticism that the narrator of "Dark in the Forest" acknowledged with reference to his Germanic kinship:

But his real history . . . is a history that runs back three centuries into primitive America, a strange and unfathomable history that is touched by something dark and supernatural, and that goes back through
poverty, and hardship, through solitude and loneliness and death and unspeakable courage, into the wilderness. For it is the wilderness that is the mother of that nation, it was in the wilderness that the strange and lonely people who have not yet spoken, but who inhabit that immense and terrible land from East to West, first knew themselves, it was in the living wilderness that they faced one another at ten paces and shot one another down, and it is in the wilderness that they still live (p. 203).

"Circus at Dawn" is pure reminiscence which recaptures the innocent moods of Look Homeward, Angel. In this story the narrator describes his and his brother's awed reactions to a circus with its atmosphere of travel and adventure. Of particular interest to this study is the young boy's admiration of the circus performers' sense of community. This family on wheels represents an apparent solution to Wolfe's conflicting desires for movement and stability: "... these people in an astonishing way seemed to have created an established community which lived an ordered existence on wheels, and to observe with a stern fidelity unknown in towns and cities the decencies of family life" (pp. 209-10).

Between November, 1931, and March, 1932, Wolfe wrote two of his most successful short novels, A Portrait of Bascom Hawke and The Web of Earth. The first, based on Wolfe's memories of his Uncle Henry Westall, was included in Of Time and the River and will be referred to later in connection with that novel. The second, The Web of Earth, grew from a conversation between Wolfe and his mother in his New
York apartment in January, 1932. These two character studies represent excellent companion pieces, illustrating, as they do, Wolfe's male-female themes of "wandering forever and the earth again." C. Hugh Holman summarizes their relationship:

Thus, The Web of Earth becomes a fascinating counter-piece to A Portrait of Bascom Hawke; for each is a character study of an elderly person, but where Bascom Hawke is defeated and despairingly resigned, Eliza Gant is triumphant and dominant; where Bascom is the male victim of time, Eliza is the female devourer of time; where Bascom's is the vain grasp of intellect and reason in a mad and fury-driven world, Eliza's is the groping of mystery, passion, and fear in a world where reason always falls victim to the decay of time. Never did Wolfe articulate more effectively than in these two short novels the fundamental polarities of his childhood and youth.39

In an April, 1932 letter to Julian Meade, Wolfe told what The Web of Earth meant to him:

It is different from anything I have ever done; it's about an old woman, who sits down to tell a little story, but then her octopel memory weaves back and forth across the whole fabric of her life until everything has gone into it. . . . I really believe . . . that I knew this old woman better than Joyce knew that woman at the end of "Ulysses" and furthermore that my old woman is a grander, richer and more tremendous figure than his was. . . . I haven't used one-tenth of the material I had, . . . but that story about the old woman has got everything in it, murder and cruelty, and hate and love, and greed and enormous unconscious courage, yet the whole thing is told with the stark innocence of a child.40

Those statements shed light on several phases of Wolfe's developing family theme. For one thing, they reveal

39Holman, "Introduction" to The Short Novels of Thomas Wolfe, p. xi.

a new appreciation by Wolfe of his mother's strength and endurance, qualities seldom associated with the miserly Eliza of *Look Homeward, Angel*. Secondly, they prove again that Wolfe's ancestral longings could be directed towards maternal as well as paternal principles. In fact, following as it does so many stories which play on the father-search motif, *The Web of Earth* appears as an ironic conclusion to *From Death to Morning*. Finally, by naming with equal weight the forces of "murder, cruelty, hate, love, greed, and courage," Wolfe betrays once more the undiscriminating approval he often gives to elemental emotions.

Wolfe originally intended to insert *The Web of Earth* into his epic narrative and to have his hero John Crockett Hawke listen to his mother, Delia, spin her tales of pioneer America. The pioneer atmosphere remained unchanged when Wolfe changed the narrator's name from Delia Hawke to Eliza Gant. The story itself involves a complex web of digressions based upon Eliza's interpretation of ghostly voices she hears one night chanting, "Two, two . . . twenty, twenty." She mistakenly associates them with the central episode of the story, the escape of two convicted murderers and her befriending one of them, but she finally learns that the voices refer to the birth of her twins. Of central interest to Wolfe's family theme, however, is the contrast of Eliza with her husband and the characterization of Eliza as a fruitful earth mother.
In *The Web of Earth*, W. O. Gant must represent a poor substitute for a god-like father figure, the object of the narrator's search in previous stories. His primary virtue is that of being a good provider. According to his wife, "he was a strange man but where he was no one was ever cold, no one was ever hungry, there was enough for all, ..." (p. 298). Even this virtue, however, is carried to excess, and Eliza must restrain him from overstocking the house with hog meat and from buying forty dozen eggs on sale when they have laying chickens of their own. In fact, Eliza acts throughout the story as a voice of restraint and common sense as opposed to Gant's extravagancies. Instead of an all-wise father, Gant is portrayed as a lecherous husband of two previous marriages; as a violent threat to all Chinese (even to yellow-skinned Negroes mistaken for Chinese by Gant in his drunkeness), who are thought to have been enemies in a former life; and as a dying man who defies his doctor's orders against excessive drink.

In contrast to this dying man, always a wanderer and a "rolling stone," Eliza represents a source of stability whose sense of kinship extends beyond her immediate family to encompass the entire nation. Speaking of her grandfather William Pentland, she says: "All these childern that he had went out and had big families of their own, those that didn't die early or get killed, until now there are hundreds of them living down there in Catawba in the mountains, and
in Georgia and Texas and out west in California and Oregon until now they are spread all over like a web -- . . ." (pp. 221-22).

Eliza also represents the ever-fruitful earth mother: "I recon for a fact I had the power of Nature in me; why! no more trouble than the earth takes bearing corn, all of the childern, . . ." (p. 297). As such, she is a triumphant voice who has survived hardship and sorrow as far back as the Civil War. Her final advice to Miller, her contemporary who desairs over the bank failures, should have consoled depression-weary readers in the summer of 1933:

"And Miller," I said, "the banks haven't got everything," I said. "They may think they have, but now," I said, winkin' at him, "I've got a secret that I'm going to tell you. I've still got a little patch of land out in the country that no one knows about and if the worst comes to the worst," I said, "I won't starve. I'll go out there and grow my food and I'll have plenty. And if you go broke you can come on out," I said. . . . "We've got the earth," I said. "We've always got the earth. We'll stand upon it and it will save us. It's never gone back on nobody yet" (pp. 302-03).

By allowing his mother's voice to dominate this narrative, with its messages of human kinship and earthly continuity, Wolfe came as close as he ever did to the Nashville Agrarians' reverence for the traditional values associated with a landed society. Her voice, in fact, rings so triumphantly in this story that it can be read as more than an effective counterpoint to the barren, isolated atmosphere of "No Door," the first selection in From Death to
Morning. It can also be read as a temporary solution to the central problem that dominated the second period of Wolfe's career: namely, the need for roots in a rootless society. The sound of ships in the harbor opens and closes The Web of Earth and suggests that man, the eternal wanderer, must forever leave his earthly home. Nevertheless, Eliza's message implies that man can return to the earth, an unending source of strength, even if that return can only be made through the door of memory.

Of Time and the River

In February, 1933, Wolfe wrote his sister Mabel Wheaton that his three-year struggle to organize his second novel was over: "I seem suddenly to have found a way of getting started, which Perkins thinks was the real trouble all along, and having made the start everything has been going with a rush." That "way of getting started" involved a chronological ordering of his autobiographical material which he had been trying unsuccessfully to objectify with myth and legend. More specifically, his novella No Door probably became the gateway to Of Time and the River. As C. Hugh Holman explains, "Since the structure of No Door is essentially that of Of Time and the River, since the prologue to No Door re-appears with only minor changes as the prologue to the long novel, and since the writing of No Door

41 Ibid., p. 358.
coincides with the finding of a way to begin the book, it is probable that the short novel was the door through which Wolfe entered *Of Time and the River.* 42

The title of Wolfe's novella, *No Door,* and its prologue, "of wandering forever and the earth again," do indeed suggest the controlling motifs of rootlessness and frustration that dominate *Of Time and the River.* In his much-publicized statement from *The Story of a Novel,* Wolfe identified the central theme of his novel as the search for 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." 43

This image, which in fact germinated from a suggestion by Maxwell Perkins, had "genuine force" for Wolfe, says Richard Walser, because "Eugene's adventures are those of a youth trying to find a mooring for his trusts and beliefs." 44 Walser's opinion would seem to be confirmed by numerous references to Eugene's father throughout the novel and by section titles bearing the names of famous lost sons: Orestes, Telemachus, and Antaeus.

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42 Holman, "Introduction" to *The Short Novels of Thomas Wolfe,* p. xiii.


The vagueness of Wolfe's father search, however, has received comment several times. John Peale Bishop, for example, says that the search serves "no purpose" in the work; and Morris Beja, as previously noted, recognizes an equally prevalent mother-search taking place. In fairness to Wolfe, it must be said that his original plan called for the father theme to emerge clearly only at the end of his book, which at that time was called The October Fair and which contained material later published in The Web and the Rock. Nevertheless, Wolfe himself was vague as to the nature of this father figure, as seen from this letter to Maxwell Perkins:

He never sees his father but he hears the sound of his foot, the thunder of horses on a beach (Poseidon and his horses); the moon dives out of clouds; he sees a print of a foot that can belong only to his father since it is like his own; the sea surges across the beach and erases the print; he cries out "Father" and from the sea far out, and faint upon the wind, a great voice answers "My Son!" That is briefly the end as I see it — but can't tell you anything about it now.46

In the summer of 1933 Wolfe was deeply immersed in trying to complete the manuscript for his novel, which he had promised but failed to deliver to Scribner's by September. Excerpts from three letters that Wolfe wrote that summer reveal two important insights into Of Time and the


River. For one thing, the father search can be seen as a metaphor synonymous with but less compelling that the hero's search for a door or a home. Equally significant, the cause of this longing for certitude by Wolfe's persona was the author's own intense feelings of homesickness and frustration during the period of composition.

On June 29, 1933, Wolfe wrote to a boyhood friend, Leroy Dock, who had invited the author to vacation at his home in Balsam, North Carolina. In his reply, Wolfe expressed interest but delayed four more years before returning home to spend a summer in a rented cabin at Oteen, North Carolina. Besides his expression of homesickness, of special interest in Wolfe's reply is an ambivalent attraction to both his father's and mother's homes:

As I told you, after so many years of wandering about the world the pull towards some sort of established place and towards some sort of place where a man feels at home and among scenes and people who are familiar to him becomes very strong, and although I have seen many cities and many strange and beautiful places in the last ten years I have had that feeling of familiarity and home only in two places. One is the country where I was born, western North Carolina, and the other my father's country, among the farms and orchards of the Pennsylvania Dutch in southern Pennsylvania. I have an idea that some day I am going back to one of these two places.47

Further evidence that Wolfe had begun to qualify his need for a father figure is found in a letter of August 17, 1933, to Percy Mackaye, a poet-dramatist living in North

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47 Ibid., p. 376.
Carolina. Mackaye had provided an introduction for Wolfe to meet the famous sculptor, George Gray Barnard, who was then over seventy years and could have well represented a patriarch to a younger artist. Wolfe expressed a vague intention to call on Barnard but qualified his answer by digressing on one's attraction to a father figure and, by implication, revealed incipient doubts about his own father surrogate, Maxwell Perkins:

It is a fine thing for a young man when he meets a great old man, because I think we never lose entirely the hope that we have in childhood and that persists strongly in the first years of our youth that we will meet someone of such invincible strength and wisdom and experience that all the grief and error in our own lives will be resolved by him. Perhaps this is a deplorable weakness, but if it is it is certainly one that all humanity shares in to some extent, and although I now know that we must find the remedy for our own error in ourselves and get out of our own lives the power to live by, and that there is no one on earth who can speak a word so magical as to release us from the confusion, struggle and bewilderment in our own spirit, I still feel always a great awakening of power and hope and joy when I meet a man like this, whose whole life is an act of faith and who has lived and worked with such grand fortitude [italics mine].

Finally, in a letter to novelist Robert Raynolds twelve days later, Wolfe describes his writing of the initial scene for Of Time and the River, Eugene's train ride north from Catawba. The excerpt quoted shows Wolfe toying with a title which became the subtitle of his novel but which substituted hunger for fury and the generic man for artist in "A Legend of Man's Hunger in His Youth." By emphasizing the

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48 Ibid., pp. 381-82.
"fury" motive in this opening scene, Wolfe in fact identifies Eugene's primary motive throughout the novel -- his search for a door to absolute knowledge and certitude by means of a Faustian assault on the world of experience, past and present:

I'm calling my piece, which like everything else is a section of the fury theme, -- "The Image of Fury in the Artist's Youth" -- is this a good or lousy title? I just slapped it down, so it can be changed, and thought of "In the Artist's Youth" as a subtitle and not really essential to it. Anyway it's about Fury, not especially artist's fury, but the kind of fury young men have, probably more in this country than anywhere on earth -- the madness, exulting, desire to eat and drink the earth, getting into the wind on lonely roads, etc. -- and it starts in just about the most furious way it can, on a train smashing northwards across the State of Virginia at night with three drunken youths, as drunk with the exultant fact and fury of going to the city for the first time, out to conquer the world, do everything, see all, etc., as with the corn liquor they keep passing from hand to hand.49

Probably no other work by Wolfe occasioned as much critical controversy as did Of Time and the River. Bernard DeVoto's criticism of Perkins' hand in its composition and Robert Penn Warren's strictures against its autobiographical formlessness are two of the most severe judgments.50 Several

49 Ibid., pp. 382-83.
explanations can be made to counter these criticisms. Wolfe was writing in haste in order to meet publication deadlines. The manuscript was in fact taken away from Wolfe and sent to press in the fall of 1934 while he was attending the Chicago World's Fair. In its published form the novel represents approximately half of Wolfe's planned volume, The October Fair, the second half of which became the second two-thirds of The Web and The Rock. Consequently, major narrative threads were left uncompleted. In addition to the unresolved father search, Eugene's love affair with Esther Jack, which begins on the last pages of the novel, is not consummated until the second half of The Web and the Rock. Also, Eugene's final rejection of his Faustian drive occurs at the end of The Web and the Rock when George Webber's body and soul engage in their debate following George's Oktoberfest brawl. Finally, Wolfe's letters and notebook entries from 1933 to 1935 reveal a mind frequently bordering on despair. For all these reasons, Of Time and the River does resemble to formalist critics a confused medley of scenes alternating between hope and despair.

An important clue to recognizing the overall significance of Of Time and the River, in relation to his other works, is the "Publisher's Note" on the first page. The note announces that Of Time and the River is the second novel in a hexology, the entire series to be called "Of Time and the River." The third novel was to be The October Fair,
relating events from 1925 to 1928, and the fourth would have been *The Hills Beyond Pentland* (1838-1926), a family chronicle of Wolfe's maternal ancestors. The last two novels, as yet unwritten according to the publisher, were to be *The Death of the Enemy* (1928-1933) and *Pacific End* (1791-1884). Richard S. Kennedy speculates that *The Death of the Enemy* was to contain "George Webber's reorientation about life, love, fame, creative activity, suffering, and social justice" that later appeared in *You Can't Go Home Again*; and *Pacific End* was to represent a family chronicle of both the Pentland and Gant families "up through the early life of W. O. Gant."  

Seen against this background of projected works, therefore, *Of Time and the River* can be recognized as a major segment of Eugene Gant-George Webber's outward journey from home. The third work in the series, *The October Fair*, would have included the climax of the hero's European wanderings, his brawl at the Oktoberfest in Munich. The fourth work, therefore, *The Hills Beyond Pentland*, would have represented a return to his native roots. This pattern of development is reinforced by the organization of Wolfe's short-story collection, *From Death to Morning*, written simultaneously with but published six months after *Of Time and the River*. It will be remembered that the pivotal work in *From Death to Morning* was "Dark in the Forest, Strange as

51 Kennedy, pp. 199-200.
Time," written in 1934, in which the narrator learns from
the dying German Jew the futility of his Faustian yearnings
and yields to his deep-seated impulse to return home to
America.

Of all the mythical and legendary heroes associated
with Eugene Gant in Of Time and the River, Faust is the
closest of kin. In November, 1928, Wolfe saw a production
of Faust in Vienna and described his response to Aline
Bernstein: "Faust's own problem touches me more than Ham­
let's -- his problem is mine, it is the problem of modern
life. He wants to know everything, to be a god -- and he is
cought in the terrible net of human incapacity." By 1933,
when Wolfe was writing his second novel, this Faustian im­
pulse had grown to a furious obsession bordering on manic
despair. The following passage from an unmailed letter to
Aline Bernstein, written in the fall of 1933, is found in
Wolfe's notebooks:

What is life and what is it for? Ten rooms, ten
different places in ten years, in each of them all
of the hope, hunger, joy, magic, fury, pain and sor­
row that the world can know. Ten years, ten rooms,
ten thousand sheets of paper in each of them covered
with ten million words that I have written. Waking,
eating, sleeping, rushing out on the streets where a
million people are swarming past, staring in their
faces and listening to what they are saying, trying
to find out where they are going with all this fury
and what is driving them on forever and what it is
they hope to find -- and finding nothing but fury
in the end.  

53Ibid., II, 619.
Although Wolfe names the father-search as "the central legend" of his book, he devotes a much larger amount of space in *The Story of a Novel* to his nightmarish struggles with "Amount and Number." Under this heading are described his attempts to record every "personal and vital" experience in every country as well as to evoke every memory "back to the farthest adyt of his childhood before conscious memory had begun, . . . ." As those exhaustive catalogues of people and places seen and remembered indicate, Wolfe's Faustian motive looked both forward and backward as he attempted both to experience and to remember every sensation. Furthermore, that forward- and backward-looking impulsion is reflected within individual scenes as well as within the overall structure of *Of Time and the River*.

From the opening scene, when Eugene leaves his family at the railroad station in Altamont, until the final section, when the church bell in Dijon, France, floods his memory with thoughts of home, almost every episode of Eugene's odyssey follows this pattern of wandering and return, of expansion and contraction. This preoccupation with Eugene's personal and family history carries with it the same positive and negative attitudes toward the past that are evident in *From Death to Morning*. On the positive side, those memories, with their simple but genuine emotions of kinship and their

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theme of seasonal rebirth, provide a healthy counterpoise to the artificial and sterile cultures that Eugene encounters at Harvard, in New York, and in Europe. On the negative side, the same atavistic, vitalistic, and ethnocentric impulses expressed by the narrator of _From Death to Morning_ are again in evidence. Because the short stories published in _From Death to Morning_ coincide generally with the writing of _Of Time and the River_ and reflect the same motifs, representative scenes from the novel will be analyzed to validate that pattern.

Wolfe's proem, "of wandering forever and the earth again," introduces the dominant motifs of the novel. As in his previous works, the "door" symbol is again present: "When shall the lonely of heart come home? What doors are open for the wanderer?" The four paragraphs that follow these rhetorical questions contain very graphic images of death -- "the snake's cold eye will peer for him through the sockets of the brain" -- suggesting that the grave is the final door for the wanderer. For that reason, the final paragraph, with its praise of "immortal love" as a release from loneliness, appears tacked on, just as Eugene's budding love for Esther appears tacked on at the end of the novel. In fact, Richard Kennedy reports that the original plan called for the shipboarding scene at the conclusion of the book to convey a "life and death symbolism" and that Wolfe added the chance meeting of Eugene and Esther only four
months before publication. The tenuousness of this cure for loneliness is further underscored when one remembers that George Webber's love affair with Esther Jack in The Web and the Rock is a failure. The point is that Wolfe's philosophical views at this stage of his career were imprecise and fluctuating. Instead of "immortal love" serving as a remedy for Eugene's loneliness, his memories of home are his only true relief.

The first section of the novel, "Orestes: Flight Before Fury," does provide a thematic unity with Eugene's farewells, first to his mother in Altamont and finally to his dying father in Baltimore, before he leaves for Boston to search furiously for a surrogate father, or a home, or a door. The contrast of his mother and father in this section reinforces the basic conflict between permanence and transience suggested by the title. His mother, the same Eliza of The Web of Earth, is rooted in the South and is as timeless as the earth. Probably as an apology for his portrayal of her in Look Homeward, Angel as small and selfish, Wolfe gives epic stature to this Eliza:

The final impression of the woman might have been this: -- that her life was somehow above and beyond a moral judgment, that no matter what the course or chronicle of her life may have been, no matter what crimes of error, avarice, ignorance, or thoughtlessness might be charged to her, no matter what suffering or evil consequences may have resulted to other people through any act of hers, her life was somehow beyond these accidents

55Kennedy, p. 269.
of time, training, and occasion, and the woman was as guiltless as a child, a river, an avalanche, or any force of nature whatsoever.56

Furthermore, her face is the "face of a woman whose spirit had an almost elemental quality of patience, fortitude and calm" (p. 5). In sum, she is a forceful opposite to the pitiful, transient Gant, dying of cancer in an antiseptically sterile hospital in Baltimore.

Although Eliza is portrayed as a stronger character than Gant, for Eugene his father's masculine homeland, "the fierce, the splendid, strange and secret North" is preferred to his mother's feminine "world-far, lost and lonely South, . . ." (p. 24). It is important to remember, however, that only Eugene, the Faustian young romantic, feels this way, for as Wolfe confessed to Leroy Dock in 1933, he could feel equally at home in western North Carolina or in Pennsylvania. It is primarily for a door to a home that Eugene is searching. His description of his father's homeland, in fact, contains the same atavistic yearnings that the young narrator felt for Germany in "Dark in the Forest, Strange as Time": "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,

56Wolfe, Of Time and the River (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 4. All subsequent references to this novel will be cited by page number within parentheses in the text.
the lost but unforgotten half of his own soul, — and take it for his own" (p. 24). Even the South is given the same associations: "... he felt suddenly and terribly, its wild strange pull, the fatal absoluteness of its world-lost resignation" (p. 24). Furthermore, as Eugene's homesickness intensifies, his pattern of reminiscence focuses primarily on events of his Southern childhood.

As soon as he boards the train, Eugene feels his alternating attraction to the North and South, to the future and past, a "strange and poignant mingling of wild sorrow and joy, grief for the world that one is losing, swelling triumph at the thought of the strange new world that one will find, ..." (p. 26). The "hymn to fury" which sets the tone for this train ride provides no clearer demonstration of Wolfe's vitalistic philosophy, with its diabolic overtones, that often dominates this second phase of his career. In trying to account for the source of this fury, this "devil moving in the conduits of our blood" and "a spirit wild and dark and uncontrollable forever swelling in our soul," the narrator offers the following scene from Eugene's boyhood:

Or in the black dark of some forgotten winter's morning, child of the storm and brother to the dark, alone and wild and secret in the night as he leaned down against the wind's strong wall towards Nigger-town, blocking his folder papers as he went, and shooting them terrifically in the wind's wild blast against the shack-walls of the jungle-sleeping blacks, himself alone awake, wild, secret, free and stormy as the wild wind's blast, giving it howl for howl and yell for yell, with madness, and a demon's savage and exultant joy, up-welling in his throat!
Oh, was he then on such a night, betrayed to fury, — was it then, on such a night, that fury came (pp. 28-29)?

The narrator concludes that no logical explanation can account for this fury but that only a "cruel impulse" makes Americans seek forever for a door: "... we hurtle onward driven by our hunger down the blind and brutal tunnel of ten thousand furious and kaleidoscopic days, the victims of the cruel impulse of a million chance and fleeting moments, without a wall at which to thrust the shoulder of our strength, a roof to hide us in our nakedness, a place to build on, or a door" (pp. 34-35).

The wild, exultant tone of this hymn to fury softens to a meditative calm as Eugene experiences his first significant retrospective epiphany by recalling the memory of his brother Ben. The scene develops through Eugene's conversation with two Altamont boosters, Mr. Flood and Emmet Wade, who question him about his brothers Steve, Luke, and finally Ben. Eugene's artistic nature is emphasized by the contrast between his recollections of Ben and those of the older men, who recall only the surface appearances of the lost brother. Eugene, as "present time fades out," relives

in detail his twelfth birthday when Ben presented him a watch and admonished him to keep time with it "better than the rest of us! Better than Mama or the old man -- better than me" (p. 52)!

In a beautifully toned mediation, Eugene reflects on the problem of time -- of things "lost and broken in the wind . . ." (p. 52). He wonders if we will waken some day from this dream of time and hear "our father's voice upon the porch again, . . ." (p. 52). As the reverie fades and present time intrudes, Eugene notices the exact time of his watch, "one minute after twelve o'clock, Sunday morning, October the third, 1920, . . ." (p. 53). The implication of this scene is that the younger brother will follow Ben's warning to keep time better than did his family. His method will be to preserve those past moments in his memory and through his art.

In contrast to the preceding well-placed and effective reminiscence, many others throughout the novel serve little purpose except to demonstrate that Eugene could live in both worlds of time, the past and present. They even at times resemble a virtuoso's demonstration of his powers of recall. More importantly, those moments of retrospection represent an escape for Eugene from the tumultuous, nightmare world of the twentieth century. In the second section of the novel, "Young Faustus," Eugene again remembers the happiest moments of his childhood, his experiences with Ben.
This time he acknowledges the therapeutic effect of those memories: "And always, now, when Ben came back to him, he came within the frame and limits of a single image, one of those instant blazing images which from this time would haunt his memory and which more and more, as a kind of distillation -- a reward for all the savage struggles of his Faustian soul with the protean and brain-maddening forms of life -- were to collect and concentrate the whole material of experience and memory, in which the process of ten thousand days and nights could in an instant be resumed" (p. 201).

Even though these reminiscences appear too frequently, they also contain some of Wolfe's finest lyrical prose. Eugene's recollections of the best side of his family life, when his mother, father, brothers and sister exhibited their strengths of loyalty and affection to one another, serve as an effective foil to the transient, superficial, and callous human relations he encounters on his journey.

As a source of personal strength, Eugene's memories of home have weight and validity. When he tries to extend their significance beyond himself, however, the result at times seems forced. Throughout the novel numerous identifications are made between the hero's parental forebears and American pioneers, especially those lone individuals who blazed trails and shed blood in the wilderness. This view
of his pioneer ancestry coincides, of course, with Wolfe's epic motive for writing *Of Time and the River* and also reflects his personal sense of isolation. At their best these paeans to forgotten heroes convey a genuine respect for the rugged virtues associated with the country's early settlers. At their worst, they reflect Wolfe's chauvinistic nationalism and his vitalistic preoccupation with blood, violence, and death. In later works, Wolfe would chronicle George Webber's Joyner forebears with a more realistic mixture of admiration and satire.

An early example of this identification of his forebears with the American past occurs on the train ride in Section I. As Eugene and an older passenger from Altamont reminisce about W. O. Gant, the conversation stirs "in the boy's mind a thousand living memories of his father. . . . There are a thousand buried, nameless and forgotten lives, ten thousand strange and secret tongues alive now, urgent, swarming in his blood, and thronging at the gateways of his memory. They are the lives of the lost wilderness, his mother's people; they are the tongues, the faces of the secret land, the dark half of his heart's desire, the fertile golden earth from which his father came" (p. 58). This flood of memories then becomes one as Eugene imaginatively, and effectively, transfers himself to his father's boyhood home when his father and brothers lay awake at night, not knowing that another brother had been killed at Gettysburg
twelve miles away: "And he lies there in the darkness with his father and the brothers -- silent, waiting -- their cold, gray eyes turned upward to the loneliness of night, the blazing stars, having no words to say the thing they feel, the dream of time and the dark wonder of man's destiny which has drenched with blood the old earth, the familiar wheat, and fused that day the image of immortal history in a sleepy country town twelve miles away" (p. 58).

In the final scene of Section I, Eugene visits his dying father in a Baltimore hospital. During this interview, the old cadaverous man reviews the strange circumstances of his life, particularly his chance meeting before the Battle of Gettysburg with his future wife's uncle, Bacchus Pentland. This accidental encounter, along with other mysterious and unplanned events in his life, leads Gant to the conclusion that his life was only an atom among the fated destinies of "the great family of earth, a single, unknown thread in the huge warp of fate and chance that weaves our lives together . . ." (p. 82).

This late-received wisdom on Gant's part, that he is only "a nameless atom in the great family of earth," points to a lesson that Wolfe's hero only gradually perceives during the course of the Gant-Webber saga. In fact, among Wolfe's last recorded words from his death bed to Maxwell Perkins was the statement that he was "just a grain of dust." 58 There

is, however, a qualitative difference between Gant's acknowledgment of human kinship and Webber's final philosophy. Whereas Webber's credo at the end of *You Can't Go Home Again* posits ultimate faith in the spirit of man to fulfill his destiny, Gant's philosophy is darker and more deterministic. As he lies dying, he reflects on "the lives of millions of others whose dark fate is thus determined, interwove, and beyond their vision or their knowledge, foredone and made inevitable in the dark destiny of unfathomed time" (p. 82).

For the youthful Eugene, however, his father's imminent death is the final proof of that mortality which he must try to escape through furious exertion of his creative spirit. As he views the pitiful figures of his father and the other dying men, he "felt suddenly a choking anger and resentment against some force in life which had betrayed these old men and made them impotent -- something unspeakably ruthless, cruel, and savage in the world which had made these old and useless capons" (p. 84). At the same time, Eugene expresses an even greater resentment against the artificial sterility of the hospital, "the whole sinister and suave perfection of the hospital which, under glozing words and cynical assurances, could painlessly and deftly mutilate a living man" (p. 84).

This implied preference by the hero of a natural death over a sterile death-in-life prefigures the pattern of events for the remaining seven sections of *Of Time and
the River. As Eugene journeys outward from home to encounter artificial and sterile cultures in America and Europe, he constantly returns, through the door of memory, to the natural, enduring rhythms of life and death, growth and decay, which he learned in his Altamont home. Furthermore, as he attempts to define the substantive values of America, those values are most often defined within the context of a family setting.

Section Two, "Young Faustus," is devoted mainly to the friendship between Eugene and Francis Starwick. Starwick, the youngest of nine children raised in a Midwestern family beside the Mississippi River, has all the raw materials of life on which to base his literary art; but, in his own words, he suffers from "a skin too sensitive, a hide too delicate and rare --" (p. 323). In contrast to the weak and ineffectual Starwick, Wolfe poses two strong characters from Eugene's own family -- his Uncle Bascom Pentland and W. O. Gant.

Wolfe's novella, The Portrait of Bascom Hawke, which he published in the same year as The Web of Earth, appears virtually unchanged in the "Young Faustus" section. Despite Eugene's protests of pursuing lonely paths, he is not long in Boston before he seeks out his mother's brother: "That first impact of the city had stunned him with its huge and instant shock, and now, like a swimmer whelmed in a raging storm, he sought desperately among that unceasing flood of
faces for one that he knew, one that he could call his own, and suddenly he thought of Uncle Bascom" (pp. 102-03).

Bascom's outward portrayal resembles a Dickensian eccentric as he makes "horrible grimaces" by pressing "his rubbery underlip against a few enormous horse teeth that decorated his upper jaw" (p. 104). His eccentricity is also reflected by his vocational pursuits. Beginning his career as a minister, he had "professed and preached the faith of the Episcopalians, the Presbyterians, the Methodists, the Baptists, and the Unitarians" (p. 195). Only late in his life did he turn to the more practical pursuits of law and real estate.

A thematic contrast develops in this section as the scenes alternate between Eugene's disillusioning experiences with Professor Hatcher's aesthetes and his encounters with his old but vitally energetic and intelligent uncle. As the nephew realizes that Bascom, like himself, had left the South to seek his fortune in the North, the uncle takes on an epic stature: "Then his eye went back into the wilderness, the lost earth, the buried men" (p. 141). From Eugene's point of view, Bascom represents primarily a door to the past, a voice from which "the living past, the voices of lost men, the pain, the pride, the madness and despair, the million scenes and faces of the buried life -- all that an old man ever knew -- would be revealed to him, . . . ." (p. 146).
Although Wolfe can be accused of intemperance in his uncritical acceptance of life forces, evidenced in his portrait of Bascom, he could also be a perceptive critic of the opposite trend in modern life -- the enfeeblement of human emotions. Wolfe detects this trend in the Boston Irish, whom Eugene contrasts with the small-town Irish he had known in Old Catawba:

There was nothing warm, rich, or generous about them of their lives: it seemed as if the living roots of nature had grown gnarled and barren among the walls and pavements of the city, it seemed that everything that is wild, sudden, capricious, whimsical, passionate, and mysterious in the spirit of the race had been dried and hardened out of them by their divorce from the magical earth their fathers came from, as if the snarl and jangle of the city streets, the barren and earthless angularity of steel and stone and brick, had entered their souls (p. 161).

Nevertheless, Wolfe could also feel sympathy for the lost moderns, even for the students of Professor Hatcher, who, like himself, were looking for a door. He describes the members of that class as belonging "to the whole lost family of the earth, whose number is uncountable, ... to that great lost tribe of people who are more numerous in America than in any other country in the world. They belonged to that unnumbered horde who think that somehow, by some magic and miraculous scheme or rule or formula, 'something can be done for them!'" (p. 169).

One episode in the "Young Faustus" section which dramatizes Wolfe's renewed respect for familial values is Eugene's affair with the Simpson family. Wolfe exercises
narrative perspective to good advantage as he relates Eugene's boorish treatment of Genevieve Simpson and her family, whom Eugene had been introduced to by Bascom. It is the Simpson's middle-class conventionality, from which the student feels liberated, that invites his scorn as he baits them with preposterous lies about his family and himself. When Mrs. Simpson finally sees through the posing and asks Eugene not to visit again, he becomes aware of the value of family life as a protection against loneliness in America:

He never saw any of them again, but he could not forget them. And as the years went on, the memory of all their folly, fakeness, and hypocrisy was curiously altered and subdued and the memory that grew more vivid and dominant was of a little family, one of millions huddled below the immense and timeless skies that bend above us, lost in the darkness of nameless and unnumbered lives upon the lonely wilderness of life that is America, and banked together against these giant antagonists, for comfort, warmth, and love, with a courage and integrity that would not die, and could not be forgotten (p. 209).

The climactic event of the "Young Faustus" section is the death of Gant, one of Wolfe's most delicately rendered fictional episodes. Narrated primarily from the point of view of Gant's daughter, Helen, the scene serves three main purposes. First, it elevates Gant once more to the stature of an epic American wanderer. Secondly, it establishes the fundamental nobility of the Gant family as they support each other in crisis. Finally, the scene contains what is probably Wolfe's final philosophy of death, the ultimate door for homeless man.
Wolfe's views on the meaning of death are initially impressed on the reader through Helen's memories of and reflections on her life under Gant's roof. Through Dr. McGuire's counsel, Helen realizes that her own life, which has been devoted to her father, must continue as part of the life cycle. As she lies awake at night, conscious of death's approach, her reflections on death as the ultimate bond among humanity echo Wolfe's meditations in his story, "Death the Proud Brother":

And suddenly, with a feeling of terrible revelation, she saw the strangeness and mystery of man's life; she felt about her in the darkness the presence of ten thousand people, each lying in his bed, naked and alone, united at the heart of night and darkness, and listening, as she, to the sounds of silence and sleep.... And it seemed to her that if men would only listen in the darkness, and send the language of their naked lonely spirits across the silence of the night, all of the error, falseness and confusion of their lives would vanish, they would no longer be strangers, and each would find the life he sought and never yet had found (p. 231).

In describing with sometimes horrible detail the death of Gant, who bleeds to death through his genitals, Wolfe pays tribute to the members of his own family, particularly Eliza and Helen, who rally for mutual support around the dying man. Trying desperately to remain hopeful for Gant's recovery, Eliza, who boasts that she "was born and brought up in the country -- close to the lap of Mother Earth, as the sayin' goes -- . . . .", tries to convince Helen that her father's cancer will heal itself, just as she has seen trees "cure themselves" (p. 241)! Perhaps the most
poignant scene in the episode is the final reconciliation between Eliza and Gant, showing Gant's determination to "die well" in spite of having often "lived badly." Patting "Eliza's worn fingers with his own," Gant pays her a final compliment: "Ah-h! Your mother is a good cook, Helen. You're a good cook, too -- but there's no one else can cook a chicken like your mother" (p. 256)!

For her part, Helen experiences an awakening to the fact that her father, surrounded on his death bed by working men, is one of them. Gant's great hands are the symbolic mark of his character, and Helen feels that those "great hands of power and strength . . . would not die, even when the rest of him had died . . . (p. 250). As Helen retraces Gant's nomadic life, her final portrait of him is that of a lost American seeking always for a door:

And it was not the loneliness of the dreamer, the 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 certainty, a light, a door (p. 254).

Gant's dream vision before his death is richly symbolic with Platonic and Christian images of pre-existence and rebirth. The three-part sequence consists of Gant's dream of returning to his boyhood home, of an interview with Eliza in which events in the dream are clarified, and a
final vision of his Father. Hans Helmcke even suggests that this last scene may be considered a premature climax to the entire father-search motif in Wolfe's fiction.\textsuperscript{59} Evidence for his assertion exists in the fact that Wolfe reverted to autobiographical chronology after he had begun his manuscript and also in the similarity between Gant's vision and that of Wolfe's "October Fair" hero which was described to Maxwell Perkins.\textsuperscript{60}

In his first dream, Gant returns to his boyhood home, where "everything was as fresh, as green, as living and familiar as it had ever been to him" (p. 258). He follows a golden-haired little boy into a forest, where, coming upon a divided path, he takes the trail where he sees footprints and thinks he hears "softly thunderous" steps ahead of him. Symbolically, Gant had begun his quest for his own father, but "suddenly he knew that he had taken the wrong path, that he was lost" (p. 261).

On awakening, Gant recalls his youth with Eliza. Eliza retells an incident similar to Gant's dream in which he and his brother Wes had followed their drunken father on the wrong path home one dark snowy night. As Eliza says, "-- poor child, I reckon you were only eight or nine years old, and boy-like thought you'd follow in your father's


\textsuperscript{60}Wolfe, \textit{The Letters of Thomas Wolfe}, p. 280.
footsteps and that everything would be all right" (p. 267). They then reminisce over the death of their son Grover, when he was only twelve, which further clarifies Gant's dream of the boy leading a man to his father. It also recalls Wordsworth's Platonic dictum: "The child is father of the man. . . ."

In Gant's final dream vision, the reappearance of the golden-haired boy and the sound of a great fatherly voice powerfully evoke the Platonic-Wordsworthian concept of pre-existence and the Christian concept of a Father-God. Moreover, to see Wolfe express his strong religious impulses in terms of the father-son relationship once again confirms how strongly embedded in his thought is the family metaphor:

For now the child -- or some one in the house was speaking, calling to him; he heard great footsteps, soft but thunderous, imminent, yet immensely far, a voice well-known, never heard before. He called to it, and then it seemed to answer him; he called to it with faith and joy to give him rescue, strength, and life, and it answered him and told him that all the error, old age, pain and grief of life was nothing but an evil dream; that he who had been lost was found again, that his youth would be restored to him and that he would never die, and that he would find again the path he had not taken long ago in a dark wood.

And the child still smiled at him from the dark door; the great steps, soft and powerful, came ever closer, and as the instant imminent approach of that last meeting came intolerably near, he cried out through the lake of jetting blood, "Here, Father, here!" and heard a strong voice answer him, "My son" (p. 268)!

Section III, "Telemachus," opens with a paean to Eugene's lost father and to the need for returning in October (the month in which Wolfe was born and his brother
Ben died: "Come to us, Father, while the winds howl in the darkness, for October has come again bringing with it huge prophecies of death and life and the great cargo of the men who will return. 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" (p. 333).

This section contains some of Eugene's most agonizing emotional conflicts, but it also reveals a new relationship between Wolfe's romantic hero and his family. Having returned to Altamont to await word on the acceptance of his play by a New York producer, Eugene becomes painfully aware that his life is no longer intimately connected with his home town. He would climb the hills surrounding Altamont "and look down on the town with a kind of horror and disbelief, an awful dreamlike unreality because the town, since his long absence and return to it, and all the people in it, now seemed as familiar as his mother's face and stranger than a dream, so that he could never regain his life or corporeal substance in it, any more than a man who revisits his youth in a dream, . . ." (pp. 334-35).

In spite of this feeling of alienation from his town, Eugene still defines his career largely in terms of the credit or disgrace it would bring to his family. With Gant dead, Eliza becomes the dominant figure in the household: "And yet, for her, even if that house, the whole world, fell in ruins around her, there could be no ruin --
her spirit was as everlasting as the earth on which she walked, ... " (p. 352). For that reason, it is to his mother that Eugene feels the greatest obligation to succeed; and because of her he feels the greatest shame when his play is rejected and after he takes his drunken ride into South Carolina.

The "Telemachus" section contains Wolfe's most significant remarks on the new relationship between his hero and the hero's family. In contrast to the dramatic heroes, Richard Weaver and Eugene Ramsey, and to Eugene of Look Homeward, Angel, Eugene of the second novel no longer feels consciously aloof from his kinsmen. For example, the aspiring young writer remarks at length on the irony that his family should discourage his writing career because he is of their blood and background. Instead, says Eugene, his earthy characteristics should give them hope for his future:

Yet the very argument they made -- that he was the same kind of person as the rest of them, and not remote, wonderful, or mysterious -- should have been the chief thing in his favor. But none of them could see this. For where they thought there was nothing wonderful or mysterious about him, he thought that there was; and none of them could see that his greatest asset, his greatest advantage, if he had any, was that he was made out of the same earth -- the same blood, bone, character, and fury -- as the rest of them (p. 359).

As a result of Eugene's more realistic perspective on life, of his wishing to "escape not out of life but into it," his leave-taking at the end of this section is much more subdued than was his initial journey to Harvard. The sound of a train whistle no longer offers an automatic escape to a
magic world that it signaled to the Weaver family in *The Mountains*. Although the city still retains its lure, Eugene, after his first failure, has begun to learn humility and responsibility:

And to his sick and desperate soul, the cry of the great train now came with a sterner and more desperate hope than he had ever known as a boy. Suddenly he knew that now there was one road, and only one before him -- flight from this defeat and failure which his life had come to, redemption by stern labor and grim loneliness, the stern challenge, the sharp peril and the grand reward -- the magic and undying image of the city (p. 401).

At the beginning of Section IV, "Proteus: The City," Wolfe poetizes again on his pioneer inheritance, sewn in blood and sweat, that he brings to the city. The vital lives of these forebears presage their descendant's rapid disillusionment with the dead flesh and electric tempo of the city:

"Who sows the barren earth?" their voices cried. "We sowed the wilderness with blood and sperm. Three hundred of your blood and bone are recompacted with the native earth: we gave a tongue to solitude, a pulse to the desert, the barren earth received us and gave back our agony: we made the earth cry out. One lies in Oregon, and one, by a broken wheel and horse's skull, still grips a gunstock on the Western trail. Another one has helped to make Virginia richer. One died at Chancellorsville in Union blue, and one at Shiloh walled with Yankee dead (p. 414).

The first two thirds of the "Proteus" section is devoted to Eugene's growing disenchantment with the enfabled rock of New York City. The mood of these scenes is similar to that of the first stories in *From Death to Morning* as the narrator describes the "one general City-Voice, one strident
snarl, one twisted mouth of outrage and of slander bared forever to the imperturbable and immortal skies of time, one jeering tongue and rumor of man's baseness, fixed on the visage of the earth and turned incredibly, and with an evil fortitude, toward depthless and indifferent space against the calm and silence of eternity" (p. 417).

His accounts of Eugene's life in New York offer further evidence that Wolfe was in a transitional stage of his career. One must conclude that many of Eugene's impressions are purely subjective, even bordering on paranoia, as when he describes his colleagues' treatment of their department chairman at the metropolitan university:

They greeted him with sly humility and a servile glance, but they snickered obscenely at him when his back was turned. And they smiled and sneered at one another with eyes that glittered with their hate: they never struck a blow but they spoke lying words of barbed ambiguity, they lied, cheated, and betrayed, and they sweltered in the poisons of their hate and fear, they breathed the weary hatred-laden air about them into their poisoned lungs (p. 421).

Nevertheless, Eugene's encounter with the city brings a growing recognition that, among this "manswarm" population, individuals, like himself, were also lost and looking for a door. Wolfe's satire of Eugene's residence in New York, the Hotel Leopold, which ironically advertises itself as "a quiet family hotel," focuses on its transiency:

And curiously, in spite of the hotel's pious assurance of its "quiet family life," its boast of permanency, there hovered about the place continually, indefinably but certainly, a feeling of naked insecurity, a terrifying transiency -- not the frank transiency of the great tourist hotels with their
constant daily flux of changing faces — but the horrible transiency of lives held here for a period in the illusion of a brief and barren permanence, of lives either on the wing or on the wane (p. 430).

Eugene's relationship with his Jewish student Abe Jones dramatizes his recognition of kinship with the city masses. When the weary young instructor finally explodes at the persistent and annoying student, Eugene discovers that Abe values his class most of all: "... this Jew, Abe Jones, the first manswarm atom he had come to know in all the desolation of the million-footed city -- had been his loyal friend" (p. 447).

As usual with Wolfe, however, he cannot accept an individual isolated in time and space but must know his background. Consequently, the author launches into an elaborate study of Abe's family. Not surprisingly, Abe is found to be, "by unspoken consent," the head of a fatherless family "which now consisted only of his mother, two brothers, and his sister's illegitimate child, Jimmy" (p. 463). Also consistent with Wolfe's view of parental figures is the portrait of Abe's mother, who, like Eliza, represents the time­less earth mother. Her face resembles "the female timeless, ageless, fixed in sorrow and fertility, as savage, as enduring, and as fecund as the earth" (p. 492).

The last significant episode of the Proteus section involves Eugene's visit to the aristocratic Pierce family on the Hudson River. Once more Wolfe makes use of a family setting to portray a side of American life far removed from
the barrenness of the Hotel Leopold "family" and from the mean and sometimes brutal quality of Abe Jones' family life. Eugene's involvement with the Pierces follows the usual pattern of his experiences. According to that pattern, say J. Russell Reaver and Robert I. Strozier, the hero fails initially to "distinguish between the promise of his imagination and the reality of his experience." 61

Joel Pierce, a Harvard classmate, invites Eugene to spend a Fourth of July weekend at his family estate. Eugene's first impression of his friend's vast acred estate by moonlight establishes the mood for the scene: "Joel opened a door: the blazing moonlight fell upon the vast swarded lawn and sleeping woods of that magic domain known as Far Field Farm. And that haunting and unearthly radiance fell as well upon the white wings of that magic house and on a group of its fortunate inhabitants who were sitting on the terrace" (p. 515). Of all the luxurious provisions of the Pierce mansion, Eugene, consistent with his eternal hunger, is most impressed by the kitchen: "...its total effect was to give one a feeling of power, space, comfort, rightness and abundant joy" (p. 541).

Eugene's enchantment begins to wear thin, however, when he learns of the wrecked lives of some of the Hudson

River aristocrats. Curious, as usual, about the backgrounds of those individuals, Eugene learns from Joel's sister Rosalind that George Thornton, for example, "has had an unhappy life of it from the beginning. . . . :

His father died a raving madman, there's been insanity in his family for generations back, his mother was a horrible woman who deserted him when he was a child and ran off with a man, and he was brought up by an aunt -- his father's sister -- who was half cracked herself. . . . Now he lives all alone on this big place that he's inherited -- he has one brother, Dick, who is two years older than he is -- and he has spent practically his whole life in looking after Dick" (p. 523).

Of further interest in the Pierce episode is Eugene's reading of his play "Mannerhouse" to Joel and Rosalind. As noted in Chapter II of this study, in retelling this play, Wolfe gives it a different coloring from that of the original. Not only is the nostalgia over the loss of the Ramsey estate played down, but also Porter, "the poor-white capitalist," is identified with Eugene's maternal family: "Even in these romantic, grandly-mannered scenes, he had already begun to use some of the powerful and inimitable materials of life itself and of his own experience: the speech of Porter was the plain, rich, pungent, earthly, strongly colored speech of his mother, of his uncle William Pentland, and of the Pentland tribe" (p. 545).

In his "portrait of the artist" which follows this reading of "Mannerhouse," Thomas Wolfe-Eugene Gant reveals a growth toward realism by acknowledging, with family imagery, that the artist "is his father's son, shaped from
his father's earth of blood and sweat and toil and bitter agony: he is at once therefore the parent and the son of life, . . . " (p. 551). On the other hand, his definition is still premised on romantic expressionism. The ultimate source of creativity, Eugene reflects, is the creator's mind, and his purpose is to create beauty, "to snare the spirits of mankind in nets of magic, to make his life prevail through his creation, . . . to fix eternally in the patterns of an indestructible form a single moment of man's living, a single moment of life's beauty, passion, and unutterable eloquence, that passes, flames and goes, slipping forever through our fingers with time's sanded drop, flowing forever from our desperate grasp even as a river flows and never can be held" (pp. 550-51).

The separation of the Pierces from the realities of life is revealed through a cumulation of scenes, such as Joel's undue concern for dress and ritual, the grandfather's proprietary attitude towards literature and his hasty literary judgments, and the women's preoccupation with appearances. Another door has been closed to the hero as he realizes that the true America cannot be found in "the haunted glory of this enchanted world, . . ." (p. 571). Instead, one could more likely find America "in the grimy and illimitable jungles of its savage cities" and in "the thing of which he was a part, that beat in every atom of his blood and brain and life, and was indestructible and everlasting, and that was America" (p. 571)!
Book V, "Jason's Voyage," takes Eugene to Europe, the geographical limit of his search for a door, before his flood of memories return him to America and home. In the opening paragraphs, the narrator's impressions of England in October convey again his frequent sensation of being just a door away from home:

And everywhere that year there was something secret, lonely, and immense that waited, that impended, that was still. Something that promised numbly, hugely, in the fog-numb air, and that never broke to any open sharpness, and that was almost keen and frosty October in remembered hills — oh, there was something there incredibly near and most familiar, only a word, a stride, a room, a door away — only a door away and never opened, only a door away and never found (p. 601).

The opening scene in Oxford describes one of several family groups visiting sons at the university. Their "manner was impregnable, . . . cold, remote, and formal almost to the point of military curtness, and yet Eugene felt among them constantly an utter familiarity of affection, a strange secret warmth, past words or secret vows, that burned in them like glacial fire" (p. 602). For the young seeker, then, the English "had found a way, a door, a room to enter, and there were walls about them now, and the way was theirs" (p. 604). For himself, however, "he was walking on beneath the timeless sky, and had no wall at which to hurl his strength, no door to enter by, and no purpose for the furious employment of his soul" (p. 605).

The English segment of the European journey is dominated by Eugene's stay with the Coulson family, who are
representative enough to illuminate Wolfe's European-American theme but are also individualized sufficiently to allow a particular feeling of kinship with them. By recalling the tumultuous boardinghouse existence of Eugene in *Look Homeward, Angel*, one could surmise that the main reason for his attraction to this English family is the privacy they afford him. Whatever the cause, his strangely silent relationship with the Coulsons has ancestral overtones and becomes fused with an image of time:

And that fixed and changeless image of dark time was this: In an old house of time Eugene lived alone, and yet had other people all around him, and they never spoke to him, or he to them. . . . Eugene could not remember how their faces looked, but they were all familiar to him as his father's face, and they had known one another forever, and they lived together in the ancient house of time, dark time; and silence, sorrow, certitude, and peace were in them. Such was the image of dark time that was to haunt his life thereafter, and into which, somehow, his life among the people in that house had passed (p. 623).

Besides the privacy they afford him, another attraction for Eugene to the Coulsons is his realization that they, somewhat like his own family, are ruined and lost. The father is a confirmed alcoholic, and their daughter Edith is rumored about town to be a loose woman. "Perhaps that was the reason that he liked them all so much, because with ruined people it is either love or hate: there is no middle way" (p. 623).

The differences between the Coulsons and the Simpson family of Boston illustrates European-American cultural contrasts, particularly the impact on family life of the
respective societies. The dominant image of the Simpson family is that of a fearful group huddled together for safety, clinging to the few middle-class conventions offered by an otherwise unstructured society. The Coulsons, on the other hand, are pictured as somewhat nonconformist rebels within an ordered social milieu. As Edith confesses to Eugene before he leaves their house, "How good it must be to know that you are young in a young country -- where nothing that you did yesterday matters very much" (p. 650).

Despite their differences, the Simpson and Coulson families both illustrate Wolfe's implicit recognition of the family unit as a protective buffer between the individual and an impersonal society. Another group in England which illustrates that conviction by Wolfe is that of the Rhodes scholars from America. The most pitiful among this group is Johnny Parks, a boy from a small Southern town, "full of kindly warmth and friendliness as he had always been," but having left familiar surroundings, "he was wandering blindly about in a life as strange to him as Asia, as far as the moon, and knew nowhere to turn, nothing to grasp, no door to enter" (p. 628). But he is not alone. The other American students gather together to form, in effect, a surrogate family:

And it was pitifully the same with all the rest of them -- the little group of Rhodes scholars that gathered together in Johnny's rooms every afternoon, and who seemed to huddle and cling together desperately as if they would try to shape, to resurrect, or to create some little pattern of familiar life, some small
oasis of warmth and friendliness and familiar things to which they turned with desperate relief from all the alien and hostile loneliness of a life which they had never entered, which they could never make their own, which stood against them like a wall they could not pass, closed against them like a door they could not open (p. 629).

The remainder of "Jason's Voyage" follows Eugene to the Continent where he continues his Faustian quest for the secret door to life and culture, this time primarily through books: "... his savage conflict with this world of print became indistinguishably mixed with the legendary quality of the life around him" (p. 657). A long series of entries from Wolfe's European notebook is included in this section as an illustration of Eugene's rampage through European art and literature. Intermixed with his observations, however, are comments which foreshadow the traveler's desire to return home: "In my father's country there are yet men with quiet eyes and slow, fond, kindly faces" (p. 680). Consistent with his usual pattern of discovery, Eugene's disillusionment with European culture soon follows. This time the catalytic agent is Francis Starwick, the continental American who has become bored, effete, and perverted.

Eugene meets Starwick in Paris on New Year's Eve and begins his debauched revelry with him and his two New England accomplices, Ann and Elinor, the latter having left her husband and four-year-old child in America. Eugene's disgust at the women's devotion to Starwick is intensified by jealousy because of his own attraction to Ann. Elinor is the
more masculine of the two women, and, as a probable jibe at
the cult of masculinity popularized by Scribner’s rival
Ernest Hemingway, Wolfe credits Elinor with having driven an
ambulance in the war.

In relation to the structure of the whole novel, the
significant action of this European episode is Eugene’s
attraction to Ann. She, together with other females in the
book, is symbolic of the female principle of America, with
all of its connotations of home:

She seemed to fulfill in part his vision of the grand
America, to make palpable the female quality of that
fortunate, good, and happy life of which he had dreamed
since childhood -- to evoke the structure of that en-
chanted life of which every American has dreamed as a
child (p. 732).

Later, before his clumsy seduction attempt with her, she
awakens in him a "rediscovery of the buried life, the funda-
mental structure of the great family of earth to which all

Eugene finally leaves the trio of decadent Americans
after he has struck Starwick and parted forever with this
"mortal enemy," the enemy of life. The brief sixth section
of the novel, "Antaeus: Earth Again," prepares for Eugene’s
climactic epiphanies at Tours and Dijon in Book VII. His
spirit begins to revive as he rides a train south towards
Orleans, enjoying the scenic countryside and conversing with
an earthy peasant family. The good-natured jokes by one
peasant about cuckolding station masters and Eugene’s
attraction to a "seductive girl with a slender figure"
provide healthy relief to the preceding scenes of perversion involving Starwick.

The only plot line of the "Antaeus" section involves Eugene's absurd relationship with a French countess, who calls herself "Little Mother." She has visited Altamont seven times and reawakens the youth's memories of home by asking about people from his past. Besides confessing to her guest that she drinks horses' blood, she insists that Eugene is a famous reporter for The New York Times and implores him to publicize in America the need for funds for a local hospital.

As he explores Orleans, however, Eugene experiences the same *deja vu* sense of familiarity that he had had in England: "... all these things and people had their counterpart, somehow, in the life of small towns everywhere and in the life he had known in a small town as a child, ... ."

(p. 820). Finally, Eugene reacts violently against the absurdity of his stay in Orleans, and his old atavistic and ethnocentric impulses emerge:

He was suddenly fed up with the provincial tedium of the town, he felt the old dislike and boredom that all dark bloods and races could awake in him an importunate and unreasonable desire, beneath these soft, dull skies of gray, for something bright, sharp, Northern, fierce, and wild, in life -- for something gold and blue and shining, the lavish flesh of great blonde women, the surge of savage drunkeness, the fatal desperation of joy (p. 833-34).

Book VII, "Kronos and Rhea: The Dream of Time," brings together all of the hints in preceding books regarding
Eugene's memories of home -- the true door he is seeking. The book opens with Wolfe's usual prose poem, this one to time, calling for music from "an unbroken spinet" to re-capture all moments of time, ancient and modern.

Eugene arrives in Tours, takes lodging in an old hotel, and begins to write. As he does so, present time stands still and a kaleidoscope of memories floods his brain: "And in those words was packed the whole image of his bitter homelessness, his intolerable desire, his maddened longing for return. In those wild and broken phrases was packed the whole bitter burden of his famished, driven, over-laden spirit -- all the longing of the wanderer, all the impossible and unutterable homesickness that the American, or any man on earth, can know" (p. 859).

The climactic epiphany of the entire book occurs to Eugene in the small town of Dijon. In this ancient capital of the kingdom of Burgundy, he makes himself a "willing captive in the spell of time, drinking the noblest wine, eating some of the noblest cookery he had ever known" (p. 894). As he sits in the town square at noon, a sexton begins to ring the church bells, recalling for the young American "the great bell at college that rang the boys to classes, . . . ." (p. 895). As has happened before to Eugene on foreign soil, everything in the square becomes strangely familiar. This time, however, he is transported almost literally into the past. The catalyst for this epiphany of time is the sound
of men returning home, "... the most lonely, lost and unforgettable of all sounds on earth -- the solid, liquid leather-shuffle of footsteps going home one way, as men had done when they came home to lunch at noon some twenty years ago, in the green-gold and summer magic of full June, before he had seen his father's land, and when the kingdoms of this earth and the enchanted city still blazed there in the legendary magic of his boyhood vision" (p. 898).

The last three paragraphs of Book VII contain the end result of Eugene's odyssey from Altamont to Dijon. He has finally discovered his "door," not the door of American riches or of European culture, but the door of memory through which he can relive moments from his childhood:

It was the life of twenty years ago in the quiet, leafy streets and little towns of lost America -- of an America that had been lost beneath the savage roar of its machinery, the brutal stupefaction of its days, the huge disease of its furious, ever-quickening and incurable unrest, its flood-tide horror of gray, driven faces, stolid eyes, starved, brutal nerves, and dull, dead flesh.

The memory of the lost America -- the America of twenty years ago, of quiet streets, the time-enchanted spell and magic of full June, the solid, lonely, liquid shuffle of men in shirt-sleeves coming home, the leafy fragrance of the cooling turnip-greens, and screens that slammed, and sudden silence -- had long since died, had been drowned beneath the brutal flood-tide, the fierce stupefaction of that roaring surge and mechanic life which had succeeded it.

And now, all that lost magic had come to life again here in the little whitened square, here in this old French town, and he was closer to his childhood and his father's life of power and magnificence than he could ever be again in savage new America; and as the knowledge of these strange, these lost yet familiar things returned to him, his heart was filled with all the mystery of time, dark time, the mystery of strange,
million-visaged time that haunts us with the briefness of our days.
He thought of home (pp. 898-99).

The final book, "Faust and Helen," has received criticism for its anti-climactic discovery of love by Eugene and Helen. Wolfe's original intention for the scene, according to Richard Kennedy, was a symbolic representation of life and death by means of Eugene's homebound ship. Details of the ship docked at evening occupy the first half of the section, and its description does effectively symbolize life's journey toward death: "Out of one darkness the travelers have come to be taken into another, but for a moment one sees their faces, awful and still, all uplifted toward the ship" (p. 909). The suddeness of Eugene's falling in love with Helen, therefore, is somewhat awkward: "... he only knew that from that moment his spirit was impaled upon the knife of love" (p. 911).

Nevertheless, by reviewing Eugene's encounters with females throughout the novel, one can find abundant foreshadowings of this final union. Besides having been constantly attracted to unnamed "seductive" females throughout his journey, Eugene has been on the verge of serious romance several times: with Genevieve Simpson in Boston, with Rosalind Pierce at Far Field Farms, with Edith Coulson in England, and more seriously with Ann in Paris. Of greater significance than their romantic attraction, however, is the symbolic role women have for Eugene as a life-giving,
creative force. Eliza Gant, of course, is the primary example, but one may also recall the image of a timeless mother associated with Abe Jones' mother and even with the French countess, "Little Mother."

Helen likewise is portrayed as a fruitful, life-giving female: "'My God, the things that I could tell you all!' she cried indignantly. 'The things I know -- the things I have inside me here'" (p. 910)! Just as the narrator in From Death to Morning returns home to the image of a fruitful, maternal female in "The Web of Earth," so does Eugene in Of Time and the River. This time, however, Helen is more than a mother. She is a potential mistress who will bring manhood to Eugene; "From that moment on he never was again to lose her utterly, never to wholly repossess unto himself the lonely, wild integrity of youth which had been his" (p. 911). In effect, then, Helen is the human counterpart to Eugene's creative release that he discovers in Dijon. They are both bound for home on the ship of death, but together they have the power to immortalize life.

Of Time and the River, for all of its disproportionate scenes and its occasionally overblown prose, is a magnificent novel in scope and design. As a Bildungsroman, it has carried its hero beyond the confinements of his immediate family to encounter the great "family of earth." There are signs throughout the novel of a growing sympathy with this family of man, most notably in Eugene's episode
with Abe Jones. Nevertheless, the novel remains primarily a portrait of artistic growth, and that growth unfortunately takes the direction of escapism. Both the strengths and weaknesses of Wolfe's second novel lie in those "escapes of time and memory" which he would reject in the last year of his life. Eugene's numerous retrospective epiphanies, at their best, evoke with compelling force a simple, idyllic past of early childhood and family life. On the other hand, those lyrical moments of recaptured time represent only one man's solution to "savage new America."

In the summer of 1935, after he had seen Of Time and the River published and had received both praise and criticism for it, he journeyed again to Europe. On his way to Berlin, where he was lionized, he made the following entry in his notebook, a clear signal of the wisdom he would attain over the next three years:

I came away "abroad" to be alone, but what I am really tired of, what I am sick to death of, what I am exhausted and sickened and fed up to the roots of my soul with -- is being alone. I am tired of myself, I am tired of being with myself, I am surfeited. I have too good a mind.62

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CHAPTER V

GEORGE WEBBER'S EXTENDED FAMILY

The first four chapters of this study have examined the parallels existing between Thomas Wolfe's own family relationships and those of his fictional persona, particularly as those relationships reflect the author's artistic and intellectual growth. Chapter One described the first phase of Wolfe's relationship with his Asheville family. That period, which lasted through publication of Look Homeward, Angel in 1929, can be described as one of revolt and estrangement from his family, although during the 1920's Wolfe indicated in his letters a growing preoccupation with and homesickness for his kindred. As explained in Chapters Two and Three, that preoccupation revealed itself first in his plays written for the Harvard Workshop and culminated in Look Homeward, Angel. Both the plays and the novel portray a romantic hero in conflict with his family, a hero who, for the most part, rejects the values of his home as he searches for a private "door" to fulfillment.

Chapter Four identified a second phase of Wolfe's development, a transitional period from 1929-1935. On a personal level, Wolfe solidified his family ties during the depression years as he sympathized with and tried to
alleviate the economic suffering of his Asheville kin. His literary and philosophical development, however, revealed a mixture of romantic and realistic tendencies. His novel, *Of Time and the River*, and his book of short stories, *From Death to Morning*, contain thematic crosscurrents. These two works, both published in 1935, prove that Wolfe's vision had begun to transcend personal barriers and become more objective as Eugene Gant desires to "escape not out of life but into it..." On the other hand, Wolfe's romantic perspective and epic purpose resulted in occasionally unrealistic appraisals of Eugene's family and of the world surrounding his hero. In *Of Time and the River*, Eliza Gant is portrayed as an archetype of the eternal earth mother, and Eugene's ancestors are frequently identified with pioneers who have drenched the land with their blood. Furthermore, although Eugene's illusions about the world beyond Altamont are replaced by realistic glimpses of its cruelty, sterility, and anonymity, he reacts to his disillusionment usually by retreating into a private world of childhood and family memories. At the end of *Of Time and the River* and *From Death to Morning*, the protagonist is going home, both literally and metaphorically.

Throughout Wolfe's career, however, regardless of changes in his personal relationships or philosophical viewpoint, his fictional hero's family provides the setting and inciting action for the major narratives. In his plays,
particularly *The Mountains* and *Mannerhouse*, the family represents a value system from which the hero must escape or lose his ideal identity. In *Look Homeward, Angel*, Eugene Gant is pulled backward and forward, backward to memories of an idyllic family unity under a single roof and forward to freedom after his house divides itself over property values. In *Of Time and the River* and *From Death to Morning*, both publications coinciding with Wolfe's new appreciation for his native roots, the birthplace of the protagonist is equivalent to an oasis which beckons the far-wanderer to return. During the last three years of his life, 1935-1938, Wolfe's philosophical perspective underwent a third change which can be related to the familial conflicts of his new hero, George Webber.

The dominant fact of Wolfe's last three years on earth is that his social consciousness expanded to universal proportions. As he declared in a letter to his former Asheville mentor, Margaret Roberts, in February, 1938: "I was a citizen of mankind -- there is my loyalty, and that is where it must go."¹ As proof of this enlarged vision, Wolfe sought to unify his final manuscript, from which his three posthumous books were published, with the motto, "You Can't Go Home Again." As he explained to Belinda Jelliffe, this

slogan implied a complete reversal of his romantic glorification of the past, both real and imagined:

I have burned some great bridges behind me: I have been grieving for the dead a lot this past year, and I have found out something which is, I think, the most important discovery of my whole life, and that is this: you can't go home again, back to your childhood, back to your town, your people, back to the father you have lost, and back to the solacements of time and memory. I found that out through exile, through storm and stress, perplexity and dark confusion.²

The causes of this reversed perspective have been thoroughly documented by Wolfeian scholars and biographers. The most important historical cause, which effected a turn from private to public concerns among a decade of American writers, was the Great Depression. In Wolfe's own words, "the staggering impact of this black picture of man's inhumanity to his fellow man . . . left a scar upon my life, a conviction in my soul which I shall never lose."³ His two visits to Nazi Germany during the summers of 1935 and 1936 provided another catalytic agent for Wolfe's new social vision. After that final visit, when Germany's preparation for war and persecution of Jews were fully evident, Wolfe finally realized the sinister implication of his own ancestral longings, that the Germanic spirit was another home to

²Ibid., p. 707.

which he could not return. That conclusion, illustrated in his narrative of the German Jew arrested on a train, "I Have a Thing to Tell You," was published first in the *New Republic* in March, 1937, and was later incorporated into *You Can't Go Home Again*.

More immediate causes than national or international concerns affecting Wolfe's social maturity were his relations with his publisher, Maxwell Perkins, and finally with his Asheville clan. Tensions over royalty contracts, law suits, and editorial supervision had accelerated between Wolfe and Scribner's since *Look Homeward, Angel* was published. Of all the attacks on Wolfe's autobiographical method, by far the most venomous was Bernard DeVoto's "Genius is Not Enough," published in the *Saturday Review* in April, 1936. In this article, DeVoto accused the writer of surrendering his artistic integrity to Perkins' editorial hand. Relations between editor and author were exacerbated even further by their growing political differences, Perkins' hard-core conservatism clashing with Wolfe's liberalism. As a result of these conflicts, Wolfe severed relations with Scribner's and

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with Perkins, his last father image, and signed a contract with Harper and Row in December, 1937.

In the summer of 1937 Wolfe made his first trip to Asheville since *Look Homeward, Angel* was published and his last before his death. Throughout that period of exile the author had frequently mentioned his desire to establish roots amid familiar surroundings. He had conducted genealogical expeditions to his father's Pennsylvania birthplace, and he had even considered the possibility of marriage. In July, 1937, he described to Hamilton Basso the impulse that caused him to rent a cabin near Asheville for the summer:

> I have come back here as the result of a very powerful and deep-rooted instinct, which has grown slowly and steadily for years. No matter what happens or how this experience may turn out, I know the instinct was right. That is to say, this time it was inevitable; it had gathered for years and I was utterly convinced that it was right for me to come home again, to make the old connections and resume myself; and if I had done anything else at this time, this feeling in me was so strong and single I should never have been satisfied. Feeling so, of course, there was nothing else for me to do. I cannot fairly tell you that I am "through with New York; but I have realized in recent months that I am "through" with it at this present period of my life.6

This last visit home, however, followed the typical pattern of Wolfe's experiences: reality belied expectations. Not only were Wolfe's hopes for creative solitude at his mountain retreat punctured by frequent visits from lion chasers and other uninvited guests, but, more importantly,

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he was disillusioned by the atmosphere of fear and defeat that he found in his hometown. In April, 1938, he described to Margaret Roberts his impressions of the previous summer:

"Time and again last summer I could have groaned in anguish at the things I saw: most pitiful and moving of all, perhaps, was the pretense -- people with naked terror in their eyes still whistling to keep up their courage, still speaking the old words, the old spurious phrases that had lost whatever meaning they may once have had because they referred to something that was gone forever. And I think the people knew it." The following month he wrote to his sister Mabel in the same vein:

The old world that you knew is largely gone -- I mean Grove Park, stucco houses, boom-town speculation, Wall Street, 1929 -- and all the rest of it. It's not coming back, Mabel. Most of those poor defeated devils in Asheville hope that it is coming back. But it's not. And most of them have nothing else to cling to, no other language to talk, because it is the only language they ever knew. I saw that last summer, and from the bottom of my heart I feel sincerely and compassionately sorry for them all.

... It's always harder to go through the woods, remember, than to take the beaten path, but you sometimes get places going through the woods that you never see or know about if you stick to the beaten path. And the old beaten path, I am afraid, is no good any more: it doesn't lead anywhere: it's like that great glittering tunnel through Beaucatcher Mountain that cost a million dollars. You get through, and there you are, just where you always were -- in Chunn's Cove. Except you find that Chunn's Cove isn't even there -- it's just something you used to think was there when you were a kid. I am going places -- better places than Chunn's Cove -- and I invite you to come along. And let me know if I can help you. I am your friend.  

7Ibid., p. 739.  
8Ibid., p. 761.
When Thomas Wolfe left his manuscript with Edward Aswell in May, 1938, before taking his fateful trip west, he never suspected that death would prevent him from making final revisions. Consequently, disputes still exist over the extent of Aswell's editing and over Wolfe's final intentions for his last book. Nevertheless, his "Statement of Purpose" written for Aswell, together with the bulk of his posthumous works, reveals an explicit redirection of narrative viewpoint. As he explained to Aswell:

This book is a book of discovery, hence union with life; not a book of personal revolt, hence separation from life. The protagonist becomes significant not as the tragic victim of circumstances, the romantic hero in conflict and revolt against his environment, but as a kind of polar instrument round which the events of life are grouped, by means of which they are touched, explained, and apprehended, by means of which they are seen and ordered.

One obvious result of this new narrative perspective was that the nature of the Wolfeian protagonist underwent significant modifications. From 1936 to 1938, the author experimented with several names for his hero, the two most prominent being Paul Spangler and Joe Doaks. Although Wolfe rejected the latter name for its suggestion of slapstick, Richard Kennedy recognizes from these experiments that "his alter ego had changed from a superman to the very type of the common man." Coincident with the hero's new characterization, his family also underwent changes, not in their

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9Ibid., p. 714.
10Kennedy, p. 341.
importance to the plot but in their realistic depiction. George Webber's next of kin are more life-sized, more objectively portrayed, and more representative than Eugene Gant's family.

When Wolfe returned to New York from Germany in the fall of 1936, he resumed work on material that he had projected as "The Hills Beyond Pentland." Although the "Publisher's Note" to Of Time and the River had claimed that this work was completed, it consisted only of sketches of Eliza Gant's strange Pentland relatives and of his own childhood reminiscences. Wolfe's awakened social consciousness, however, and his sharper awareness of evil in American life caused him to shift his narrative focus away from nostalgic reminiscence towards satire and social criticism.

During the fall months of 1936, Wolfe laid the groundwork for his next novel, titled at different times "The Vision of Spangler's Paul" and "The Ordeal of the Bondsman Doaks" but finally published as The Web and the Rock. Reverting to usual practice, Wolfe provided his new hero with genealogical background and placed his thematic conflict within family boundaries. Because of his desire to avoid further charges of autobiography, Wolfe changed the parental background of his persona from that of Eugene Gant. Instead of being pulled between a mother and father, the adolescent Paul Spangler, whose mother is dead, is raised by his maternal aunt, while his romanticized northern father
lives in exile from his wife’s provincial family. This new setting, however, which provided the framework for The Web and the Rock, allowed Wolfe’s persona once more to purge the conflicts that Eugene Gant had experienced earlier: the outward and inward pulls of male and female, freedom and security, North and South, future and past. This time, however, the symbolic equivalencies would be more obvious, and there would be less subjective rhetoric by the narrator. Wolfe was moving toward objectivity.

During the winter and spring months of 1938, Wolfe returned again to the ancestral heritage of his protagonist, by now christened with the symbolic name of George Webber. He had begun work on a family chronicle as early as 1933 when he planned for "The Hills Beyond Pentland" to stretch chronologically from 1838-1926 and for his last book, "Pacific End," to span nineteenth-century America from 1791-1884. In the spring of 1937, when Wolfe had temporarily given his persona the commoner’s name of Joe Doaks, he even invented a burlesque ancestry extending back to the medieval Sir Guy Le Doakes. Sir Guy is awarded a lemon by Richard the Lion-Hearted as a symbol for his coat of arms; and Sir Guy’s descendant, Sir Doakes Le Greal, cannot fulfill a damsel’s request because he is unwilling to look in the right place to find her "knyttinge."  

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Wolfe transferred some of this same spirit of burlesque into his genealogical history of the Joyners, George Webber's maternal ancestors. This history was designed to introduce *The Web and the Rock*, but it was published separately by Harper and Row as *The Hills Beyond* in 1941. The Joyner genealogy, however, is a much more realistic and purposeful chronicle than the Doaks'. Although this incomplete fragment has been treated as a not-too-successful venture into American folklore, the work in fact has larger implications. Because the Joyner family is made large enough to encompass diverse strains of American stock, it offers an appropriate heritage for George Webber, Wolfe's final embodiment of the American spirit. For that reason, *The Hills Beyond* will be examined separately as a prelude to the posthumous novels, *The Web and the Rock* and *You Can't Go Home Again*. None of these final three works is an artistic whole, but each contains sufficiently complete episodes from which to draw conclusions about Wolfe's final interpretation of America's cultural heritage as reflected through a family's history.

wrong to take a life "in cold blood," but it was not nearly so wrong as to take a drink (p. 231).

While their younger siblings remain in rural Zebulon, the older, more progressive Joyners move to the larger settlement of Libya Hill. This move parallels the national trend: "... the national history could almost be written in the lives of men who went to town" (p. 235). As a result of that separation, the two branches of the family become further divided: "The Libya Hill Joyners were facing ever toward the world, and those in Zebulon away from it; and as years went by, it seemed that this directiveness became more marked than ever -- the town Joyners ever more the world's men; those in Zebulon more withdrawn from the world" (p. 236).

Wolfe's descriptions of life among the "world-lost" mountain Joyners reveal that his social vision had become much sharper during this third phase of his career. The romantic interpretations of "Old Catawba" and the Catawban natives that occasionally emerge in Of Time and the River and From Death to Morning are sharply qualified in The Hills Beyond. The destruction of natural beauty by man's greed is emphasized for the first time:

Some vast destructive "Suck" had been at work here; and a visitor, had he returned after one hundred years, would have been compelled to note the ruin of the change. It was evident that a huge compulsive greed had been at work: the whole region had been sucked and gutted, milked dry, denuded of its rich primeval treasures: something blind and ruthless had been here, grasped, and gone. The blind scars on the hills, the denuded slopes, the empty mica pits were what was left (pp. 236-37).
The Hills Beyond

Chapter I of The Hills Beyond, "The Quick and the Dead," provides a satirical account of the founding of "Old Catawba" (North Carolina) in 1594 by one Hugh Fortescue. This original "lost colony," with its legends of white settlers intermarrying with Indians, provides its descendants of mixed blood an aristocratic myth; consequently, they establish The Society of the Sons and Daughters of the Aborigines, an obvious slap at the Daughters of the American Revolution. This burlesque of aristocratic pretensions allows Wolfe to define his new attitude toward the past. In describing the conflict between the backward-looking eastern section of the state and the progressive western section, Wolfe anticipates the same conflict within the Joyner family and, by extension, within America and her spokesman, George Webber:

Now the history of genealogies is very significant and curious. In America, as in most young countries, people are much less likely to be snobs over the thing they have than over the thing they lack. Thus Americans are seldom snobs about money, but they are often snobs about "family." The amount of time spent by certain people in New England and the South in talking about their "families" is appalling. In the South, particularly, this preoccupation seems to absorb most of the spare energies of the female population, for it is an axiom of Southern life that a woman without "family" is nothing.

So it was in this final phase of the war between the East and the West. As a last resort, the East claimed the right to rule the West on grounds of "family." In a state which had hitherto been singularly free of aristocratic pretensions this was a most peculiar development. But the reasons for it are not far to seek.
The East now knew that its cause was hopeless. It had grown fat on power, and now it saw that it must yield before the new men of the West. It read the signs of its declining influence, and hated to think of the future. So, as nearly always happens under such circumstances, the East took refuge in the glories of an imagined past as compensation for the threatened loss of its future.\(^{13}\)

This aristocratic-democratic tension reaches its climax in the race for governor between a fastidious "Son of the Aborigines" and Zachariah Joyner, the earthy leader of the vital Joyner clan. This victory of the "quick" over the "dead" provides occasion for Wolfe to celebrate lyrically the enduring spirit of America's common man:

So Zachariah Joyner won, and his victory was a great deal more than the triumph of one half of the state over the other half. It was the triumph of the common man -- of all the obscure and unknown lives that somewhere had turned a wheel, or swung an ax, or plowed a furrow, or blazed a trail and made a clearing in the wilderness. His was the voice, the tongue, the language of every one of these who had lived and died and gone unrecorded to the earth -- and who now arose again, incarnate in one living man, to say to all proud hearts, stiff necks, and Aborigines soever that in the final reckoning the representatives of privilege must bow before the insistent rights of universal humanity (pp. 209-10).

In Chapter Two, "The Old Man of the Tribe," Wolfe creates in William "Bear" Joyner, father of "Zach" and patriarch of the Joyner tribe, a primeval embodiment of the American spirit and of American myth. Typically democratic, "Bear" Joyner's antecedents are doubtful, but he plants the

\(^{13}\) Thomas Wolfe, The Hills Beyond (New York: Harper & Row, 1941), pp. 204-05. All subsequent quotations from The Hills Beyond will be cited by page number in parentheses within the text.
seeds for a vast tribe of Joyners, producing seven children by his first wife and "fourteen or sixteen" by his second. His feats of strength and courage rival those of Paul Bunyan, Davy Crockett, and Mike Fink: crushing a blacksmith's ribs with one blow of his fist, wrestling a grizzly bear, bringing fierce dogs to bay with a snap of his fingers, and carrying eight hundred pounds of leather on his shoulders. Added to these physical accomplishments, however, were Yankee shrewdness and, more important as a foreshadowing of George Webber's talent, the ability to read and write. "Bear's" motivation for becoming literate is unknown "except that men sought India once, and braved inhuman seas beyond the world's edge, in their scallop shells; and looked at one another with 'a wild surmise!'" (p. 219).

This sketch of George Webber's mountaineer ancestor, "Bear" Joyner, illustrates the distance Wolfe had traveled in almost twenty years since his early play, The Mountains. In that play, the idealistic doctor, Richard Weaver, is set apart from his family and given the same artistic temperament as the playwright: "... and much of the beauty and tragedy and the mystery in the hearts of men will be revealed to his deeper insight, to thrill and exalt him. It has been his fate, and it will continue to be his lot to struggle with the Angel of Vision..."\(^{14}\) In contrast to Weaver, 

"Bear" Joyner's intellectual bent is identified with his clan, all of whom are considered "queer" by neighbors; and his gift can be understood on a rational level:

Boiled down to their essential element, all of these "eccentric" qualities which have, for a hundred years or more, caused their neighbors to accept the Joyners as belonging to their special type, and "queer," are nothing but the marks of an intensely heightened curiosity, a questioning, probing, debating, and examining intelligence that their neighbors did not have. There's the mystery -- if mystery it be; indeed, the only mystery there is (p. 220).

In Chapter Three, "The Great Schism," the Joyner history, with its larger implications of kinship, is further delineated. As a probable reflection of his own renewed sense of family identity, Wolfe describes the sense of unity which exists among the Joyner kin despite their seeming indifference to each other. Again, this description measures the distance Wolfe had traveled from Eugene Gant's feeling of separation from his parents and siblings:

The truth is that no family ever lived that had a stronger sense of their identity. It is hard to describe the thing in more familiar terms, for the whole tribe violates the standards by which such things are commonly appraised. Of "affection," "love," "devotion," even "clannishness" -- as these terms are generally accepted -- the family seems to have had little. It is perfectly true that years have gone by when brothers have not seen or spoken to each other, even when they lived in the same town.

Many people have observed these things and wondered at them, and then accepted them as further proof that the tribe was "queer." And yet, paradoxically, out of this very indifference came the family unity. From this very separateness came the deep and lasting sense of their identity. In a way, they reversed completely the old adage that if men refuse to hang together, they
will all hang separately: of the Joyners it could rather be said that they hang separately because they know they hang together (p. 227).

The schism that resulted from Bear Joyner's two marriages, the first producing seven children (five surviving) and the second "fourteen or sixteen," offers a microscopic parallel of America's rural and urban development since the Civil War. The division between these two groups of offspring is accounted for mainly by the different qualities of their mothers. Martha Creasman is the mother of the first five "superior" children, among whom are Zach, a governor and U. S. senator, and Robert, a noted lawyer. Martha is "a good wife, a quiet and hard-working mother," and, significantly, "a Presbyterian" (p. 229). Bear's second wife, who is unnamed, belongs to the less prestigious Baptist congregation; and her children are patronized as "country cousins" by the elder Joyners. The first five children held "a larger, bolder, more tolerant and experienced view of life than she had ever known; and her narrow prejudice, her cramped vision, her rigid small moralities ... aroused their ridicule and mirth" (pp. 230-31). As the narrator observes, this second wife's uncritical acceptance of Biblical and community authority represents the dark, irrational side of American behavior:

That harsh code to which she adhered was indigenous to America. It has not only done much to shape our lives and histories, but it persists to this day, and is at the root of much of the sickness, the moral complex of America. For example, she believed it was
Furthermore, the mountain people themselves, whom Wolfe had praised as earthy and juicy in earlier letters to Maxwell Perkins and John Hall Wheelock, are now pictured in a grimmer, if not more sordid, light. The mountain folk of *The Hills Beyond* are far removed from any pastoral ideal of harmonious families living close to nature. Instead, their typical lot is to suffer from ignorance, poverty, disease, and often incest:

Turned backwards now, world-lost, in what was once new land! Unseeking now, in what their forebears with blue vistas in their eyes, alone, in Indian country, sought! Turned in upon themselves, congruent as a tribe, all intermarried (so each man now was cousin to the very blood he took: each Cain among them brother to his very deed!) (p. 238) —

Nor is the people's condition improved by naive do gooders:

The people! To be gloated over by exultant Ph.D's (who find in mountain shacks the accents of Elizabeth); to be gawked at by tourists (now the roads are good) in search of the rare picturesque; to be yearned over by consecrated school-marms "from the North"; have their "standards" "improved" by social service workers, who dote upon the squalor, ignorance, and poverty; lasciviously regret the degradations of the people's lot, and who do valiantly their little bit (God bless their little, little souls!) to help the people, teach the people, prop the people, heal the people, . . . (p. 238).

Despite these realistic insights into the degradations of the mountains and their inhabitants, Wolfe could still invoke his lyrical powers when he reveals his personal feelings for the land and his kinsmen:

And the old formations of the earth were left: the boiling clamor of the rocky streams, the cool slant darkness of the mountain hollows. Something wild, world-lost, and lyrical, and special to the place
called Zebulon was somehow left: the sound of rock-bright waters, bird calls, and something swift and fleeting in a wood; . . . the small, heart-piercing wisps of smoke that coiled into the clear immensity of weather from some mountain shack, with its poignant evidence that men fasten to a ledge, and draw their living from a patch of earth — because they have been here so long and love it and cannot be made to leave; . . . (p. 237).

Chapter Four, "How Certain Joyners Went to Town," sketches the careers of Zack and Robert Joyner, the politician and the lawyer, respectively, with deft satirical strokes. No doubt because Wolfe was smarting from his own legal entanglements, he used this occasion to criticize the self-serving side of the law profession. Although his attack may have been personally motivated, he locates his criticism within a framework of social values:

In this way, it came to be accepted almost without question among mountain folk that the most gifted of their sons would, if possible, get into the profession of the law. The lawyer was a kind of medicine man to the community. To his ruder, simpler, and less talented contemporaries, he was the man of learning and of argument, the man of reason and of fluent speech.

The evil of this system — an evil that has become widespread, rooted in the very structure of the nation's life — is instantly apparent. It offered to many unscrupulous men, under the protections of a high authority, the opportunity to prey upon their neighbors — neighbors who were not endowed with their own shrewdness, smoothness, gift of gab, and formal training, and who, by the conditions of the system, were forced to seek recourse for their troubles from the very men who preyed on them (p. 253).

Chapter Five, "The Plumed Knight," finds Wolfe's satire aimed once more at one of his favorite targets: Southern antiquarians. This time Theodore Joyner, Bear's
youngest and most educated of sons, provides the example. Theodore, twice unsuccessful at passing his bar exams, "set up for a 'Professor,'" (p. 264) and establishes "The Joyner Heights Academy" on a hill named Hogwart Heights, a name he tries unsuccessfully to make the townspeople forget. At the approach of the Civil War, Theodore changes the name of the school to "The Joyner Heights Military Academy": "By this simple expedient he jumped his enrollment from sixty boys to eighty, and -- more important -- transmogrified himself from a rustic pedagogue into a military man" (p. 265).

Although the pretensions of Theodore's "academy" are undermined by Zack Joyner, Theodore and his cadets do indeed march to war "to a man" and thus establish for themselves a lifetime legend. After the war, Theodore, having failed his bar exams a third time, re-establishes Joyner Heights, another proof of the South’s myth-making faculty: "It was a pitiable spectacle to see a great region and a valiant people bedaubleing itself with such gimcrack frills and tin-horn fopperies after it had been exhausted and laid waste by the very demon it was making obeisance to" (p. 272).

In his early play Mannerhouse, Wolfe had also debunked the code of Southern chivalry, but his hero Eugene Ramsey finally accepts the code as proof of his own preference for dreams over reality. In The Hills Beyond, however, the narrator sees clearly the dangers of myth-making:

In a curious way, the war became no longer a thing finished and done with, a thing to be put aside and
forgotten as belonging to the buried past, but a
deaf fact recharged with new vitality, and one to
be cherished more dearly than life itself. The
mythology which this gave rise to acquired in time
the force of an almost supernatural sanction. It
became a kind of folk-religion. And under its
soothing, other-worldly spell, the South began to
turn its face away from the hard and ugly realities
of daily living that confronted it on every hand,
and escaped into the soft dream of vanished glories
-- imagined glories -- glories that had never been
(p. 272).

In Chapter Six, "The Battle of Hogwart Heights,"
Wolfe's caricature of Theodore's Virginia-born wife, Emily
Drumgoole Joyner, provides further satire of family preten­sions in the South. By her standards, the entire Joyner
clan is excluded from her social list because of their lack
of pedigree:

Her standards of selection were as rigid as the
law of the Medes and the Persians, and just as in­comprehensible to most of her neighbors; but she knew
well enough what they were, and she adhered to them
to the end of her days. Wit did not count with her,
nor did wisdom, charm, grace, intelligence, character,
or any other happy faculty with which men are endowed
by nature. The only standard that she had, really,
was "family" (p. 279).

Chapter Seven, "A Stranger Whose Sermon Was Brick,"
introduces John Webber, whose appeal to young Edward Joyner
anticipates the same attraction felt by Webber's son, George,
in The Web and the Rock. Webber, the Pennsylvania brick
mason and builder who is Wolfe's last fictional portrait of
W. O. Wolfe, arrives in Libya Hill simultaneously with
"progress" and boosterism:

It was the time when they were just hatching
from the shell, when the place was changing from a
little isolated mountain village, lost to the world,
with its few thousand native population, to a briskly-moving modern town, with railway connections to all parts, and with a growing population of wealthy people who had heard about the beauties of the setting and were coming there to live. It was, in fact, the beginning of their "boom" -- a boom which at times was to lapse, to lie dormant, but never to die out utterly until the final explosion fifty years later. People had already begun to learn the language and to talk the jargon with a practiced tongue (p. 297).

The "innate dignity of the man" and his "self-respect" inspire the admiration of Webber by Judge Robert Joyner and his son, Edward. Unimpressed by his father's legal profession, Edward regards Webber as a man who "could do anything he attempted, and do it well" (p. 302). Like his son, "Monk" Webber, John Webber is given a simian description: "... his short legs, bowed a little outward, his large, flat-looking feet, the powerful, barrel-like torso, and the tremendous gorilla-like length of his arms, with the huge paws dangling almost even with his knees" (p. 305). Although these physical features fail to reinforce the "innate dignity" of John Webber, they do emphasize his humble origins and prove Wolfe's attempt, though not wholly successful, to distance his created characters from his own family.

Chapter Eight, "The Dead World Relived," involves a lengthy dialogue between Edward Joyner and his father, Judge Joyner, about the Civil War and Southern values. Once again Wolfe uses the occasion to separate himself from a world of subjective illusion in which Eugene Gant felt at home. In
this chapter, Edward fantasizes, much as Eugene Gant had, about his exploits as a Civil War general under Robert E. Lee. He even writes fictional accounts of these heroics at the expense of his school work. When his father discovers these writings, he lectures at length on the "fatal weakness in the Southern temperament -- its capacity for romantic self-deception and mythology" (p. 322): "Well, the South is full of just such people -- people who sit around and sit around, mourning the loss of something that they never had, or are better off without -- and there's work to be done! A whole new world to build, a whole new life, better than anything we ever had before! ... And ... we ought to be up and doing it" (p. 324). John Webber is cited by Joyner as a man who "goes ahead and does things" (p. 326).

Chapter Nine, "The Bell Strikes Three," provides evidence that Wolfe's lyrical gift had not been depleted but could still effectively support his new philosophical outlook. The country courthouse, with its bell giving "a brazen pulse to haunting solitudes of June" and "jarring the drowsy torpor of the afternoon. . . ." (p. 327), symbolizes the failure of American justice: "Here was, in sum, the whole framework of America -- the abysmal gap between its preaching and performance, its grain of righteousness and its hill of wrong" (p. 330). Furthermore, the courthouse symbolizes the dualistic character of American society, with its ingrained evil now a more prominent object of Wolfe's vision:
The country courthouse was, in short, America —  the wilderness America, the sprawling, huge, chaotic, criminal America. It was murderous America soaked with murdered blood, tortured and purposeless America, savage, blind, and mad America, exploding through its puny laws, its pitiful pretense. It was America with all its almost hopeless hopes, its almost faithless faiths —  America with the huge blight on her of her own error, the broken promise of her lost dream and her unachieved desire; and it was America as well with her unspoken prophecies, her unfound language, her unuttered song. And just for all these reasons it was for us all our own America —  with all her horror, beauty, tenderness, and terror —  with all we know of her that never has been proved, that has never yet been uttered —  the only one we know, the only one there is (p. 332).

In the same chapter, a full-sized portrait is presented of "Old Looky Thar," a reprobate Civil War veteran whose nickname derives from a shrapnel wound in the roof of his mouth, to which he continually points with pride. In "Old Looky Thar," Wolfe finds the lower class counterpart of Theodore Joyner, both men professional Southerners and equally adept at mythology. For Judge Joyner, the progressive Southerner, Looky Thar represents a Southern cancer:

Looky Thar represented everything he hated most —  shiftlessness, ignorance, filth, lechery, and professional veteranism. But hate, loathing, anger, or contempt were not sufficient to prevail over Old Looky Thar; he was a curse, a burden, and a cause of untold agony, but he was there in his split-bottomed seat against the courthouse porch, and there to stay —  a burden to be suffered and endured (p. 339).

The last chapter of The Hills Beyond, "The Lost Day," brings the relationship between Edward Joyner and his father to a rather melodramatic and unsatisfactory conclusion. Reading one day in his father's study, Edward learns that his father's leg had been shattered by minie ball at the
Battle of Spotsylvania. This revelation of the heroism of his pacifist father creates dramatic irony, but its significance does not extend beyond Edward's renewed admiration for his father. Chapter Ten concludes with Edward reminiscing fifty years later about the day of his discovery. His recapture of that day in his boyhood is given the same lyrical enchantment of Eugene Gant's discoveries in the first novels:

And time still passing . . . passing like a leaf . . . time passing, fading like a flower . . . time passing like a river flowing . . . time passing . . . and remembered suddenly, like the forgotten hoof and wheel . . .

Time passing as men pass who never will come back again . . . and leaving us, Great God, with only this . . . knowing that this earth, this time, this life, are stranger than a dream (p. 348).

The Hills Beyond is obviously an uneven, fragmented work which Wolfe would have revised considerably had he lived. Undoubtedly the narrative threads of Edward Joyner's youth, of John Webber's marriage to Amelia Joyner, and of George Webber's birth and childhood would have been interwoven. Nevertheless, this fairly extensive genealogy of George Webber's maternal ancestry provided solid premises on which Wolfe constructed his final manuscript.

The ten chapters of The Hills Beyond prove again that Wolfe's literary and philosophical orientation had changed from subjective to objective and from a preoccupation with his personal history to a realistic concern for the future. The contrasting characters in those ten chapters verify Wolfe's changed perspective. The pretentious
Sons and Daughters of the Aborigines represent, in the first chapters, the pseudo-aristocratic, backward-looking eastern Catawbans. They are overshadowed by the democratic western Catawbans, for whom Zack Joyner speaks: "'I don't know where we came from, and, what's more, I don't give a damn. The point is, we're here now'" (p. 212). The schism within the Joyner clan itself further confirms Wolfe's progressive leanings. George Webber's inherited traits are clearly those of "the Joyners who went to town" and not of those who remained in "world-lost Zebulon." Wolfe's sordid picture of that mountain life, with its natural and human degradation, illustrates his new awareness of human greed and human suffering, which can occur even amid the scenic grandeur of a mountain state. Finally, the temperamental contrasts among the "Joyners who went to town" represent Wolfe's final evaluation of his Southern heritage. Judge Robert Joyner's progressive outlook, corresponding to that of the Northern newcomer, John Webber, conflicts with that of his antiquarian brother, Theodore, and Old Looky Thar.

To compare Wolfe's treatment of Eugene Gant's family with his characterization of George Webber's ancestry is to establish an index to the author's growth and maturity. For the sensitive young Eugene Gant, his family conflicts are an awful, immediate force that both wounds and shapes his personality. Torn between the frustrations of his mother and father, Eugene's only response is to suffer and to long for
escape. Because his family is all important, Eugene feels keenly any slights caused by the Gants' social position. He and Ben are "by nature aristocrats," and Eugene can secretly admire the aloof hauteur of the Hilliard family as well as the established smugness of Altamont's Presbyterian congregation. Furthermore, the larger significance of Eugene's numerous and diverse Gant-Pentland relations is lost upon him. For example, the commercial spirit of Luke and Eliza, in retrospect, can be seen as symptomatic of the 1920's. For Eugene, however, that spirit is primarily a matter of bad taste.

By contrast, George Webber's family is viewed from a more distant perspective; consequently, it serves a more obvious symbolic function within a larger framework of social values. Like Eugene Gant before them, both Edward Joyner and George Webber are attracted to the fictional counterpart of W. O. Wolfe. In *Look Homeward, Angel*, Wolfe models W. O. Gant from nearly the same clay as his actual father. As a result, Gant's role as a frustrated artist trapped within the mountain confines of Altamont is significant mainly as an example for Eugene to avoid. John Webber, on the other hand, is constructed of more solid stuff. Unlike Gant, he is a successful artisan, a brick mason whose values are as concrete and progressive as his working material. A Northerner who arrives in Libya Hill in 1881 along with the railroad and its attendant influence, John Webber is a far
cry from Gant, the reprobate outsider who forever questions his mortifying fate. Edward Joyner defines the entire history of Libya Hill in terms of Webber's arrival: B.W. and A.W. (before and after Webber). Likewise, George Webber admires his father's liberalism and independence for defying the provincialism of the Joyner clan and living in Libya Hill as a divorced man.

A fundamental cause for this greater objectivity and reliance on symbolic values by Wolfe was his own changed sense of family. From the point of view of Eugene Gant as well as the early dramatic heroes, Richard Weaver and Eugene Ramsey, the family represents a constricting circle within which a creative individual might well suffocate unless he can find a door for escape. From George Webber's viewpoint, the family more nearly resembles a chrysalis, a germinating center from which life expands centrifugally. Instead of an individual's identity being frustrated by his family circle, the family is only a first step in his growth to a larger sense of kinship with his fellow man. In Bear Joyner's colloquial phrasing: "My God Almighty! A man can plant the seed, but he cain't make the weather! I sowed 'em -- now, god-damn 'em, let 'em grow" (p. 226)! The very size and diversity of the Joyner family make them representative of Wolfe's late attitudes toward American democracy and brotherhood. Those attitudes are clearly evident in his posthumous works, The Web and the Rock and You Can't Go Home Again.
The Web and the Rock

The Web and the Rock, published in 1939, actually represented only the second section of Wolfe’s entire manuscript of the same name. The first section became The Hills Beyond, published in 1941; and the last part was You Can’t Go Home Again, published in 1940. The disparate episodes of The Web and the Rock accounted for a negative critical reaction, the critics condemning the novel for its structural and tonal disunity. This flaw becomes understandable when one realizes that after Wolfe’s death Edward Aswell had before him, in Richard Kennedy’s words, "a mass of undigested gobbets, some of which came from the period of Wolfe’s passionate outpourings, some from his period of satire about Joe Doaks, and some from his period of social criticism."\(^1\)

The Web and the Rock falls into a fairly well-defined two-part division, representing two different periods of Wolfe’s creativity. The first three books of the novel — "The Web and the Root," "The Hound of Darkness," and "The Web and the World" — contain childhood memories of George Webber and his introduction to the city. They can be dated, for the most part, after 1935. The last four books — "The Magic Year," "Life and Letters," "Love’s Bitter Mystery," and "Octoberfest" — are unified by the hero’s love affair with Esther Jack. As explained in Chapter Four, that

\(^1\)Kennedy, p. 390.
material was originally planned as the second half of "The October Fair," the first half of which became Of Time and the River. Consequently, the structural and thematic incongruities in The Web and the Rock can be explained, not only by the unfinished state of Wolfe's manuscript, but also by the fact that two stages of Wolfe's career are represented by the two-part division.

As will be recalled, the second stage of Wolfe's career, extending roughly from 1929-1935, saw Eugene Gant's epic attempt in Of Time and the River to synthesize man's dualistic motives "of wandering forever and the earth again." At the end of that novel, Eugene is returning to his American homeland with Helen (later named Esther Jack) to discover love and to achieve beauty by capturing lost moments of time. That quest for love and fame would be continued by George Webber and Esther Jack in the second part of The Web and the Rock. The third and final stage of Wolfe's career, extending from 1935 until his death in 1938, can be recognized within the first three books and at the conclusion of The Web and the Rock. George Webber, like Eugene Gant before him, leaves home to discover truth; but his viewpoint is more dispassionate, and his final resolution, unlike Eugene's, is that "you can't go home again."

Book I, or "The Web and the Root," provides the genealogical and geographical setting for George Webber's "discovery of life and of the world," as Wolfe described the purpose of the novel in his "Author's Note." Richard Walser
claims that the changed background of Wolfe's new persona "was not much of a change at all."\(^{16}\) Granted that similarities do exist between George Webber and Eugene Gant, between the Gant-Pentland family and the Webber-Joyner tribe, and between Altamont and Libya Hill, one can still find reason to confirm Wolfe's own opinion of his book: that it represented, according to the "Author's Note," a "genuine spiritual and artistic change" and that it was "the most objective novel that I have written." Wolfe's claim is substantiated by the fact that a greater aesthetic and philosophical distance separates the narrator from George Webber's adventures than separated the teller from Eugene Gant's tale. As a result of that wider and deeper perspective, George Webber's family relationships assume a sharper symbolic role than did Eugene Gant's. Furthermore, a dramatic irony is achieved by the contrast between George's illusory dreams and the realities of his experience. In the case of Eugene Gant, the reader is never completely sure of the dividing line between Eugene's youthful illusions and Thomas Wolfe's own idealism.

The main connecting link between *The Hills Beyond* and *The Web and the Rock* is John Webber. Young Edward Joyner's hero worship of Webber is now transferred to Webber's son, George. The contrast between the solid, 

rational, orderly world of Webber and the dark, superstitious world of George's maternal kin establishes a symbolic dualism that extends throughout Wolfe's posthumous works. Once again, in Wolfe's fictional world, the keys to the present are found in the ancestral past. Not only George's nature, but also that of his race can be explained only as a fluid combination of the rational and irrational, the male and female.

When the novel begins, George's mother has died, after divorcing her husband, and George has been "rescued" from his reprobate father by his Uncle Mark and Aunt Mag Joyner. Throughout the first chapter Webber identifies the Joyners with all of the negative images of his mountain birthplace: "It came to him at night, in Winter from a room before a dying fire, in Summer from the porch of his grandfather's little house, where Aunt Maw sat with other rusty, aged crones of her own blood and kin, with their unceasing chronicle of death and doom and terror and lost people in the hills long, long ago. It came to him in all they said and did, in the whole dark image of the world they came from, and something lost and stricken in the hills long, long ago." 17

In contrast to these self-righteous, "death-devouring," and "time-triumphant" Joyners, John Webber's

17 Thomas Wolfe, The Web and the Rock (New York: Harper and Row, 1939), pp. 8-9. All subsequent references to this novel will be cited by page number in parenthesis within the text.
world stands for light opposed to darkness, reason opposed to superstition, warmth opposed to cold, and sinfulness opposed to prudery:

The story of his father's crimes, his father's sinfulness, his father's lecherous, godless, and immoral life was written on his heart. And yet the image of his father's world was pleasant and good, and full of secret warmth and joy to him. All of the parts of town, all of the places, lands, and things his father's life had touched seemed full of happiness and joy to him. . . . He felt miserably that he was tainted with his father's blood. He sensed wretchedly and tragically that he was not worthy to be a death-triumphant, ever-perfect, doom-prophetic Joyner. . . . He knew he was not good enough for them, and he thought forever of his father's life, the sinful warmth and radiance of his father's world (p. 9).

Although George Webber's childhood is described by Wolfe as "dark and melancholy" and "savagely divided," the reader nevertheless misses the extreme sense of isolation felt by Eugene Gant. George, unlike Eugene, never drowns in his speechless secretions or batters his head against the wall like an insane goat. Instead, the divided worlds of Webber and Joyner are treated objectively and symbolically, with the genealogical contrast soon extended to geographical differences.

At the end of Chapter One of The Web and the Rock, the dichotomous Joyner-Webber value systems are identified with specific places. For George, the "bad" side of town, from the Joyner's point of view, is the "good" side of his father's world. That part of town includes hardware and lumber stores, barber shops, drug stores, tobacco shops, and railway depots. For Eugene Gant, those childhood locales
were described in terms of a lost paradise, to be enshrined permanently in his memory and imagination. George Webber's narrator, however, gives ironic significance to the boy's sense of place. He attributes George's prejudice toward his father's world to "the naive but passionate intensity of childhood" (p. 12). Furthermore, this youthful vision is equated with a Currier and Ives drawing, "drawn in very bright and very innocent and very thrilling colors -- . . .," a world "in which there were no rough edges and no bleak vacancies, no desolate and empty gaps" (p. 12). In later years, George would experience that same sensation in two places, in his father's Pennsylvania homeland of "great red barns" and "white fences" and "in certain sections of Germany, the Austrian Tyrol -- . . ." (p. 12). Thus, at the outset of the hero's odyssey, the reader is provided a clear foreshadowing of one of George's final lessons: that an idyllic place on earth is an ever-vanishing illusion.

Richard Walser criticizes the early chapters of The Web and the Rock for their not "recording Monk's development as a well-defined character." This criticism is justified insofar as George's personal ambitions are concerned (the reader must wait until Chapter Fifteen to discover that Webber is a writer). Nevertheless, one can discern in the quality of his observations a growth from childhood to adolescence to manhood. The title of Webber's first novel,
for example, is "The End of the Golden Weather," a narrative encompassing ten months of George's life between his twelfth and thirteenth years.

Chapter Two, "Three O'Clock," comprises fifty-four pages of boyhood reminiscences by Webber. Some of these passages undoubtedly represent unused material from Wolfe's earlier manuscripts, such as his apostrophe to Pity and Beauty:

Then pity is there, is there at once with its dark face and sudden knife, to stab us with an anguish that we cannot utter, ... . . .

And beauty swells like a wild song in our heart, beauty bursting like a great grape in our throat, beauty aching, rending, wordless, and unutterable, beauty in us, all around us, never to be captured — and we know that we are dying as the river flows (p. 59)!

Nevertheless, sections of this chapter do represent a growth by George away from the simple, clear-cut Currier and Ives world of his childhood impressions. Illustrating this development are his meditations on Old Catawba and South Carolina and his memories of violent scenes in Libya Hill.

The chapter opens with George lying on his uncle's yard one afternoon in May, meditating on his home state, Old Catawba, a pseudonym for North Carolina. This digression recognizes the ambiguities of place, a recognition that, unlike the world of Currier and Ives, the real world does contain "rough edges" as well as "desolate and empty gaps." George finds Old Catawba superior to its southern neighbor, South Carolina, because Old Catawba is farther north and
therefore doesn't share South Carolina's "old, stricken, wounded 'Southness' of cruelty and lust" (p. 14):

So Old Catawba is better because it is more "North." Even as a child, George Webber realized that in a general way it was better to be more North than South. If you get too North, it gets no good. Everything gets frozen and dried up. But if you get too South, it is no good either, and it also gets rotten. If you get too North, it gets rotten but in a cold, dry way. If you get too South, it gets rotten not in a dry way -- which if you're going to get rotten is the best way to get rotten -- but in a horrible, stagnant, swampy, stench-like, humid sort of way that is also filled with obscene whisperings and ropy laughter (p. 15).

For the foregoing reasons, then, Old Catawba is "just right" for George Webber; and the ensuing descriptions of its natural beauty and solid citizenry justify his subsequent homesickness. Not until Libya Hill's corruption and greed are revealed in You Can't Go Home Again does George finally lose his nostalgia for hometown simplicity.

Throughout the remainder of "Three O'Clock," random scenes of violence in Libya Hill, such as automobile accidents and street fights, further undermine the earlier pastoral image of Libya Hill held by George. In one particular episode, George is rescued by Nebraska Crane after being ganged up on by a group of West Side mountain grills, degenerate descendants of Catawban mountaineers. Nebraska Crane, a half-breed Cherokee destined to be a professional baseball player, rescues George from this pack by breaking the ringleader's arm with a baseball bat. Thus, at the end of "Three O'Clock," George recognizes in his own blood the taint of evil, which he identifies with the seamy side of
his mother's mountain stock: "Bone of their bone, blood of their blood, flesh of their flesh, by however various and remote a web, he is of them, they are in him, he is theirs -- has seen, known, felt, and has distilled into his blood every wild passion, criminal desire, and rending lust they have known" (p. 62).

George Webber still retains two illusions from his adolescence: an idyllic vision of his father's land and a faith in heroes, specifically in Nebraska Crane's heroism. His father's northern homeland, with its promise of "certitude, peace, joy, security and abundance..." (p. 63), represents the same ancestral home sought by Eugene Gant in Of Time and the River: "It is the unknown land which all of us have known and have longed to find in youth. It is the undiscovered complement of all that we have seen and known, the lost half of our dark heart, the secret hunger, need, and magic working in our blood; ..." (p. 63). In addition, Nebraska Crane represents a final symbol of security, a heroic father image also sought by Eugene Gant: "What is there to fear on earth if Nebraska Crane is there? Nebraska stands there in his life like the image of that heroic integrity in life which cannot be touched or conquered, which is outside a man, and to which his own life must be united if he will be saved" (p. 63). Dramatic irony is achieved again in You Can't Go Home Again when George, in Nazi Germany, is finally dispossessed of those two illusions.
The following chapter, "Two Worlds Discrete," further develops the opposite worlds of Webber and Joyner, with particular emphasis on the superstitions and religious fanaticism of the Joyners. At the end of that chapter, however, occurs a dream vision which offers another hint as to the ultimate significance of Wolfe's family theme.

George dreams that he works as a ticket taker for a circus, that ideal community on wheels celebrated in From Death to Morning. In this dream George arrives with the circus at a place he knows instantly to be "his heart's desire, his father's country, the earth his spirit dwelled in" (p. 89). Then, in a scene resembling the parable of the prodigal son, George discovers the home of his long-lost father and two brothers (perhaps W. O. Wolfe and the two dead brothers, Grover and Ben). As his father and brothers welcome him with open arms and lavish provisions, "all the pain of loneliness and the fierce hungers of desire were scoured away like a scum of frost from a bright glass"; and "they understood all that he wanted to say but could not speak..." (p. 90).

The lyrical intensity of this idealized vision of fatherhood and brotherhood is reminiscent of Gant's dying moments in Of Time and the River, when he sees himself as a boy and hears his father's great voice. Both of those scenes can be read as a figurative answer to the father search by Wolfe's persona. Specifically, they both point to the conclusion of George Webber's "Credo" in You Can't Go
Home Again, in which the hero looks beyond death "to find a land more kind than home, more large than earth."19

Book II of The Web and the Rock, "The Hound of Darkness," follows "Monk" Webber through his fifteenth year in Libya Hill. Much of the material in these five chapters repeats, perhaps redundantly, the thematic division of George's heritage: the Joyner-Webber dichotomy symbolizing South and North, superstition and reason, the past and the future, darkness and light. By far the most significant episode of "The Hound of Darkness" section is Chapter Eight, "The Child by Tiger."

This well-constructed narrative of the mysterious Negro Dick Prosser is, in Floyd C. Watkins' estimation, "one of the best short stories Wolfe ever wrote."20 In addition to its internal unity, the story is effectively placed in the novel. Occurring during Monk's teen-age years and following numerous sketches of Libya Hill's violent underside, the story of Prosser serves as a turning point in the hero's education because it dramatically counterpoints the earlier childhood vision of a pastoral world without shades of grey.

Wolfe's characterization of Prosser, a new house servant of George's friend Randy Shepperton, reveals the


author's late-developing skill as an objective narrator. A Bible-quoting Army veteran who performs every task with military courtesy and precision, Prosser evolves as one of Wolfe's most complex characters. Despite his surface impression of rationality and orderliness, the black man moves like a cat. Later his eyes are "shot with red" when a town drunkard side-swipes the Shepperton's car Dick is driving and then pummels the Negro's face. Those hints of his submerged violence prepare for the catastrophe when Prosser runs amuck through Libya Hill and kills seven men before he is riddled with bullets from a posse and hung in a store window for public inspection.

The winter setting for this violent tragedy, with Northern snow falling on a Southern scene, adds further symbolic richness to the story. The snow, which comes "as a strange and wild visitor from the secret north" (p. 139), parallels the divided nature of man symbolized by Prosser: "In every man there are two hemispheres of light and dark, two worlds discrete, two countries of his soul's adventure. And one of these is the dark land, the other half of his heart's home, the unvisited domain of his father's earth" (p. 140). Wolfe summarizes the impact of this experience on Webber and his friends:

And something had come into life -- into their lives -- that they had never known about before. It

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21 For a full treatment of this episode, based on an actual event in Asheville in 1906, see Watkins, Thomas Wolfe's Characters, pp. 102-07.
was a kind of shadow, a poisonous blackness filled with bewildered loathing. The snow would go, they knew; the reeking vapors of the sky would clear away. . . . And all of this would vanish as an evil dream. And yet not wholly so. For they would still remember the old dark doubt and loathing of their kind, of something hateful and unspeakable in the souls of men. They knew that they would never forget (pp. 153-54).

The last chapter of "The Hound of Darkness," called "Home from the Mountain," follows George and his Uncle Mark on a mountain hike above Libya Hill. This chapter once again stresses the twin pulls within George: "the huge, bitter conflict of those twin antagonists, those powers discrete that wage perpetual warfare in the lives of all men living -- wandering forever and the earth again" (p. 157).

Most of the chapter consists of Uncle Mark's bitter denunciation of his father, Major Lafayette Joyner, a phony Civil War hero and would-be scholar who neglected his family, and of his Uncle Rance Joyner, the eccentric religious prophet who waits for Armageddon.

Those stories of his Joyner kinsmen confirm the wisdom of George's desire to escape his mountain home; yet, as the chapter closes, the youth still seeks an undiscovered door. As George and his uncle descend the mountain, the lights of houses and the smells of cookery evoke in the nephew "the glorious hope of the plain, priceless, and familiar happiness of a wedded love that might belong to any man alive -- . . . ." (p. 170). This final image of marital happiness points toward the second part of the novel, the love affair between George and Esther. But the chapter
concludes on a prophetic note, that a door to earthly happiness would never open for George Webber:

The sight of these closed golden houses with their warmth of life awoke in him a bitter, poignant, strangely mixed emotion of exile and return, of loneliness and security, of being forever shut out from the palpable and passionate integument of life and fellowship, and of being so close to it that he could touch it with his hand, enter it by a door, possess it with a word -- a word that, somehow, he could never speak, a door that, somehow, he would never open (p. 170).

Book III of the novel, "The Web and the World," takes George Webber beyond Libya Hill and his Joyner kinsmen. Viewed as a single work, the posthumous novels of Wolfe can be read as a series of rejections leading to a final affirmation. Those rejections follow encounters with reality which dispel from George's mind illusions of security or happiness. Thus, at the end of Book II, George has become disenchanted with the web of his maternal kinsmen, although his final break from home will occur in You Can't Go Home Again. Nevertheless, as George leaves the "web" of his family roots and ventures into the world beyond Libya Hill, he is still possessed by two dominant illusions related to his strong sense of family. As did his predecessor Eugene Gant, George Webber searches for a "door" to personal happiness and success. Furthermore, he usually looks to another human being, a strong parental figure, as one possessing the key to that door. Just as Nebraska Crane

served as father-protector during George's boyhood, so will other figures loom as supportive props for the hero. Webber's disillusionment with the world of that parental figure coincides with his disappointment in the individual himself. These later rejections by Webber have been clearly foreshadowed in the early chapters of The Web and the Rock, which depict the flawed family of George Webber as well as the flawed ancestry of man, symbolized by Dick Prosser. As one would expect, therefore, Webber's final statement of faith at the end of You Can't Go Home Again both recognizes and transcends man's mortal limitations.

Like Eugene Gant, George Webber first experiences life beyond the limits of home at college, this time Pine Rock substituting for Pulpit Hill. Unlike Eugene Gant's experience, however, the chapters devoted to Webber's collegiate career look beyond the unique personality of the hero and concentrate instead on other characters as well as on the significance of the experience itself. Eugene's years at Pulpit Hill reflect Wolfe's own progress at Chapel Hill when he wrote his mother that he found himself an ever-growing source of interest.

In Look Homeward, Angel, Wolfe emphasizes his collegiate hero's romantic sensibilities and social isolation. Eugene reads "at random, for pleasure," but prefers "all weird fable and wild invention," especially the poetry of Coleridge, "the chief prince of the moon and magic."23

23Thomas Wolfe, Look Homeward, Angel (New York:
At Pulpit Hill Eugene is apolitical, "quite content with any system which might give him comfort, security, enough money to do as he liked, and freedom to think, eat, drink, love, read, and write what he chose." Finally, Eugene views Pulpit Hill itself as a cultural oasis in a desert of provincialism: "He was reading Euripides, and all around a world of white and black was eating fried food." 

From the narrative perspective of George Webber, a much different college student emerges. His observations on the people and events around him reveal a more mature, objective student than Eugene Gant. The Pine Rock episode, in fact, focuses on two companions of George Webber: Jim Randolph, a father figure, and Jerry Alsop, a "mother hen."

Jim Randolph, "a classic type of the tall, young American" (p. 175), is also a classic type of the "big man on campus." Having traveled widely, had women all over the world, and worked at a variety of occupations, including semi-professional baseball, Jim is naturally revered by his younger comrades. His triumphant feat at Pine Rock, the glory of which he outlives, is scoring the winning touchdown against arch-rival Madison and Monroe. When World War I erupts, he is one of the favored few who enlist and return as wounded heroes. Later, when George is living with Jim


24Ibid., p. 491.

25Ibid., p. 352.
and other fellow Catawbans in a New York apartment, Randolph has become a tragic figure, "a memory to those for whom he once had been the embodiment of heroic action" (p. 268). Thus the career of Jim Randolph serves as an early exemplum, in Wolfe's posthumous work, of the illusory quality of fame, the danger of living in the past, and the fallibility of human heroes.

Another extensively developed contemporary of George Webber, one that allows Wolfe to digress at length on the Southern sense of community, is Jerry Alsop, "a kind of Mother Machree of the campus, the brood hen of yearling innocents, the guide and mentor of a whole flock of fledgling lives" (p. 188). In his sentimentality, his intellectual shallowness, and his worship of tradition, Alsop bears a close resemblance to Major Theodore Joyner of *The Hills Beyond*, another Southerner unwilling to face reality. Whereas Theodore worships the "Lost Cause," in Jerry's "scheme of things -- call it rather, this mythology -- the saintly figure of The Mother was supreme" (p. 191). The conflict between Jerry and George is most apparent in their reading habits. In contrast to Eugene Gant's preference for the romantic poets, George Webber now reads Dostoevski and appreciates the social criticism in Dickens' novels. Alsop, however, reads only those writers who represent "the more wholesome and well-rounded point of view" (p. 193).

In recognizing Alsop as a product of provincial educational values in the South, Wolfe demonstrates the distance,
in social perspective, between Eugene Gant and George Webber. Whereas Eugene is repelled by the provincial life beyond Pulpit Hill, George recognizes his college's shortcomings. In a world of unregulated child labor, disenfranchisement of Negroes, poverty, hunger, and tenant farming, George concludes that "high-sounding talk about 'service,' 'ideals of leadership,' and 'democracy'" failed to make "much actual difference in the way things were" (p. 196).

In concluding this episode on Webber's collegiate career, the narrator places its final value to George not, as with Eugene's experience, on the recognition of his personal uniqueness, but rather on his sense of kinship with other lost souls looking for a door: "He had met a lot of other young people, like himself, and this fact was 'beautiful' -- a lot of young fellows all together, not sure where they were going, but sure that they were going somewhere" (p. 218).

Chapter Thirteen, "The Rock," provides a transition from Webber's college days to his young manhood. As Monk enters New York City past the slums, factories, and garbage heaps of Jersey City, Wolfe ironically juxtaposes the wide-eyed wonder of Monk with the realities of what he sees. In this scene Wolfe skillfully employs his earlier rhetorical style for satirical effect:

The train rushed past a glue factory. With the expression of one drunk with wonder the young man
drank the pageant in. He saw with joy the great stacks, the glazed glass windows, the mighty furnaces of the enormous works; the pungent fragrance of the molten glue came to him and he breathed it in with rapturous appeasement.

The train swept on across a sinuous stream, itself an estuary of the infinite and all-taking sea, itself as motionless as time, scummed richly with a moveless green; the sheer beauty of the thing went home into his mind and heart forever (p. 220).

The obvious import of the narrator's satire in this scene is that the magic city or "rock," his father's country and the other half of George's soul, will prove as disappointing as the "web" of his mother's country. Later in this chapter, as he comments on city apartment dwellers who try to achieve an air of solidity in their surroundings, the narrator recognizes the "enormous sadness and wistfulness of these attempts to simulate an established life in a place where the one permanent thing is change itself" (p. 230). Thus George's position in the novel, both socially and artistically, is defined in terms of paradox and dilemma. A Southerner whose maternal ancestors are the timeless, "death-defying" Joyners, George Webber arrives in a Northern city to create permanent art "in a place where the one permanent thing is change itself."

The next chapter, "The City Patriots," contains some of Wolfe's most astute observations on the significance of his Southern heritage and, by implication, on the significance of family material in his fiction. Those comments are inspired by George's renewal of acquaintance with Jerry Alsop, who has become the leader of a new coterie of foppish
Southerners in New York. Wolfe begins with a criticism of Southern failures, who retreat to "the comforting assurance of the hinterland" (p. 240) when Northern competition becomes too fierce. Among the Southerners who rationalize their defeat Wolfe alludes to the Nashville Agrarians, "the refined young gentlemen of the New Confederacy . . ." (p. 242). His criticism of the Agrarian argument in this passage reflects the shift in Wolfe's thinking that had occurred since 1935.

As was demonstrated in Chapter Four, both the novel, Of Time and the River, and the short-story collection, From Death to Morning, follow a pattern of outward progression and return. The stories in From Death to Morning move from sterile settings in Brooklyn, to Europe, and finally to the narrator's home in Old Catawba. In the last story, "The Web of Earth," Eliza Gant represents an eternal mother whose fecundity suggests the rhythms of earth. Likewise, in Of Time and the River, Eugene Gant moves from home to Boston to New York to Europe and back home again. Throughout the novel, the female, such as Ann in Europe, serves to re-establish the hero's contact with the "family of man." At the conclusion, Eugene and Helen, who symbolizes both muse and mistress, are sailing from Europe to America, where Eugene presumably will create art from the storehouse of his memories.

In Chapter Fourteen of The Web and the Rock, however, the narrator scorns Southern writers who advise the
artist to "return to that place which had given him life and from which the strengths and energies of his art had been derived" (p. 242). But in Chapter Forty-Two of the novel, Webber seems to be following the Southerners' advice. In that chapter, "The Parting," Webber prepares to leave his mistress Esther Jack, who has come to symbolize the city, after their tumultuous love affair. George blames Esther and her city for the loss of his "squeal," which, like Whitman's "barbaric yawp," signifies his creative spirit. More specifically, George's squeal represents the creative union of memory and imagination from which his art has derived: "He had known it ten thousand times in childhood, and it had come to him upon the lights and hues of a million evanescent things; . . ." (p. 605). It is finally described in terms of a mystical force which wells up from the earth and unites him to the human race:

> Knowledge, power, and truth had been in that wild cry. It had united him to the whole family of the earth, for he had always known that men in every age and history had felt the same wild cry of triumph, pain, and passion on their lips, and that it had come to them from the same movements, seasons, and unchanging certitudes of joy as it had come to him (pp. 610-11).

Another apparent contradiction in the novel between Webber's criticism of Southern writers and his later practice is his mockery of their fear of urban literary cliques:

"In these unnatural and unwholesome weathers of creation, the artist -- so these rebellious challengers asserted -- lost his contact with reality, forgot the living inspirations
of his source, had been torn away from living union with what he had begun to call his 'roots'" (p. 242). Nevertheless, in Book V of *The Web and the Rock*, called "Life and Letters," seven chapters are interspersed with merciless satire of New York's literati. For example, Chapter 30 describes Webber's impressions of a literary group in New York at one of Esther Jack's parties. Behind the fictional masks of this party are Carl Van Vechten, Ernest Boyd, and Elinor Wylie, who is referred to in this passage as Rosalind Bailey:

> It was a precious coterie -- a group of privileged personalities who had won for themselves an intoxicating position in the life of the city. They had formed themselves into a clique, which at that moment was supreme, and at the head of this clique, crown jewel of its reverence, object of its idolatry, was the poetess, Rosalind Bailey (p. 483).

These apparent contradictions, within the same novel, of Wolfe's literary theory and practice can be explained by the different composition periods of the book. As stated earlier, the last two-thirds of the novel consist of material Wolfe had planned for "The October Fair." Consequently, the attitudes of George Webber in those chapters conform closely to those of Eugene Gant in *Of Time and the River*. Specifically, those chapters contain some of Wolfe's most passionate diatribes against the sterile ugliness of New York and some of his most nostalgic backward glimpses into the world of his boyhood. Therefore, toward the end of *The Web and the Rock*, Webber is doing precisely
what he had earlier criticized the gentlemen of the "New Confederacy" for recommending: he is returning "to that place which had given him life and from which the strengths and energies of his art had been derived."

Between 1936 and 1938, when Wolfe returned to his "October Fair" manuscript, his sensibility had changed from a preoccupation with his own past, from escapes into time and memory, to a concern with contemporary social problems. For that reason, and probably from a failure to understand the Agrarian argument, Wolfe identified that school as typical of "Southern fear and Southern failure: its fear of conflict and of competition in the greater world; its inability to meet or to adjust itself to the conditions, strifes, and ardors of a modern life; . . ." (p. 243). Apparently Wolfe interpreted the Agrarian manifesto, I'll Take My Stand, as advocating a literal return to the land for everybody rather than a return to the values inherent in a traditional society. George Webber, for instance, expresses "mild surprise" at the defense of an "'agrarian way of life'" when he thinks of his own forebears in Catawba "who had struggled year by year to make a patch of corn grow in the hill erosion of a mountain flank" and "of generations of farm workers in Pennsylvania who had toiled for fifteen hours a day behind the plow to earn a wage of fifty cents, . . ." (p. 243). Nevertheless, both Wolfe and the Agrarians attacked the same enemies, primarily the
dehumanizing and fragmenting effects of industrialization. As C. Hugh Holman states, "Yet one has the feeling that much of his contempt rested on ignorance of what the Agrarians were advocating, and that he would have been pretty much of their party if he had known what the party really was." 26

Another similarity which Thomas Wolfe shared with the Nashville Agrarians was his quest for community, for a "door" to a community of shared values. Following his criticism of Southern intellectuals, the narrator comments on the loneliness felt by the transplanted Southerner in the city:

For that reason his first instinctive movement in the city is likely to be in the direction of his own kind. The first thing he does when he gets to the city is to look up old college chums or toys from his home town. They form a community of mutual interests and mutual self-protection; they build a kind of wall around themselves to protect them from the howling maelstrom of the city's life. They form a Community of the South which has no parallel in city life (p. 244).

That movement "in the direction of his own kind" is precisely the pattern followed by Thomas Wolfe, Eugene Gant, and George Webber. One remembers that Eugene Gant, like his creator, immediately sought out his aunt and uncle in Boston when he arrived at Harvard in Of Time and the River.

Likewise George Webber seeks refuge against the "howling maelstrom of the city's life" by sharing an apartment with fellow Catawbas in *The Web and the Rock*. Yet Wolfe's persona could never completely lose his sense of personal isolation from any human community.

Somewhat scornfully, the narrator attributes this Southern sense of community to "the deep-rooted and provincial insularity of Southern life":

The cleavage of ideas, the division of interest, of social customs and traditional beliefs, which were developing with a tremendous gathering velocity in American life during the first half of the nineteenth century, and which were more and more separating the life of an agrarian South from the life of the industrial North, were consummated by the bloody action of the Civil War, and were confirmed and sealed by the dark and tragic act of reconstruction. After the war and after reconstruction, the South retreated in behind its shattered walls and stayed there (p. 245).

The narrator then describes an image of the Reconstruction South, an old house set back from the main-traveled road and overgrown with grass. That was the South that George and his contemporaries "somehow remembered" in fleeting memories: "upon the rustling of a leaf at night, in quiet voices on a Southern porch, in a screen door slam and sudden silence, . . . and Aunt Maw's droning voice . . . long ago" (p. 245). These rather desolate, personal evocations of the Reconstruction South by Webber represent a different Southern image from that held by the Agrarians, who looked to the ante-bellum South for a social order which came closest to Thomas Jefferson's vision of America. Later, in *You Can't Go Home Again*, Webber would come closer to the
Agrarian's position when he says that "America went off the track somewhere -- back around the time of the Civil War, or pretty soon afterwards." 27

Most of Wolfe's comments about the South, however, from his early plays to his last manuscript, identify him generally as a spokesman for Southern progressivism. Nevertheless, he continuously defined his hero in terms of a paradox, recognizing his attractions toward both the past and the future. As Webber says of himself and his Southern contemporaries: "They had come out -- another image now -- into a kind of sunlight of another century. . . . They heard wheels coming and the world was in, yet they were not yet wholly of that world" (pp. 245-46).

One of the clearest ways in which Wolfe reveals his identity as a Southern writer is by his preoccupation with the hero's ancestry. One cannot fully understand George Webber's progressive leanings, for example, unless he remembers that schism within the Joyner family in The Hills Beyond. Obviously, George's hereditary influences derive from the forward-looking Joyners, those "who went to town," as well as from his father, John Webber. At the end of his chapter on "The City Patriots," the narrator enumerates the qualities that successful, creative Southerners bring to the city. Those qualities -- warmth, faith, 

27 Wolfe, You Can't Go Home Again, p. 393.
an integrity of purpose -- are normally by-products from a healthy integration of individual, family, and community:

They brought you . . . a warmth you lacked, a passion that God knows you needed, a belief and a devotion that was wanting in your life, an integrity of purpose that was rare in your own swarming hordes. They brought to all the multiplex and feverish life of all your ancient swarming peoples some of the warmth, the depth, the richness of the secret and unfathomed South. They brought some of its depth and mystery to those sky-shining vertices of splintered light, to all those dizzy barricades of sky-aspiring brick, to those cold, salmon-colored panes, and to all the weary grey of all those stony-hearted pavements (p. 247).

The remaining four books of The Web and the Rock, except for probably the last chapter, continue the adventures of Eugene Gant, now named George Webber, where he had been left at the end of Of Time and the River. The tone of those four books, particularly the agonized soul-searching of George Webber, is quite different from the self-effacing, objective observations by George in the first chapters. In fact, the hero of the last four books is the same hero of Of Time and the River, this time with a different name and a slightly different problem.

In The Story of a Novel, published in 1936, Wolfe elaborated on two related problems he faced in writing Of Time and the River, originally called "The October Fair." The first, that of "time and memory," is solved by Eugene at the end of the published novel. He has discovered the way to capture moments in time by translating his memories into literary art. In the last chapter, he and his muse, Helen, are literally homebound on a ship; aesthetically,
Eugene is going home in memory to discover the source of his artistic wellspring.

The second problem referred to in *The Story of a Novel*, that of "amount and number," Wolfe apparently planned for Eugene to solve in the second half of "The October Fair" manuscript. Throughout the last four books of *The Web and the Rock*, Monk Webber's Faustian struggles with New York City border on manic-depressive behavior as he alternates between despair and joy. His desire to possess New York and his frustration over his inability to do so torment him continually. The following passage is typical:

He wanted to eat and drink the earth, to swallow down the city, to let nothing escape from him, and it seemed to him that he was going to succeed! Each little moment was crammed with an intolerable joy and glory, so rich with life that all eternity seemed packed into it, and to see it pass, to lose it, to be unable to fix and hold it, was an intolerable and agonizing loss (p. 447).

The solution to Webber's Faustian hunger was anticipated in Wolfe's short story, "Dark in the Forest, Strange as Time." One recalls that story as the turning point of *From Death to Morning*. The young voyager, who also feels the Germanic hunger for life, is advised by the dying old man on the train to limit his desires: "Vun field, vun hill, vun riffer." The remaining stories, consequently, focus on the narrator's memories of Old Catawba. Apparently the same lesson was to be impressed on Wolfe's hero at the end of "The October Fair"; only this time he would come to his senses after a tavern brawl in Munich. Support for this hypothesis
is also found in the sequence of novels Wolfe listed for his hexology in the "Publisher's Note" to *Of Time and the River*. Wolfe planned to follow "The October Fair" with "The Hills Beyond Pentland," a fictional return to the time and place of his ancestors.

After George has left Esther Jack in New York because his "squeal" had deserted him, he travels to Europe under the same compulsions that directed Eugene Gant's travels. While in France, he experiences the same "time stops" that Gant had felt when stimulated by familiar sensory experience. For example, when Webber hears "a low, rich burst of laughter, tender and voluptuous . . . , a lost moment lives again with all its magic and terrible intensity, and the traveler is a child again, and he hears at night, beneath the leafy rustle of mid-Summer trees, the feet of lovers passing by along the street of a little town in America when he was nine years old . . ." (p. 632).

In Munich, as one would expect, Webber's Faustian appetite, of both mind and body, increases: "It was a hunger not only of the belly, but a hunger of the mind and heart and spirit, which got translated in the most astounding and appalling way to all the appetites of sense and flesh. It was a hunger that he had felt from the moment he had entered Germany, . . ." (p. 658). In a Munich beer hall during the Oktoberfest, Monk experiences the same sense of union with ancestral spirits as had the narrator of "Dark in the Forest, Strange as Time": " . . . something dark and
strange as Asia, something older than the old barbaric forests, something that had swayed around an altar, and had made a human sacrifice, and had devoured burnt flesh" (p. 669).

After Monk is hospitalized in Munich following a fight in that same beer hall, the scene shifts back to Esther Jack, sitting at night on a park bench in New York. This chapter, called "Dark October," was probably intended to conclude "The October Fair." As Esther muses aloud over the significance of her love affair with George, a policeman assumes she is drunk and escorts her home. Her musings, however, recapitulate the two problems George has faced throughout "The October Fair": time and memory, and amount and number. She dwells again on Wolfe's old theme of mutability: "Strange time, forever lost, forever flowing like the river! Lost time, lost people, and lost love -- forever lost" (p. 682)! In addition, she also offers a solution to Webber's Faustian sickness, the same solution given by the dying Jew in the short story: "All rooms, all windows, and all persons for your hunger? No. Return to one: fill all that room with light and glory, make it shine as no other room ever shone before, and all life living on this earth will share it with you" (p. 686).

The poetic intensity of "Dark October" causes the last chapter, "The Looking Glass," to be anti-climactic. In fact, the reader can easily assume that Wolfe, probably in the spring of 1938, added that chapter as a transition to
the last part of his manuscript, "You Can't Go Home Again." The brief chapter shifts back to George, lying in a Munich hospital while his body and spirit debate human limitations. This debate provides a solution, different from Esther's, for George's attempts to re-capture past time and to experience all of life. As the argument concludes, the spirit describes George's childhood as the best time in life, but the body replies with the final lesson of the novel:

"And then Crane's cow again, and morning, morning in the thickets of the memory, and so many lives and deaths of life so long ago, together with the thought of Winter howling in the oak, so many sunlights that had come and gone since morning, morning, and all lost voices -- 'Son, where are you?' -- of lost kinsmen in the mountains long ago. . . . That was a good time then."

"Yes," said Body. "But -- you can't go home again" (p. 695).

You Can't Go Home Again

As previously explained, the novel You Can't Go Home Again originally represented the third and last section of Wolfe's final manuscript, "The Web and the Rock." The first section became The Hills Beyond, while the middle section was published as The Web and the Rock. Even though loose threads exist because of its unfinished state, You Can't Go Home Again serves as a culmination of the themes originated in the first two sections.

As Wolfe explained his purpose in the "Author's Note" prefacing The Web and the Rock, his novel was to be "about one man's discovery of life and of the world -- . . . . ." As such, the controlling thematic conflict can be
defined as the gap between George Webber's expectations and the realities of his experience, between illusion and reality.28 This conflict was identified several times in The Hills Beyond: for example, in the contrast between the realistic Zack Joyner and his antiquarian political opponent from eastern Catawba, and in the conflicting views of the Civil War held by Major Theodore Joyner and Judge Robert Joyner. In the early chapters of The Web and the Rock, the same conflict appears as George Webber discovers the dark underside of his boyhood "Currier and Ives" vision of Libya Hill. Scenes of violence among his townsmen culminate in the bloody episode of Dick Prosser, a clear warning that life offers no safe retreat in either time or place. When George leaves Libya Hill for Pine Rock College, therefore, the reader has been forewarned that no return is possible.

Wolfe's last pocket notebook, compiled in the spring of 1938, contains proof that You Can't Go Home Again was intended to resolve his hero's search for reality. A note indicates that he originally planned for Elizabeth Nowell to publish the piece separately: "You Can't Go Home Again (I believe this may work out into something very interesting, although Nowell may have trouble finding a place where it can go: . . . ."29 As the note continues, however, the

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28 For a full discussion of this theme, see Chapter 27, "The Web of Illusion and The Rock of Reality," in Kennedy, The Window of Memory, pp. 388-402.

relationship between *You Can't Go Home Again* and the early chapters of *The Web and the Rock* becomes clear. Specifically, Wolfe intended this final motto as a rejection of Webber's boyhood illusions along with other escapes from reality:

And here would follow the whole Currier and Ives passage of time that Nowell liked. Concluded with the culminating phrase "You can't go home again." The way I have thought it out, the whole piece would develop to this pattern and would really be a kind of spiritual autobiography or narrative: . . . , and I think it would be possible to use all the chants and passages of time and memory that I have written — which are, of course, just a form of trying to "go home again" — building right up to the conclusion which would be a final realization and discovery that one can't go home again — home to his childhood, home to his father, home to time and memory and all the things to which he has gone back in his mind and heart so many thousand times -- and ending maybe in some such way as this:

"You can't go home again, you can't go home again — oh brothers, friends, comrades — our home is in the future: There is no other way."\(^{30}\)

The pattern of rejections in *You Can't Go Home Again* has been well documented by Wolfeian scholars. Richard Walser and Clyde C. Clements, Jr. identify essentially the same illusions discarded by Webber. Walser names the rejections as "blind hometown allegiance, privilege and love, praise and success, social uninvolvment, Fame, man's inhumanity to his fellows, and fatalistic determinism."\(^{31}\) Clements identifies the following symbolic patterns which Webber outgrows: the Family, the Hometown, the Business

\(^{30}\)Ibid., pp. 925-26.

\(^{31}\)Walser, p. 107.
Ethic, Love and Art, Fame in Exile, and the Father. Because of its episodic quality and unrevised condition when Wolfe died, the novel has been questioned as a reliable guide to the author's intentions. Nevertheless, the pattern of rejections is clearly visible. Most relevant to this study are Webber's rejections of his mother's family, his hometown, his spiritual affinity for Germany, and his father surrogate, Foxhall Edwards.

The first chapter of the novel provides a structural counterpoint to the final lesson the hero will learn. Following his drunken brawl in Munich at the end of The Web and the Rock, Webber has now learned that "he was still the son and brother of all men living" and "that he could not devour the earth, . . . ." Tentatively, therefore, Webber has accepted the advice Esther Jack offered in the next-to-last chapter of The Web and the Rock: to illuminate one room "with light and glory" rather than try to fill all rooms. In curbing his Faustian appetite, however, Webber has apparently moved in an opposite and equally dangerous direction towards self-preoccupation. He has yet to learn the

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33 Kennedy says, "The hand of the editor intrudes more often than readers have suspected" and "Aswell identified himself with Wolfe to the extent that he felt free to play author with the manuscript." The Window of Memory, p. 405.

34 Wolfe, You Can't Go Home Again, p. 6. All subsequent quotations from this novel will be cited by page number in parentheses within the text.
lesson his Body offered his Spirit in the last chapter of The Web and the Rock: "You Can't Go Home Again." As the book opens, therefore, George is found musing on his newly acquired sense of place: "With a sharp stab of wonder he reminded himself, as he had done a hundred times in the last few weeks, that he had really come home again -- home to America, home to Manhattan's swarming rock, and home again to love; and his happiness was faintly edged with guilt when he remembered that less than a year before he had gone abroad in anger and despair, seeking to escape what now he had returned to" (pp. 4-5).

The remainder of Chapter One recounts George's renewed love affair with Esther Jack; in Chapter Two he is introduced to fame when James Rodney and Company accepts his first novel. Thus, at the beginning of the novel, "Monk" Webber differs mainly in physical appearance from Eugene Gant, the self-absorbed romantic of Wolfe's first two novels. Furthermore, he temporarily discovers in his editor, Foxhall Edwards, the father figure whom Eugene Gant had sought: "Little by little it seemed to George that he had found in Fox the father he had lost and had long been looking for. And so it was that Fox became a second father to him -- the father of his spirit" (p. 27).

At the end of Chapter Four, "Some Things Will Never Change," appears the fatalistic sermon which Wolfe had used to preface Of Time and the River and his short novel, No Door. This Ecclesiastical wisdom, spoken by a nameless city
man whom Webber envisions as "the face of Darkness and Time," dwells on the changeless cycle of life and death, in which "Only the earth . . . endures forever" (p. 44). In the last two chapters, Webber will disavow this fatalistic creed held by Foxhall Edwards.

His first opportunity to reject a deterministic philosophy occurs when he returns to Libya Hill for the funeral of Aunt Maw Joyner, who "had been the most solid and permanent fixture in his boy's universe" (p. 45). Wolfe's characterization of Aunt Maw, who was introduced in The Web and the Rock, reverses the role Eliza Gant had played in Of Time and the River as a fertile earth mother. In fact, Aunt Maw's obsession with death, shared by her Joyner kin, and her intolerant Puritanism make her an even less sympathetic character than the land-trading Eliza Gant of Look Homeward, Angel. By rejecting the fatalistic values of his Joyner kinsmen, Webber has taken a first step towards his final acceptance of time as flow rather than fixity.

Another image of fixity which also proves mutable is George's hometown. On his train ride home to Libya Hill, Webber receives premonitions of his town's bankrupt values when he overhears a conversation among a group of local boosters. A significant foil to these land speculators, however, is Nebraska Crane, Webber's boyhood hero, who is retiring from a professional baseball career. Untempted by the promoters' talk of land bargains, Nebraska announces his plans to farm "three hundred acres of the purtiest bottom
land you ever seen. That's all I want. I couldn't use no more" (p. 80).

Nebraska Crane represents one of the few wholly integrated characters in Wolfe's fiction. As a part-Cherokee Indian, his roots go deeper into American soil than do Gant-Webber's Anglo-Saxon ancestors'. From Wolfe's viewpoint, Crane is the ideal combination of a man of the soil who has pursued the American dream to success. Paschal Reeves, in fact, believes that Crane, as a "man of nature" who also embodies the savage element in American life, approaches epic stature more nearly than Wolfe's persona: "Thus in the final analysis it is Nebraska Crane rather than the introspective Eugene Gant or the socially conscious George Webber who approaches archetypal statue as the fitting symbol of the fatherland."35

Another effective foil to the town boosters is Judge Rumford Bland, who describes the promoters "as eminent a set of sons-of-bitches as were ever gathered together in the narrow confines of a single pullman car" (p. 81). A notorious practitioner of usury among the Negroes of Libya Hill, Judge Bland has also been blinded by syphilis. Despite his sordid history, Bland achieves some measure of dignity by refusing to "deny the epic disease that makes us men,"36 a phrase Wolfe had used in his early notebooks.

After equating Parisian whores with their American counterparts, the Judge tells George, "'You'll find there's not much difference . . . . Syphilis makes the whole world kin"" (p. 81). It is also Judge Bland who prophetically questions George, "' . . . do you think you can really go home again'" (p. 83)?

After Aunt Maw's funeral, George learns first hand of the corrupted values in Libya Hill, especially when he overhears the demeaning interview between his boyhood friend, Randy Shepperton, and Shepperton's boss, David Merrick, of the Federal Weight, Scales, and Computing Company. When Randy fails to make his sales quota, Merrick warns him: "'You deliver or you go right out on your can! See? The Company doesn't give a damn about you! It's after the business'" (p. 138)! In his final meditation over the lost town of his youth, George sees in Rumford Bland's undisguised sinfulness a clue to the town's failure:

Was it possible that in the blind man whose whole life had become such a miracle of open shamelessness, there had once been a warmth and an energy that had sought for an enhancement of the town's cold values, and for a joy and a beauty that were not there, but that lived in himself alone? Could that be what had wrecked him? Was he one of the lost men -- lost, really, only because the town itself was lost . . . . (p. 145)?

As Wolfe could only explain a character by reference to his heredity, so does George Webber look to the past to explain the failure of his home town and nation. On several occasions he speculates on the root causes of the spiritual sickness he has witnessed. As he anticipates the angry
reaction by Libya Hill over his first autobiographical novel, he examines the sense of guilt in both his region and the nation: "He knew that there was something twisted, dark, and full of pain which Southerners have known with all their lives -- something rooted in their souls beyond all contradiction, about which no one had dared to write, of which no one had ever spoken" (p. 327). After suggesting the causes of Southern shame -- "their old war," slavery, repressed lusts "below the harsh and outward patterns of a bigot and intolerant theology," he enumerates the reasons for national guilt: "the record of corrupt officials and polluted governments, . . . the huge excess of privilege and graft, . . . the daily tolling of the murdered men, . . ." (p. 328). Webber concludes this essay by recognizing a "collective wound" shared by all Americans:

But it is not only at these outward forms that we must look to find the evidence of a nation's hurt. We must look as well at the heart of guilt that beats in each of us, for there the cause lies. We must look, and with our own eyes see, the central core of defeat and shame and failure which we have wrought in the lives of even the least of these, our brothers. And why must we look? Because we must probe to the bottom of our collective wound (p. 328).\(^\text{37}\)

When the Great Depression strikes in October, 1929, the paper empire of Libya Hill collapses along with that of the nation. Baxter Kennedy, the mayor of Libya

\(^{37}\)Paschal Reeves explains this passage in relation to Wolfe's own broken family as "the projection of a deep personal wound received in childhood -- the rupture of the family relationship": "Thomas Wolfe and the Family of Earth," *Spectrum* (Georgia State University, Atlanta), 2 (June, 1972), 49.
Hill, is one of dozens of suicides during the first few days. Later, Webber offers his explanation of the Depression to Randy Shepperton:

"But I'm not thinking about the Stock Market. I'm thinking about America. . . . Sometimes it seems to me . . . that America went off the track somewhere -- back around the time of the Civil War, or pretty soon afterwards. Instead of going ahead and developing along the line in which the country started out, it got shunted off in another direction -- and now we look around and see we've gone places we didn't mean to go. Suddenly we realize that America has turned into something ugly -- and vicious -- and corroded at the heart of its power with easy wealth and graft and special privilege . . . And the worst of it is the intellectual dishonesty which all this corruption has bred. People are afraid to think straight -- afraid to face themselves -- afraid to look at things and see them as they are. We've become like a nation of advertising men, all hiding behind catch phrases like 'prosperity' and 'rugged individualism' and 'the American way.' And the real things like freedom, and equal opportunity, and the integrity and worth of the individual -- things that have belonged to the American dream since the beginning -- they have become just words, too (p. 393).

This passage clearly indicates the shift in Wolfe's view of history that had taken place since his first novel. In Look Homeward, Angel, Eugene Gant sees himself as a bright star illuminating the dust of a decaying civilization but offering little hope for mankind's betterment. In Of Time and the River, Eugene alternates his focus between his own private history and that of his nation. But his recording of American history usually takes the form of Whitmanesque epic chants, celebrating the blood spilled by his pioneer ancestors. In his final manuscript, however, Wolfe's
persona George Webber critically evaluates his cultural heritage in terms of the Jeffersonian American dream.

The longest episode, and the one most highly praised for its structural unity, is Book II of You Can't Go Home Again, "The World That Jack Built." Richard Kennedy devotes an entire chapter of his critical biography to an analysis of the social symbolism underlying the apartment-house fire, with its leveling of all the building's occupants and employees. Although the fire has revolutionary overtones, Kennedy concludes that Wolfe's individualized characters, with selfishness equally distributed among bourgeoisie and proletariat, saves the story from a Marxist label. Regardless of its political implications, the decadent party given by Esther Jack and her husband, the highlight of which is Piggy Logan's puppet circus, separates Webber forever from the world of romantic love and irresponsible privilege. After the fire, George recognizes "a higher devotion" than love for his mistress and "a larger world than this glittering fragment of a world with all its wealth and privilege" (p. 320). Henceforth, George decides to plumb the "stronger, deeper tides and currents running in America . . ." (p. 321).

Following the stock market crash and Libya Hill's angry resentment to its depiction in Webber's first novel,
Home to Our Mountains, George examines his artistic assumptions at length with Randy Shepperton. Just as Eugene Gant, in Of Time and the River, had confessed the dramatic faults of Wolfe's play, Mannerhouse, so does George Webber dissociate Wolfe from Eugene Gant. Webber describes his autobiographical hero in Home to Our Mountains as "a stick, a fool, a prig, a snob, . . . ." (p. 385) and realizes that "his own self-pity was just his precious egotism coming between him and the truth he strove for as a writer" (p. 396). George has now divested himself of ties to family and hometown, of romantic love and the world of city aesthetes, and of his self-importance as an artist. His solution to these ruptures in his life is a move to Brooklyn, where he may sample the "deeper tides" among the common family of man.

Book IV of You Can't Go Home Again, based on Wolfe's years in Brooklyn during the Depression, covers the same time period in the author's life as do the first stories in From Death to Morning, such as "No Door," "Death the Proud Brother," and "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn." As explained in Chapter Four, those stories develop a theme of human kinship; but that theme is almost submerged by the narrator's sense of isolation and revulsion from the sterile city scenes. In You Can't Go Home Again, the theme of kinship is repeated, this time, however, by a more objective and sympathetic narrator: "He saw himself more clearly now than he had ever done before, and, in spite of living thus alone, he no longer thought of himself as a rare and special person
who was doomed to isolation, but as a man who worked and
who, like other men, was a part of life" (p. 408).

Webber's most important discovery during his
Brooklyn years is that his own sense of homelessness had
become a national phenomenon. In moving detail, Webber
observes "the homeless men" who ravaged garbage cans for
food and huddled in public latrines for warmth. Although
some are "stumble bums," most of them are honest, decent
men of all ages looking for work: "These were the wanderers
from town to town, the riders of freight trains, the
thumbs of rides on highways, the uprooted, unwanted male
population of America" (p. 413). To dramatize the injustice
of those scenes, Wolfe follows them with the description of
a debutante ball. He concludes that chapter on his Brooklyn
years, "The Locusts Have No King," with a lengthy essay on
man's potential for good and evil, with its affirmation of
man's immortal spirit and love of life pointing toward
Webber's final credo:

For there is one belief, one faith, that is man's
glory, his triumph, his immortality -- and that is
his belief in life. Man loves life, and, loving life,
hates death, and because of this he is great, he is
glorious, he is beautiful, and his beauty is ever­
lasting (p. 436).

Webber's growing disenchantment with his father
surrogate, Foxhall Edwards, also points toward his final
emancipation from spiritual retreats. In Book IV, their
philosophical differences culminate in their separate re­
actions to the suicide of C. Green, who leaps to his death
from the Admiral Francis Drake Hotel. Whereas "Fox" views Green as an expendable cipher, Webber treats his death as a tragic yet heroic act. Consistent with his usual practice, Wolfe places Green in an historical framework. He reviews the whole tradition of western heroism, suggested by the Admiral Drake Hotel, and juxtaposes Green ironically against this heritage:

No, no. He was no voyager of unknown seas, no pioneer of western trails. He was life's little man, life's nameless cipher, life's manswarm atom, life's American -- and now he lies disjected and exploded on a street in Brooklyn (p. 467)!

Instead of being a voyager or pioneer, Green "was accustomed to the gas tanks going out of town, he was an atom of machinery in an endless flow, going, stopping, going to the winking of lights; . . ." (p. 468). Nevertheless, Wolfe recognizes a bond of kinship between Green and his heroic predecessors:

No Drake was he, no Spaniard, no coon-skin cap, no strong face burning west. Yet, in some remote and protoplasmic portion, he was a little of each of these. A little Scotch, perhaps, was Green, a little Irish, English, Spanish even, and some German -- a little of each part, all compacted and exploded into nameless atom of America (p. 469)!

Finally, Green's suicide is seen as a desperate yet heroic affirmation of his individualism in a sterile world of mass. The chapter devoted to Green, "The Hollow Men," can therefore be interpreted as a qualified rejection of T. S. Eliot's poem of the same name. By spilling his blood in public, Green has demonstrated that he did indeed possess
life instead of "the same Standard Concentration of embalm-
ing fluid that fills our veins -- . . ." (p. 479).

In the last chapter of Book IV, "The Promise of America," Webber reaffirms his belief in the American dream of individual fulfillment. Despite all the deadening influences of modern life, the universal desire for fame can still be realized in America:

So, then, to every man his chance -- to every man, regardless of his birth, his shining, golden opportunity -- to every man the right to live, to work, to be himself, and to become whatever thing his manhood and his vision can combine to make him -- this, seeker, is the promise of America (p. 508).

With this affirmation, Webber travels to Europe with two final illusions yet unblemished: the all-sufficiency of fame and the existence of a geographical homeland for his spirit.

During the hero's stay in England, his relationships with his charwoman, Daisy Purvis, and with the American writer, Lloyd McHarg (Sinclair Lewis), cause him to re-vise his concepts once more. He learns from Daisy that social injustice exists on both sides of the Atlantic, that in England the division between "Big People" and "Little People" is taken for granted, even by Daisy, a "little person" herself: "Her feeling seemed to be that the poor are always with us, that they are quite used to their poverty, and that this makes it unnecessary for anybody to bother about it, least of all the miserable victims themselves" (p. 529).
His second disillusionment in England occurs when he learns that Lloyd McHarg, a living symbol of fame achieved, is himself infected with a universal anxiety. The presence in McHarg's company of Myneer Bendien, "a kind of Dutch Babbit," causes George to realize that "the true races of mankind" are not defined by national frontiers: "More and more George was coming to believe that the real division of humanity cut across these barriers and arise out of differences in the very souls of men" (p. 353).

When Webber and McHarg travel to the country manor of McHarg's friend, Rickenbach Reade, McHarg collapses from exhaustion and alcoholic indulgence. In Reade, George recognizes another human type whose kind crosses national boundaries. Reade, George concludes, "was one of those men who are unequal to the conditions of modern life, and who have accordingly retreated from the tough realities which they could not face" (p. 605). From these experiences in England, then, the hero is prepared for his final disillusionment with Germany, his spiritual homeland.

Book VI, "I Have a Thing to Tell You," painfully recounts Webber's gradual recognition of the fatal sickness in Germany, the land of his spirit. Although initially intoxicated by his triumphant reception in Berlin and by his brief affair with Else von Kohler, he soon becomes aware of

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39 Holman briefly describes the separate publication of this episode, in which, he claims, Wolfe tried to imitate the direct style of Ernest Hemingway: "Introduction," The Short Novels of Thomas Wolfe, pp. xiv-xv.
a hidden terror during the Olympic Games. In addition to
his shock at the overly regimented population, George sees
for himself the diabolical extreme to which the search for
a father figure can lead:

At last he came -- and something like a wind across
a field of grass was shaken through that crowd, and
from afar the tide rolled up with him, and in it was
the voice, the hope, the prayer of the land. The
Leader came by slowly in a shining car, a little dark
man with a comic-opera mustache, erect and standing,
moveless and unsmiling, with his hand upraised, palm
outward, not in Nazi-wise salute, but straight up, in
a gesture of blessing such as the Buddha or Messiahs
use (p. 628).

Gradually, the whispered stories of Nazi repression
and terror seep through to George. In his evaluation of
Naziism, he realizes that "The roots of it were much more
sinister and deep and evil than politics or even racial
prejudice could ever be. . . . What George began to see
was a picture of a great people who had been psychically
wounded and were now desperately ill with some dread malady
of the soul" (pp. 630-31). The event which finally severs
George from his adopted fatherland is the arrest of a Jew
who is trying to smuggle money out of Germany. As he is
led away from the train he and George had shared, Webber
and his traveling companions feel the loss to humanity:

George and the others felt somehow naked and ashamed,
and somehow guilty. They all felt that they were
saying farewell, not to a man, but to humanity; not
to some pathetic stranger, some chance acquaintance
of the voyage, but to mankind; not to some nameless
cipher out of life, but to the fading image of a
brother's face (p. 699).
The significance of this episode to Thomas Wolfe's feeling for humanity becomes apparent when one recalls his previous fictional account of a train ride through Germany. In "Dark in the Forest, Strange as Time," the pivotal story of From Death to Morning, the narrator leaves his train after failing to report the death of the old Jewish man with whom he had shared a compartment. He rationalizes his omission as a logical conclusion to a human relationship which is always transient. George Webber, in contrast, feels diminished by every man's death, physical or spiritual, even though he be a faceless entity such as the Jew or C. Green.

In "The Way of No Return," the last chapter of Book V, George meditates on his relationship to Germany, "the dark, lost Helen that had been forever burning in his blood -- the dark, lost Helen he had found" (p. 704). His meditation contains the significance of Wolfe's last published novel:

For this was the way that henceforth would be forever closed to him -- the way of no return. He was "out." And, being "out," he began to see another way, the way that lay before him. He saw now that you can't go home again -- not ever. There was no road back. Ended now for him, with the sharp and clean finality of the closing of a door, was the time when his dark roots, like those of a pot-bound plant, could be left to feed upon their own substance and nourish their own little self-absorbed designs. Henceforth they must spread outward -- away from the hidden, secret, and unfathomed past that holds man's spirit prisoner -- outward, outward toward the rich and life-giving soil of a new freedom in the wide world of all humanity. And there came to him a vision of man's true home, beyond the ominous and cloud-engulfed horizon of the here
and now, in the green and hopeful and still-virgin meadows of the future (p. 704).

From all of his experiences of disillusionment and rejection, George is now prepared to write his farewell to Foxhall Edwards, the last human father of his spirit. That letter, extending over the last four chapters of the novel, recapitulates his learning experiences. It seems ironic that George, who has now turned to the future as the only door which offers hope for mankind, should feel compelled once more to review his past, including his early family struggles. That irony can be explained, however, by George's new concept of time. In Chapter Forty-seven, "Ecclesiasticus," Webber compares his philosophy with that of Fox. The young man has accepted the wisdom of his mentor in part, "to acknowledge the tragic underweft of life into which man is born, through which he must live, out of which he must die" (p. 734). George, however, has learned that resignation to evil only compounds its effects; therefore he concludes the chapter with this resolution: "Man was born to live, to suffer, and to die, and what befalls him is a tragic lot. There is no denying this in the final end. But we must, dear Fox, deny it all along the way" (p. 737).

George Webber's final credo, expressed in the last chapter, defines his new orientation in time and expresses his faith in America's future. No longer will his personal past, "the torrential recollectiveness, derived out of my mother's stock" (p. 740), be used as a retreat from present
reality. Instead, his own past and that of his fellow man, one may assume, will be used to illuminate the present and provide direction for the future. George's hope for American democracy is often cited as the final wisdom of You Can't Go Home Again:

I believe that we are lost here in America, but I believe we shall be found.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

I think the true discovery of America is before us. I think the true fulfillment of our spirit, of our people, of our mighty and immortal land, is yet to come (p. 741).

Frequently overlooked, however, are the paragraphs following that affirmation. Webber looks back once more to the source of human evil, "the enemy," which he identifies as Greed masquerading as a false brother. This time, Webber gives a broader explanation for America's tragedy than the historical misdirection he had cited earlier to Randy Shepperton. From his experiences in Europe, he has learned that the enemy is as old as time:

I think the enemy is here before us, too. But I think we know the forms and faces of the enemy, and in the knowledge that we know him, and shall meet him, and eventually must conquer him is also our living hope... I think the enemy is single selfishness and compulsive greed. ... I do not think the enemy was born yesterday, or that he grew to manhood forty years ago, or that he suffered sickness and collapse in 1929, or that we began without the enemy, ... and suddenly were in his camp. I think the enemy is old as Time, and evil as Hell, and that he has been here with us from the beginning. I think he stole our earth from us, destroyed our wealth, and ravaged and despoiled our land. I think he took our people and enslaved them, that he polluted the fountains of our life, took unto himself the rarest treasures of our
own possession, took our bread and left us with a crust, and, not content, for the nature of the enemy is insatiating — tried finally to take from us the crust (pp. 741-42).
At the beginning of this study, two explanations were cited for the continuing interest in Thomas Wolfe's fiction. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. emphasized Wolfe's ability, especially in his early works, to recapture in sensuous detail the mood and atmosphere of his youth. Sam I. Belman, however, identified Wolfe's recurring theme of loneliness as a source of empathy for the modern reader. These two explanations are not inconsistent. Instead, they call attention to two constant motives of Wolfe's persona: on the one hand, he seeks to establish a communal identity by resurrecting his past; simultaneously, he seeks escape from the constrictions of that heritage. Both of those drives are related to the distance, mental and geographical, separating Wolfe from his own family; but those twin impulses of the protagonist to wander and return are also relevant to Wolfe's growth as an artist. That tension between union and isolation justified this examination of Thomas Wolfe's family relationships, real and fictional. Those associations were interpreted both as a record of Wolfe's personal growth and maturity and as a literary metaphor reflecting his artistic and intellectual development.
The starting place for this study was Wolfe's own family, its size and diversity giving it the dimensions of a small community. The shaping influences of Wolfe's home on his personality and career have been indicated numerous times. As explained in Chapter Three, William U. Snyder even calls the Wolfes a "symbiotic family" whose members established relations beyond their clan only with difficulty. A major familial influence on Wolfe was his position as the youngest son among eight children, the "baby" of the family whose infant dependency was prolonged by his mother. That extended dependency can well explain, psychologically, the fictional heroes' search for a father figure or an external source of authority. The traumatic event of Wolfe's childhood, however, was the division of his family into two households by his mother's purchase of "The Old Kentucky Home." Thus Wolfe spent his formative years in a boarding house, which only aggravated his natural preference for privacy. Although this family rupture was not offered as a total explanation for the motivation of Wolfe's persona, it does add poignance to the hero's restless search for a "door."

Wolfe's family history, with its Freudian implications, illuminates the author's almost unvaried use of family conflict in his plays and fiction. The purpose of this study, however, was not to explain Wolfe's works in psychological terms, terms of which the author himself was aware. Instead, the literary and cultural implications of
Wolfe's family theme were examined as it developed throughout his career. As a premise for this examination, Wolfe's career was recognized as falling into two cycles, separated by a transitional period. The first phase, the Eugene Gant period, was characterized by a romantic, subjective authorial point of view, whereas the final cycle, involving George Webber, reflected a more realistic, objective, and humanitarian viewpoint.1

Wolfe's first serious literary efforts were his three plays written under George Pierce Baker's guidance at Harvard University. Of primary significance is the fact that in each play the hero is inextricably involved in a web of kinship. In The Mountains and Mannerhouse, Richard Weaver and Eugene Ramsey, respectively, subsume their private ideals to uphold family honor. In Welcome to Our City, Rutledge refuses to join his white townsmen in their conspiracy to confiscate the Negro district of Altamont, despite his desire to reclaim the family mansion owned by the Negro, Johnson. In the subplot, however, Rutledge establishes a

1Despite what appears to be primary evidence and substantial secondary opinion to the contrary, Louis D. Rubin, Jr. fails to recognize growth on Wolfe's part: "So I doubt that toward the end of his career Thomas Wolfe was moving convincingly away from that romantic self-justification, and that the books he would have written had he lived would have been importantly less egocentric than his earlier work." "Introduction: The Sense of Being Young," in Thomas Wolfe: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), pp. 23-24.
bond of secrecy with his son, Lee, to conceal the latter's attempted seduction of Johnson's daughter. This two-way pull in Wolfe's plays, between isolation from and union with family, is expressed repeatedly in Wolfe's letters home during the time he was writing his plays and first novel.

From the romantic consciousness of those dramatic heroes emerged Eugene Gant, whose career in *Look Homeward, Angel* parallels the first twenty years of Wolfe's life. Besides sharing their idealistic point of view, Eugene also resembles his dramatic predecessors in his struggle to free himself from family ties. Although the hero's primary motivation is to escape the suffocation of "Dixieland," his constant reconstruction of the past and his strong feelings for blood kin assure the reader that his escape will be geographical, not mental.

A consistently recurring but elusive image throughout Wolfe's fiction is that of the unfound door, which usually suggests entrance into the meaning of life. In relation to Wolfe's family motif, this door image was interpreted as both exit and entrance: as an escape into the future but also as a retreat into the past. In *Look Homeward, Angel*, Eugene Gant's door signified an escape from his tangled heredity into a subjective world of beauty and freedom. As the novel closes, the hero is preparing to leave Altamont for an inward journey into the hidden seas of his consciousness.

During the transitional phase of Wolfe's career, extending roughly from 1929 to 1935, the author underwent
considerable turmoil in his attempt to discover a proper literary form. The result was a series of short stories, collected in *From Death to Morning*, and another group of stories and episodes which were published in novel form as *Of Time and the River*. In these two publications, the narrator of the short stories and Eugene Gant in the novel move beyond home boundaries into the violent, mutable world of the twentieth century.

One reaction to this encounter with strange cultures in American cities and European capitals is a deeper sense of kinship with the "family of man" or the "family of earth," two phrases that recur with some frequency in both the short stories and in Wolfe's second novel. From his experiences in America and abroad, the Wolfeian spokesman learns that his search for a "door" is a universal rather than a personal quest. Coincident with this deeper sense of kinship by Wolfe's persona was a solidification of ties between the author and his Asheville family, a change that is reflected in his fictional treatment of the Gant family. Instead of a constricting force, the family is now seen as a source of stability. In contrast to the parsimonious Eliza of *Look Homeward, Angel*, Eliza Gant in *Of Time and the River* and in "The Web of Earth" is elevated to the stature of a fruitful earth mother.

A second reaction by the Wolfeian hero to his new environments, however, is to escape into his private past. The stories in *From Death to Morning* shift locale from
settings in New York and Europe to the narrator's home state, Old Catawba. Likewise Eugene Gant, at the end of Of Time and the River, is literally returning home to America from Europe while, artistically, he has learned to create beauty by capturing lost moments of time. In effect, then, during this transitional period of Wolfe's career, his protagonist re-enters the same door of family identity from which Eugene Gant had escaped in Look Homeward, Angel. Although this reaffirmation by the hero of his cultural roots appears to be a healthy alternative to his anonymous existence in Brooklyn, it is often accompanied by unhealthy feelings of atavism and ethnocentrism.

When Wolfe began work on his final manuscript, a number of influences -- the Great Depression, his visit to Nazi Germany in 1936, and his last trip to Asheville in 1937 -- caused him to shift his search for meaning in life from subjective revelation to an objective scrutiny of human reality. Consequently, he created a new persona, George Webber, who serves more often as a critical observer and commentator on events than as a direct participant. Instead of being absorbed with memories of childhood and family as was his predecessor, Eugene Gant, Webber's attention focuses more often on relationships among characters and events within the larger "family of man."

Like Eugene Gant, George Webber is also provided a family history which shapes his character and destiny. This time, however, the hero's parental influences are treated
more objectively than Eugene's and serve a clearer symbolic function. The divided heritage of George Webber, represented by the Joyner schism in *The Hills Beyond* and by the Webber-Joyner dichotomy in *The Web and the Rock*, symbolizes the dualistic forces which shape his life. Instead of being sustained by memories of home and by the image of a life-giving mother, as was Eugene Gant, Webber, whose mother is dead, is raised by his puritanical, death-obsessed Aunt Maw Joyner. By identifying his new hero with the progressive members of his family — with the Joyners who "went to town" in *The Hills Beyond* and with his father, John Webber, in *The Web and the Rock* — Wolfe provided a new door for his protagonist to enter — a door to the future.

The three posthumous works of Thomas Wolfe — *The Hills Beyond*, *The Web and the Rock*, and *You Can't Go Home Again* — derive from Wolfe's final, unrevised manuscript. As a result, internal inconsistencies exist, most noticeably in *The Web and the Rock*, which represents early and late periods of composition. Consequently, the self-effacing, forward-looking George Webber of the first third of the book contrasts with the self-absorbed, backward-looking Webber of the last two-thirds. Nevertheless, *The Hills Beyond* and *The Web and the Rock*, with their contrasts between illusion and reality, point towards the final work, *You Can't Go Home Again*.

The title of Wolfe's last-published novel, used frequently as an introduction to newspaper editorials,
requires qualification. Among the illusions which Webber discards at the end of his journey is the all-sufficiency of family ties. When he recognizes the extreme provincialism of his Joyner kin and the corruption of Libya Hill during his trip home for Aunt Maw's funeral, he realizes that he has outgrown the values of his family and hometown. Those values, like his exaggerated estimates of love, art, and fame, are rejected as spiritual retreats for the truly progressive voyager. Therefore, the title, You Can't Go Home Again, does not recommend a rejection of kinship. Instead, by rejecting the "escapes" of family and home, George Webber reaffirms his hard-won sense of kinship with the "family of man."

Nor does the title of You Can't Go Home Again imply a rejection of the past. On the contrary, as Wolfe explained, he was rejecting the "escapes of time and memory."2 Throughout the novel, in fact, Webber retraces his own history and that of his nation to illuminate the present. By doing so, he is also re-examining the common ground of humanity to discover sources of community. At the end of the novel, he expresses his faith in democracy on the condition that its enemy, human greed, be recognized and eliminated.

Thomas Wolfe's consistent reliance on family settings and conflicts in his drama and fiction is relevant to his place in literary history as well as to his artistic problems with form. From an historical viewpoint, his recognition of the need for human community and of the vital relationship between past and present identifies him with his contemporaries who participated in the Southern literary renaissance. Although he rejected the traditionalism of the Nashville Agrarians, he also rejected, as they did, the uncritical acceptance of industrial progress. George Webber's final credo attempts to transcend a tragic view of man; nevertheless, he acknowledges the claims of the past. Even the progressive-minded George Webber cannot be fully understood without tracing his ancestry to his father, John Webber, and then to the progressive side of his maternal ancestors, the Joyners "who went to town."

Finally, the central position in Wolfe's works of the family motif provides a reliable index to his artistic development. Family images, such as the "unfound door" and the "family of man," served as a vehicle for Wolfe to explain and explore the tension in his own life between union and isolation. So intense are those images, in fact, that they often assume religious overtones. Both W. O. Gant and George Webber experience dream visions of immortality described as a family reunion.

Beginning his career as an overly sensitive romantic who had suffered severe conflicts within his own family,
Wolfe created dramatic heroes who sought "strange harbors" and a fictional protagonist who searched for "a stone, a leaf, a door." When that same protagonist moved beyond home boundaries, he began to lose his romantic isolation and recognize a kinship with the "family of man." By continuing to explore the family history of his persona as well as that of other characters, Wolfe sought to define a national identity in his epic undertaking. Although limited by subjective and provincial attitudes, at the end of his career Wolfe gave evidence of having achieved an objective humanitarian vision. In *The Story of a Novel*, published in 1936 before the last phase of his career, Thomas Wolfe expressed hope that he had discovered an appropriate door to human community:

> I know the door is not yet open. I know the tongue, the speech, the language that I seek is not yet found, but I believe with all my heart that I have found the way, have made a channel, am started on my first beginning. And I believe with all my heart, also, that each man for himself and in his own way, each man who ever hopes to make a living thing out of the substances of his one life, must find that way, that language, and that door -- must find it for himself as I have tried to do.3

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