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THOMAS WOLFE AND THE ART OF LEGEND

by

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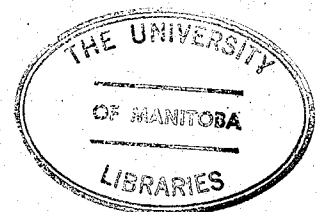
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#### PREFACE

Special thanks go to Dr. John J. Teunissen, who supervised the writing of this thesis, and whose graduate course in Myth Criticism and American Primitivism provided the background and stimulus for many of my ideas.

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## INTRODUCTION

Much has been made of Thomas Wolfe's famous statement, in The Story of a Novel, that "man's search to find a father" was "the central legend that I wished my book [Of Time and the River] to express."<sup>1</sup> In all the discussion of this theme, the important word "legend" has tended to become lost. But if this particular theme may be expressed as the "search to find a father", then it would appear that the vehicle or mode for that theme is "legend". And Wolfe, whether speaking about trains or about literary criticism, would no doubt agree that the vehicle is as important as the passenger.

In an early description of Of Time and the River, contained in a letter to Max Perkins, Wolfe states that the first part of the book will tell, not about the protagonist, but "about his country, the seed that produced him, etc." Furthermore, "I want to construct my story on the model of the old folk epic: 'Beowulf', for example." In the same letter he talks of creating "fables and legends", of his use of ancient myths, and of his belief that "man's greatness comes in knowing [that he is lost] and then making myths."<sup>2</sup>

References to this plan, or to the endless variations upon it, are sprinkled throughout Wolfe's letters and notebooks, and the scheme has left what might best be called a giant glacial scar upon the continent of the novelist's fictional output. And the ear that is attuned to that little word "legend" will hear it leaping out from Wolfe's pages in an astounding variety of contexts, connotations, and tones, but somehow always carrying the same elusively unified thrust of meanings and imports. Wolfe's use of the word always contains a kind of wild and epic force, held within the highly complex and filigreed structure of a literary mode or technique. It is the contention of this thesis that Wolfe had a coherent theory or idea of legend, as sophisticated and as significant as any concept of metaphor, narrative technique, or characterization.

Chapters Two and Three of the thesis deal with specific works by Wolfe. Chapter Two will use Look Homeward, Angel to show how Wolfe developed his theory of legend through a fictional protagonist, distinguishing meanwhile between the popular and literary concepts of legend. The final chapter will examine The Hills Beyond, not as Wolfe's most stunning achievement, but as a clearly-defined and fascinating exploration of legend both in theory and in fictional practice.

But since Wolfe made it his task to describe what it is that is distinctively American about America, it is part of the critic's job to define also what is distinctly American about Wolfe. So, Chapter One of the thesis will explore the world of Wolfe's thought (with the idea of legend as touchstone) against the background of the American literary tradition. The purpose of this chapter is manifold, as it attempts to draw together, under a common heading, several strains in American thought and literature, all of which are facets of "legend" as understood by Wolfe. Basically, Wolfe's idea of legend has its roots in the symbolic mode of nineteenth-century American literature, and this in turn, it is suggested, springs from American transcendentalism and idealism--not only as expounded by Emerson, but as embraced on a general and fundamental level by the American mind. The nature of the railroad is explored briefly as an example of a traditional and legendary symbol in American literature, and Frederick Jackson Turner's "Frontier Thesis" is cited as representative of a widespread, mythic view that Americans have of their own development and character. Chapter One also shows that Wolfe's critics have dealt inadequately, if at all, with his uses of symbolism. The idea of "the enchanted city" is taken as characteristic of this aspect of his technique, suggesting at the same time Wolfe's belief that these symbolic concepts

have their origin in a state of pre-existence, or in the very structure of the American psyche. Legend, in fact, while not the same thing as symbol, may be thought of as a symbol that derives, and takes its force from, the national culture.

In all of these respects, Henry David Thoreau wrote a much better introduction to my thesis than I ever could. In his essay entitled "Walking",<sup>3</sup> Thoreau holds, like Wolfe, that "There is a truer account of [America] in mythology than in any history of America, so called, that I have seen" (p. 604). The essay, written some thirty years before Turner, contains a concise statement of the Turner thesis: "Ever I am leaving the city more and more, and withdrawing into the wilderness. I should not lay so much stress on this fact, if I did not believe that something like this is the prevailing tendency of my countrymen. I must walk toward Oregon, and not toward Europe. And that way the nation is moving..." (p. 608). The notion of pre-existence is there, too (p. 599), and the title of the essay is also its central image, becoming Thoreau's Ideal or symbol of the American adventure: the individual walker consents "in his pettiest walk with the general movement of the race" (p. 608). Indeed, Wolfe would have little quarrel with the passage Thoreau quotes from the journals of Sir Francis Head: "The heavens of America appear infinitely higher, the sky is bluer, the air is fresher, the cold is intenser, the moon looks larger, the stars are brighter, the thunder is louder, the lightning is vivider, the wind is stronger, the rain is heavier, the mountains are higher, the rivers longer, the forests bigger, the plains broader" (p. 611). Truly, America "is a fabulous country, the only fabulous country; it is the one place where miracles not only happen, but where they happen all the time."<sup>4</sup>

Besides dealing with Wolfe's own idiosyncratic use of the term "legend",

the thesis should also contribute towards filling the gap indicated by Richard Dorson's perhaps exaggerated, but nonetheless considerable, complaint that "We have as yet no studies demonstrating the influence of legendry on American literature."<sup>5</sup>



NOTES

1. The Story of a Novel (London: William Heinemann, 1936), p. 39.
2. Elizabeth Nowell, ed., Selected Letters of Thomas Wolfe (London: William Heinemann, 1958), pp. 131-34. (Hereafter, SL).
3. Brooks Atkinson, ed., Walden and Other Writings by Henry David Thoreau (Modern Library College ed.; New York: 1937), pp. 595-632.
4. Of Time and the River (New York: Scribner's, 1935), p. 153.
5. Richard M. Dorson, American Folklore and the Historian (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 193.

CHAPTER I

THOMAS WOLFE: THE REACH AND THE GRASP

My concern in this study is with the grandest dream of one of America's most puzzling and eccentric novelists. And because the concern is the dream, we must consider not only its realization, but the plan or theory which gave rise to its fruition. We must evaluate process as well as product, and if the two are farther apart in Thomas Wolfe than in many another artist, then that is all the more reason to consider them individually. Paschal Reeves notes that "Wolfe's fiction, whatever its shortcomings may be, would have merited the approval of Browning's Andrea del Sarto in at least one particular: his reach exceeded his grasp."<sup>1</sup> One of the central themes of his work is that man envisions far more than he can ever grasp, and the value of a person's life is not measured by what he in fact achieves, but by what he hopes for--by how ardently he seeks "the unfound door" and "the great forgotten language." Wolfe, perhaps more than any other American novelist, must be evaluated in the light of his vision, not just in the light of that infamously sprawling mass of manuscript he left behind as his achievement.

This critical approach--tending toward the theoretical more than the practical--finds itself in good company, for William Faulkner said that "among his and my contemporaries, I rated Wolfe first because we had all failed but Wolfe had made the best failure because he had tried to say the most."<sup>2</sup> A lesser man, Henry Seidel Canby, has denigrated Wolfe for this same reason. Speaking of Look Homeward, Angel, he writes, "So much for the purpose of this novel. Its achievement is less. With all its richness of detail, its passion, its poetry, and its intense realism of contemporary life, there is an impotence in this book like the impotence Wolfe ascribes to his America."<sup>3</sup>

Certainly the record of Wolfe's books is one of search and journey, and not of discovery or arrival; and surely a novelist is entitled to match his style and content to his theme. As Pamela Hansford Johnson expresses it, "His work was left in chaos, he had seen the world as chaos,"<sup>4</sup> and as Wolfe himself told John Hall Wheelock, "You want to make a perfect thing, but I want to get the whole wilderness of the American continent into my work."<sup>5</sup> If this be "impotence", it is an impotence which stylistically reproduces the phenomenon about which Wolfe is writing. If Wolfe's novels are formless and sprawling (and finally not "novels" at all), it is because he is writing about a formless and sprawling nation, and it is precisely these qualities which he is trying to define.

That Wolfe viewed these traits of impossible conception and restless, formless wandering as being essentially American, may be seen in the following passage from the story "Dark In the Forest, Strange as Time":

The scene was one of richness, power and luxury, evoking as it did the feeling of travel in a crack European express, which is different from the feeling one has when he rides on an American train. In America, the train gives one a feeling of wild and lonely joy, a sense of the savage, unfenced, and illimitable wilderness of the country through which the train is rushing, a wordless and unutterable hope as one thinks of the enchanted city toward which he is speeding; the unknown and fabulous promise of the life he is to find there.

In Europe, the feeling of joy and pleasure is more actual, ever present. The luxurious trains, the rich furnishings, the deep maroons, dark blues, the fresh, well-groomed vivid colors of the cars, the good food and the sparkling, heady wine, and the worldly, wealthy, cosmopolitan look of the travellers--all of this fills one with a powerful sensual joy, a sense of expectancy about to be realized. In a few hours' time one goes from country to country, through centuries of history, a world of crowded culture and whole nations swarming with people, from one famous pleasure-city to another.

And, instead of the wild joy and nameless hope one feels as he looks out the window of an American train, one feels here (in Europe) an incredible joy of realization, an immediate sensual gratification, a feeling that there is

nothing on earth but wealth, power, luxury, and love, and that one can live and enjoy this life, in all the infinite varieties of pleasure, forever.<sup>6</sup>

In this passage, Wolfe takes one of his most important symbols of the American character,<sup>7</sup> and shows that, while the concrete basis for the symbol might be present in another cultural milieu, its significance is quite different for the American than for the European.

In substantiation of this theory, it is well to remember that both the symbol of the train, and the particular significance attached to it, are part of the American literary tradition. Hawthorne's story "The Celestial Railroad", for example, is the New World version of Bunyan's famous allegory, transferring the City of Destruction and the Celestial City to America, and portraying a trainload of Americans en route to the latter destination. The story is satirical, of course, for while Bunyan's pilgrim Christian may have made progress, Hawthorne's point is that in the one country which in modern times has seemed the embodiment of progress, real progress is but an illusion. As Mr. Stick-to-the-right, who eschews the comforts of rail travel in favour of the surer locomotion of his own feet, says of the "celestial" railroad, "You may travel on it all your lifetime, were you to live thousands of years, and yet never get beyond the limits of Vanity Fair." Still, the first person protagonist of the Hawthorne story has the sense that he is actually going somewhere: he does not doubt that he will arrive at his destination, and even at the end he continues to marvel, naïvely, at the iron-shod wonder of modern technology that has made such a journey at once so comfortable and so expeditious.

The similarity between Hawthorne's "Celestial City" and Wolfe's "enchanted city" (as the image is expressed in the passage above, and

throughout Wolfe's work) will be immediately apparent. The great city to which Wolfe's protagonists are always journeying on the train, which they always see in the form of a vision, which is the end of all strife and the realisation of the greatest happiness, love, fame, etc. that men can imagine, and which is never there when they arrive--this is no less than the Holy City, the Celestial Jerusalem: but with an American twist.

A famous passage in Walden provides a similar perspective on this phenomenon of the American Dream. Chapter IV, entitled "Sounds", is given over largely to a discussion of the train which regularly passed close to Thoreau's retreat. In one place, Thoreau's phrase "a celestial train" echoes Hawthorne. The phrase is, as in Hawthorne, ironic, for Thoreau is at this point describing not the train itself, but its clouds of smoke, "going to heaven while the cars are going to Boston." By comparison with its transcendent train of vapour, "the petty train of cars which hugs the earth is but the barb of the spear", and it is the barb which does the damage.<sup>8</sup>

Analogously, the dreams of Wolfe's and Hawthorne's protagonists are directed toward the celestial city, while their bodies are headed for disappointment, if not damnation--whether it be in the form of Boston, New York, or some other airy urban fantasy. Hawthorne, in fact, puts his story into the very form of a dream, from which his protagonist awakes upon receiving a cold shower from the waters of Death. Wolfe, too, maintains artistic distance from his protagonist, for we never accompany Eugene or George on a train without the knowledge that the illusion of stepped-up life which travel induces, and the fantasy of the distant city, will vanish the moment the train-wheels stop--or at least as soon as the traveller's inertia (a not inconsiderable factor in Wolfe) is arrested. In this connection, Louis Rubin aptly remarks that Wolfe's forte is "the

poetry of motion."<sup>9</sup>

All three of these American writers demonstrate a fascinated enthusiasm for the railroad. This is inherent in the highly-charged language with which they describe it, but it is belied by their common theme. For all three (and this may even be argued in the case of Thoreau) consciously betray a naïveté in their protagonist or persona. It is important that this should be naïveté and not sinfulness (even in Hawthorne), for if there is one predominant image of America in her literature and history, it is that of the nation as an adolescent, which does not sin in stumbling, but merely stumbles into sin.

This blind, driven, and yet wholly innocent quality of the American character is often represented in the image of the rails of destiny.<sup>10</sup> Thoreau says that although he suspects the train will return the way it has come, "its orbit does not look like a returning curve." That is, like Hawthorne's train, it gives the illusion of transcendence, while in fact it is going, ultimately, nowhere. Wolfe's work is full of this ironic tension between curves or arcs, and straight lines. In "Death the Proud Brother", for instance, he describes the scene after a construction worker has fallen to his death from a tall building: "The street, the people, the tall thin buildings: these were all plane lines and angles. There were no curves in the street--the only thing that curved had been that one rich cry." Immediately preceding the man's fall and his arcing cry of doom, the writer describes a vision of his "mistress's jolly, delicate, and rosy face of noble beauty": "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."<sup>11</sup>

The "rosy" face, with its empetalled circularity, suggestive of the Mystic Rose, is, like the curve of the death-cry, an attempt to escape from the empty, harsh linearity of the American reality into the transcendent comfort of the cyclical. (The construction worker's final word, incidentally, is "Christ!"--"that word so seldom used for love and mercy.") The contrast here between the ideal and the real, between the transcendent and the immanent, parallels that which Wolfe makes in the passage on European and American trains quoted above.

The term "transcendent" has been used deliberately. For Wolfe was aware of the ironic tension inherent in the fact that while the dominant philosophy of nineteenth-century America was Transcendentalist, the country's practical stance has always been empirical. America hopes for the existence of the holy city at the end of its rail journey, but, like Hawthorne's protagonist in "The Celestial Railroad," it also expects to be able to return. It is only logical to assume that one can always go home again, and weekends and holidays may be reserved for jaunts to Jerusalem. The American railroad network does indeed form a circle despite the optical illusion of linearity it presents: but it is a circle which ends where it began (usually in the City of Destruction). The transcendent circle or cycle, on the other hand, begins where it ends. Or, if you will, does not end at all.

There is a danger here in becoming too involved with labels and terminology, and this is one trap that Wolfe, unlike some of his literary predecessors of the nineteenth-century, managed to avoid. Of course, he had read his Kant, Hegel, Coleridge, Carlyle, Emerson, et al<sup>12</sup>--but he never seriously used any philosophical terminology. It may be worth recalling that Hawthorne, in the story we have been discussing, describes an encounter

with "a German by birth ... called Giant Trancendentalist", who "shouted after us, but in so strange a phraseology that we knew not what he meant, nor whether to be encouraged or affrighted." Wolfe, too, knew better than to discourage his readers by the use of heavy-handed terminology.

The purpose of these remarks, then, is not to label Wolfe as a frustrated "Transcendentalist", nor to explore the Scylla and Charybdis of Immanence and Transcendence, or Empiricism and Idealism. But there is a value in showing that Wolfe had certain things in common with American Transcendentalism, that he could not escape his heritage, and that he was conscious of it. For it is only in this light that Wolfe's theory of legend may properly be understood.

Charles Feidelson, in his valuable book on American symbolism, has demonstrated the relationship between Transcendentalism, as the nineteenth-century's characteristic cast of thought, and symbolism, as the basic mode of the century's literature. The repercussions of Transcendentalism were general, according to Feidelson, and "could not be escaped even by writers like Melville, Hawthorne, and Poe, who were hostile to its superficial features. As a method, the new philosophy extended beyond the provincial clique which was labeled 'transcendentalist' and which stated the theory most fully; for it arose as a function of American life and thought." Furthermore, Feidelson shows that "the new philosophy was thoroughly native, though not in a sense that cuts it off from contemporary thinking."<sup>13</sup>

There should be no need to re-harrow this already-broken ground, but a few words from Emerson may be enough to suggest the importance of the symbolic mode and the Transcendental vision to an understanding of Thomas Wolfe:



The Idealism of the present day acquired the name of Transcendental from the use of that term by Immanuel Kant ... who replied to the skeptical philosophy of Locke, which insisted that there was nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the experience of the senses, by showing that there was a very important class of ideas or imperative forms, which did not come by experience, but through which experience was acquired; that these were intuitions of the mind itself; and he denominated them Transcendental forms.<sup>14</sup>

It is perhaps significant that Emerson uses the Platonic terminology-- "ideas" and "forms"--while Kant himself would have talked in terms of "categories" of thought and "modes" of perception. This may appear a meagre distinction, until we consider that Wolfe's "enchanted city" might very readily have found a place in Emerson's "class of ideas ... through which experience [is] acquired", where it would probably have been considered but an airy fantasy in Kant's much more sophisticated and abstract system of thought. This difference may stem merely from the fact that Emerson had a more poetic mind than Kant, or it may be that adolescent America has a penchant for pampering dreams. Whatever the case, Wolfe's fiction is full of what might be called "Transcendental forms", and these find their expression through the medium of symbol. Wolfe's "enchanted city" is just such a symbol, as are "the stone, the leaf, the unfound door", the web and the rock, the angel, the night, the river, the railroad itself, and many more.

Significantly, there is one large idea which, in one way or another, subsumes all these symbols, and it is one which several of Wolfe's critics have expounded: the notion of pre-existence.<sup>15</sup> This idea is central, and explicit, in Look Homeward, Angel, appearing first in the poetic epigraph on the opening page: "Remembering speechlessly we seek the forgotten language, the lost land-end into heaven, a stone, a leaf, an unfound door." Much has been made of the similarities between Wolfe and Proust,

but when Proust has the great artist Elstir say, "We are not provided with wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves",<sup>16</sup> this would seem to be directly contrary to the stance and direction which Wolfe's novels take. Wolfe's protagonists begin with an ideal--such as the city--which has no practical basis in their own, private experience. This ideal they carry perpetually with them, continually testing it against reality, usually finding it lacking, but nevertheless remaining stubbornly faithful to the original vision. It matters not how many disappointments, inhumanities, and banalities Eugene Gant or George Webber have to live through in New York: the shining city remains burning in their vision, with all its promise of glory, love, fame, wealth, and a hundred other Wolfean abstractions.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, these intuited symbols need not be "ideals" in the restricted sense of being desiderata. The symbols of the web and the rock, for example, or the ideas of South and North, are closer to being true Kantian "categories" of thought. Consider this remarkable passage from The Web and the Rock:

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.

And this is the land he knows the best. It is the earth unvisited--and it is his, as nothing he has seen can ever be... It is the great world of his mind, his heart, his spirit, built there in his imagination, shaped by wonder and unclouded by the obscuring flaws of accident and actuality, the proud, unknown earth of the lost, the found, the neverhere, the ever-real America, unsullied, true, essential, built there in the brain, and shaped to glory by the proud and flaming vision of a child.<sup>18</sup>

The passage goes on to designate these two hemispheres by the terms "South" and "North", and an analysis of similar passages could reveal these to

correspond, respectively, to the "web" and the "rock". Although in the face of these pure, "essential", and "unsullied" categories, "actuality" is an "obscuring flaw", nevertheless there is a tendency for Wolfe and his protagonists to see the world in and through these terms, and to line up the objective things of experience under one heading or the other. It is often useless, however, for the reader to try and decide which things, places, and people belong in which category, for the categories remain inherent structures of the mind, mappings of the human psyche, and as such bear little relation to the external facts of reality or experience. They are not things perceived, but modes of perception. While in such a conceptual world the laws of thoughts are the laws of things, in Wolfe's novels things have a way of following their own laws, too, willy-nilly. And thus the conflict between idealism and naturalism<sup>19</sup> --a conflict that has found its way into the phrase "the iron horse",<sup>20</sup> and incidentally into the very marrow of American literature. Wolfe's grasp is not only less than his Transcendental reach: the two are locked in a basic conflict.

There need be no apology, then, for having quoted Emerson in an essay on Wolfe. In fact, one of Wolfe's most memorable characters bears a suspicious resemblance to the Concord philosopher himself. Eugene's Uncle Bascom, like Emerson, was educated at Harvard; studied theology and was ordained; wrote poetry; left the church because he could not accept its doctrine; read and admired Carlyle, Hegel, and Kant. In fact, Wolfe's original name for Bascom was "Uncle Emerson", and if this is not enough, we are told that Bascom had "a head that was high-browed, lean and lonely, a head that not only in its cast of thought but even in its physical contour, and in its profound and lonely earnestness, bore an astonishing resemblance to that of Emerson."<sup>21</sup> The fact that this physical resemblance

is confined to the head again suggests the conflict of idealism and naturalism: the sordid, confused details of Bascom's life, the frustration of his odd marriage, the pettiness of his career and the plainness of his office--all these are in direct contrast to his dignity of thought and his greatness of spirit. Wolfe's superb characters, his "great people", all have a reach that is infinitely greater than their grasp.

E.K. Brown, although he does not point out the similarities between Bascom and Emerson, does recognise Bascom as, "after Mr. Gant, the most demonic male figure in the novels", and a symbol of the lost past.<sup>22</sup> Sometimes, when Eugene "looked at the old man, he had a sense of union with the past."<sup>23</sup> Emerson, as the founder of the formal Transcendentalist school in America, really does represent America's past--and therefore an important aspect of the American character in the present century. In many ways, Wolfe's work is not "the moral history of the Young American"<sup>24</sup> so much as the moral history of Young America.

A recognition of the symbolic dimensions of Wolfe's characters is an important step, and one that inevitably leads to a much larger critical problem involving the whole of American literature. In his study of Faulkner, for example, William Van O'Connor contrasts the "new realism" of most of Faulkner's contemporaries (Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, and John Dos Passos are his examples) with Faulkner's tendency towards the creation of "allegorical characters", the invention of "highly symbolic actions", and the writing of "poetic and richly rhetorical prose". He goes on to say: "Their kind of realism was an effort to reflect everyday experience or 'ordinary reality'. It was a period when many Americans were suspicious of rhetoric, elegance, style, even literary conventions."

O'Connor aligns Faulkner more with nineteenth-century American writing: the "high rhetoric", "folk rhetoric", "archaic" language, and "tall tales"; "the sensational and eerie imaginings of Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, and even Ambrose Bierce"; "Hawthorne's allegory and Gothic romance, both employed in a detached explication of a people of grim righteousness"; "Cooper's protagonists of innocence". He even says that "in at least one respect, Faulkner is reminiscent of Melville", in that both writers could forge at once "a vision of pure innocence" and "a vision of nightmarish horror."<sup>25</sup>

O'Connor's views are, for the most part, representative, and in his alignment Thomas Wolfe would probably fall into the camp of the "new realists". Or, just possibly, with his often rhetorical, poetic, and even archaic prose, Wolfe might be allowed to be a hybrid. Hugh Holman, for example, links Wolfe and Faulkner by way of rhetoric, especially their "particular linguistic combination ... of concrete detail, accurate speech, and incantatory rhetorical extravagance."<sup>26</sup>

Whether Faulkner be the true heir and preserver of the nineteenth-century American prose tradition, and the so-called "new realists" indeed represent a departure from this tradition; or whether, on the other hand, the likes of Dreiser, Lewis and Dos Passos may be shown to have the same affinity with Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe that O'Connor has suggested is the case with Faulkner; or, on still another hand, whether "realism" has not always been the dominant tenor of American fiction, are questions beyond the scope of this present study. In the case of Thomas Wolfe, however, an attempt will be made to show that, given O'Connor's guidelines, Wolfe shares with Faulkner, besides certain important traits of language and style and not a little of the puritanical and Gothic flavour,

the latter's allegorical, symbolic, and mythic techniques.

In this respect, Brown's article entitled "Thomas Wolfe: Realist and Symbolist" is significant, for it points out that Wolfe's main characters "were at once highly complicated individuals who attracted the realist in him and also typical figures, often indeed gigantic symbols, of American life. His central character in the first two novels, Mr. Gant.... has the symbolic significance of nothing less than America itself." Brown goes on to say that Gant, as "a symbol of the American adventure", gives to his fellow townsmen "an imperfect awareness of a hidden affinity--of something in Mr. Gant which is going beyond them on a path that they too ideally would follow."<sup>27</sup> And this is the clue: Wolfe's large portraits are not necessarily of typical Americans--in fact, they are usually quite untypical, and many critics have spoken adversely of the gargantuan exaggeration of the Wolfean characters.<sup>28</sup> However, they do embody the typical American drives and dreams, and in this way they tend to be projections of the American psyche. Wolfe spoke of describing things "not the way they were, but the way they should be in the unfathomed, strange, and unsuspected logics of man's brain and heart--and that were, on this account, more real than realness, and more true than home."<sup>29</sup> These "unfathomed ... logics" would seem to bear comparison with Kant's "categories" of thought--to be, in short, inherent structures of the human mind and psyche.

Several critics besides Brown have talked of "symbol" and "myth" in connection with Wolfe. Blanche Gelfant explores the city as a symbol in Wolfe: "As he recreated the city, he imposed upon it his personal meanings, so that he moved always from literal transcription to symbolic statement."<sup>30</sup> Clyde Clements contends that "partly because Wolfe was working steadily on

one elaborate manuscript in his later life ... he created symbolic patterns which inform and structure his work."<sup>31</sup>

Robert Penn Warren calls Mr. Gant a "symbol of the fatherland, the source, the land of violence, drunkenness, fecundity, beauty, and vigour." Gant has a quality that is "heroic, mythical, symbolic", and "even after the old Gant is dead the force of his personality, or rather the force of the symbol into which that personality has been elevated, is an active agent, and a point of reference for interpretation."<sup>32</sup> Henry Seidel Canby has made a similar comment on the dead Gant, saying that in Of Time and the River he "still dominated the imagination of the youth, for he in his vast energy and incredible vitality is the old America where man almost became worthy of his continent."<sup>33</sup> W.P. Albrecht argues that the Wolfe novels illustrate "a relating of action to time through image, myth, and symbol", and that Wolfe has his protagonists discover, "partly through the creative process, that certain human experiences are typical of all human experiences, that identification with the archetypal could bring a man something of the stability he desired."<sup>34</sup>

Critics such as Hugh Holman have connected Wolfe's symbolic technique with his "epic impulse, the desire to define in fiction the American character and to typify the American experience." Holman credits Wolfe with attempting to raise realistic scenes to a level of "universality": "He wished to weave a myth of his native land, an embodiment of its nature and spirit."<sup>35</sup> Elsewhere, Holman describes the "powerful epic impulse" as having "motivated much American writing since the eighteenth century: the attempt to encompass in a fable or narrative the spirit and nature of the land, to represent the soul of a people through a representative hero and archetypal actions."<sup>36</sup> T.L. Collins says that Wolfe's characters have

"symbolic" dimensions representing various facets of America: Wolfe thus achieves a "synthesis of the universal and the particular."<sup>37</sup>

Richard Kennedy goes further into Wolfe's actual epic technique, suggesting that by means of such devices as Homeric epithet, dithyramb, and rhythmic and poetic diction, "he adds heroic stature to his characters, as, for example, old Gant, the 'Far-Wanderer', with his 'earth-devouring stride.'"<sup>38</sup>

As enlightening as these comments are, they are also, oddly enough, scattered and undeveloped. They are contained, for the most part, in general surveys of the Wolfe canon, or in essays that are primarily concerned with Wolfe's literary reputation. As with Thoreau's train, these incisive remarks puff up to heaven like smokey waste, while the rail-roading critic chugs on to matters of greater importance (such as the endlessly-debated question of "form" in the novels, or the absorbing problems of "autobiography").

Generally, one senses a critical confusion about the symbolic aspect of Wolfe's technique. More than that, there is a shirking of responsibility--a feeling that, since Wolfe did not know what he was doing, it is not up to the critic to shore up his epic ruins. The critics seem to feel that Wolfe was so successful at creating marvellously realistic people and scenes, that to explore his use of such a device as symbolism would be slightly irrelevant. They sense it is there, but there is an embarrassment over analysing too closely a technique that Wolfe himself may not have been aware he was using. At once refreshing and maddening, for example, is W.M. Frohock's moment of insight, when he compares the Gant family in Look Homeward, Angel to the Oresteian family. The important thing is not Frohock's exact parallels (which are, perhaps, a little



far-fetched), but the fact that he notices mythic dimensions. He concludes, however, by saying, "One feels that Wolfe cannot really have intended these things, and yet, vaguely, there they are!"<sup>39</sup>

Holman notes that Wolfe "borrowed Greek myths, sketching characters to fill the roles of Antaeus, Heracles, Poseidon, Kronos, Gaea, Helen, Jason--seeking to find in the pattern of their lives a controlling myth or metaphor for the meanings he wanted to convey."<sup>40</sup> This is true enough, but it does not take into account Wolfe's conviction that "in the cultures of Europe and of the Orient the American artist can find no antecedent scheme, no structural plan, no body of tradition that can give his own work the validity and truth that it must have."<sup>41</sup>

In one of the most recent (albeit informal) surveys of current developments in Wolfe criticism, some "new directions" discussed include Wolfe's relation to romantic critical theory, his influences during the undergraduate years, his use of humour and satire, the relevance of the Notebooks, and the movement towards greater social concern in the later work. There is a feeling that discussion of Wolfe has tended to be too evaluative, and it is high time to get down to some serious elucidation of his ideas and techniques. However, there is a tameness and lack of imagination in the few fresh critical perspectives that are advanced.<sup>42</sup>

In short, one of the things that is lacking in Wolfe criticism is a solid framework within which to analyse his expressed aims and concerns, particularly his feeling that he was "a voice for the experience of a race."<sup>43</sup> His "epic impulse"--his desire to universalise his material in such a way that it would be specifically expressive of the grand designs of the American land, personality, history, and culture--needs no further documentation, but the presence of this urge in his works, in the form of

specific fictional techniques and thematic designs, does require much more detailed analysis and explication.

One of the techniques Wolfe employed in order to accomplish his universalising or epic ends has been called "symbol", but this is a term that Wolfe rarely used. What he did talk about was "legend", and for Wolfe this one word seemed to gather into itself all that is traditionally meant, not only by "legend", but also by the term "symbol". A passage from the Notebooks will clarify how these two apparently different concepts came together in Wolfe's mind under a single heading:

The personality of a great man almost inevitably creates a legend. That legend begets other ones, until as time goes on, the legends have so mixed and multiplied that the original character and personality of their hero is partially obscured. This happened to Napoleon. It happened to George Washington. It happened to Abraham Lincoln.... And in a way this is inevitable because a great man is a legend.

For a legend, considered in one light, is only a condensed and heightened form of reality. With every great legendary book, for instance ... the legend is not a fanciful interpretation of human life but really an intense illumination of that life. Consider Joyce's book as an illustration of this: In Ulysses one gets constantly the sense of looking at a brick wall so intensely that he looks right through the wall. It is the same with everything in the book: The whole work attains a fabulous and legendary quality from the very intensity of its vision ... and in its essence is not unlike the great legendary epic of the Greeks before Troy and in the end it is apparent that the legend is right. It is apparent that the legend is true.

It is apparent that the legend attains a superior reality through the clarity and intensity of its vision.

The passage is too long to quote in its entirety, but Wolfe goes on to describe the process of looking at a door "a thousand times" yet never seeing it "as it was":

And then one day, when I was far away, years after I'd passed the door, I would suddenly remember it.... And finally I saw it, the essential door, the way it was.

The final door, therefore, was the legendary door, and yet it was at last the right one. It was, at last, reality.

Again, there is a story of the Chinese painter who painted horses. For twenty years he stayed in the stables of the emperor and looked at horses and never painted them. And then he went away and never looked at horses any more, but painted them. And the horses that he painted were legendary horses, unlike any single horse that ever was but more like horses than any single horse could ever be.... Finally, there is Plato, with his concept of the idea which is, it seems to me, just another philosophic way of saying concept of the legend. According to this concept the idea of a wheelbarrow is closer to reality than the wheelbarrow itself, because the idea of the wheelbarrow is the essence from which all wheelbarrows past and present have been derived, and which, therefore, unlike the wheelbarrow itself, is of the essence of reality since it is everlasting and indestructible.<sup>44</sup>

There is a veritable galaxy of related ideas here, all of which provide valuable perspectives on Wolfe's method of writing. First of all, we note that Wolfe's idea of legend includes certain people (e.g. Abraham Lincoln), books (Joyce's Ulysses), mythic stories ("the Greeks before Troy"), concrete objects (the door; the wheelbarrow), and animals (horses). We may also include places in this list, as the unquoted beginning of the passage will attest. It will also be apparent that the list naturally divides itself into two categories: viz., the particular legend (such as Abraham Lincoln), and the generic legend (the door). The former is a particular personage, event, place, or thing, which becomes a legend, in the traditional sense of the word, by filling a psychic need in a society (or perhaps by being in its essence a projection of that psyche) in such a way that its highly individualistic nature becomes celebrated. The latter performs the same function, but its particularity is obfuscated, and it becomes representative of a class of things, an unmistakable characteristic of the "weather" of a people's life. These two processes are

normally dissociated, and might be considered to be quite different. But Wolfe exploits them both, in similar ways, in his fiction, recognising that they spring from a common source in the "logics" or inherent structures of the human psyche. It is this conviction which prompted the following not untypical comment in one of Wolfe's letters: "Tonight we are staying here in the Wartburg, a great legendary kind of hill from which came the legend that inspired Richard Wagner to write *Tannhäuser*."<sup>45</sup> That is, the hill itself was possessed of a legendary quality, abstract and undefined. This same quality was responsible for the urge or impulse which caused man to build up a legend around the hill: in other words, to define or express, in a collection of symbols and allegories, that quality which first gave the hill a mysterious universal appeal, which seemed to vibrate sympathetically with some lost chord in the unfathomable mind of man.

Wolfe's theory of legend has even found its way into the mouth of his fictional protagonists. In *You Can't Go Home Again*, George Webber explains to Randy Shepperton, "I'm looking for a way.... I think it might be something like what people vaguely mean when they speak of fiction. A kind of legend, perhaps. Something--a story--composed of all the living I've seen. Not the facts, you understand--not just the record of my life--but something truer than the facts--something distilled out of my experience and transmitted into a form of universal application. That's what the best fiction is, isn't it?"<sup>46</sup> The idea of the "legendary door"--this time a wall--appears a few pages later: "You see a wall, you look at it so much and so hard that one day you see clear through it. Then, of course, it's not just one wall any longer. It's every wall that ever was."<sup>47</sup>

Wolfe himself points to the correspondence between his "concept of the legend" and Plato's "concept of the idea." In his book on Wolfe, Herbert Muller suggests that Plato's "philosophy is plainly a development from myth": "His Ideas are not purely logical concepts but images, divine symbols; he is personifying the world of reason as the early myths personified the world of nature."<sup>48</sup> Wolfe may be said to be "personifying" the world of his own country, through the various ways in which he uses the device of legend: his portraying of distinctively American things or places (such as the wall, or the town square in Altamont) in such a way that they become Ideas, heightened forms of reality, distillations of fact; his defining of the "categories" of the American mind, such as South and North; his ritualistic commitment to abstractions like "the enchanted city"; his creation of characters that suggest phases in the development of America as a nation (Eugene Gant is the most important of these, but Uncle Bascom is another example); his use of American heroes (of the type of Abraham Lincoln), and also of more ordinary characters representative of American types; his telling of stories that are succinct allegories of the American experience (Gant's trip to California is an early example of this). In all these ways, Wolfe may be seen to be in the direct line of American Idealism and Transcendentalism, and of the tradition of symbolism in American literature.

If Emerson is the literary exponent of Idealism in America, his counterpart in the field of history, at least from a modern standpoint, is Frederick Jackson Turner. A fine essay by Thomas Boyle, entitled "Frederick Jackson Turner and Thomas Wolfe: The Frontier as History and as Literature",<sup>49</sup> explores the relationships between the mythic tendencies of these

two men. To summarise briefly the "Frontier Thesis", in Turner's own words, "American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier."<sup>50</sup> The long period of expansion required for the settlement of America accounts for some of the most basic traits in the American character (and incidentally for the differences between Americans and Europeans), including many that Wolfe emphasized: the belief in democracy, the vice of waste, the restless wandering, the materialism, and so on.<sup>51</sup>

As Boyle observes, "Critics of the Turner Thesis have rightly contended that the [frontier] myth does not correspond to the historical, empirical facts, that the assumptions do not correspond to the actual American experience. They have wrongly concluded, however, that the incongruity invalidates the Thesis. Myth does not have any less importance simply because it is discovered not to be true." But Boyle qualifies his statement somewhat: "The true meaning of the West resides not in empirical fact nor in myth, but in the conflict between the two, the Greek word for which is "Agon", from which is derived our word "agony". And, indeed, the dramatization of the agonizing process by which assumption is undercut by experience is the very stuff of literature."<sup>52</sup> Ironically, however, Boyle is speaking more of historical than of literary truth. From an analysis of a single passage in Wolfe (Chapter 29 of You Can't Go Home Again), he concludes that the novelist "rejected assumption in favor of experience" (in contrast to Turner, who "retained his commitment to American idealism"), that although "the anticipation of Wolfe's protagonists embodies the myth articulated by Turner", Wolfe himself "rejected the ideal world, the

'spiritual reality which stereotyped American myth objectifies."<sup>53</sup>

What Boyle fails to consider is that it is not Wolfe who rejects the ideal; rather, the ideal is undercut by the very material with which the novelist is forced to deal in his role as American bard. The "agonizing" conflict between ideal and real is certainly one of the main characteristics of Wolfe's work; but Wolfe's own stance, in his letters and notebooks, and in the passages of pure theory (in the author's voice) interspersed throughout his novels, is that of the idealist. The grasp of the would-be epic writer is inevitably less than his idealistic reach. Legend, both as a fictional technique and as a phenomenon of American culture, is an embodiment of the ideal, and is thus a means of grasping conceptually that which cannot realistically be reached. Furthermore, the ironic perspective through which we see unfold the lives of Wolfe's youthful protagonists is never displayed at the expense of true myth and legend. Even to the time of the last piece of writing on which Wolfe was at work (The Hills Beyond), he maintained, along with his protagonists, that "The Myth is true."<sup>54</sup>

Therefore, when Boyle questions Wolfe's unswerving devotion to the unimpeachable truth of myth and legend, he is inaccurate. He is right, however, in sensing that the writer was not indiscriminate in his acceptance of the ideal world. Before moving on to The Hills Beyond, then (which is the clearest embodiment of Wolfe's idea of legend), it will be necessary to examine just where he drew the line, in that airy realm of the ideal, between the false and the true.

NOTES

1. Paschal Reeves, Thomas Wolfe's Albatross: Race and Nationality in America (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1968), p. 1. Wolfe, incidentally, included Browning among "the poets I like best and to whom I have gone back most often." (SL, p. 232). There are also numerous allusions to Browning in the novels. Chapter 29 of The Web and the Rock, for example, not only assumes the title of the poet's magnum opus, but adopts the basic symbols of the ring and the book as representative of the artistic and emotional temperaments of, respectively, Esther and Monk.
2. Quoted in Richard Walser, "Preface" to The Enigma of Thomas Wolfe: Biographical and Critical Selections, ed. Walser (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), p. vii. (Hereafter, Enigma).
3. Henry Seidel Canby, "The River of Youth", in Seven Years' Harvest: Notes on Contemporary Literature (New York: Ferrar and Rinehart, 1936), p. 167. Rep. in Enigma.
4. Pamela Hansford Johnson, "Thomas Wolfe and the Kicking Season", Encounter, XII (April, 1959), p. 90. Rep. in Thomas Wolfe: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Louis B. Rubin (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973. (Hereafter, Views).
5. Quoted in Richard S. Kennedy, The Window of Memory: The Literary Career of Thomas Wolfe (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), p. 6.
6. From Death to Morning (Scribner Library ed.; New York, 1970), p. 111.
7. Morris Beja believes that "no symbol is more pervasive in Wolfe's work than the train", and even suggests that a more appropriate title for Wolfe's second novel might well have been "Of Time and the Railroad." (Morris Beja, "You Can't Go Home Again: Thomas Wolfe and 'The Escapes of Time and Memory'", Modern Fiction Studies, XI, iii (Autumn, 1965), p. 303. Rep. in Views.
8. Walden and Other Writings, p. 106.
9. Louis D. Rubin, "Introduction" to Views, p. 8.
10. Wolfe was concerned enough with "destiny" to make it the subject of the first paragraph of his first novel.
11. From Death to Morning, p. 38; p. 34.
12. Wolfe once remarked that "it would surprise many people today to know that at the age of seventeen I had an A-1 rating as philosopher... and now that I have gone in definitely for boasting, I made a one in Logic, and it was said it was the only one that had been given in



that course for twenty years. So you see, when it comes to speaking of philosophy, there is one before you who is privileged to speak." (William Braswell and Leslie A. Field, ed., Thomas Wolfe's Purdue Speech: "Writing and Living" (Purdue University Studies, 1964), pp. 32-33.)

13. i.e. from the European strain of transcendentalist thought, represented in Kant, Hegel, Carlyle, etc. Charles Feidelson, Jr., Symbolism and American Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 104-105. Feidelson's remarks should be ample forewarning to philosophers that the terms "idealism" and "transcendentalism" have here a general application much wider than their purely philosophical connotations would permit. For it is idealism in its pragmatic sense, and the instinct of transcendentalism, which have been embraced by Wolfe, and by the America about which he wrote.
14. Emerson, Works (Fireside ed.; Boston, 1909), I, pp. 320-321.
15. See, for example, W.P. Albrecht, "Time as Unity in Thomas Wolfe", in Enigma, p. 241, and Kennedy, pp. 129-130.
16. Marcel Proust, Remembrance of Things Past, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: Random House, 1934), Vol. I, p. 649.
17. The same is true, qualifiedly, of Wolfe himself: "I had built the enchanted vision of the city in great flaming pictures in my brain from my childhood and I believe it is not too much to say that to the very end some portion of that enchantment remained." (SL, pp. 262-263).
18. The Web and the Rock (New American Library ed.; New York, 1969), p. 135.
19. Kennedy has stated this idea in terms only slightly different: "Platonic idealism stands opposed to evolutionary naturalism in a conflict which surges throughout Wolfe's works" (p. 10). Elsewhere he says, "Even in Wolfe's later work one seldom finds resolutions of the tensions between American ideals and realities which the epic view demands." See "Thomas Wolfe and the American Experience", Modern Fiction Studies, Vol. XI (Autumn, 1965), p. 231. Rep. in Views.
20. Significantly, the wheels of Wolfe's trains do not go around--they pound like horses' hooves. See the marvellously equine and latinate evocation of the clacking of train wheels in Of Time and the River, p. 76.
21. Of Time and the River, p. 129.
22. E.K. Brown, "Thomas Wolfe: Realist and Symbolist", University of Toronto Quarterly, Vol. X, (January, 1941), p. 160, Rep. in Engima.
23. Of Time and the River, p. 146.
24. Alfred Kazin, "The Rhetoric and the Agony", in On Native Grounds (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1942), p. 475. Rep. in Views.

25. William Van O'Connor, William Faulkner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959), pp. 42-44.
26. C. Hugh Holman, "'The Dark, Ruined Helen of His Blood': Thomas Wolfe and the South", in Louis D. Rubin and Robert D. Jacobs, ed., South: Modern Southern Literature in its Cultural Setting (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 189. (Hereafter, South).
27. Brown, p. 208; p. 214.
28. Bernard DeVoto's famous article "Genius Is Not Enough" (rep. in Enigma, pp. 140-148) complains that in Of Time and the River not only Eugene but "practically every other character in the book ... suffered from fury and compulsions", and what was more, "they 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." (pp. 142-143). As with most of DeVoto's misdirected remarks (rife with much crasser exaggeration than Wolfe was ever guilty of), this is precisely the point about Wolfe's characters.
29. The Story of a Novel, p. 66. Compare Wolfe's statement in SL, pp. 64-65, in which he describes his first novel as "a fiction that is, I believe, more true than fact," telling "not ... what people did, but what they should have done."
30. Blanche Houseman Gelfant, The American City Novel (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), p. 119.
31. Clyde C. Clements, "Symbolic Patterns in You Can't Go Home Again", Modern Fiction Studies Vol. XI, (Autumn, 1965), p. 286. Rep. in Thomas Wolfe: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Leslie A. Field (New York: New York University Press, 1968).
32. Robert Penn Warren, "A Note on the Hamlet of Thomas Wolfe", American Review, Vol. V (May, 1935), p. 203; p. 193. Rep. in Enigma.
33. Canby, p. 167.
34. Albrecht, pp. 240-241.
35. C. Hugh Holman, Thomas Wolfe (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1960), pp. 6-7.
36. Holman, South, p. 181.
37. Thomas Lyle Collins, "Wolfe's Genius Vs. His Critics", in Enigma, pp. 172-173.
38. Kennedy, p. 3.
39. W.M. Frohock, "Thomas Wolfe: Of Time and Neurosis", in The Novel of Violence in America (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press,

- 1950), p. 55. Rep. in Enigma.  
Frohock is not referring to the "blessed stupidity" theory of archetypal art (see Leslie A. Fiedler, "Archetype and Signature", Sewanee Review, Vol. LX,ii (1952), p. 263. As it turns out, he sees Wolfe's "Aeschylean family" as being "implausible if not preposterous."
40. Holman, South, p. 181.
41. The Story of a Novel, p. 92.
42. Paschal Reeves, ed., "New Directions in Wolfe Scholarship", in Thomas Wolfe and the Glass of Time, ed. Reeves. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1971), pp. 136-155.
43. SL, p. 122.
44. Richard S. Kennedy and Paschal Reeves, edd., The Notebooks of Thomas Wolfe (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), Vol. II, pp. 855-857. (Hereafter, Notebooks).
45. SL, p. 228.
46. You Can't Go Home Again (Perennial Library ed.; Harper and Row, 1973), p. 299.
47. Ibid., p. 320.
48. Herbert J. Muller, Thomas Wolfe (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1947), p. 5.  
The title of Muller's first chapter--"On Myths and Legends"--sounds promising. Unfortunately, however, his concepts of "myth" and "legend" are so vague and broad as to be practically worthless as critical perspectives, embracing not only the myths of the ancients, and Mark Schorer's often-quoted definition of myth ("A large, controlling image... which gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life, that is to say, which has organising value for experience"), but also any kind of shaping ideology, and "imaginative scheme" (including "literature, philosophy, religion, and even science"), and any sort of popular fantasy.
49. Thomas E. Boyle, "Frederick Jackson Turner and Thomas Wolfe: The Frontier as History and as Literature", Western American Literature, Vol. IV (1969-70), pp. 273-285.
50. Ray Allen Billington, ed., The Frontier Thesis: Valid Interpretation of American History? (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p. 10.
51. These traits, together with their frontier origins, are summarized in Billington's "Introduction", p. 2.
52. Boyle, pp. 275-276.
53. Ibid., pp. 281-282; p.276.
54. The Hills Beyond (New York and Toronto: New American Library ed., 1968), p. 169.

CHAPTER II

LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL: FROM FANTASY TO LEGEND

Leo Marx, in his book on the symbol of "the machine in the garden" in American literature, distinguishes between "two kinds of pastoralism--one that is popular and sentimental, the other imaginative and complex."<sup>1</sup> The former is "merely another of our many vehicles of escape from reality ... a diffuse nostalgia, and a naive, anarchic primitivism", while the latter is manifested in literature, or "high" culture, being "invaluable for its power to enrich and clarify our experience." Although the "starting point" in each case is the same, "the results could hardly be more different."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Marx maintains that "to appreciate the significance and power of our American fables it is necessary to understand the interplay between the literary imagination and what happens outside literature, in the general culture."<sup>3</sup>

What Marx says about pastoralism, or the myth of the garden, may apply equally well to any other fable or legend in what he calls the "collective imagination" of America--any, that is, which has managed to find its way also into literature (for there are those, as Marx implies, which remain in popular culture, and are little more than "infantile wish-fulfillment dreams").<sup>4</sup> Marx's distinctions are germane to an understanding of Wolfe's theory of legend--of which American fables or fantasies are suitable for serious literary treatment, and which are not. This, in fact, is a central theme of Look Homeward, Angel.

An example of Marx's "pastoral design", and the invasion of the machine, may be seen in Chapters 30-31 of Look Homeward, Angel. The end of Chapter 30 is a pastoral love scene, in which Eugene and Laura James go for a walk in the hills around Altamont. It is a bright, perfect day, and the natural setting is described as "a vast green church", and a

"paradise" where the two forget the "pain and conflict" of the town.<sup>5</sup> This little springtime Eden, however, is not without its Fall: there is, quite literally, a snake in the grass, startling the lovers with "the old snake-fear" (p. 376). Time is there, too, personified in a man "mowing with a scythe, moving into the grass like a god upon his enemies" (p. 377), and then, literally again, in Laura's watch, binding her "lovely hand ... with its silken watch-cord" (p. 378). But most importantly, at the very crescendo of "the apple-tree, the singing, and the gold", a train intrudes: "Far out beyond that timeless valley, a train, on the rails for the East, wailed back its ghostly cry: life, like a fume of painted smoke, a broken wrack of cloud, drifted away. Their world was a singing voice again: they were young and they could never die. This would endure" (p. 380). But the chapter ends with a rhapsodic chant on the theme of "O Lost!" tolling its bell over the mortality of life and evanescence of event that is attendant upon the fall from grace.

There seem to be two voices here: one which naively affirms the permanence and reality of this "paradise", and another, more mature, questioning, skeptical; one which ignores the intrusion of the train whistle (in the same way that it "scarcely heard" Laura's announcement of the time [p. 378]), and another which not only hears the train but pauses over its significance. This dual perspective continues in Chapter 31, where the very train that is about to take Eugene's love away forever from him is described in terms that evoke both the pastoralism ("he sat beside her in the close green heat of the pullman" [p. 381]), and the exuberance of the previous chapter ("Even the gray weather of their lives could not deaden the excitement of that hot chariot to the East" [p. 382]), Clearly, these two conflicting attitudes indicate that Wolfe is passing

artistic judgment upon the emotional flights of his youthful protagonist. This is in accordance with Marx's conclusion that a literary version of the pastoral myth "brings irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture."<sup>6</sup> Throughout Wolfe's work, whenever his protagonist is filled with hope and excitement by the spectacle of the train, Wolfe as artist sounds the ironic note that the train carries a false promise of glory. It will be recalled that a similarly ironic perspective is provided by Thoreau in his passage on the train, and by Hawthorne in "The Celestial Railroad".

The whole episode of Eugene and Laura James is full of this ironic contrast between Eugene's fantasy and the author's more mature awareness of reality. Although we are not told directly that Eugene is merely in love with love, Wolfe as narrator makes this point abundantly clear. We are told, for example, that Eugene's passion "was governed by a religious ecstasy", such that he "wanted to hold her, and go away by himself to think about her" (p. 369). The mundaneness of the girl's character, as revealed in such comments as "I spend all my money on clothes" (p. 370), seems to sail right over Eugene's head. His rhapsodic delusion is so great that he asks Laura "to wait for me and to love me forever", while he goes "all over the world" (p. 363).

This fantasy, in itself, is not so ludicrous as it may first appear, for when Eugene asks Laura to "live in a house away in the mountains" and to "wait for me, and keep yourself for me", he is asking her to become no less than his home, his earth, his America. It is a noble enough vision, and the theme of the woman as a symbol of the enduring American earth is one that recurs throughout Wolfe's novels. The ludicrous thing is that Laura James is hardly a fit object for Eugene's gropings toward

nobility. At this point, his fantasy has no basis whatsoever in fact.

His attraction to Mrs. Selbourne is equally naive. To Eugene, she is "the living symbol of his desire--the dim vast figure of love and maternity, ageless and autumnal... Demeter, Helen, the ripe exhaustless and renewing energy" (p. 121)--and yet she is a false goddess, for she herself falls for Steve, who is described as a "romantic criminal."

Look Homeward, Angel, in tracing the early stages in the development of an artistic temperament, shows Eugene maturing from an indulgence in what Marx calls "vehicles of escape from reality", to an understanding of how good fiction--a form of fantasy which, far from being an escape, is a heightened form of reality--can have the "power to enrich and clarify our experience." It is an understanding which Wolfe as narrator has from the start.

Perhaps the most astute comment on Eugene's first love affair comes, unwittingly, from Laura James herself, when she says of his remarkable fantasy that "people don't live like that. It's like a story" (p. 379). Indeed, it is very like many of the stories in which Eugene has been immersed in the course of his childhood and adolescence. We are given quite a detailed account of the boy's early reading, which includes "translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey at the same time as Diamond Dick, Buffalo Bill, and the Algers, for the same reason" (p. 85). The "reason", at this point, is escape from reality, whether it be through "romantic legendry" (p. 85), "fantasy" (p. 89), or "ancient myths, where the will and the deed were not thought darkly on" (p. 90). Eugene participates in these fictions, even to the point of becoming "Bruce-Eugene", the self-sacrificing hero beloved of a beautiful and virtuous woman.

As ridiculous as these story-fantasies are, they do express a part of the "buried life" by showing how fiction, even in the cheap form of

romantic fantasy, fulfills some of man's deepest needs and wants (e.g. "to be loved", and "to be famous", which, according to Wolfe as well as Eugene, are "the two things all men want" [p. 89]). Many of these imaginings deal with taboos, such as marrying out of one's class (pp. 87-89), or having an affair with one's teacher (pp. 90-91), thus providing a necessary outlet or safety-valve for repressed desires. They still exist, however, in the realm of the popular and sentimental, enabling Eugene briefly to ignore "all the grimy smudges of life: he existed nobly in a heroic world with lovely and virtuous creatures" (p. 89). The very next chapter, in fact, begins with a rude awakening into reality as Eugene is forced to get his first job: "This dreaming and unlimited time of fantasy was not to last unbroken. Both Gant and Eliza were fluent apologists for economical independence: all the boys had been sent out to earn money at a very early age" (p. 92).

Concerning these "Bruce-Eugene" fantasies, one commentator has observed, "It is not [Eugene's] mind we are beholding mirrored in the stream of this sweet, sloshy fiction, but rather his judgment upon the reading and thinking of his overbearing contemporaries."<sup>7</sup> This is typical of the confusion that has arisen among Wolfe's critics in neglecting to make any distinction between Wolfe and his protagonist. In this case, it is important to realize that this is the mind of the adolescent Eugene we are beholding, and it is, furthermore, the adolescent mind of America--a part of America that has never grown up, and has never learned the difference between fictional fantasy and literature, nor that the relationship between fact and fiction is a complex matter.

Marx, still speaking particularly of the pastoral myth, says that the



crux of the matter is "in crossing the borderland between life and literature": "Most literary works called pastorals ... do not finally permit us to come away with anything like the simple, affirmative attitude we adopt toward pleasing rural scenery. In one way or another ... these works manage to qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture. And it is this fact which will enable us, finally, to get at the difference between the complex and sentimental kinds of pastoralism."<sup>8</sup> In general, then, artists provide a dimension of reality or truth, although still working within a mythical or fantastical construct. Thus, the point at which Eugene realizes the difference between sentimental "romantic legendry" and artistic legendry--between the Algiers and the Homers--is an important one, for it marks his awakening as an artist.

Fittingly, this point comes late in the book, adding to the climactic structure which too many critics have failed to appreciate. It comes soon after the appearance of "a small tetter of itch" on Eugene's neck--"a sign of his kinship with the Pentlands" (p. 488). With this blemish, our hero "shrank back at the memory of his lost heroic fantasies". He "escaped forever from the good and the pretty", and gave up "the creatures of romantic fiction" in favour of a more realistic acceptance of blemish and imperfection: "It was not his quality as a romantic to escape out of life, but into it. He wanted no land of Make-believe: his fantasies found extension in reality" (p. 491).

He will no longer love a simple-minded girl like Laura James: the object of his fantasies now is "subtle, and a little weary: a child and a mother, as old and as deep as Asia, and as young as germinal April"<sup>9</sup> (p. 490).

His fantasies now tend toward the truly mythic or legendary: "He saw no reason to doubt that there really were 1,200 gods in Egypt, and that the centaur, the hippogriff, and the winged bull might all be found in their proper places. He believed that there was magic in Byzantium, and genii stoppered up in wizards' bottles" (p. 491).

In short, Eugene has come to see what his creator has maintained all along: that legends such as the centaur and the winged bull, unlike the cinematic and dime-novelish Bruce-Eugene fantasies, are not airy escapes from reality, but forms of heightened reality, timeless symbols and repositories of the most important human concerns. It is for this reason that, as we are told on the first page, "you shall see begin in Crete four thousand years ago the love that ended yesterday in Texas."

It is for this reason, too, that the romantic idyll with Laura James takes place, supposedly, in "a place where no time was" (p. 378). As we have seen, time certainly was there; but if the experience had been more genuine, and less a product of Eugene's romantic fantasy, it might indeed have conquered time. "A place where no time was" is a place that can be reached only through legend, and Wolfe's concept of legend includes not only centaurs and winged bulls, but all things that have "existed ... anciently and forever" (p. 134).

The power of traditional legendry to transcend time and circumstance can be seen in the following passage, which occurs immediately after Eugene has received his letter of rejection from Laura James: "One [star] had flashed out the light that winked on him the night that Ruth lay at the feet of Boaz; and one on Queen Isolt; and one on Corinth and on Troy. It was night, vast brooding night, the mother of loneliness, that washes our stains away. ... His bitter wound was for the moment healed in him" (pp. 383-384).

Here, he is momentarily beyond time, united with all of history and all of legendry. Indeed, history and legend seem to fuse, making (at the risk of echoing Polonius) history legendary and legend historical. History is sprung out of its linear confines into a cyclical world of recurrence where huge blocks of time are but moments, and "each moment is the fruit of forty thousand years." One of Eugene's earliest instincts is to scoff at the dictum, "Nature never repeats herself" (p. 77): the fact that there will always be snow indicates that Nature most certainly does repeat herself; but that every flake is different suggests that she may do so within slightly different patterns. And so with history, and with art.

This historico-legendary effect is even more pronounced in a great list that occurs near the end of the book, including everything from "Jesus-of-Nazareth Gant" to Gant "the slain God of Harvest" to "Vercingetorix Gant" and Gant "the Olympian Bull" (pp. 493-494). The list not only brings together figures from both legend and history, but also demonstrates that the self (in the person of Eugene) contains everything and everyone, all history and all mythology--a view which recapitulates the themes set out in the novel's opening paragraphs, and which is echoed by the oracular Ben at the end, when he answers Eugene's question, "Where is the World?" with, "You are your world" (p. 520). This is not to say that the individual is possessed, romantically, of a Byronic and indomitable ego and will, but that he is the "apexical summation, from the billion depths of possibility, of things done" (p. 520).

So it is that the great list referred to above ends with "Mumbo-Jumbo Gant"--and this is as far back as one can go into the murk of human history. "Mumbo-Jumbo", in fact, comes close to embodying the "lost world"

of pre-existence: like Eugene's first word, "Moo", it expresses the "lost word", the "great forgotten language" that we are all "trying to recall" (p. 465).<sup>10</sup> Richard Kennedy, remarking that Wolfe became interested in Jung and psychoanalysis through Aline Bernstein, notes: "As Mrs. Bernstein put it, "Tom believed that people knew more than they knew-- that is, what their ancestors had known." Some passages in the later Wolfe novels reflect this notion of the racial memory traces in the unconscious."<sup>11</sup> As we have seen, it is not necessary to go to the later novels for this theme. In Look Homeward, Angel it is manifested in the the protagonist's inherent sympathy with the myths and legends of other and ancient cultures, and in his integral involvement with the whole of history. Eugene's birth in 1900 is set against all of ancient, modern, and contemporary history (pp. 29-30). This list, like its more myth-oriented counterpart (pp. 493-494) has no apparent order--chronological or otherwise--and this emphasises the unity, the simultaneity, of all time. But both catalogues have a common ending, or origin: the later one ends with "Mumbo-Jumbo", and the earlier goes back to when "our earliest ancestors had crawled out of the primeval slime."

One passage in the book has Eugene actually making a kind of symbolic, but nonetheless real, voyage back to his primitive origins. Chapter 22 describes his experiences with the Niggertown paper route. Eugene was fascinated with Niggertown, to the point where "his need for the negroes had become acute": "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" (p. 251). It was among the pariahs of Niggertown, with their primitive amorality, that he felt "his desire and wonder met",

and the chapter climaxes in his confrontation with Ella Corpening, the negro whore who introduces him to the ritual mystery of nakedness and sexuality in all its raw power. As Eugene flees Niggertown on this occasion, he hears "lost twangling notes", reminiscent of the underwater bell and the "far-forested horn-note" which, throughout the book, represent the vestiges of man's deepest, farthest origins.

Chapter 22 complements this with a literary exploration of some of the same themes. Again we learn about Eugene's development through his reading and he in turn finds confirmed in great literature what he learns by experience. The climate of Niggertown is reflected in Eugene's admiration for Edmund in King Lear--whose famous soliloquy is "as evil as Niggertown", expressing "the evil of earth, of illicit nature" (p. 257)--and even for Falstaff, whom Eugene sees as an example of Shakespeare's making "vice attractive" (p. 259). Eugene scoffs at Margaret Leonard's pronouncement that none of Shakespeare's characters "is the same at the end as he was in the beginning", that "you can see them grow." Eugene realizes that this is not growth but, in the great plays, decay into death and madness: "In the beginning was the word. I am Alpha and Omega. The growth of Lear. He grew old and mad. There's growth for you" (p. 259). For Wolfe--and increasingly for Eugene--the answer lies in the beginning of things, in the "lost lane-end into heaven", in the logos: "Where darkness, son, is light. Try, boy, the word you know remember. In the beginning was the logos" (p. 245).

We are told that Margaret Leonard had "wisdom" but not "knowledge", for she would have been "stricken with horror" by the adolescent boy's quite natural brooding over sex (p. 254). Eugene learns in this chapter that you can't have "Parnassus As Seen From Mount Sinai"--that you have

to get back to the original Parnassus, to the beginning, clearing away the clouds of civilization and morality along with those of literary prejudice. We must learn to listen to the messages from our lost past, represented in the horn-note or bell: "The woodpecker pecked at the schoolhouse door, / He pecked and he pecked till his pecker got sore. / The woodpecker pecked at the schoolhouse bell, / He pecked and he pecked till his pecker got well" (p. 77). In this not-so-silly rhyme, sung to the young Eugene by Ben "in his thin humming ghost's voice", an unusually cryptic Wolfe provides a clue to his own symbols of the door and the bell. The door is the passageway to all the past that has escaped forever, and the seeker who would discover the door and find his way back into this lost world will find only exasperation, for there is "no door". What one can do, however, is listen to the bell--the instinctual, psychic, and racial communications from the past. Many of these are discoverable, and they have a healing quality.

The value of legend or myth lies in its power to preserve the most primitive instincts of the human race, to enshrine the horn-notes, to record pre-history and many of the essential things which history, in its lust for fact, does not record. In Wolfe's view, "The most important part of history is the unrecorded part."<sup>12</sup> Wolfe's primarily legendary view of history, and of fiction, and Eugene's gradual education in this view, may again be seen in Eugene's early reading. Even before he could read, his favourite book was Ridpath's History of the World, illustrated and in three huge volumes. These books seem to contain as much legendry as history, and it is largely the former which fascinates Eugene: "The past unrolled to him in separate and enormous visions; he built unending legends upon the pictures of kings of Egypt, charioted swiftly by soaring horses, and something infinitely old and recollective seemed to awaken in him as he looked on fabulous monsters, the twined beards and beast-bodies of Assyrian kings,

the walls of Babylon" (p. 50). The volumes themselves, as physical objects, almost come alive as Eugene exults "in the musty odor of leaves, and in the pungent smell of their hot hides."

Later, when Eugene is in school, the first book Margaret Leonard gives him is Reade's The Cloister and the Hearth, and again it is the book's legendary aspect which impresses him: "He was drowned deep at midnight in the destiny of the man who killed the bear, the burner of windmills and the scourge of banditry" (p. 179). When the class comes to read Schiller's Wilhelm Tell, the boys are impressed by the scenes with a legendary quality, which demonstrate the fight for liberty--"the apple-shooting scene, and the escape by boat"--but are bored by the windy speeches which exhort it (p. 264).

The literary influence of Gant is also evident. He was fond of reading Shakespeare to Eugene, especially parts of Hamlet, Julius Caesar, Macbeth, and Othello: all plays which are based on a combination of history and legend. Again, Gant would recite poetry, among his favourites being, "'We are lost,' the captain shouted, As he staggered down the stairs;" "Ninety and nine with their captain, Rode on the enemy's track"; "Half a league, half a league, half a league onward" (p. 51): poems that give legendary renditions of historical events.<sup>13</sup>

What is more, Gant had no need to resort to a text for his legendary material: he was quite capable of acting the bard himself. The Dixieland boarders would listen enraptured to Gant, as "lunging back and forth in the big rocker, before the blazing parlor fire, he told and retold the legends of his experience, taking, before their charmed eyes, an incident that had touched him romantically, and embellishing, weaving and building it up. A whole mythology grew up as, goggle-eyed, they listened" (p. 224).

There follow examples, condensed, of Gant's legendizing, one of which is this: "General Fitzhugh Lee, who had reined up before the farmer boy and asked for a drink of water, now tossed off an oaken bucketful, questioned him closely concerning the best roads into Gettysburg, asked if he had seen detachments of the enemy, wrote his name down in a small book and went off saying to his staff: "That boy will make his mark. It is impossible to defeat an enemy which breeds boys like that." The elements of real legend are here: a famous personage, hyperbole ("tossed off an oaken bucketful"), the glorification of the common man, a colourful historical event (the Civil War) as background.

On another occasion, Gant performs similarly in telling the story of how "Teddy and his Rough Riders took the hill at Santiago" (p. 111). He makes this the central event of the war, mythologizing the role of America-- "the greatest people of the face of the earth"--and of Roosevelt, calling him "the Faultless descendant of Julius Caesar, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Abraham Lincoln." The boarders didn't always agree with Gant, but they did agree that "he had a fine head and ... should have been a lawyer."

The part of the lawyer/politician in American legend will be discussed later, but the important thing here is that a lawyer should have the spell-binding power of rhetoric, and thus acts as a kind of bard. Richard Kennedy maintains that Wolfe's "approach to his work was oral and not literary. He was a story-teller, like the scop or the minstrel, except that he sang not of traditional heroes but of his own life."<sup>14</sup> But Wolfe sang of traditional heroes, too, at first through figures like Gant, and later more directly, as we shall see, in The Hills Beyond. Kennedy calls Wolfe a "bard", and with the bard the main concern is not only the story (although that is foremost), but the manner of telling it. Both Gant and Wolfe make



similar use of rhetoric and declamation in telling their stories. In doing this, they may often be accused of lying--yet the impulse behind their words remains true. Gant, in contrast to Eliza with her "primitive and focal reasoning", has a "customary indifference to reasoned debate", but his exclamations make up with violence and passion what they lack in logicity. One senses the right tone, cadence, and emotion behind Gant's rhetorical flourishes, however untrue be their content, and even their form--and this is equally true of Wolfe's fiction.

Gant's lies need not be dwelt upon: "'Your miserable old father,'" howled Gant, 'was horsewhipped on the public square for not paying his debts.'" This was a purely imaginative insult, which had secured itself as truth, however, in Gant's mind, as had so many other stock epithets, because it gave him heart-cockle satisfaction" (p. 25). Here, then, is reason behind the lie; or, as Byron put it, a lie is "but the truth in masquerade."<sup>15</sup> It is largely from Gant that Eugene gains an instinctual grasp of the difference between a cheap or dirty lie, and one that has a nobility or truth to it. Early in the book, for example, one of Eugene's friends insults another boy by saying, "His mother takes in washin' from an ole nigger," upon which Eugene "turned away indefinitely, craned his neck convulsively, lifted one foot sharply from the ground. 'She don't!' he screamed suddenly into their astounded faces. 'She don't!'" (p. 81). The boy's insulting lie has none of the magnificence of Gant's rhetoric, and right after this Harry Tarkinton, another of Eugene's boyhood friends, described as a "breaker of visions", "smashed forever, as they lay there talking, the enchantment of Christmas." An earlier scene had shown how Gant instilled "the fantasy of Christmas" in his son:

Gant was his unwearied comrade; night after night in

the late autumn and early winter, he would scrawl petitions to Santa Claus, listing interminably the gifts he wanted most, and transmitting each, with perfect trust, to the roaring chimney. As the flame took the paper from his hand and blew its charred ghost away with a howl, Gant would rush with him to the window, point to the stormy northern sky, and say: "There it goes! Do you see it?"

He saw it. He saw his prayer, winged with the stanch convoying winds, borne northward to the rimed quaint gables of Toyland, into frozen merry Elfland: heard the tiny silver anvil-tones, the deep-lunged laughter of the little men, the stabled cries of aerial reindeer. Gant saw and heard them, too (p. 73).

No mere fantasy, this, for Wolfe makes the reader hear and see these things, too. At this point, however, Eugene's participation in the ritual is indeed fantasy, and so it is easily "smashed" later on. Gant has doubtless gone through this stage of disillusionment also, but he has come through it and retained his reverence for the mystery, the true legend, of Christmas.

Thus it is that Gant brings with him "the great gusto of living, of ritual" (p. 51). It is significant that "living" and "ritual" are practically equated here. Gant's "pious regard for ritual", his formalized rhetoric and punctual tirades, his great fires--these are all woven from the same cloth as his preposterous lies and epithets, his story-telling, and his ability to participate, boyishly, in the elfin legendry of Christmas. Ritual and belief in legend are inextricably enmeshed, and together they provide life with a genuineness and a gusto that are inaccessible to Eliza, "the practical, the daily person" (p. 40).

The man who would re-create legend must be something of a legend himself, and Gant is referred to variously as "Thor", as "a fallen Titan", and as having a "Parnassian" contempt for reason. As he storms through

loud good health of America, which is really a sickness, because no man will admit his sores" (p. 489).

Gant's use of sentimental fantasy or "rude" legend may be paralleled to that of the more minor character Vergil Weldon. Eugene recognizes in his professor "the last of the heroes, the last of those giants to whom we give the faith of our youth" (p. 502). But at one point he is subtly criticized for his condescension to the task of teaching: "'On one side of the table stood the combined powers of Europe; on the other stood Martin Luther, the son of a blacksmith.' The voice of husky passion, soul-shaken. This they can remember, and put down" (p. 496). Of course the class will remember this, for it is a legendary construct: the legend of the underdog, or the individual pitted against a massed power, that is so prevalent in democratic societies. But the reason Weldon is ridiculed in this instance (especially on p. 497) is that he exploits the Luther legend for its sheer melodrama, the impact it will have as a teaching device: he himself regurgitates without filtering, evokes an archetype without stamping his own distinctive character upon it. Eugene feels that teaching is beneath Weldon, and that he might have aspired to greater things: "What were all the old philosophies that you borrowed and pranked up to your fancy, to you, who were greater than all?" (p. 503)

This is not to say that "rude" legend, or what we are here calling "fantasy", is always an undesirable or laughable thing: quite to the contrary, it is a perfectly normal and often healthy aspect of all human thinking. The point is, however, that fantasy is not suitable material for serious art, whose job, to recapitulate Marx's view, is to "enrich and clarify our experience", not to muffle experience beneath velvet cloaks of sentiment.

What Gant and Vergil Weldon both lack is the artistic ability to select and shape. From the Jungian point of view, archetypal motifs are the result of "certain necessary psychic processes", which in turn arise from "the structural nature of the psyche": "These are generic to the nature of the human being as such, and therefore, they are expressed in the individual in dream and fantasy, just as they are expressed in the group via myth."<sup>17</sup> In Look Homeward, Angel Wolfe tries, over the course of the book, gradually to convert the personal dreams and fantasies of his protagonist into an artistic expression of myth--that is, into a form in which they will be deeply striking and relevant to a mass audience. At the same time as Wolfe achieves this, from the beginning of the novel, through a figure such as Gant (who, although he is not an artist himself, is capable of being lifted by an artist into a mythic voice for male America), he is showing us how Eugene, as a maturing artist, comes to understand this process. Learning the difference between fantasy and myth, and then between myth and art, is a necessary part of becoming an artist. If Gant is "a fallen Titan", then Eugene may be seen as a representative of the new race of Olympians: "And suddenly, he knew how completely he was his father's son--how completely, and with what added power and exquisite refinement of sensation, was he Gantian" (p. 411).

By the beginning of Part Three, Wolfe tells us that Eugene "belonged with the Mythmakers"--"an older and simpler race of men": "For him, the sun was a lordly lamp to light him on his grand adventuring. He believed in brave heroic lives ..." (p. 325). At this point, however, Eugene is not a full-fledged "Mythmaker", much as he may "belong" in that august company, for he is still a "fantasist of the Ideal." He is yet too young to realize that Myth does not necessarily embody "the Ideal"--at least the

sort of ideal he believes in here: "beauty", "order", "love", "goodness", "glory", "valiance", and so on. As yet, "the harsh rasp of the world had worn no grooving in the secret life", and "his hard wisdom melted at the glow of his imagination." Even though "four years later, when he was graduated, ... he was still a child," Part Three of Look Homeward, Angel shows the beginning of his graduation from childhood fantasist to Mythmaker.

So far, no clear distinction has been made in this study between the terms "myth" and "legend". This is largely because Wolfe, no lover of definitions or restricted meanings for words, made no absolutely clear distinctions himself. Certain trends of thought, however, are discernible. First of all, it has been shown in the previous chapter that, in passages in the Notebooks as well as the novels, Wolfe developed quite fully his concept of "legend", giving the term more careful and idiosyncratic consideration than he appears to have given to "myth". But apart from this, in Look Homeward, Angel (representative of the later novels in this respect), the term "legend" is more prevalent than "myth", and the latter is more often used loosely. For example, there are references to the Gants' "insensate mythology of hoarding" (p. 112), to the thought of Catullus' Lesbia being a married woman as "a wild and possibly dangerous myth" (p. 182), and to students making up "myths" of one of their professors as "a passionate and sophisticated lover" (p. 334). Moreover, "myth" is sometimes associated with Eugene's immature visions. Quite early he realizes that "mythology", practically speaking, is untrue, but that "creative men" must live "for falsehood." However, he senses this only "brokenly, obscurely", and connects mythology with "the tinsel and the gold" (p. 186)--that is, with mere fantasy. And as late as Chapter 33,

"the age of myth" still represents not only a lie but a fantasy--this time in the form of the "lyrical music" of war (pp. 424-425) with, among other glories, its "romantic charm of mutilation" (p. 445).

But most important in considering Wolfe's distinction between myth and legend is the fact that he often connects "myth" with foreign and ancient culture, whereas "legend" is more exclusively reserved for material that is somehow peculiarly American. It is as if America is too young a country to have Myths, as such, of its own. Wolfe seemed to feel that Greece had myths, but America has legends, the latter being no less respectable, and indeed, more meaningful and exciting to the native artist, if only on account of their being closer to home. As Eugene was to realize in Of Time and the River, "Instead of whining that we have no traditions, or that we must learn by keeping constantly in touch with European models, or by keeping away from them, we should get busy telling some of the stories about America that have never been told."<sup>18</sup>

Thus, in describing the Square in Exeter, Eugene remarks: "How real it is.... It is like something we have always known about and do not need to see. The town would not have seemed strange to Thomas Aquinas, but he to the town" (p. 423). The lack of antiquity to America's legends does not matter, for America has both absorbed its European roots, and gone beyond them. Thomas Aquinas would have cause to venerate America's legendary institutions, but America need not be ashamed of finding Thomas Aquinas merely quaint or antiquated.

It is true enough that American legend has its roots in Europe: the curious affinity that Eugene and George Webber have with Germany stems from this. Although the German theme does not appear to any great extent

in Look Homeward, Angel, the book is not lacking in indications of America's European ties. For instance, Schiller in Wilhelm Tell is compared to the American patriots Patrick Henry, George Washington, and Paul Revere, as being "religiously impressed ... with the beauties of Liberty." When John Dorsey Leonard observes that mountains--characteristic of both Switzerland and Altamont--"have been the traditional seat of Liberty", the author tells us that he has been "touched, in a happy moment, by the genius of the place" (p. 264). There is an irony, but also a curious rightness, in Eliza's billing of Altamont as "America's Switzerland" (p. 131).

But however much American legendry may be spawned from European folklore and ancient myth, the vital legends of a young and energetic country look forward and not back. This is the reason for Eugene's "fear of the legend" of the South, a legend inculcated in him through "the romantic halo that his school history cast over the section", "through the whole fantastic distortion of that period where people were said to live in 'mansions', and slavery was a benevolent institution, conducted to a constant banjo-strumming, the strewn largesses of the colonel and the shuffle-dance of his happy dependents, where all woman were pure, gentle, and beautiful, all men chivalrous and brave, and the Rebel horde a company of swagger, death-mocking cavaliers" (p. 127). There is something distastefully European, undemocratic, un-American, about the South's "cheap mythology, their legend of the charm of their manner, the aristocratic culture of their lives."<sup>19</sup> Their legendry is cheap and false--and thus more akin to fantasy--because it is not forward-looking; it is characterized by a "hostile and murderous intrenchment against all new life." There are dead legends as well as living ones.

When Eugene visits Charleston, representative of the South, we learn that "they've let the place run down.... It's no bigger now that it was before the Civil War." The signs of intrenchment and stagnation, of a false and sentimental legendry, are everywhere: The city is described as a "ruined Camelot"; Eugene looks "reverently" at the "old Southern mansions"--"good houses in their day"--as at the husk of a dead religion; there is "a green stench of warm standing water" in the bay (p. 302). The sight of an "ante-bellum darkey" moves Eugene to romanticize "on the beautiful institution of human slavery, which his slaveless maternal ancestry had fought so valiantly to preserve. Bress de Lawd, Marse! Ole Mose doan' wan' to be free niggah. How he goan' lib widout marse? He doan' wan' stahve wid free niggahs. Har, har, har! Philanthropy. Pure philanthropy. He brushed a tear from his een" (p. 303).

These last few words demonstrate that, in Wolfe, fantasy is always betrayed through diction or style. The antiquated word "een", the outworn purple prosiness of "brushed a tear", the sentimental nobility of "We were defeated.... not beaten" (p. 303), all complement the effect of hollow staleness and falsity that Wolfe is striving for. Examples from other passages that ridicule fantasy are not scarce: "the fixed vision of the great hands clasped across the sea, the flowering of green fields," etc., from the section on the Leonards' love for "Albion's Isle" (pp. 289-291); "Two smoking globes of brine welled from the pellucid depths of her pure eyes and fell with a hot splash on his bronzed hand" (p. 226), from one of Eugene's movie fantasies; "She leaned toward him, her lips half-parted and tremulous, her breathing short and uncertain, and as his bare arms circled her fiercely ..." (p. 88), from one of the "Bruce-Eugene" idylls. And on and on. It is obvious that Wolfe is mocking not just sentimental fantasy,



but the use of such material and language in non-satiric literature. Much of the purple prose that Wolfe himself has been criticized for using is in fact intended as satirical comment on his protagonist's foolish adolescence. When the material has a truly legendary impact and seriousness, the diction is often of a clearness and purity that Wolfe has not been noted for. Consider the effortless beauty of "All of the gods have lost the way" (p. 78), or the simplicity of "Every man a Sleeping Beauty" (p. 228). Even the be-comma'd baroque-ness of "O lost, and by the wind griev'd, ghost, come back again!" does not mar, but rather enhances its unpretentious grandeur.

Wolfe's attempts to come to grips with Southern legendry are part of his epic impulse--his desire to get to the very heart of a whole region and people, and finally of a nation. Several times in Look Homeward, Angel Wolfe attempts to create a sweeping but intense bird's-eye vision of the town of Altamont, sometimes as a typical Southern town, and sometimes as a typical American town. There is Gant's "Gulliverian" view upon his return from California; there is Eugene's tramp through the town with Guy Doak in Chapter 24; and Chapter 14, as Edward Aswell noted, is Wolfe's attempt "to portray a whole Southern town, with all its interwoven complexities of character and motive."<sup>20</sup> For Wolfe, it was possible for the artist to attempt composition on such a large scale, for "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."<sup>21</sup> Wolfe also seemed to feel that the sheer immensity of America has imparted to its artists, and indeed to all Americans, a particularly grand or epic scale of thinking, markedly different from the narrowness of the European countries. Of the French he says, "They are

completely contained within themselves--this certitude comes from the rigid and narrow limit of their life", in contrast to the Americans, "even the dullest" of whom "has the sea in his mind, and the immensity of his own country."<sup>22</sup> England receives similar treatment in You Can't Go Home Again, to great comic effect: "Once out of London, both of these Americans, in their unconscious minds, were as little impressed by the dimensions of England as they would have been by a half-acre lot. When McHarg said he'd like the sea, George thought to himself: "Very well. We'll just drive over to the other side of the island and take a look at it."<sup>23</sup> This same idea occurs, in a more serious tone, in Look Homeward, Angel: "Our senses have been fed by our terrific land; our blood has learned to run to the imperial pulse of America.... We walked along a road in Cumberland, and stooped, because the sky hung down so low; and when we ran away from London, we went by little rivers in a land just big enough. And nowhere that we went was far: the earth and sky were close and near" (p. 352).<sup>24</sup>

If Wolfe's attempt to express the immensity and single texture of his country often results in Whitmanesque catalogues and chants, his desire to express its character is manifested in the search for uniquely American things, places, institutions, and people. When he says, "No one has written any books about America--I mean the real America",<sup>25</sup> he is expressing the same dissatisfaction as Eugene does at Pulpit Hill, in his boredom with "Essays for College Men--Woodrow Wilson, Lord Bryce and Dean Briggs": "But there was no word here of the loud raucous voice of America, political conventions and the Big Brass Band, Tweed, Tammany, the Big Stick, lynching bees and black barbecue parties, the Boston Irish, and the damnable machinations of the Pope as exposed by the 'Babylon Hollow Trumpet' (Dem.),

the rape of the Belgian virgins, rum, oil, Wall Street and Mexico" (p. 330). Wolfe would have thought of these things--along with a hundred other American things enshrined in his novels: baseball, the railroad, the Civil War, the American circus, the courthouse, New York City--as legends. In all their apparent plainness or tawdriness, these distinctively American things have a symbolic and evocative power, and become "elfin and lovely": "Behind him, the cheap million lights of the concessionaries, the clatter, the racket, the confetti, the shrill blare of the saxophones, all the harsh joyless noise of his country, was softened, was made sad, far, and phantom. The wheeling merry-go-round, the blaring dance-orchestra, played 'K-K-K-Katy Beautiful Katy', 'Poor Little Buttercup', and 'Just a Baby's Prayer at Twilight'. And that cheap music turned elfin and lovely; it was mixed into magic--it became a part of the romantic and lovely Virginias" (p. 436).

In Wolfe's hands, these things become characteristic or representative of America, and the way he uses them to get at the heart of American culture concurs with the methods of the folkloristic school of history and sociology. Richard Dorson's views are representative: "The vital folklore and especially the legends of a given period in American history reflect the main concerns and values, tensions and anxieties, goals and drives of the period."<sup>26</sup> That is, the "lies" of legendry tell the truth about a society in a way that history--in its elitist preoccupation with politics and financial concerns--does not.

Wolfe's desire to express a truly American legend in Look Homeward, Angel may be seen in his, and Eugene's, search for an American ghost--for a superhuman, enduring, and omnipresent embodiment of the spirit of the land and its lost, lonely, hungry people. The problem is that America is

a young country that has, as yet, "no ghosts to haunt it" (p. 352).<sup>27</sup> In America, the very idea of a ghost is slightly ridiculous: "He was reading Euripides, and all around him a world of white and black was eating fried food. He was reading of ancient sorceries and old ghosts, but did an old ghost ever come to haunt this land? The ghost of Hamlet's Father, in Connecticut. '... I am thy father's spirit, / Doomed for a certain term to walk the night / Between Bloomington and Portland Maine'" (p. 352). Such a ghost as that of Hamlet's father is so obviously out of place in America, for America is an untamed wilderness which cannot forever draw its strength from transplanted European traditions, and yet has few venerable traditions of its own: "Stogged in the desert, half-broken and over-thrown, among the columns of lost temples strewn, there was no ruined image of Menkaura, there was no alabaster head of Akhnaton. Nothing had been done in stone" (p. 352).

This passage may be compared with the much later piece of work, "The Microscopic Gentleman from Japan."<sup>28</sup> Mr. Katamoto, a sculptor who lives in the flat directly below George Webber, is a tiny man who nevertheless performs "the labors of a Titan." One of his sculptures is described as a "North Dakota Pericles", and another as an "Ozymandias" (the reference to Shelley's poem suggesting titanic labours that have come to nothing, and been swallowed by the immensity of earth). While Mr. Katamoto's efforts belie the claim that "nothing had been done in stone" in America, it is equally clear that such stone-work as that of this little foreigner is altogether inappropriate, and even curiously inadequate, for the American environment. Nevertheless, Katamoto's "products were apparently in greater demand than those of American sculptors."

The young Eugene is similarly indiscriminate in his tastes: "He liked all weird fable and wild invention... he liked the fabulous wherever he found it, and for whatever purpose." Recognizing that legend is truer than fact, "He did not want his ghosts and marvels explained. Magic was magic." Yet he ignores, with that prejudice Americans often have against the common and home-grown, legendary materials that are native to his own country: "He wanted old ghosts--not Indian ghosts, but ghosts in armor, the spirit of old kings, and pillioned ladies with high coned hats." Suddenly, however, his truer instincts are touched: "Then, for the first time, he thought of the lonely earth he dwelt on. Suddenly, it was strange to him that he should read Euripides there in the wilderness" (pp. 351-352; emphasis mine).

The beginning of this passage shows that Eugene still connected the idea of "myth" and "fable" exclusively with foreign or ancient (especially Greek) literature: he read Euripides (Alcestis was the "noblest and loveliest of all the myths of Love and Death") and Aeschylus (although in Prometheus "the fable moved him more than the play"), and also Boccaccio and Swift ("there's no better fabulist in the world"). From Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, however, he learned the distinction between art and myth: it is "not only one of the greatest plays in the world, it is one of the greatest stories... --perfect, inevitable, and fabulous." That is, the story itself is mythic; but not all art is mythic: only the greatest and the most moving combines art and myth. The compliment to Swift must be considered in the light of Wolfe's opinion, expressed in the "To the Reader" prefacing Look Homeward, Angel, that "a more autobiographical work than Gulliver's Travels cannot easily be imagined." The combination of auto-

biography and fable indicates that Wolfe felt truth to be best embodied in fable, or seeming lie, and the frequent allusions to Swift's book (see also pp. 58, 66) suggest that Wolfe is conscious of using similar fictional techniques.<sup>29</sup>

This whole passage (pp. 351-352), then, is extremely important as an index to Eugene's development, summarizing many of the main themes discussed so far in this study: the importance of distinguishing fantasy from myth or legend, of abandoning mere fantasy and learning to recognize the truth in myth, and of sloughing off borrowed culture and forging an individualistic, or native, heritage out of the material of one's own national environment. It shows Eugene groping towards a concept of American legend, a definition of the American ghost.

An earlier scene had shown Eugene imagining himself as "The Dixie Ghost": "He became the hero-actor-star, the lord of the cinema, and the lover of a beautiful movie-queen, as heroic as his postures, with a superior actuality for every make-believe. He was the Ghost and he who played the Ghost, the cause that minted legend into fact. He was those heroes whom he admired" (p. 227). Here the gunslinger, an American ghost or legend, has been "minted into fact", but not into art, for in Eugene's mind, and in the thousands of paperback thrillers of the Wild West when "passions were primitive", the whole western romance is invariably set against "the convenient blaze of a constantly setting sun." But Eugene's game of being "those heroes whom he admired" is not merely a game: this, too, is fact, for while most people do not act like heroes, they all think like heroes. The hero is a psychic projection, not only for an individual, but for a whole culture; and as Wolfe is to say in The Hills Beyond, "the spirit of a people is recorded in the heroes it picks."<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps the real hero of Look Homeward, Angel is Ben, and he makes a climactic and triumphant appearance in the book's last chapter, in the form of a ghost. As Eugene questions the phantom on the porch of Gant's marble shop, Ben insists that he is not a ghost--meaning simply that he is not a ghost like that of Hamlet's father. For America has no such ghosts; they belong to the European tradition: "I am thy father's spirit, doomed for a certain term to walk the night--'But not here! Not here, Ben!' said Eugene. 'Where?' said Ben wearily. 'In Babylon! In Thebes! In all the other places. But not here!'" (p. 517). Eugene is still astounded that "miracles" can occur in his own country, that America can actually be the home of myth and legend. But this chapter shows Wolfe attempting to build something in stone, some lasting, legendary tradition or symbol, in the sprawling wilderness of his country. Where Old Gant had failed to carve an angel because he was not an artist--"He wanted to wreak something dark and unspeakable in him into cold stone. He wanted to carve an angel's head ... He never learned to carve an angel's head" (p. 4).--through the ghost of Ben these marble angels are brought to life, and do a haunting moonlight dance right in Gant's shop. Eugene, the young American artist, sees Gant's angels come to life, while Wolfe the writer carves them in words. If Canby is right in declaring that Gant, "in his vast energy and incredible vitality is the old America where man almost became worthy of his continent",<sup>31</sup> then Eugene represents a new and refined breed of American who does have this worthiness within his reach--if only for a fleeting but transcendent moment.

It is Ben, however, even more than the angels, who is the lasting monument to America, a legend made out of its own earth. Through Ben, "all the minutes of lost time collected and stood still", and Eugene saw

a vision of "the fabulous lost cities" and the "vanished cultures", of all the world's legendry and history intermingled. He also saw it all vanish, but "amid the fumbling march of races to extinction, the giant rhythms of the earth remained." Even though linear history and its facts are eaten away by time, myths and legends remain, and although "new men" come with their "new gods", they are really the same old gods in slightly different garb. Ben has already taken his place beside Adonis, Attis, and Osiris (the names of Proserpine, Ceres, and Demeter are mentioned specifically) by the beginning of Part Two, where he is linked with the advent of Spring: Spring is "that sharp knife" (p. 78) with its "fresh-bladed tender grass", and Ben's "face is like a blade, and a knife, and a flicker of light"; every Spring the plum tree "will grow young again", and Ben's face, burned into Eugene's memory, "scowls beautifully forever" (p. 137).

Legend keeps man in touch with the earth's cyclical rhythms of renewal, and is thus an answer to "lost time" and all the "forgotten faces" that have fled down the corridor of years. In America, "all of the gods have lost the way"--"the earth is full of ancient rumor and they cannot find the way" (p. 78)--and it is the job of the American artist to rekindle the old gods in the wilderness of his traditionless country, in a form that will be meaningful to Americans. Americans could not envision Apollo prowling the streets of Altamont, haunting the newspaper office or the Uneeda Lunch No. 3, any more than they could see Thomas Aquinas in Exeter--but they do feel for the ghost of Ben: "We can believe in the nothingness of life, we can believe in the nothingness of death and of life after death--but who can believe in the nothingness of Ben? Like Apollo, who did his penance to the high god in the sad house of King Admetus, he came, a god with broken feet, into the gray hovel of this world.



And he lived here a stranger, trying to recapture the music of the lost world, trying to recall the great forgotten language, the lost faces, the stone, the leaf, the door" (p. 465).

Pure "fantasy" continues throughout the Wolfe canon; in The Web and the Rock, for example, there is Monk Webber's chapter-long reverie over his winning as a mistress the wealthy and elegant woman whose lost purse he has found and returned.<sup>32</sup> But these fantasies are always made fun of: they picture the mind of adolescent America, a country which is still growing up, and whose legends are still in the process of "gelling"--or rather, whose natives are still in the process of learning to accept and to take seriously their own indigenous legends.

In You Can't Go Home Again, George Webber encounters a New York waiter who tells him an exotic "Armenian" story in the hopes that George will write it up and split the profits with him. The story is grotesquely sensational and contrived--a product of popular fantasy--and the waiter assumes that the mere fact of its foreignness is "enough to guarantee rare colour and fascinating interest." Upon the conclusion of the story the last waitress leaves the restaurant; the waiter says good-night to her and then relates to George, very briefly, her poignant history. He ends with "a far-off look of tragic but tranquil contemplation in his eyes", then returns to his gross enthusiasm over the "Armenian" story. Clearly, the story of the American waitress is not only the more moving story, but the truer and the better one, and finally the more universal and "legendary" one.<sup>33</sup> The waiter does not realize this because it is only American, with none of the exotic splendour of Armenia. Wolfe makes a similar point in the story "Gentlemen of the Press",<sup>34</sup> which ridicules the reporter "Red" for trying to trace Lincoln's ancestry back to Napoleon: Americans will

not accept the fact that they are just plain Americans; they must have something more exotic. "On Leprechauns"<sup>35</sup> criticizes Americans for pampering foreign artists (especially Irish ones) and kicking their native sons in the teeth, and "Portrait of a Literary Critic"<sup>36</sup> cites Mark Twain as a fine writer while satirically adding that he could never have been truly great "just because he was--American." This emphasis on American art, and on plain American stories as ample material for art, is thus one of the major themes of Wolfe's last great novel, and also one with which he was occupied in many of the later short works. But, as this chapter has shown, it was a theme which had obsessed him from the time of Look Homeward, Angel.

It is in The Hills Beyond, however--Wolfe's final, unfinished work--that he was to consummate, as far as he was able in his short life, his desire to create a legendary picture of America, to tell "some of the stories about America that have never been told."

NOTES

1. Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden (Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 5.
2. Ibid., pp. 10-11. For a similar distinction between a myth as it appears in high culture, and as it is manifested in the general or popular culture, see Herbert J. Muller, Thomas Wolfe (Norfolk, Conn: New Directions, 1947), pp. 11-12. Muller treats "the great national myth, the American Dream", saying that it "appears as the background of many folk legends and tall tales; as a political creed, embodied in the life and work of Franklin, Jefferson, Jackson and Lincoln; as a poetic and religious image in the work of Whitman, Emerson and the Transcendentalists; as a philosophical faith in William James and John Dewey. It has also taken many crude forms, of naive optimism, noisy chauvinism, brawling individualism, vulgar materialism..." [emphasis mine].
3. Ibid., p. 4.
4. Ibid., p. 11.
5. Look Homeward, Angel (New York: Scribner's, 1929), pp. 376-378. In this chapter, all subsequent page references to Look Homeward, Angel are contained in parentheses immediately following the quotation.
6. Marx, p. 25.
7. Nathan L. Rothman, "Thomas Wolfe and James Joyce: A Study in Literary Influence", A Southern Vanguard, ed. Allen Tate (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1947), p. 59. Rep. in Enigma.
8. Marx, p. 25.
9. A paralled passage in the Notebooks traces a similar development in the young Wolfe: "When I was ten years old, I read myself blind and dizzy in all romantic legendry:--the Iliad and the Odyssey at the same time as the Algers, the Hentys.... But I was born ... with an autumnal heart... It seems to me that this great pageant of my life, beginning in cheap legendry, in which all was victory, faultless perfection, has led my dark soul across perilous seas, scarring me here, taking a tooth or an ear, putting its splendid blemish on until now I come to my autumn home ... beyond youth, beyond life, beyond death." This is a passage in which, as the editors say, Wolfe "puts a mythological construction on his attraction to older women." (Notebooks, Vol.I, pp. 79-81).
10. cf. the epigraph on p. 1: "Remembering speechlessly we seek the great forgotten language." Eugene's "goat-cry" and George Webber's "squeal" may be other manifestations of this lost language.

11. Richard S. Kennedy, The Window of Memory: The Literary Career of Thomas Wolfe (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), p. 116.
12. Notebooks, p. 866.
13. Another of these poems was "O why should the spirit of mortal be proud"--which Gant liked to refer to as "Lincoln's favorite poem" (p. 51). That Wolfe considered Lincoln to be one of America's most important legendary figures is evident throughout his work, and most conspicuously in The Hills Beyond, p. 169.
14. Kennedy, p. 2.
15. Byron, Don Juan, Vol. XI, 37.
16. "Pisgah" was the mountain from which Moses was allowed to glimpse the Promised Land. (Deuteronomy, 3:27).
17. Ira Progoff, Jung's Psychology and its Social Meaning (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 72.
18. Of Time and the River, pp. 669-670.
19. Frederick Jackson Turner made a similar observation: "The South represented typical Englishmen, modified by a warm climate and servile labour, and living in baronial fashion on great plantations." (op.cit., p. 14).
20. Edward C. Aswell, "Thomas Wolfe: The Playwright Who Discovered He Wasn't", in Look Homeward, Angel: A Play by Ketti Frings (New York: Scribner's, 1958), [p. 8.]. In this same introduction, Aswell quotes a comment Wolfe made on his play Welcome To Our City in a letter to Professor Baker: "I have written this play with 30-odd named characters because it required it, not because I didn't know how to save paint. Some day I'm going to write a play with 50, 80, a hundred people--a whole town, a whole race, a whole epoch." ([pp. 8-9]).
21. Wolfe in a letter to Perkins; quoted in Holman, South, p. 181.
22. Notebooks, Vol.I, p. 145.
23. You Can't Go Home Again, p. 454. That McHarg's first impulse--again arising from the "unconscious mind"--is to go to "Plymouth", is the crowning touch to this scene of the two Americans in exile.
24. The choice of "Cumberland" and "London" is significant: London is the only European city larger than New York, and Wordsworth described Cumberland, in "The Old Cumberland Beggar", as a region of "wild, unpeopled hills" (l.14), and thus fairly comparable to the Altamont area.
25. SL, p. 173.

26. Richard M. Dorson, America in Legend (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), p. xiv.  
What Dorson has to say about the Paul Bunyan legends is also interesting: "Most Paul Bunyan books fall under the heading of fakelore.... Furthermore, the actual contents of the Paul Bunyan books greatly distort the actual nature of folk tradition, by presenting a saccharine superman, suitable for a Walt Disney production but not for the raw, coarse nature of much folkstuff" (p. xv). The word "saccharine" brings to mind much of Eugene's romantic fantasy, and suggests that his realization of the importance of hard reality and blemish is a significant step on the road to understanding legend.
27. Earle Birney has said much the same thing of Canada, "It's only by our lack of ghosts we're haunted." See "Can. Lit.", in Ice Cod Bell or Stone (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962), p. 18.
28. You Can't Go Home Again, pp. 28-32.
29. Wolfe even contemplated dedicating one of his later books "To the honored memory of Lemuel Gulliver, Esq.", whom he describes quite frankly, and historically, as "an English Gentleman and Explorer of the Eighteenth Century." Notebooks, Vol. II, p. 871.
30. The Hills Beyond, p. 172.
31. Canby, p. 167.  
Frederick Jackson Turner has explained, "At the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe, not simply the development of Germanic germs.... The advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines." (op.cit., p. 11).
32. The Web and the Rock, Chapter 16.
33. You Can't Go Home Again, pp. 323-329.
34. The Hills Beyond, p. 43.
35. Ibid., p. 112.
36. Ibid., p. 118.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE HILLS BEYOND

Nathan Rothman argues that, starting with Of Time and the River, the major influence upon Wolfe changed from Joyce to Whitman. With the second novel we have much more frankly the "pure poetic chant", "the impersonal, racial voice", "the great catalogs of times and years and places, names, occupations, men and women, sounds and smells, words and gestures of America."<sup>1</sup> The shift is evident even in the late chapters of Look Homeward, Angel, especially with Eugene Gant's first taste of independent travel. On his trip to the east coast he sees "the toughs, the crooks, the vagabonds of a nation--Chicago gunmen, bad niggers from Texas, Bowery bums, pale Jews with soft palms, from the shops of the city, Swedes from the Middle-West, Irish from New England, mountaineers from Tennessee and North Carolina, whores, in shoals and droves, from everywhere...." (p. 427). The man who would write his country's legend, who would tell "some of the stories about America that have never been told", must lose his own identity so that he may find it, must immerse himself in and explore the strongest drives of his race if he is to understand those drives in himself--and this is the function of the "chant", the "racial voice." Eugene's first summer away from home on his own is an "initiation to the voyage" and "a prelude to exile" (p. 431), and this is how the boy begins his discovery of the true America--for Americans are "a nomad race" (p. 428), and wandering is part of their essence.

The change that Rothman notes is important, for it is from a European influence to an American. It may be argued that much of the setting for Of Time and the River is European, and that because the field of discovery is Europe, the controlling mythic patterns, at least on the surface of the

book, are also European: "Wolfe decided to give shape to Eugene's search by the use of certain Greek legends which would almost never be mentioned except in the eight section headings. From time to time, the hero would be Orestes, Telemachus, Proteus, Jason, Antaeus, and Kronos; twice, departing from the Greek myths, he would be Faust. Each would suggest the nature of the journey in that particular segment."<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, according to Rothman, the material and voice of Of Time and the River are more essentially American than in Look Homeward, Angel.<sup>3</sup> Wolfe himself says that he discovered America only by going to Europe, that he in fact thought more about his country, and learned more about it, when he was away from it: "I had found out during these years that the way to discover one's own country was to leave it; that the way to find America was to find it in one's heart, one's memory, and one's spirit, in a foreign land."<sup>4</sup>

It may be stated as a paradox in Wolfe's work that although home is the subject or message, travel is the medium: "Of wandering forever and the earth again." One of Wolfe's favourite poems was Matthew Arnold's "The Buried Life", and Wolfe adopted the phrase as the subtitle of Look Homeward, Angel. The poem is full of Wolfean language and sentiment--"nameless sadness", "unspeakable desire", "skill to utter", "a bolt is shot back", and so on. The dominant image in the poem is that of the river, and the final lines read, "And then he thinks he knows / The hills where his life rose, / And the sea where it goes." While "the sea where it goes" is the subject of Of Time and the River and much of Wolfe's writing, "the hills where his life rose" is the subject of his final, unfinished manuscript The Hills Beyond. Even more than Look Homeward, Angel, this final fragment is concerned with Wolfe's roots, for whereas the first book used

materials from the writer's childhood environment, the latter probes deep into the very childhood of those environs, into the childhood of America itself.

The original title of this last book was "The Hills Beyond Pentland", and the vast difference between this title and "The Hills Beyond" will be apparent: it is a difference in direction or focus, the former looking outward, and the latter inward but still with an ambiguous suggestion of the world outside. "The Hills Beyond Pentland" is equivalent to "beyond the hills", and in Look Homeward, Angel we are told that "Beyond the hills were the mines of King Solomon, ... the moonlit roofs of Bagdad, the little grated blinds of Samarkand, the moonlit camels of Bythinia ..." (p. 161). The list goes on to include all the exotic and romantic imaginings of a boy. The hills are "the cup of reality" (p. 158), and Eugene felt that within their ring there was "confusion and waste" and formlessness, whereas beyond the hills was the perfect, ordered world of romance and fantasy: "There was no disorder in enchantment" (p. 160). By the end of that book he has learned that childhood fantasy is simply unreal, untrue, and in the course of the next novel he learns that true reality is in the hills, in his roots, in discovering the legendary qualities, the heightened realities, in his own folk. Look Homeward, Angel is full of words such as "hillbound", "hill-haunted", "hillborn", "hill-lost", "mountain-walled", "prison-pent", and by the time of The Hills Beyond the focus has shifted from trying to escape from the hills to learning to escape through the hills. The following comment in the Notebooks is roughly contemporaneous with The Hills Beyond: "Each man of us, he has his own America, his own stretch, from which here outward he shall shape his scheme, until the lengths, the patterns, and the prospect is all his,



but he must start first with his own."<sup>5</sup> Legend, in fact, is what results from "the fusion of two strong egotisms, Eliza's inbrooding and Gant's expanding outward."<sup>6</sup> One must go inwards and backwards in order to expand outward and become universal, and this is what The Hills Beyond does.

This is why it is so important to Wolfe in The Story of a Novel that he has renounced the desire to visit a million cities, meet a million people, and, in short, do everything that could possibly, and impossibly, be done in a human lifetime: "And now I really believe that so far as the artist is concerned, the unlimited extent of human experience is not so important for him as the depth and intensity with which he experiences things."<sup>7</sup> The completion of Of Time and the River sees a change from the restless, aimless wanderer, to the man who begins to look homeward and inward for his meanings, who looks not at a million things, but into the heart of a single thing that he knows:

The quality of my memory is characterized, I believe, in a more than ordinary degree by the intensity of its sense impressions. . . . I would be sitting, for example, on the terrace of a café watching the flash and play of life before me on the Avenue de l'Opéra and suddenly I would remember the iron railing that goes along the boardwalk at Atlantic City. I could see it instantly just the way it was, the heavy iron pipe; its raw, galvanized look; the way the joints were fitted together. It was all so vivid and concrete that I could feel my hand upon it and know the exact dimensions, its size and weight and shape. And suddenly I would realize that I had never seen any railing that looked like this in Europe. And this utterly familiar, common thing would suddenly be revealed to me with all the wonder with which we discover a thing which we have seen all our life and yet never known before.<sup>8</sup>

These intense sensual memories are legendary; in Wolfe's mind, the iron railing at Atlantic City, like the wall and the door, is characteristically and essentially American. It should be noted, too, that these sense

experiences take on the force of legend only at a significant remove in time, space, or motion. In Look Homeward, Angel Eugene pondered the fact that so many of his remembered sensations "had been caught from a whirling landscape through the windows of the train":

And it was this that awed him--the weird combination of fixity and change, the terrible moment of immobility stamped with eternity in which, passing life at great speed, both the observer and the observed seem frozen in time.... [It was] like those motion-pictures that describe the movements of a swimmer making a dive, or a horse taking a hedge--movement is petrified suddenly in mid-air, the inexorable completion of an act is arrested. Then, completing its parabola, the suspended body plops down into the pool. Only these images that burnt in him existed without beginning or ending, without the essential structure of time (p. 159).

Like all legends, they exist outside time, in a cyclic pattern or parabola of timelessness. At this point, however, Eugene is merely baffled by the seeming paradox that these fixed images and moments, Wordsworthian "spots of time", are caught through the window of a speeding train. But there is no contradiction, for the train itself is an American legend, and legends themselves stand still, are frozen, at the same time that they embody the forward movement and destiny of a nation.

It would not be accurate to say that The Hills Beyond owes its legendary character to this Proustian type of heightened sensual remembrance. In this later work, the distance necessary for the flourishing of Wolfean legend is not achieved through the agonized memory of a single American, but through the memory of the whole nation. This accounts for the greater objectivity of Wolfe's style in The Hills Beyond; the book is an historical novel, in the truest sense. As Robert Penn Warren noted prophetically in

May, 1935, "Mr. Wolfe promises to write some historical novels, and they may well be crucial in the definition of his genius, because he may be required to re-order the use of his powers."<sup>9</sup>

Sadly, Wolfe's critics have not considered The Hills Beyond to be "crucial" at all; in fact, it has been largely ignored. Among the major critics, Richard Kennedy has devoted the most space to Wolfe's little posthumous orphan, and his comment is limited to a single paragraph in his huge and otherwise definitive study of the literary career: "The collection of anecdotal improvisation and the creation of legendary figures like Bear and Zack Joyner have attracted the interest of folklorists and regionalists but scarcely anyone else. With his excursion into tall tale and folk humor Wolfe tried hard. Unfortunately, it is all as consciously imitative as his attempts to write 'folk drama' in his student days. He was working in a dead tradition like an antique-maker. The kind of legendizing that came naturally was the conversion of his own experience into living legend."<sup>10</sup> Kennedy does recognize that Wolfe had a theory of legend: on the same page (but no longer talking specifically about The Hills Beyond) he states one of Wolfe's basic aims as "the apprehension of that 'condensed and heightened form of reality' he called legend." But in so brusquely dismissing The Hills Beyond on account of the inferior quality of its art, Kennedy and most other critics have failed to consider its importance from a standpoint of theory and technique. Furthermore, a study of Wolfe's final master-plan<sup>11</sup> reveals that the author did not intend The Hills Beyond to stand alone, but envisioned it as the first volume of his great work, to come at the beginning and to set the stage and background (both technically and thematically) for all that followed.

The Hills Beyond might almost be read as a work of theory. Along with his many other styles, Wolfe frequently used the expository, and this aspect of his voice has, again, been ignored by the critics (except, of course, in the case of the letters, the Notebooks, and The Story of a Novel, in all of which the expository occurs in its frankest form). Passages of pure or but thinly-disguised theory, philosophy, or explanation are interspersed freely throughout all the major novels, but one is most aware of this in The Hills Beyond. Despite its unfinished state, it has a more "finished" quality than any of the other books (and perhaps for this very reason it is a less satisfying expression of Wolfe's art). It is pervaded by a calm, a control, an objectivity, and a sense of direction (although still marked by Wolfe's sprawl and gigantic scope) quite uncharacteristic of the earlier works. The text is larded with quite objective comments and whole passages in which the author, speaking in his own voice, discusses everything from history, myth, and legend, to anthropology, sociology, and his own opinions of the characters he is presenting. One of these passages is especially significant, for it occurs in the early chapters and presents, in the form of a miniature essay, most of the book's themes and theories. This is the same passage of which Leslie Field comments that it is "almost as if Wolfe were explaining the evolution of a folk tale or a myth",<sup>12</sup> and it begins, "Bear Joyner, like his famous son, was increate with myth, because the very nature of the man persuaded it.... It is not the Myth that falsifies the true identity of man.... The Myth is true."<sup>13</sup> In regard to this concept--perhaps the most important idea in the book--the author cites the example of Lincoln, saying that the unauthenticated legends surrounding the man give a far more truthful picture of him than do the verifiable historical facts. The passage goes on, for

many pages, to present several more of the book's central themes.

First of all, we are told that "Myth is founded on extorted fact" (p. 170), that legendary stories, "if they did not happen--they should have!" (p. 174). This stance of idealism, of legend as a primordial ideal, will be familiar from the first two chapters of this study. We "cannot guess the reason" for the shape of these legends, "except that men sought India once" (p. 170)--and for Wolfe this is sufficient explanation.

Secondly, Wolfe notes the importance of place, or geography, to the character of a legend: "All things must have their precincts, and our own are there, in Old Catawba, with Bear Joyner, in the hills of home" (p. 170). We are told repeatedly that it does not matter where Bear Joyner came from, for he was formed out of the hills of Catawba, and one need look no further. Of Zack Joyner, the author says he was "as much a part of all their lives as the geography of their native earth, the climate of their special weather. No other place but Old Catawba could have produced him" (pp. 173-174). From here, it is but a short step to the idea that America, because of her special climate and topography, will have her own special legends, and that these legends may in turn be used to deduce the national character.

This gives rise to a third premise: "If, as Carlyle says, the history of the world is recorded in the lives of its great men, so, too, the spirit of a people is recorded in the heroes it picks" (p. 172). It is not enough, then, to say that a hero is "increate with myth": his people, too, are increate with a need or desire for certain kinds of heroes. And "it does not matter", the author tells us, "how much the man shaped the myth, how much the myth shaped the man, how much Zack Joyner created his

own folk, or how much his people created him" (p. 173).

Finally, Wolfe leaves us in no doubt as to his legendary intentions in the creation of Bear and Zack Joyner. Zack, he says frankly, was the people's "hero", "their own native Lincoln", "their Crockett and Paul Bunyan", "a native divinity", "their legend and their myth": "a kind of living prophecy of all that they themselves might wish to be" (p. 173). Furthermore, Leslie Field has shown that in Bear Joyner Wolfe has created a legendary figure who conforms in his major attributes to traditional American heroes, such as Mike Fink and Paul Bunyan. Wolfe drew "heavily on folklore material for the purpose of writing his fictional history of America", and Bear Joyner is "the father of America--an American Moses."<sup>14</sup>

It is well to keep in mind Richard Dorson's warning: "Must we explain that a novelist does not create folk heroes, unless his characters pass into oral tradition?"<sup>15</sup> But it must also be remembered that Wolfe's concept of legend encompasses much more than the word's textbook connotation of the oral and pseudo-historical. The Hills Beyond deals mainly with the relationship between history and legend, and these in some ways become metaphors, respectively, for fact and fiction. Etymologically, legend is a way of "reading"; for Wolfe it is also a method of writing.

In this expository manner, then, Wolfe early on presents the themes, and also the techniques, that are to inform The Hills Beyond, and eventually the whole of his grand scheme. To follow each of these ideas as it unfolds would be much too lengthy an undertaking for this study; it is enough to note that Wolfe was deliberately occupied with manipulating his materials according to an integrated theory of legend.

Another aspect of this theory, as we have seen, is symbol, and we may take the American courthouse as an example of Wolfe's conscious realization

of symbol. In examining the ways in which an author can rejuvenate popularized but archetypal materials, Leslie Fiedler explains, "The writer can, like Graham Greene or Robert Penn Warren, capture for serious purposes--that is, re-render through complex and subtle Signatures--debased "popular" Archetypes; the thriller, the detective story, the western or science-fiction."<sup>16</sup> This is exactly what Wolfe does in his marvellous re-creation of the courtroom drama (pp. 197-203), which "hasn't changed a bit" since Zack Joyner's time. "The whole history of man is here", and "in it, somehow, is the whole enigma of our violent and tormented life--the huge complex of America, with all its innocence and guilt, its justice and its cruelty, its lawlessness and its law" (p. 199). With the courthouse, as so often in Look Homeward, Angel, we again see Wolfe re-discovering or re-defining a legend, where before was only a welter of popular fantasy. Drawing a fine line between sentiment and melodrama, on the one hand, and genuine legend, Wolfe attempts to describe what it is that Americans have found so fascinating about trials and lawyers and courtrooms, concluding, "The county courthouse was, in short, America--the wilderness America, the sprawling, huge, chaotic, criminal America" (p. 255). In developing this symbol or legend of pioneer America, Wolfe notes "the way the county courthouse shaped human life and destiny through all America": "In Libya Hill the courthouse was the center of the community, for Libya Hill had been the county courthouse before it was a town. The town grew up around the courthouse, made a Square, and straggled out along the roads that led away to the four quarters of the earth" (p. 253). In this way, the courthouse is the New World counterpart of the European church. Whereas in Europe it had been the church which was the central structure in any town, and the focus for ecclesiastical, governmental, and

even military power, in America the courthouse has emerged as temple, the law as the new religion, and the judge or lawyer as priest, presiding over an obscure but somehow cleansing and necessary pattern of rituals. "The lawyer", says the author, "was a kind of medicine man to the community" (p. 196), possessed of an esoteric, recondite, and truly "mystic" (as it is termed on p. 193) body of charms, incantations, and rites which gave him a power over the common people. Thus arose the phenomenon of the lawyer/politician in America, as law became, not a function of ecclesiastical life (as it was in Europe), but a religion in itself. Just as priests had their eyes set more on positions of political power than on heaven, so "from the beginnings of American life the profession of the law was commonly considered, not so much an end in itself, as a means to an end" (p. 196).

Zack Joyner, of course, is Wolfe's personification of this force in American society, and his way had been paved by the "Old Man of the Tribe" in his persistence, even late in life, in learning to read: "The pattern of divergence was set by the founder of the clan. At a time when it was the convention of all men in the wilderness to be illiterate, in a place where the knowledge contained in books was of no earthly use, nothing would suit old Bear Joyner but that he must learn to read" (pp. 171-172). And this is what makes these figures legendary: they are prototypes, as well as embodiments, of the basic drives that have formed the American culture and character. This is as true, to a certain extent, of the other members of the Joyner clan as it is of Bear and Zack, although in this unfinished novel the others are not nearly so well developed. Leslie Field observes that the Joyner children, "in their various occupations-- lawyer, politician, teacher, businessman--represent the occupational face



of America. They stand as prototypes of myriad rural and urban occupations."<sup>17</sup> And Old Catawba, as Thomas Boyle explains, is "an explicit microcosm of the historical American experience."<sup>18</sup>

There is a significant difference, however, in the legendary or archetypal force behind Zack Joyner, for example, and his less illustrious brother Theodore. For while Theodore does represent a certain kind or class of American, the undeniable element in the nation's life that he stands for is a retrogressive one. Turnus-like, he represents a force that has stood in the way of America's true destiny, a force too weak to prevail but strong enough to be a nuisance. For Theodore is "the plumed knight", a flower of the false Southern military aristocracy, and one of the features of the South's "intrenchment" in fantasy from which Eugene recoiled in Look Homeward, Angel. In fact, Colonel Joyner made his first appearance in Look Homeward, Angel, as Colonel Pettigrew. William Styron has said of Wolfe's description of Pettigrew, on page 288 of Look Homeward, Angel, that the "otherwise vivid passage ... is diminished rather than reinforced by the culminating Joyce-like allusion: ... 'He was a very parfit gentil knight.'"<sup>19</sup> Quite to the contrary--the "parfit gentil knight" touch is the very thing that is most important, for it exposes the Colonel as a transplanted and hoked-up European legend. Just as America has no Claudian ghosts, so too no genuine American hero could be a knight: America has its military heroes, but they are not "parfit" or "gentil". Americans, in their very efforts to be heroic, are often grotesque, and the result is a Pettigrew or a Theodore Joyner, who are but weak shadows of legends, aborted attempts to live up to true legends. Theodore is "the stock type of the 'Southern Colonel-plumed knight'"

(p. 207), and a symbol of the South's penchant for fantasy, turning away from "the hard and ugly realities" and escaping "into the soft dream of vanished glories" (p. 210).

In the Reconstruction South, this fantasizing adopted a form almost like that of religion. In The Hills Beyond, we are told that after the Civil War many southerners went through a series of "psychic processes" that gave rise to "a vast mythology of the war"--a mythology that had the force of "supernatural sanction: and that "became a kind of folk religion" (p. 210). Wolfe is here parodying the steps in the formation of an organized religion: first the psychic need, then the mythologizing, then the divine sanction. the next steps are a priest, a vocabulary or litany, and a church. Theodore Joyner, who "resurrects" his military school and himself becomes "a kind of sacred symbol" (p. 212), is one of the new priests. But a church cannot operate without an order of service, and this "concrete manifestation" of the mythology comes to Theodore in the middle of the night as an "inspiration", in the form of "a sequence of ringing phrases": "First at Manassas, fightingest at Antietam Creek, and by far the farthest in the Wilderness" (p. 211). Compared to America's true religion--which, for better or worse, is the law--Theodore's cult is a false and pranked-up religion of fantasy, taking its nourishment from an imagined and decayed past rather than from the force and promise of a young nation's destiny.

Clearly, Wolfe ridiculed Southern legendizing because it was so elitist and exclusively Southern, whereas a true American legend must somehow be true for the whole country. A passage in the Notebooks explains, in no uncertain terms, Wolfe's opinion of this aspect of the Southern mentality:

"It came about that in the South, more than in any other section of the land, we became makers of myths about our lives, makers of myths about all living, and these myths did not often have the core of truth or beauty that a great myth had, but were more often spurious, sweet, and shoddy, and behind their florid phrases dwelt forever the shame and silence of our fear."<sup>20</sup> Theodore Joyner is one of several characters in The Hills Beyond who represent this intrenched, retrogressive quality of life in the South. Other examples of this strain are Old Looky Thar, the grotesquely wounded practitioner of "professional veteranism", and Theodore's wife, the type of the "pure Southern lady" whose sole standard for measuring character is "family".

Even more inbred and retrograde, perhaps, are "The People"--those who, when the true American legend was to "go to town", stubbornly and ignorantly kept to the hills. They are "turned in upon themselves", "unseeking", "turned backwards now, world-lost, in what was once new land!" (p. 184). At one point, the author even indicates that his sympathy is with the "town" Joyners by the use of a first-person pronoun: "They [the Joyners who stayed in the hills] would not come with us. They did not have it in them to push on with the Joyners of the great will, the great spirit, the great determination" (pp. 190-191). In fact, America's "national history could almost be written in the lives of men who went to town" (p. 182), and this goes a long way towards accounting for the importance of the city as a symbol or legendary ideal in Wolfe's work.

From this perspective, it might almost be said that The Hills Beyond tells the story of America in terms of progress. Thus, "it really was this sense of two directions that divided them. The Libya Hill Joyners were facing ever toward the world, and those in Zebulon away from it" (p. 183).

As Bear Joyner said of the country branch of the clan, "they lived only fifty miles away" from the town, but it was "the wrong way". Both the country and the South, then, are "wrong" directions, and this is equally true of the East. For the East, like the South, has tended to hang on to the vestiges of European culture, to take "refuge in the glories of an imagined past" (p. 160). It is the East which originated "The Society of the Sons and Daughters of the Aborigines", with its preposterous aristocratic pretensions, and in Zack Joyner's election campaign he declared "that the East was dead, or should be" (p. 162): "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" (p. 160). Zachariah was one of these "new men". Under his banner of "should be"--the same banner under which Wolfe campaigns his theory of the essential truth of legend--he became the first Governor of Old Catawba to hail from the West: "The West had won at last. And the leader and hero of that victory became from that time on the symbol of the West" (p. 163).

From the earliest pages of The Hills Beyond, where Wolfe recounts the story of the "Lost Colony" disappearing with no trace but an arrow pointing towards the western wilderness, it is clear that in the author's mind the West is the Truth, the true America, the true direction of the country's destiny. Thomas Boyle has noted the importance of "the image of the West" in Wolfe's writings, declaring that it "has itself become an exponent of that nebulous notion, the American dream." Furthermore, "The West is a primordial image in human experience simply by virtue of the direction of the earth's rotation. West represents the end of the basic dawn to dusk cycle.... The analogy between west and human destiny is an archetypal metaphor."<sup>21</sup>

Boyle, however, does not cite Wolfe's clearest statement on this matter, contained in a comment to Edward Miller, his companion on a tour of the Western parks taken just weeks before Wolfe's death: "Almost every American, no matter where born, is a Westerner at heart.... The West is inevitable. Somehow or other the great development in this country is taking the western direction--not north or south--but moving across. The West will be truly great when it has enough people. The West is the American horizon."<sup>22</sup>

Nor does Boyle examine closely enough the character Dolph Joyner, an important personification or legend of this drive in The Hills Beyond. Dolph, in fact, may have inspired the book's title: "He looked and saw the hills, and his kindling vision leaped beyond them" (p. 218). He is described as a latter-day "Moses" who glimpses the "Promised Land" and "the golden cities of the plains" (p. 218). The West is the direction of his vision, and finally he shocks his poor "aristocratic" parents by "going out West, to the Territory of Oklahoma", for this was "the thing that his sure instinct told him was inevitably right" (p. 221). Wolfe promises "to return to him a little later", and it is probable that Dolph would have had a much more prominent place in the book's total scheme, for he is a type of the American adventurer and visionary.

An adventurer of a different sort is John Webber, the "stranger whose sermon was brick." This man, described as being "somewhat like a brick himself" (p. 237), confronts the problem that "nothing had been done in stone in America" by recommending stone or brick as the material for any new building. As a builder, he is Wolfe's legendary personification of what Reconstruction should have been in the South, for he arrives in Libya Hill with his "sermon" not long after the end of the war, and in Edward Joyner's mind he was the "incarnation" of the "new order" (p. 239). In

identifying John Webber with a crucial turning point in his own life and in the history of Libya Hill, Edward divides time into two periods-- "Before Webber" and "After Webber" (Or "B.W." and "A.W."). The former was a time of insularity and stagnation in the South, and the latter a time "when the townspeople's thoughts and visionings were going out" (p. 239). "B.W." and "A.W.", one surmises, might just as easily stand for "Before the War" and "After the War".

In the late chapters of The Hills Beyond, Edward seems to emerge as Wolfe's protagonist, possibly the successor to Eugene Gant and George Webber. His father Robert achieves something of legendary stature himself, and he certainly has the right instincts concerning the false and the true in legendry. He is appalled at the spectacle of Old Looky Thar, for instance, and like Zack he was "perfectly aware of a fatal weakness in the Southern temperament--its capacity for romantic self-deception and mythology": "God knows, before the war the thing was bad enough--Sir Walter Scott, fake chivalry, fake lords and ladies, fake ideals of honor, fake wooden columns on the houses--everything fake except the plumbing, which wasn't, fake because it didn't exist at all" (p. 248). Both Zack and Robert have a low opinion of Theodore's "tin-soldierdom", for they are the carriers of the true legend and have no use for the "gimcrack frills and tin-horn fopperies" of the stagnant South.

The characters in The Hills Beyond, then, fall into two categories: those who represent the inbred intrenchment and diseased romanticism of the South (such as Theodore and his wife), and those (like Bear and Zack Joyner) who somehow embody a truer, healthier, and more complete American experience, standing for the legendary ideals of progress, westward expansion, democracy, and the American Dream. In much the same way that Look

Homeward, Angel pitted fantasy against legend, The Hills Beyond contrasts the mannered regionalism of the South with a larger, epic picture of a growing America.

Hugh Holman, in his new book on Wolfe, proposes that the American epic is characterized above all by the author himself as hero, and this has resulted naturally from America's "paucity of native materials" and the general lack of interest in history or the past among the country's artists. Holman quotes James Fenimore Cooper: "There are no annals for the historian; no follies (beyond the most vulgar and commonplace) for the satirist; no manners for the dramatist; no obscure fictions for the writer of romance."<sup>23</sup> Holman's lack of insight in this instance (and Cooper's, too) is remarkable, for The Hills Beyond is a book full of just those things that Cooper says are missing in America, and, however much the author may be the hero of Wolfe's other novels, this is not the case with the final work, and it is this book which probably comes closest to embodying the spirit and technique of the epic.

Concerning "follies...for the satirist", The Hills Beyond abounds in them. Wolfe's treatment of all those characters who go against the legendary American grain is essentially satirical, and satire as a mode is no stranger to American symbolic writing. Daniel Hoffman, for instance, has some illuminating comments on Melville:

[Richard] Chase describes Melville's style as that "required by the basic relation between fact and fantasy in American folk art." In Israel Potter, Melville turned from the epical view of American folk traditions to their satirical use. The objects of Melville's satire are the failings in the American culture he cherished; these he was to see most clearly in The Confidence-Man, the bitterest fable ever written against the back-

ground of our native traditions. Melville appropriated the stereotypes of contemporary folklore and popular literature and transformed them into symbolic representations of the American character.... Having subtly blended them with grander myths from classical and Christian traditions, Melville used these native materials with an awareness of potential evil which, by contrast to their optimistic comedy, gives his satire great dramatic power.<sup>24</sup>

Once again, this passage supports Leo Marx's theory that literature brings irony to bear against the fantasies of popular culture. The genuine satire in The Hills Beyond, however, is confined to Wolfe's group of mannered and grotesquely provincial characters. The others, the legendary personifications of the truer directions of American development, are given earnest treatment. Thus, The Hills Beyond, unlike Melville's Israel Potter (at least in Hoffman's reading of that work), may be said to combine the epic and the satirical use of legendry. Wolfe is better able to tell the truth by showing also the falseness.<sup>25</sup>

This is not to say that the tone throughout The Hills Beyond is not light-hearted. The calm and control and genial, folksy humour of the work imbue its technique and spirit alike, making it a sort of Cosmic Comedy, whereas the other novels might be described as being closer in their conception to tragedy. By the time of The Hills Beyond Wolfe has gained a confidence, even a philosophic sureness, about his use of legendary materials, and of legend as a fictional technique. He not only employs legend to tell the truth about American history, he moreover explains, like Frederick Jackson Turner, the theory of why legend is more true than history. He shows us what he is doing, and then he does it. E.K. Brown has complained that "What Wolfe was unable to clarify, either



for himself or for his readers, was the exact mode in which he passed from the level of faithful realism to the higher, dimmer level of imaginative symbolism."<sup>26</sup> But this is exactly what Wolfe does clarify in The Hills Beyond: the mode is legend. Legend is both the theme and the technique of The Hills Beyond; as Charles Feidelson says of the related phenomenon of symbolism, in the work of the great nineteenth-century American authors "symbolism is at once technique and theme. It is a governing principle..."<sup>27</sup> Wolfe's conscious aim was, in many ways, the same as that of his nineteenth-century literary forebears: "to attain a language without particulars."<sup>28</sup>

In another comparison between Wolfe and Melville, Robert Penn Warren says that although "there is much in common between Moby-Dick and Of Time and the River", there is a significant difference: "Melville had a powerful fable, a myth of human destiny, which saved his work from the centrifugal impulses of his genius, and which gave it structure and climax. Its dignity is inherent in the fable itself. No such dignity is inherent in Mr. Wolfe's scheme, if it can properly be termed a scheme."<sup>29</sup>

If Mr. Warren is to be believed, Melville told only one story; but Wolfe's aim, especially in The Hills Beyond but also in the other novels, was to tell all the American "fables" that have inherent dignity. He was aware of the potential power of this archetypal material, and once noted that the "reason why Jesus' words have had such enormous influence" is that his "parables are common folk stories."<sup>30</sup>

Wolfe, too, was all too keenly aware of the immensity, and perhaps the impossibility, of his project. In The Story of a Novel he describes the task of the American artist as "one whose physical proportions are

vaster and more difficult here than in any other nation on the earth." Nevertheless, "he must make somehow a new tradition for himself, derived from his own life and from the enormous space and energy of American life, the structure of his own design": "Out of the billion forms of America, out of the savage violence and the dense complexity of all its swarming life; from the unique and single substance of this land and life of ours, must we draw the power and energy of our own life, the articulation of our speech, the substance of our art."<sup>31</sup> Perhaps Wolfe came closest to meeting this task through his use of American legend, and through his theory of legend as a superior reality, as a language and technique for fiction, and as a viable theme in itself. For it was through legend that the author hoped to subsume "the billion forms of America" into a system of patterns, symbols, and stories that would characterize the whole culture, history, and personality of his country. During his final and most intensely creative years, Wolfe worked tirelessly on "a book that will try to tell through the hundreds of members of one family the whole story of America."<sup>32</sup> It is only to be lamented that The Hills Beyond is but the ghost of that plan.

NOTES

1. Rothman, p. 72.
2. Richard Walser, Thomas Wolfe: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961), p. 74. Walser is the only critic to have done a valuable analysis of how Wolfe actually uses these myths.
3. Canby says that Of Time and the River, despite being set partly in Europe, "is a wholly American book, one of the most American books of our time. It is in the direct tradition of those earlier anguished spirits and great seekers on our soil, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman." (op.cit., p. 165).
4. The Story of a Novel, p. 30.
5. Notebooks, Vol. II, p. 885.
6. Look Homeward, Angel, p. 160.
7. The Story of a Novel, p. 47.
8. Ibid., pp. 31-32.
9. Warren, p. 207. On p. 192, Warren outlines Wolfe's scheme, as it then appeared, for his "big book"--a cycle of six novels.
10. Kennedy, p. 411.
11. Published as "Thomas Wolfe's Rough Outline of his Last Book", in Kennedy's "Appendix", pp. 415-437.  
In this scheme, Wolfe's symbolic technique, his "categories" of thought, may be seen at work in such sectional headings as "The Web and the Root", "The Web and the Wheel", "The Web and the Hound", "The Web and the World", etc. Some of the proposed chapter titles for the first section are also interesting--e.g. "A Digression on Myths", "The Image of the Circus and His Father's Earth", "There's Always Hercules (How Libya Hill Got Its Name)" (which last suggests that Wolfe had the character and legend of Bear Joyner in his mind even from the time of the earliest George Webber material).
12. Leslie A. Field, "The Hills Beyond: A Folk Novel of America", in Thomas Wolfe: Three Decades of Criticism, ed. Field (New York: New York University Press, 1968), p. 249.
13. The Hills Beyond, p. 169. All further page references to The Hills Beyond in this chapter are contained in parentheses immediately following the quotation.

14. Field, pp. 241-242. Incidentally, one of Bear Joyner's exploits may be likened to the adventure of another modern American literary hero--Hemingway's Santiago in The Old Man and the Sea: "[Bear] was known in his day to be a mighty hunter; and old men who remembered him used to tell of the time he 'chased the dogs the whole way over into Tennessee, and was gone four days and nights, and never knowed how fer from home he was'" (p. 166).
15. Richard M. Dorson, American Folklore and the Historian (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 188.
16. Leslie A. Fiedler, "Archetype and Signature: A Study of the Relationship Between Biography and Poetry", Sewanee Review, Vol. LX, ii (1952), p. 272. Rep. in No! in Thunder: Essays in Myth and Literature, Fiedler. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960).
17. Leslie A. Field, op. cit., p. 242.  
In a curious letter to Hamilton Basso, Wolfe, in his relentless search for great symbolic tags to pin on the vastness of America, tried to pin down The Characteristic Profession of Americans, concluding that "every American in a fundamental sense is a surveyor. Have you ever thought ... of the great number of Americans who actually were surveyors? George Washington was one.... I believe you would find that millions of the pioneer Americans had some knowledge of surveying and of how to handle surveying instruments. What I am trying to say here is that America has really never yet, in any profound and essential way, been explored--it has rather been surveyed." In the same letter, in a passage of equally legendary import, Wolfe attempts to define The Physical Characteristics of the American ("the dry neck of the American, a kind of prognathous set and bleakness of the face and jaw, the way he moves and walks, a kind of meagerness around the hips, the nasality of the voice..."), saying that these result from "a kind of weather of our lives conjoined of all our space and light and our immense and superhuman distances." (SL, pp. 267-278). Both of these passages indicate Wolfe's interest in defining America in terms of a single legendary, archetypal, and consummate figure.
18. Boyle, p. 277.
19. William Styron, "The Shade of Thomas Wolfe", Harper's, CCXXXVI (April, 1968), p. 100. Rep. in Views.
20. Notebooks, Vol. II, p. 760.
21. Boyle, pp. 274-275.
22. Notebooks, Vol. II, p. 963.
23. C. Hugh Holman, The Loneliness at the Core: Studies in Thomas Wolfe (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), pp. 163-164.

24. Daniel G. Hoffman, Paul Bunyan: Last of the Frontier Demigods (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1952), pp. 163-164.
25. If it be doubted that legend, as we have been using the word, may be put to satirical use, Wolfe's own use of the term "satiric legendry" may be cited. (Notebooks, Vol.II, p. 942) The so-called "Doaksology", which never appeared in any of Wolfe's published fiction, is a superb example of his use of "satiric legendry". It is an immensely comic genealogy of the Doakes family, recounting such adventures as that of "Syr Doakes Le Greal", "Sir Guy Le Doakes", and how the lemon came to be the emblem of the Doakes family. (Notebooks, Vol.II, pp. 865-870).
26. Brown, p. 166.
27. Feidelson, p. 43.
28. Ibid., p. 118.
29. Warren, pp. 206-207.
30. Notebooks, Vol. I, p. 306
31. The Story of a Novel, pp. 92-93.
32. Thomas Wolfe's Letters to His Mother (New York: Scribner's, 1951), p. 293.

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