The Problem of Time in Thomas Wolfe's "Look Homeward, Angel"

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THE PROBLEM OF TIME IN THOMAS WOLFE'S LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL

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ABSTRACT

Like many other modern writers, Thomas Wolfe was obsessed with time. For him, the problem of time's inexorable progression, with its attendant loss of innocence, purity, and eventually life, was not one merely of literary representation, but of living; he was haunted, like Keats, by "fears that [he] may cease to be/Before [his] pen had gleaned [his] teeming brain." As much as Wolfe feared time's progression, however, his horror of stasis and stagnation -- the prospect of remaining ever the same -- was equally powerful. It is this paradox that Wolfe struggles to represent and to resolve in his first novel, even as he represents the growing consciousness of that struggle in the character of Eugene Gant.

In his search for a resolution of time's paradox, Wolfe was alternately subject to fits of exultant confidence and transcendent despair -- he was conscious not only of the constraints imposed upon him by time, but also of a force working within himself to counteract these constraints. In this essay, I demonstrate how these opposing forces in Wolfe's consciousness of time operate in *Look Homeward, Angel*, elucidating first of all Wolfe's representation of the constraints that time imposes upon mankind, and next his dramatization of the struggle for transcendence of time's bonds.

Finally, I consider the possibility that, as many Wolfe critics have argued, the time problem is resolved by Eugene's discovery of his artistic vocation during his conversation with the ghost of Ben. I conclude that the contradictions and uncertainties that have plagued all of the other "solutions" Eugene has considered in the novel -- myth, history, love, cyclical regeneration, memory -- are equally immediate in this final scene. I argue, furthermore, that such a resolution of the problem, had Wolfe achieved it, would have been inconsistent with his vision of life as a process of constant development, or becoming, as it is represented throughout *Look Homeward, Angel*. 
THE PROBLEM OF TIME IN THOMAS WOLFE'S LOOK HOMeward, ANGEL
Literature is a necessarily temporal art. Just as time is the basic category of human existence, so it is also the basic category of fiction, the inescapable medium of narration (Meyerhoff, 27). To be engaged in literature, as a reader or a student but especially as an author, requires the consideration of certain questions about the meaning of time, in terms not only of the aesthetic medium in which it is represented, but of human life itself (Meyerhoff, 3). Fortunately or unfortunately for the course of modern literature, the consideration of these questions about time has reinforced the general sense of the relativity of all things, and particularly of the self, that is our intellectual inheritance from the nineteenth century (Frohock, 238). Time makes us and unmakes us. Our physical cell structure is completely renewed every few years; our mental consciousness is most accurately represented as an ever-flowing river of random, unconnected thoughts, neuroses, and desires; and the only certain lesson of human history is ceaseless, inexorable change (Meyerhoff, 29). To a sensitive, questioning person awakened to these realities, the problem that presents itself is this: How can that which constantly changes be thought of as the same? What, if anything, survives the mutability of our physical and mental structure?

Thomas Wolfe was, emphatically, just such a questioning person, and one who was very nearly obsessed with the problem. In the words of his editor at Scribners, Maxwell
Perkins, Wolfe was "harassed by time," consumed like Keats by "fears that [he] may cease to be/Before [his] pen had gleaned [his] teeming brain." In a 1921 letter written to Horace Williams, his undergraduate philosophy professor at Chapel Hill (represented as Vergil Weldon in Look Homeward, Angel) the young Wolfe writes poignantly about this feeling:

Mr. Williams, at times my heart sickens and sinks at the complexity of life. I know I haven't looked through yet; I am enmeshed in the wilderness and I hardly know where to turn. Your words keep haunting me almost even in my dreams: 'How can there be unity in the midst of everlasting change?' In a system where things forever pass and decay, what is there fixed, real, eternal? (Letters, 18).

These are the words of a young man, still under the influence of a favorite teacher. The feelings that they express, however, were not superficial, nor would they prove to be of the kind that are easily resolved and forgotten as undergraduate days fade into the past. Eight years later, shortly after completing the first draft of the manuscript he was calling "O, Lost!" (and which eventually became Look Homeward, Angel), Wolfe grappled with these same questions in his notebook: "The problem of modern culture is to extract from the enormous ocean of impermanent things some of those things which will endure beyond the moment. But what?" (Notebooks I, 230). Travelling in Paris during this same period, Wolfe visited the American Library, where he read William James and consulted a philosophical dictionary in search of a solution to his fears and concerns about the inevitable, irreversible linearity of time (Church, 1968;
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95). The William B. Wisdom collection of Wolfe materials at Harvard University contains the fruits of this search: six pages of typed manuscript listing all possible types of time, with illustrative quotations (Huntley, 33). A consideration of the titles of Wolfe's four novels, furthermore, indicates what an even cursory examination of their thematic content confirms -- that Wolfe never abandoned his obsession with the mystery of time.

If art can be said to hold up a mirror to the mind of its creator, then Wolfe's first novel, *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), stands as certain proof of Wolfe's consciousness of the effects of time on the self and on human life in general. The quest for clarification of the self in time, Meyerhoff has written, leads to a remembrance of things past (2); and, as most readers are aware, *Look Homeward, Angel* is an intensely autobiographical novel, a more or less fictional representation of actual events in the childhood and adolescence of its author. Many of its purely fictional incidents, furthermore, involve the recollection of lost time by various characters, while much of the imaginative quality of the writing proceeds directly from Wolfe's sense of time as flux (Beja, 132). In writing his novel, however, Wolfe was concerned not merely with representing the problem of time as he perceived it, but also with searching for a solution to the questions that time raised for him, an antidote to time's curse of changeless change. He was conscious not only of the constraints imposed on him by
time, but also of a force working within himself to counteract these constraints. Wolfe's sense of these opposing forces is best expressed in terms of the Platonic duality of matter and spirit: man's physical life is subject to the immutable laws of time and constant change, while his spirit represents a will that operates within these limitations but against them, an individuality that is aware of its position in relation to time and contains within itself the possibility for transcendence. It is this duality that Wolfe represents in *Look Homeward, Angel*, using all of the imagery, symbolism, technical skill, metaphysical systems, and, above all, experience of life at his disposal.

In this essay, I plan to demonstrate how these two opposing forces in Wolfe's consciousness of time operate in *Look Homeward, Angel*: to elucidate first of all Wolfe's representation of the constraints that time imposes upon mankind, and next his dramatization of the struggle for transcendence of time's bonds. Finally, I will attempt to discover the degree to which Wolfe is able to offer a solution to the problem of time in this novel that ultimately satisfies his desire for complete, unqualified transcendence.

In one of the earliest critical studies of the Wolfe oeuvre, W.M. Frohock argues that Wolfe's obsession with feelings of solitude, in combination with his intense awareness of the erosions of time and the imminent presence of death in his novels, together constitute a "badge of
immaturity" (228). Frohock was neither the first nor the last critic to charge Wolfe with immaturity. What is interesting about his particular argument is that in accounting for the sense of immaturity in Wolfe's writings he has identified the two main elements in their manifestation of the human temporal experience. The feeling of inevitable, irreversible linear progression through time is experienced in Look Homeward, Angel primarily in terms of loneliness, and next in terms of the constant change which that progression effects.

Although the sense of time as flux is almost always associated with the feeling of being alone or isolated in the novel (Holman, 29), loneliness does not necessarily follow from the feeling of being trapped in time in any logical, comfortably rational manner. In fact, one would think that an awareness of time's irreversible progression would inspire a feeling of community with the rest of mankind, all of whom share this fate, rather than a sense of solitude. For Wolfe, however, the connection between loneliness and time, logical or not, was palpable (Notebooks I, 60), and in the writing of Look Homeward, Angel he strove to communicate this feeling to his readers -- if not against reason, then in spite of it.

Crucial to the sense of solitude in Look Homeward, Angel are three basic premises: first, that life on earth entails exile from an ideal realm; second, that this exile constitutes an imprisonment; and third, that, try as they
might, no two of the inmates in this prison can ever really come to know one another. Wolfe introduces all three of these axioms in the prose poem that opens Part One of the novel:

Naked and alone we came into exile. In her dark womb we did not know our mother's face; from the prison of her flesh have we come into the unspeakable and incommunicable prison of this earth. Which of us has known his brother? Which of us has looked into his father's heart? Which of us has not remained forever prison-pent? Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone? (LHA, p. 1)

For Wolfe solitude is part of the curse of time, in the sense that the term of our imprisonment in solitude, as in time, is forever. The only escape from our lonely exile on earth is a retreat backwards in time -- a recourse that time's ceaseless flow into the future closes to us. Indeed, the laws of time and constant change enforce solitude. As the novel progresses, we discover that all of Eugene's attempts to reverse the fault line of his aloneness are foiled by this irreversible flow of time. His friendship with a roommate at college, Bob Sterling, ends in death, and Eugene grieves not so much for his own loss as for the suffering of the boy's mother, of whom he thinks, "She's alone now" (LHA, 401). Earlier in the novel, Eugene's attempt to form a lasting bond with Laura James, a boarder at his mother's rooming-house, are defeated by the mutability of love (LHA, 383-5). Finally and most importantly, the death of Eugene's brother, Ben, confirms for him the inevitable solitude of man's destiny on earth.
Of all the people he has known, Ben is the one to whom Eugene has felt the closest connection; both brothers seem to feel their exile, their essential solitude, so that in their mutual awareness they are, in a sense, together. When mortal time takes Ben away from him, Eugene understands its message immediately: "You are alone now. You are lost." (LHA, 482). Ben's death and its meaning for Eugene, incidentally, may be the most autobiographical section in an extremely autobiographical novel. Like Eugene Gant, Thomas Wolfe had a brother, named Ben, who died of tuberculosis while he was in college. The degree of isolation that Wolfe himself experienced as a result of his brother's death is evident in a letter that he wrote to his sister some ten years later: "I think the Asheville I knew died for me when Ben died. I have never forgotten him and I never shall" (Letters, 178). Similarly, in Look Homeward, Angel Ben's death confirms Eugene's sense of isolation from his home town, Altamont, which had up to that point constituted for him the center of the known world: "Go find yourself, lost boy, beyond the hills" (LHA, 482), he thinks.

This sense of lonely despair is accompanied, paradoxically, by a celebration of solitude that becomes more intense and pronounced as the novel progresses. In a passage reminiscent of Goethe's Faust, for example, Wolfe writes of the child Eugene that "when the bells broke through the drowning winds at night, his demon rushed into his heart, bursting all cords that held him to the earth,
promising him isolation and dominance over sea and land, inhabitation of the dark . . . " (LHA, 74). In passages such as this one, Wolfe seems to envision the earth as a prison enforcing not solitude, but a degrading and debilitating proximity to the other inmates. For Eugene, this alternate view of his relation to the world around him is associated with the process of growing up, of his assimilation into the society of his family and peers:

He was almost twelve. He was done with childhood. As that Spring ripened he felt entirely, for the first time, the full delight of loneliness. Sheeted in his thin nightgown, he stood in darkness by the orchard window of the back room at Gant's, drinking the sweet air down, exulting in his isolation in darkness, hearing the strange wail of the whistle going west. The prison walls of self had closed entirely round him; he was walled completely by the esymplastic power of his imagination -- he had learned by now to project mechanically, before the world, an acceptable counterfeit of himself which would protect him from intrusion. (LHA, 166-7)

Alongside these celebrations of the delights of solitude Wolfe continues to bewail the loneliness of life in this world, and Eugene persists in his attempts to connect with those around him.

Aside from this evident sense of isolation, the most important aspect of the human experience of time as Wolfe represents it in Look Homeward, Angel is the fear of constant change that attends its inevitable, irreversible linear progression, of the ceaseless flow of cause into cause (LHA, 158). As Louis D. Rubin, Jr. points out, the world Wolfe depicts in Look Homeward, Angel is one in which stability and certainty are almost completely absent. The
only fixed element in the entire novel is the consciousness of its hero, Eugene, and even that changes and expands as Eugene matures (Rubin, Jr., 1955: 76). Indeed, one of the few elements of Eugene's consciousness that remains constant throughout the novel is his awareness of and sensitivity to mutability as a function of the onward rush of time. As a young child Eugene regrets "the interminable sleep that obliterated time for him, and that gave him a sense of having missed forever a day of sparkling life" (LHA, 30). As a boy he laments the loss of his heroes:

One by one the merciless years reaped down his gods and captains. What had lived up to hope? What had withstood the scourge of growth and memory? Why had the gold become so dim? All of his life, it seemed, his blazing loyalties began with men and ended with images; the life he leaned on melted below his weight, and looking down, he saw he clasped a statue. (LHA, 179)

And as a young man, he wonders at the effects of change upon his own life:

There by the sea of the dark Virginias, he thought of the forgotten faces, of all the million patterns of himself, the ghost of his lost flesh. The child that heard Swain's cow, the lost boy in the Ozarks, the carrier of news among the blacks, and the boy who went in by the lattice with Jim Trivett. And the waitress, and Ben, and Laura? Dead, too? Where? How? Why? Why has the web been woven? Why do we die so many deaths? How came I here beside the sea? 0 lost, 0 far and lonely, where? (LHA, 436)

The fear of change through time is manifested in the character of Eugene's father, W.O. Gant, even more fundamentally and thoroughly than in Eugene himself. The novel's full title is Look Homeward, Angel: A Story of the Buried Life, and the elder Gant's life is truly buried,
hidden beneath the debris of the years (Rubin Jr., 1955: 77):

Gant thought briefly of his four and fifty years, his vanished youth, his diminishing strength, the ugliness and badness of so much of it; and he had the very quiet despair of a man who knows the forged chain may not be unlinked, the threaded design unwound, the done undone. (LHA, 48)

The fear of death that is evident throughout the novel is a variation on this sense of horror at the prospect of inevitable change. Death, W.M. Frohock has observed, is time's child (236); it is the mysterious certainty that provides the progression of time with much of its sting. In Look Homeward, Angel, the sense of death is always imminent; when it is not in the foreground, death hovers in the background of its characters' lives. Three people close to Eugene -- his brothers Grover and Ben, and a college roommate named Bob Sterling -- die during the course of the novel, while a number of more minor characters are mentioned only in connection with their deaths. Other reminders of mortality are W.O. Gant's slow but sure destruction by prostate cancer; the omnipresence of convalescing tuberculars at Eliza Gant's boarding house and in the town of Altamont in general; the prominence in several chapters of conversations between medical men and the town's undertaker, Horse Hines; and, finally, the presence of World War I in the background of the final two-thirds of the novel (Hagan, 1982: 7). And while death is of course the final ending, all separations and partings, such as those of
Eugene with his mother and with Laura James, are shadowed with the fear of death (Teicher, 47), and thus inspire analogous feelings of wondrous dread at the manifestation of time's ceaseless passage.

The character in *Look Homeward, Angel* who experiences the fear of death most acutely is Eugene's father, W.O. Gant. Imbued with a passion for life but intensely aware of the passing of time and the immanence of his own demise, Gant is without a "gift for philosophy" (*LHA*, 230), without religion, and without the consoling belief that his life has been anything more than a series of random, unordered accidents, "an accumulation of worn-out pieces in a junk yard" (Meyerhoff, 117). As "the minute-winning days, like flies, buzz home to death" (*LHA*, 3), all that Gant has to combat his fear are "the familiar weakness[es] of the sensualist" (*LHA*, 19) -- primarily alcohol, a form of denial whose efficacy in Gant's case proves limited, self-defeating, and, of course, temporary. At the close of the nineteenth century, Gant reaches his fiftieth birthday; "he knew he was half as old as the century that had died, and that men do not often live as long as centuries. . . . he saw the passionate fulness of his life upon the wane, and he cast about him like a senseless and infuriate beast" (*LHA*, 17). Throughout most of *Look Homeward, Angel*, Gant is an old and sick man, well past his prime; although he does not die in this novel, his anticipation of the event is a perpetual issue. He reads the papers greedily for news of death, and
greets the deaths of his friends and acquaintances with "the melancholy hypocrisy of old men, saying: 'They're all going, one by one. Ah Lord! The old man will be the next.' But he did not believe it" (LHA, 230), and he could not accept it. When the methods of his denial inevitably fail, Gant's only recourse is to wretched self-pity. Faced with the death of his son, Ben, this tendency reaches its outrageous nadir:

"Merciful God! That I should have to bear this in my old age. . . . Why must you put this upon me? I'm old and sick, and I don't know where the money's to come from. How are we ever going to face this fearful and croo-el winter? It'll cost a thousand dollars before we're through burying him, and I don't know where the money's to come from." He wept affectedly with sniffing sobs. (LHA, 460)

It is this degrading self-obsession, proceeding from utter helplessness in the face of death and the passage of time, that Eugene must find a way of avoiding in his own life.

Another way in which the fear of change is manifested in the novel is the sense of alarm experienced by certain characters, principally Eugene and his father, at the passing of youth and loss of innocence that comes with the inexorable onward flow of time (Holman, 28). Early in the novel, Wolfe writes of Eugene that "he did not understand change, he did not understand growth. He stared at his framed baby picture in the parlor, and turned away sick with fear and the effort to touch, retain, grasp himself for only a moment" (LHA, 158). This horror of growth is responsible for Eugene's disgust at his adolescent sexual longings, and causes his hesitation at the brink of sexual initiation:
He waited, saying farewell to himself. He stood over his life, he felt, with lifted assassin blade. He was mired to his neck, inextricably, in complication. There was no escape. . . . In him the ghost, his stranger, turned grievously away. O God! I shall remember, he thought. (LHA, 339-41)

Afterwards, Eugene is "haunted by his own lost ghost," the feeling of innocence which he knows "to be irrecoverable" (LHA, 343); he becomes "insanely conscious of spotless youth" (LHA, 489), jealous of those he meets who have not lost, as he has, the innocence of childhood. Like his father, who had yearned for "a spring somewhere to wash me through. Clean as a baby once more" (LHA, 61), Eugene dreams of "the miraculous spring, or the bath, neck-high, of curative mud, which would draw out of a man's veins each drop of corrupted blood, dry up in him a cancerous growth, dwindle and absorb a cyst, remove all scorbutic blemishes, scoop and suck and thread away the fibrous slime of all disease, leaving him again with the perfect flesh of an animal" (LHA, 132).

Similar to this sense of dread at the passing of youth and the loss of innocence is the fear of decay and disintegration that attends the passage of time in the novel. Man's inevitable progression toward disintegration is implicit, for example, in Doctor Coker's explanation of Ben's illness to Eugene's sister, Helen:

"My dear, dear girl," he said gently as she tried to speak, "we can't turn back the days that have gone. We can't turn life back to the hours when our lungs were sound, our blood hot, our bodies young. We are a flash of fire -- a brain, a heart, a spirit. And we are three-cents-worth of lime and iron -- which we cannot get back." (LHA, 461)
Sick almost to the point of death himself during his summer in Norfolk, Virginia, Eugene thinks of "the strange lost faces he had known, . . . damned in chaos, each chained to a destiny of ruin and loss -- Gant, a fallen Titan, staring down enormous vistas of the Past" (LHA, 434). Indeed, it is the elder Gant who seems to embody and symbolize the tendency of all mortal things toward decay and ruin over time. On a visit to Sydney, the state capital, Eugene and Helen reflect that "it was to Sydney that Gant had come, a young man, from Baltimore, on his slow drift to the South." Together they search for marks of their father's hand upon the city where the years of his prime were spent,

until they stood at length before a dreary shop on the skirts of the negro district. "This must be it," she said. "His shop stood here. It's gone now." She was silent a moment. "Poor old Papa." She turned her wet eyes away. There was no mark of his great hand on this bleak world. No vines grew round the houses. That part of him which had lived here was buried -- buried with a dead woman below the long gray tide of the years. They stood quietly, frightened, in that strange place, waiting to hear the summons of his voice, with expectant unbelief, as some one looking for the god in Brooklyn. (LHA, 349)

Again, in the final chapter of the novel, Eugene relates to the ghost of Ben the changes that have taken place since his death:

"They say papa is dying. Did you know that, Ben?" Eugene asked. "Yes," said Ben. "They have bought his shop. They are going to tear it down and put up a skyscraper here." "Yes," said Ben, "I know it." We shall not come again. We never shall come back again. "Everything is going. Everything changes and passes away. To-morrow I shall be gone and this ---" he stopped. "This -- what?" said Ben. "This will be gone" (LHA, 517-18).
Just as the fear of loneliness in *Look Homeward, Angel* is accompanied by an apparently inconsistent celebration of the joys of solitude, so also does Wolfe's experience of time's flow, as Morton Teicher has noted, evoke two seemingly contradictory concerns:

First, why experience anything if nothing can be held permanently? Secondly, must we be permanently trapped in a given experience? . . . [Wolfe] abhorred ending, but he also hated never ending; he feared change, but he also feared the unchanging. (Teicher, 47).

Gant, for example, fears his fast approaching death; yet he is also oppressed by "the cramped mean fixity of the Square . . . the one fixed spot in a world that writhed, evolved, and changed constantly in his vision, and he felt a sick green fear, a frozen constriction about his heart" (*LHA*, 62). Similarly, while Eugene is horrified at the inexorable rush of time that renders his youth and innocence irrecoverable, he also despises the stagnant inanition of the South, which he feels to be especially oppressive in South Carolina: "Charleston, fat weed that roots itself on Lethe wharf, lived in another time. The hours were days, the days weeks. They arrived in the morning. By noon, several weeks had passed, and he longed for the day's ending" (*LHA*, 298). This same feeling is expressed in a scene cut from the final version of the novel, in which Eugene returns home from a trip North with his mother:

Eugene thought of the South with a sense of desolation. He was as far North as he had ever been. He wanted to pierce farther on into the opening Spring. As they went back across Virginia, the vision of the undiscovered land at whose door he had knocked made a great wound in
him. He stared moodily out of the window at the raw bleak windy land. The little illusion of his power was gone. He felt the poverty, the imprisonment of his life. Suddenly he dared phrase within him his disapproval of the discomfort and ugliness in which people lived. (Notebooks, I; 114-15)

Indeed, travelling is the primary means employed by Wolfe's characters in their effort to overcome the stagnation that horrifies them. Early in Eugene's childhood, Gant makes his "last great voyage" to California; upon his return, Wolfe writes that "unspoken and undefined there was in him the knowledge that he was at length caught in the trap of life and fixity, that he was being borne under in this struggle against the terrible will that wanted to own the earth more than to explore it [Eliza]" (LHA, 57). After Ben's death, Eugene also experiences the yearning for travel (LHA, 482).

Wolfe's apparent horror of stasis illuminates a central difference between his perspective on the human experience of time and that of Proust, the author to whose handling of time Wolfe's own is most often compared.¹ Remembrance of Things Past, with its minute character analysis, does achieve and appears to celebrate unreservedly a kind of stasis that would have made Wolfe uncomfortable. There is in Proust's work no fear that stagnation or any other negative effect will result from Marcel's attempts to halt the flow of time (Church, 1968: 99-100). In his dread of stasis and his emphasis on the importance of movement and the desire of his characters for journeys, Wolfe is closer to the literature of the English Romantic period, "'a literature of
movement' in which the protagonist is a compulsive wanderer" (Abrams, 193).² Wordsworth's *Prelude*, for example, is replete with 'the Wanderers of the Earth,' and after the period of childhood, its chief episodes are Wordsworth's own wanderings through the English countryside, the Alps, Italy, France, and Wales -- literal journeys through actual places which modulate easily into symbolic landscapes traversed by a metaphorical wayfarer." (Abrams, 285).

For Wolfe as for the Romantics the fear of stasis, along with the urge to guard against it by means such as travelling, is vital as a corrective to the desire to stop the constant forward flow of time. Yet the fear of stasis that accompanies the fear of change in Wolfe makes his search for a solution to the problem of time much more difficult to identify, since any adequate solution must mediate between these contradictory impulses.

Opposed to Wolfe's sense of time's ceaseless flow is his experience of time as a relative concept, and of the objective time continuum as little more than an artificial construct. The crux of the concept is this: time experienced subjectively is characterized by irregularity, uneven distribution, and non-uniformity, and thus differs radically from the regular, quantitative units of the objective metric by which we measure it (Meyerhoff, 13). According to the theory of relativity, furthermore, time assumes different meanings in different systems, and varies from one frame of reference to another: "'There are as many time-series as there are selves who perceive things as in time . . ."
Strictly speaking, no time can be common to two selves'" (Mendilow, 63).

In his notebooks, Wolfe tries to put into words his feeling of time's relativity, of the meaningless of our objective time continuum to his own subjective experience of time: "Yet have I made propitiations for but one faultless moment; it is enough that the years be twisted if a day is straight; and if an hour is crowded, our lives have been long" (Notebooks I, 57-58). In The Story of a Novel, Wolfe relates a similar feeling of time's relativity, experienced during the writing of his book:

If I could have known at that time what lay before me in those next four years; if I could have known how four years could lengthen, widen out into an ocean depth of time and memory; if I could have known that in those next four years there would be packed a century of living, a hundred lives of birth and death, despair, defeat, and triumph and the sheer exhaustion of a brute fatigue; if I had really known all that lay before me in the next four years, I do not know whether or not I could have found the power within myself to continue (Autobiography, p. 38)

And in the novels themselves, Wolfe never tires of repeating that each man has his own time, that there is the time of clocks, of mountains, of rivers, and then the times of each individual man, "for time has ten thousand faces and yet is a fable, a mystery" (Church, 1968: 99).

As readers of almost any piece of commentary on Wolfe's use of time are undoubtedly aware, Wolfe describes in The Story of a Novel his experience of time as being composed of three elements:
The first and most obvious was an element of actual present time, an element which carried the narrative forward, which represented characters and events as living in the present time and moving forward into an immediate future. The second time element was an element of past time, one which represented these same characters as acting and as being acted upon not only by the events and conflicts of the life around them, but by all the accumulated impact of man's memory and experience so that each moment of his life was conditioned not only by what he saw and felt and did and experienced in that moment, but by all that he had seen and felt and done and experienced and had been in the process of becoming up to that moment. In addition to these two time elements, there was a third which I conceived as being not only time past and present, but as time immutable, as time fixed, unchanging, subject neither to past or present time, as, for instance, the time of rivers, mountains, oceans, and the earth.

The first two elements of time that Wolfe mentions here express its relativity; the scientific, objective system of time (time present) is contrasted with the subjective, arational way in which it is experienced (time past). His description of the third element, time immutable, as time fixed and unchanging would seem then to be inconsistent with the first two. How can time be both relative and immutable? The distinction between these two apparently contradictory concepts of time is explained by Larry Rubin:

When time is considered as immutable, no function of memory is needed to recall the past, since the past and the present are coexistent. But when time is merely relative, the past, though foreshortened, still exists as a separate division of time, so that memory is the vital agent in making events of the past live again as if they were in the present. (1975: 285)

As Rubin goes on to argue, Wolfe's characters experience the past primarily as a separate division of time, requiring an agent or catalyst of some kind to bring it into the present:
The need for memory, of whatever type, to bring these scenes [in Wolfe's novels] from the past up into the present indicates that we are dealing here with the relativity of time, rather than its immutability; for the distinction between past and present has not been obliterated, merely blurred, making 'keys' to the past necessary. (1975: 285, 290)

For Wolfe, then, time as it is experienced subjectively is not so much immutable as it is relative; time immutable is rather objective than subjective, and functions in his work primarily as a backdrop against which he can project, and in contrast to which he can emphasize, the relativity of human time.

Wolfe's vision of time as it is experienced in human life, then, is fraught with contradictions. As represented in Look Homeward, Angel, time is both relative and immutable. It is a ceaseless flow into the future, and an irregular jumble of past, present, and future moments that defies linearity. Its progression inspires horror of both change and stasis, and enforces a sense of solitude that is alternately feared and desired. These incongruities caused Wolfe serious difficulties in the search not only for a solution that could resolve them, but also for a language through which his enigmatic experience of time could be adequately represented.

The need to represent the simultaneous existence of relative and immutable time, for example, presented Wolfe with a "tremendous and almost unsolvable problem" -- one, he writes, "that almost defeated me and that cost me countless hours of anguish and frustration" (Autobiography, 51).
other contradictions in Wolfe's experience of time -- his simultaneous fear of and desire for the solitude and change that time engenders -- also required a means of expression that could convey experience not at the cognitive or rational level of everyday language, but rather at the emotional, arational level of actual experience. Wolfe described his search for such a language in The Story of a Novel:

I was convinced that somehow I must get into the pages of a single book, embody in every word and phrase and sentence and in every page that I should write the dense and multiple interweavings of this whole gigantic time scheme . . . in which the substance was all included. (Autobiography, 52)

The evidence of this effort can be found in virtually every page of Wolfe's first novel. The experiments in literary technique, the groping after symbols and images, and the rhetorical flights of which Look Homeward, Angel is full are all part of Wolfe's desperate attempt to discover a new language, an adequate means of expressing his temporal experience, and in this way, perhaps, to find a solution to the problems that time presents.

Wolfe's selection of the novel as the genre within which to communicate his story is the most fundamental of the many technical decisions he had to make. The importance of this choice, and the fact that for Wolfe it was a choice and not his original creative impulse, is easily overlooked since it is almost exclusively as a writer of novels that Wolfe is known and studied. In fact, Wolfe began his career
not as a novelist but as a writer of plays. His switch to non-dramatic prose, of which Look Homeward, Angel was the first product, came only after years of unsuccessful attempts to get his plays produced. Even if he had persevered as a dramatist, it is unlikely that Wolfe would ever have attained any degree of success in the theater -- a medium of creative expression almost perversely unsuited to his particular gifts and temperament. But if he was almost ludicrously unlucky in his first choice of a creative outlet, Wolfe was extremely fortunate in his second. "Perhaps no other literary medium is as immediately suited to showing the corrosive effects of the passage of time as the novel," Holman comments (53). The drama, in contrast, is particularly ill-suited to representing these effects. According to Aristotelian aesthetics, the ideal length of a drama is a single day, while from a merely practical standpoint the physical limitations that govern the production and staging of a play stipulate certain restrictions as regards the passage of time. It is significant that Wolfe's greatest weakness as a playwright was his inability to control the length of his plays. Even in the earliest stages of his creative development, Wolfe was rebelling against the inability of his chosen medium to convey the sense of time's passage as he felt and experienced it, and in a way that predicted the generic form that his creative imaginings would ultimately take.
Wolfe's pacing of the action in his novel also contributes significantly to the feeling of time that he attempts to convey. Borrowing heavily from Edwin Muir's analysis of the time scheme in Tolstoy, Louis D. Rubin, Jr. has pointed out that Look Homeward, Angel is, like War and Peace, a "chronicle novel" -- that is, a novel in which the speed of time is not determined by the intensity of the action, but rather has a deadly regularity which is external to and unaffected by the characters and situations. The emphasis is on the aging of the characters, "on the fact that they are twenty now, that they will be thirty, then forty, they fifty, and that in essential respects they will then be like anybody else at twenty, thirty, forty, and fifty." Change in War and Peace, Muir continues, is inevitable and general, "it is regular, arithmetical, and in a sense inhuman and featureless" (1955; 34-5).

One of the most effective techniques that Wolfe employs to express mankind's entrapment in time and change is to contrast this plight with those things in nature which exist according to a time element unlike and independent of human time. In The Story of a Novel, Wolfe describes this other time element as "time immutable . . . [and] everlasting, a kind of eternal and unchanging world and universe of time against which would be projected the transience of man's life, the bitter briefness of his day" (Autobiography, 51). In Look Homeward, Angel, the symbols of permanence against which the bitter briefness of man's day is most frequently projected are mountains, families, and the seasons of the earth. In keeping with the ambiguity that governs Wolfe's vision of the human temporal experience, however, these harsh reminders of mankind's ephemerality can also suggest
the possibility of his escape from impermanence into the "unchanging world and universe of time" that they symbolize.

As a reminder of the ironic contrast between time immutable and mortal time, the mountains that encircle Wolfe's hometown of Asheville, North Carolina, were for him a particularly personal, enduring, and powerful image. While travelling in Europe during the early stages of the novel's composition, Wolfe writes in his notebook of these mountains: "The mountains were my masters, the unyielding mountains which were beyond the necessity for growth and change" (Notebooks, I; 35). In The Story of a Novel, Wolfe mentions "the time of . . . mountains" as an example of time immutable (Autobiography, 51). Similarly, as old Gant returns to Altamont from his final voyage beyond the hills, his awareness of "the hills here" leads directly, in the stream of his consciousness, to the consideration of his increasing age: "I'll soon be sixty" (LHA, 58). And as Eugene grows and becomes aware of his own and others' mortality, he is increasingly moved by the contrasting permanence of the earth itself (Hagan, 1982; 8): "The mountains were his masters. They rimmed in life. They were the cup of reality, beyond growth, beyond struggle and death. They were his absolute unity in the midst of eternal change" (LHA, 158).

Even as Wolfe emphasizes the mountains' mastery over Eugene, however, he subtly suggests a more positive interpretation of the symbol. In the last sentence of the
above quotation, the mountains are presented not as a cruel reminder of mankind's mortality, but rather as a welcome indication that permanence can be achieved in the physical world. In this way the mountains can symbolize what Eugene himself hopes to accomplish. Hence his desire to "grow to the earth like a hill or a rock," and thereby to "unweave the fabric of nights and days; unwind my life back to my birth; subtract me into nakedness again" (LHA, 412).

Like the mountains, Eliza's family, the Pentlands, are associated throughout the novel with time immutable, with that which endures through time in mocking contrast to individual man. W.O. Gant senses and resents this aspect of the Pentland family the first time that he meets them: "as their talk wore on, and Gant heard the spectre moan of the wind, he was entombed in loss and darkness, and his soul plunged downward in the pit of night, for he saw that he must die a stranger -- that all, all but these triumphant Pentlands, who banqueted on death -- must die" (LHA, 13). Later, at Ben's funeral, Eugene remarks on this same quality of the Pentland clan: "There they were, smelling of the earth and Parnassus -- that strange clan which met only at weddings or funerals, but which was forever true to itself, indissoluble and forever apart, with its melancholia, its madness, its mirth: more enduring than life, more strong than death" (LHA, 479). As a family, the Pentlands transcend the fate of individual man, and partake of the eternal; like the earth, like the mountains, the clan remains. Thus they
become a symbol of time immutable, and a cruel reminder to both Gant and Eugene of their human ephemerality.

At the same time, Wolfe conveys the impression that family membership can be a way of overcoming mankind's entrapment in time. Gant, for example, tries to relive his youth and ensure his immortality by forcing his son to live out his own unfulfilled dream of becoming a lawyer and politician: "In his youngest son he saw the last hope of his name's survival in laurels -- in the political laurels he so valued" (LHA, 321). Unsurprisingly, Eugene experiences his familial connections primarily as a negative force, encouraging the inertia and stasis that he fears as intensely as he does change. Reminded of his connection to the Pentlands by an itchy patch on his neck that they all share, Eugene feels "the nightmare horror of destiny: he was of them -- there was no escape. Their lust, their weakness, their sensuality, their fanaticism, their strength, their rich taint, were rooted in the marrow of his bones" (LHA, 479). It is in order to escape this stagnation that Eugene struggles to break with and finally rebels against his family (418-22). Although his rebellion is on the one hand an act of liberation, it entails at the same time a discernible loss of the sense of temporal placement, continuity, and belongingness that comes with membership in a family. Bereft of his family, Eugene's life is confined to a much narrower span of time than when he consciously felt himself a link between several successive generations. For
Eugene, then, family functions as a symbol of entrapment, and of liberation. It is for this reason that Eugene is never able to completely reject or wholeheartedly embrace his family, wavering in the end between rebellion (LHA, 422) and repentance (LHA, 513).

Wolfe also dramatizes the contrast between the enslavement of mankind to time and the extra-temporality of nature by presenting the cycle of the seasons as a foil to the linearity of human time. The seasons, with their progress from birth in spring, through the blossoming of summer, followed by decay and death in autumn and winter, mark the passage of time in the novel and approximate for its main characters the course of human life: "Eugene watched the slow fusion of the seasons; he saw the royal processional of the months; he saw the summer light eat like a river into the dark; he saw dark triumph once again; and he saw the minute-winning days, like flies, buzz home to death" (LHA, 249). The death of nature in winter, however, is followed by a rebirth in spring; and it is thus the advent of spring, with its implicit reminder of the everlasting rebirth of nature and the earth, that seems to recall to Eugene his own entrapment in linear time, and therefore to inspire many of his fears and regrets (Rubin Jr., 1955: 35-6): "And we shall pass, and shall not come again. What things will come again? O Spring, the cruellest and fairest of the seasons, will come again" (LHA, 486).
A fascinating example of Wolfe's use of the seasonal cycle in counterpoint to the linearity of mortal existence occurs at the beginning of the second part of the novel. Wolfe opens this section with an evocation of the regenerative powers of spring: "The plum-tree, black and brittle, rocks stiffly in winter wind. Her million little twigs are frozen in spears of ice. But in the Spring, lithe and heavy, she will bend under her great load of fruit and blossoms. She will grow young again" (LHA, 137). Immediately following this tribute comes the panoramic sweep of Altamont lives at dawn, which emphasizes man's entrapment in time's linearity: "It was now five-thirty. Ben had gone out of the house into the orchard at three twenty-five. In another forty minutes Gant would waken, dress, and build the morning fires" (LHA, 141). By introducing this section with a celebration of the restorative powers of the earth and nature in the spring, Wolfe makes clear the contrast between the cyclical progress of the seasons and the inescapably linear progression of human life. Elsewhere, however, Wolfe suggests the opposite -- that men, like nature, can die in the autumn and be reborn in the spring (LHA: 186; 275, 423, 486). Thus the seasons, like the other symbols Wolfe uses to compare the time of men with immutable time, are used to express both the contrasts and the affinities between the two.

In order to convey the sense of solitude that accompanies mankind's entrapment in time's linear
progression, Wolfe employs a literary technique that he had encountered in the Wandering Rocks section of James Joyce's *Ulysses*; that is, the panoramic description. Most notably in Chapter 14 of the novel, and then again in Chapter 24, Wolfe offers a series of descriptions of various residents of Eugene's hometown, Altamont, at a particular moment in time (Rubin Jr., 1955; 37). In the first instance, Wolfe presents slices of different, essentially separated Altamont lives in the hours just before dawn:

As the courthouse bell boomed out its solid six strokes, eight negro laborers, the bottoms of their overalls stiff with agglutinated cement, tramped by like a single animal, in a wedge, each carrying his lunch in a small lard bucket. Meanwhile, the following events occurred simultaneously throughout the neighborhood. Dr. H.M. McRae, fifty-eight, minister of the First Presbyterian Church . . . descended from his chamber in his residence on Cumberland Avenue, to his breakfast of oatmeal, dry toast, and boiled milk. . . . In Dr. Frank Engel's Sanitarium and Turkish Bath Establishment on Liberty Street, Mr. J.H. Brown, wealthy sportsman and publisher of the *Altamont Citizen*, sank into a dreamless sleep . . . across the street, at the corner of Liberty and Federal, and at the foot of Battery Hill, a white-jacketed negro sleepily restacked in boxes the scattered poker chips that covered the centre table in the upstairs centre room of the Altamont City Club. (LHA, 154)

None of the characters mentioned in this section are important in the action of the novel; only one is even mentioned elsewhere in the book. The point that Wolfe makes here has less to do with the specific characters mentioned than with the fact that each character's specificity is pointless. Given even the most absolute proximity of time and space, not just these lives but every human life is disconnected, detached, and isolated from the rest.
The notion of man's existence on earth as an exile from a pre-natal paradise is crucial to Wolfe's representation of man's loneliness in time; unfortunately, it is also a strategy that is likely to inspire confusion and incredulity in modern readers. As set forth in the *Phaedo*, *Meno*, *Timaeus*, and several of the other Platonic dialogs that Wolfe translated in his Greek classes at Chapel Hill, the concept of a lost, pre-natal paradise is relatively simple. At birth, a person's spirit leaves the timeless, unchanging, and real world of Ideas and becomes chained to a physical, mortal body. Throughout its exile in the physical world man's spirit recalls its preexistent bliss and yearns to break free of its fleshly bonds, to regain the timeless paradise (Kennedy, 129-30). In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the English Romantic poets adopted and expanded on this basic concept. In his "Ode on Intimations of Immortality," Wordsworth writes that "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;/The soul that rises in us, our life's Star,/Hath had elsewhere its setting,/And cometh from afar" (ll. 58-61). Even more than Plato, Wordsworth seems concerned with the ways in which mortal man becomes aware of his preexistent state; the soul arrives "Not in entire forgetfulness," but "trailing clouds of glory" (ll. 63-64).

In *Look Homeward, Angel*, Wolfe too is interested in the realm of preexistence primarily as it manifests itself in human life through memory. His hero, Eugene Gant, comes into the world as the speaker of the Immortality Ode had,
trailing clouds of glory. His birth, too, is but a sleep and a forgetting of his preexistent state, and during his childhood he has fading intimations of "the great forgotten language, the lost lane-end into heaven" (LHA, 1; Donald, 149). For Wolfe's characters, especially Eugene and (to a lesser extent) Ben, the recollection of pre-natal bliss serves not merely to reinforce but also more subtly to formulate their vague feelings of loneliness and exile. Their sense of solitude and lostness in this life is constructed in opposition to the security and community of a previous one they can sometimes recall, but despair of ever recapturing. Shortly after Ben's death, Wolfe uses the idea of preexistence in order to convey the loneliness in which Ben lived his life:

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. . . . O Artemidorus, farewell! (LHA, 465).

Although Eugene's recollections of the timeless world before his birth often cause him feelings of loneliness and exile, the very existence of such a world beyond time can also be a consolation, holding forth as it does the possibility of return. In one sense, at least, the "home" toward which the angel of the novel's title is urged to look is this pre-natal paradise, the true home of the spirit (Hagan, 1981: 268). Eugene's "intimations of immortality," then, are crucial to his quest in that they provide him the
strength and encouragement he needs to continue it, feeding
his need for transcendence of the bonds of necessity imposed
by time, for escape into beauty and permanence: "He had been
sent from one mystery into another: somewhere within or
without his consciousness he heard a great bell ringing
faintly, as if it sounded undersea, and as he listened, the
ghost of memory walked through his mind, and for a moment he
felt that he had almost recovered what he had lost" (LHA,
31). It is largely because he believes in this perfect
other-world that Eugene, "no matter how often he is made
aware of 'the nightmare cruelty of life' (LHA, 379), remains
to the end a 'Mythmaker' (LHA, 325), a visionary, a
romancer, an American Adam, who is always seeking to return
to the paradise from which he feels he has been expelled"

Wolfe uses a number of symbols to convey Eugene's
alternately encouraging and discouraging awareness of a
timeless, immutable preexistent world. From his reading of
Euripides and Wordsworth, Wolfe understood the symbolic
power of three particular linked natural images; in Look
Homeward, Angel, he derived his favorite symbol of the lost
paradise -- 'a stone, a leaf, an unfound door' (LHA: 1, 4,
245, 465, etc.) -- from these models. Often, Wolfe uses
this set of images to emphasize the lostness of the timeless
paradise: "'There is something I have lost and have
forgotten. I can't remember, Ben.' 'What do you want to
remember?' said Ben. A stone, a leaf, an unfound door" (LHA,
But at others, the series symbolizes the possibility of return to the lost paradise: "The way is here, Eugene. Have you forgotten? The leaf, the rock, the wall of light. Lift up the rock, Eugene, the leaf, the stone, the unfound door. Return, return" (LHA, 245).

Another symbol of the pre-natal paradise is the sound of music, ranging in distinctness from the muffled ringing of a bell beneath the sea, to a full "symphonic orchestration", of music and song: "Nothing seemed any longer hard and hot and raw and new. Everything was old. Everything was dying. A vast aerial music, forever far-faint, like the language of his forgotten world, sounded in his ears" (LHA, 435). Like the other symbols of the lost paradise, this music can be a bitter reminder of that world's inaccessibility, as in the quotation above, or it can suggest the possibility of return: "Strange aerial music came fluting out of darkness, or over his slow-wakening senses swept the great waves of symphonic orchestration. Fiend-voices, beautiful and sleep-loud, called down through darkness and light, developing the thread of ancient memory" (LHA, 244).

Wolfe's favorite figure for mortal man isolated not only from other people but also from his own true self -- the spiritual self of his preexistent life -- is the 'phantom,' variations of which (ghost, stranger) appear throughout the novel. When Eugene is still a child, for example, his mother recognizes "that in her dark and
sorrowful womb a stranger had come to life, fed by the lost communications of eternity, his own ghost, haunter of his own house, lonely to himself and to the world. O lost" (LHA, 66). When Eugene himself recalls his childhood and preexistent life, his memories are almost always described as ghost-like (LHA: 159, 435, 436, etc.; Hagan, 1982: 9). Indeed, Wolfe never tires of invoking the part of himself that was lost at birth: "O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again" (LHA: 1, 245, 380, 487, etc.).

The need to convey his sense of time's flow presented Wolfe with another difficult representational problem. One of his favorite ways of solving this problem in Look Homeward, Angel is the use of the train image as a symbol for the ceaseless motion and inexorable passage of time. For old Gant, thoughts of lost youth and the approach of death are often accompanied by the sounds of a train hurtling by in the distance: "How came he here from the clean Dutch thrift of his youth into this vast lost earth of rickets? The train rattled on over the reeking earth . . . . the bell tolled mournfully above the clacking wheels" (LHA, 6). Eugene, too, experiences the sounds of the train -- its wheels, bells, and whistles -- as a cruel reminder of the way that time also hurtles past him (e.g. LHA, 382). Even when he is on a train and can think of himself as keeping pace with time's forward flow, he views the scene that passes by the window of his berth as a figure for time's
changeless change, and for the irretrievability of that which is past:

Lost in the dark land, he lay the night-long through within his berth, watching the shadowy and phantom South flash by, sleeping at length, and waking suddenly, to see cool lakes in Florida at dawn, standing quietly as if they had waited from eternity for this meeting; . . . or seeing, in pale dawn, the phantom woods, a rutted lane, a cow, a boy, a drab, dull-eyed against a cottage door, glimpsed, at this moment of rushing time, for which all life had been aplot, to flash upon the window and be gone. (LHA, 133-4)

But the train's ceaseless motion also has a positive symbolic meaning for Eugene. Since his experience of time involves the fear of both stasis and change, the negative symbol of constant change must also be a positive symbol of stagnation overcome. Thus, while the image of the train can, at times, discourage Eugene, it can also fill him with a sense of exultation and release: "As he thought of his future liberation into this epic world, where all the color of life blazed brightest far away from home, his heart flooded his face with lakes of blood. . . . he had heard thus the far retreating wail of a whistle in a distant valley, and faint thunder on the rails; and he felt the infinite depth and width of the golden world" (LHA, 68).

Another way in which trains function as positive symbols for Wolfe is in their ability to suggest, and at times even to effect, the fusion of relative and immutable time. Wolfe hints at this conception of train travel in The Story of a Novel: "Now a very interesting novel could be written about a great American train, and perhaps someday I
shall try to write one because the effect that a train has upon man's memory, upon his senses and emotions, have always interested me profoundly" (Autobiography, 76). In Look Homeward, Angel, Wolfe expresses his sense of the train's potential effect on the human experience of time more overtly. Eugene's most profound experiences of the intersection of past, present, and future with eternity occur as he gazes at "a whirling landscape through the windows of the train:"

It was this that awed him -- the weird combination of fixity and change, the terrible moment of immobility stamped with eternity in which, passing life at great speed, both the observer and the observed seem frozen in time. There was one moment of timeless suspension when the land did not move, the train did not move, the slattern in the doorway did not move, he did not move. It was as if God had lifted his baton sharply above the endless orchestration of the seas, and the eternal movement had stopped, suspended in the timeless architecture of the absolute. Or 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. Fixed in no-time, the slattern vanished, fixed, without a moment of transition. (LHA, 159)

Wolfe was not the first to sense this transcendent potentiality in the motion of trains. Albert Einstein, whose theory of relativity had revolutionized popular and scientific conceptions of time in the years prior to and during Wolfe's composition of Look Homeward, Angel, frequently used the train as a means of explaining the relativity of time to non-scientists:
Events which are simultaneous with reference to the embankment are not simultaneous with respect to the train, and vice versa (relativity of simultaneity). Every reference-body (co-ordinate system) has its own particular time; unless we are told the reference-body to which the statement of time refers, there is no meaning in a statement of the time of an event. Now before the advent of the theory of relativity it had always tacitly been assumed in physics that the statement of time had an absolute significance, i.e. that it is independent of the state of motion of the body of reference. But we have just seen that this assumption is incompatible with the most natural definition of simultaneity. (Einstein, 26-27)

A popular misconception about Einstein's theory at about this time was that it implied that if a person travelled in space at the speed of light, that person could return to earth after two-hundred earth-years had elapsed without having aged a day (Bergson, 1965: 73-74). In light of this theory, it is tempting to argue, as Julie M. Johnson has of Quentin Compson's train rides in The Sound and the Fury, that Eugene's fascination with train travel stems from a desire to travel fast enough to slow, if not to stop altogether, the forward flow of time (227).6

The river, another important symbol of time in Faulkner's novel, is Wolfe's other major symbol of the fusion of relative and immutable time. Eternal in its flow and thus immutable as well as relative and transient, the river symbolically represents a solution to Wolfe's paradoxical desire for change without loss, stability without stagnation (Church, 1968: 85; Huntley, 42). In Look Homeward, Angel, Wolfe compares Gant's life, impacted in the present by all he has been in the past, to the Mississippi River: "His life was like that river, rich with its own
deposited and onward-borne agglutinations, fecund with its sedimental accretions, filled exhaustlessly by life in order to be more richly itself" (LHA, 65).

Perfect as the river is as a natural symbol of changeless change, Wolfe clearly preferred the train in this regard, and used it much more often in his novel. The reason for Wolfe's preference is that his interest in the time problem was primarily practical, not theoretical. Since the solution of the problem suggested by the river is inapplicable to the life of man, the value of its solution in man's own quest for transcendence can only be symbolic, suggesting nothing more than the theoretical possibility of transcendence. The train, on the other hand, is capable not only of symbolizing the resolution of the many paradoxes in Wolfe's experience of time, but also of effecting it.

This is not to suggest that train travel represents an unambiguous solution to the time problem in Wolfe's novel. Eugene's ecstatic moment of vision from the moving train, of the woman frozen in "no time" (LHA, 159), is followed by a traumatic withdrawal back into time:

His sense of unreality came from time and movement, from imagining the woman, when the train had passed, as walking back into the house, lifting a kettle from the hearth embers. Thus life turned shadow, the living lights went ghost again. The boy among the calves. Where later? Where now? (LHA, 159)

The transcendence of time achieved aboard the moving train is temporary -- the timeless moment it provides is subject to time's law of change. Although the union of relative with
immutable time symbolized by the train is more applicable to mankind's struggle to transcend time than is the river, it is ultimately an imperfect agent of this transcendence, and thus remains a symbol that suggests a possibility, rather than an accomplished fact.

Much like the train, myths and historical records are able to effect, symbolically and to some extent actually, the interpenetration of past, present, and future moments in the novel. As a toddler, Eugene looks through the pictures of a history book in his father's sitting room and feels "the past unroll to him in separate and enormous visions; he built unending legends upon the pictures of the kings of Egypt, . . . and something infinitely old and recollective seemed to awaken in him as he looked on fabulous monsters, the twined beards and huge beast-bodies of Assyrian kings, the walls of Babylon" (LHA, 50). In passages such as this, the scene out of history is the key to the past, and exemplifies the idea that this past is not so very far removed from us as the laws of our objective, scientific time continuum would lead us to think. (Rubin, 1975: 291). The mythical figures that Wolfe invokes throughout the novel — from Apollo (LHA, 380; 465) Helen (LHA, 121; 127; 161) and King Solomon (LHA, 161) to Demeter (LHA, 121), Artemidorus (LHA, 465), the Trojan War (LHA, 228, 375), and the myth of Atlantis (LHA, 228) -- have a similar function, expressing the repetition of archetypes through numberless
forms (Albrecht, 245). Meyerhoff has observed that writers invoke mythical symbols for two basic reasons:

to suggest, within a secular setting, a timeless perspective of looking upon the human situation; and to convey a sense of continuity and identification with mankind in general. . . . If the cycles of the same human situation and type repeat themselves continually, "all time is eternally present." (79)

The myth that brings back the past most powerfully in Look Homeward, Angel is the myth of the antebellum South, the impact of which is felt quite palpably in the novel's present. While visiting the "ruined Camelot" of Charleston, Eugene and his friends watch as an old woman is led onto the high veranda of her house by "an attentive negress":

She seated herself in a porch rocker and stared blindly into the sun. Eugene looked at her sympathetically. She had probably not been informed by her loyal children of the unsuccessful termination of the war. . . . Fortunately, she was almost blind, and could not see the wastage of their fortune. It was very sad. But did she not sometimes think of that old time of the wine and the roses? When knighthood was in flower? (LHA, 303)

Eugene's own attitude toward his Southern heritage is shaped by the romantic halo that his school history cast over the section, by 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 women were pure, gentle, and beautiful, all men chivalrous and brave, and the Rebel horde a company of swagger, death-mocking cavaliers. (LHA, 127)

Unsurprisingly, Eugene's appraisal of the South's surrender in the Civil War is a product of Southern mythmaking: "'We were defeated,' said Eugene, quietly, 'not beaten!'" (LHA, 303). As the irony in Wolfe's evocation of the myth of the
Old South suggests, the problem with history and with myths as means of producing an awareness of the past's impact on the present is that they tend to encourage the tendency to live entirely in the past, and thus result in stagnation. Wolfe describes the American South as a "barren spiritual wilderness," whose inhabitants wallow in "their cheap mythology, their legend of the charm of their manner, the aristocratic culture of their lives, the quaint sweetness of their drawl," and a "hostile and murderous intrenchment against all new life" (LHA, 127). During his travels in Europe in the year prior to the publication of Look Homeward, Angel, Wolfe sensed this same stultifying nostalgia for a mythic past among the Italians, and expressed his disgust in the pages of his notebook: "The rantings of their opera singers here about the re-creation of Rome mean as much to me as the painting of a modern Hungarian 'in the manner of Raphael'. . . . I can live neither upon the dead nor among them -- The Italians can do both" (Notebooks, I: 279-280).

Wolfe's desire to convey in writing his experience of time's relativity inspired him to experiment with several of the fashionable literary techniques of his day. An important and revolutionary technique at the time Wolfe was writing Look Homeward, Angel was stream of consciousness, much in vogue through its popularization by such novelists as James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, and Virginia Woolf. In Look Homeward, Angel, as in the works of these writers, stream of
consciousness is used to represent more accurately the relativity of time as it is subjectively perceived by the mind:

The principles of selection and artistic economy inevitably force the reader to look at a picture of life as though it consisted of a series of consistent acts or events regulated by the rigid application of causality working within a narrowly limited number of factors. It is primarily to oppose this view that the 'stream of consciousness' writers evolved their technique. (Mendilow, 48)

In addition, stream of consciousness writing seeks to convey a sense of that which endures through the constantly changing and successive thoughts and sense impressions: the quality of eternal flow suggested by the image of the river or stream, from which the technique gets its name. Wolfe uses stream of consciousness to great effect in order to represent the mind of old Gant (e.g. LHA, 58-64, 150, 228). On several occasions, also, Wolfe depicts the stream of Eugene's consciousness: "King Solomon's mines. She. Proserpine. Ali Baba. Orpheus and Eurydice. Naked came I from my mother's womb. Naked shall I return. Let the mothering womb of earth engulf me. Naked, a valiant wisp of man, in vast brown limbs engulfed" (LHA, 229).

A technique far more prevalent in Look Homeward, Angel is interior monologue, which is also used to convey the relativity of time in the mind through the enduring power of past memories and through haunting foreknowledge of the future (Huntley, 37). Filtered as it is through its hero's consciousness, much of Wolfe's book consists of Eugene's
interior speech, the narration of which alternates randomly and without warning between first and third person:

As Eugene watched, the old fatality of place returned. Each day, he thought, we pass the spot where some day we must die; or shall I, too, ride dead to some mean building yet unknown? Shall this bright clay, the hill-bound, die in lodgings yet unbuilt? Shall these eyes, drenched with visions yet unseen, stored with the viscous and interminable seas at dawn, with the sad comfort of unfulfilled Arcadias, seal up their cold dead dreams upon a tick, as this, in time, in some hot village of the plains? He caught and fixed the instant. A telegraph messenger wheeled vigorously in from the avenue with pumping feet, curved widely into the alley at his right, jerking his wheel up sharply as he took the curb and coasted down to the delivery boy's entrance. And post o'er land and ocean without rest. Milton, thou shouldst be living at this hour. (LHA, 276)

Wolfe's ability to make certain scenes radiate back and forth across the novel contributes powerfully to the feeling of time's relativity, by suggesting to the reader's mind the fusion of past and future in the present. Examples of scenes that work together in this way abound in *Look Homeward, Angel*; Gant's reflective approach to Altamont on his return from California (LHA, 57-63) looks forward to Eugene's walk home through the town from school (LHA, 270-288), which in turn recalls and reflects back on the earlier scene. The most important instance of this technique is the interaction between Gant's moment of fixity in the Altamont town square (LHA, 222-223) and Eugene's in the final chapter (LHA, 514-521), which anticipate, recall, and reflect each other.

Wolfe achieves similar effects by the use of panoramic description, a technique he employs most effectively at the beginning of the novel's second part. By subtly injecting
reminders of the passage of time -- the train approaching Altamont, the gradual emergence of daylight -- as the various scenes flow into one another, Wolfe conveys the impression of simultaneity, of union with the absolute, in the midst of the teeming relativity, the vast separateness, of the lives that he represents (Meyerhoff, 39). For example, Wolfe writes, "Ben laughed noiselessly, and bent his pointed face into the mug again. . . . 'Oh-h-h-h my God!' [he said]. Virginal sunlight crept into the street in young moteless shafts. At this moment Gant awoke" (LHA, 150).

The angel symbol, finally, plays a vital and apparently contradictory role in Wolfe's representation of the human experience of time. At times, angels symbolize the inevitability of death -- witness, for example, the "dark angels" (LHA, 93) that hover around the doomed Ben. More importantly, they serve as a mocking reminder of man's inevitable failure in the quest to transcend time, as for example the funerary angels in Gant's monument shop: "In his rages, Gant sometimes directed vast climaxes of abuse at the angel. 'Fiend out of Hell!' he roared. 'You have impoverished me, you have ruined me, you have cursed my declining years, and now you will crush me to death, fearful, awful, and unnatural monster that you are!'" (LHA, 221). Gant, a stone cutter, had been led to his profession by the desire to carve an angel's head, "to wreak something dark and unspeakable in him into cold stone" (LHA 4), and
although he does become a stone cutter, he fails to fully realize his dream. Gant did not carve the "grimy" \( (LHA, 15) \) angels that fill his shop; he has purchased them from other, more skillful artisans. Both for Wolfe and for Gant himself, this failure is symbolic of all the other failures in Gant's life -- the most crucial one being his failure to resolve the fear of change through time with his horror of stagnation \( (LHA: 4, 15, 57, 221-2, 397) \).

Even as the angels mock Gant's failure, however, they represent a possibility for Eugene. Entombed in their marble silence, the angels are an affliction to old Gant because they symbolize a potential that he has been unable to realize. For his son, however, the potential for success still exists. Eugene's progress through the novel thus becomes a sort of hereditary quest to discover the secret possibility that the angels represent, and that his father has been unable to fulfill.

Just as Wolfe's paradoxical experience of the time problem causes him serious difficulties in the representation of that experience, so it also jeopardizes his hero's quest for a solution to the problem that resolves its many contradictions. At times, Eugene seems convinced that the solution cannot be found in this world, and thus seeks entrance into a timeless other-world (closely associated with the pre-natal paradise) through "the strong good medicine of death" \( (LHA, 521) \). Even as an adolescent,
Eugene senses death's potential not merely as an ending, but as a new beginning:

There sounded in his heart a solemn music. It filled the earth, the air, the universe; it was not loud, but it was omnipresent, and it spoke to him of death and darkness, and of the focal march of all who lived or had lived, converging on a plain. The world was filled with silent marching men: no word was spoken, but in the heart of each there was a common knowledge, the word that all men knew and had forgotten, the lost key opening the prison gates, the lane-end into heaven, and as the music soared and filled him, he cried: "I will remember. When I come to the place, I shall know." (LHA, 245)

Eugene's obsession with death is suggested, also, by the lines of poetry that come to his mind as he walks through downtown Altamont with George Graves on his way home from school (LHA, 270-288). The most recurrent allusions in this section are to Robert Herrick's "Ode to Ben Jonson," Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale," and Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" -- all of which are particularly evocative of the power of death (Reaver, 122-3). The death of his brother Ben, however, first suggests to Eugene's conscious mind the possibility of death as a means of transcending time:

Suddenly, marvelously, as if his resurrection and rebirth had come upon him, Ben drew upon the air in a long and powerful respiration; his gray eyes opened. Filled with a terrible vision of all life in the one moment, he seemed to rise forward bodilessly from his pillows without support -- a flame, a light, a glory -- joined at length in death to the dark spirit who had brooded upon each footstep of his lonely adventure on earth; and, casting the fierce sword of his glance with utter and final comprehension upon the room haunted with its gray pageantry of cheap loves and dull consciences and on all those uncertain mummers of waste and confusion fading now from the bright window of his eyes, he passed instantly, scornful and unafraid, as he had lived, into the shades of death. 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? (LHA, 465)

In the aftermath of Ben's death, furthermore, Eugene and Luke speak of him "not as of one who had died, but as of a brother who had been gone for years, and was returning home. They spoke of him with triumph and tenderness, as of one who had defeated pain, and had joyously escaped" (LHA, 469-70). Through death Ben seems almost to have regained the lost paradise.

Yet Eugene is uncomfortable with the idea of death as a solution to his problems with time. He cannot avoid feeling that it is not life that needs to be escaped, but death (Hagan, 1982: 10). As Eugene and Luke leave Gant's house on the morning of Ben's death, they hear the sound of birds waking:

A cock crew his shrill morning cry of life beginning and awaking. The cock that crew at midnight (thought Eugene) had an elfin ghostly cry. His crow was drugged with sleep and death: it was like a far horn sounding under sea; and it was a warning to all the men who are about to die, and to the ghosts that must go home. But the cock that crows at morning (he thought), has a voice as shrill as any fife. It says, we are done with sleep. We are done with death. O waken, waken into life, says his voice as shrill as any fife. . . . He heard the cock's bright minstrelsy again. . . . life was waking. Joy awoke in him, and exultation. They had escaped from the prison of death; they were joined to the bright engine of life again. Life, ruddered life, that would not fail, began its myriad embarkations. (LHA, 468).

For Eugene, death cannot be a solution to the problem of time because it means an end to life, the joys of which he appreciates fully as much as the sorrows. He wants not to
die, but to live forever, to recreate the timeless paradise on this earth.

A second concept in which Eugene places his faith, at least temporarily, is the theory of the soul's regeneration through the cycle of time. Wolfe introduces this idea at the very beginning of *Look Homeward, Angel*:

> Each of us is all the sums he has not counted: subtract us into nakedness and night again, and you shall see begin in Crete four thousand years ago the love that ended yesterday in Texas. . . . our lives are haunted by a Georgia slattern, because a London cutpurse went unhung. Each moment is the fruit of forty thousand years. (*LHA*, 3)

In a notebook entry Wolfe made soon after he began writing the novel, he tries to express his sense of the soul's regeneration in terms of myth:

> I want eternal life, eternal renewal, eternal love — the vitality of these immortal figures: I see myself sunk, a valiant wisp, between the mighty legs of Demeter, the earth Goddess, being wasted and filled eternally. I want life to ebb and flow in me in a mighty rhythm of oblivion and ecstasy. Upon a field in Thrace Queen Helen lay, her amber body spotted by the sun. (*Notebook I*, 62)

Wolfe eventually used a variation on this last phrase in the final version of *Look Homeward, Angel* (161); along with the other mythical allusions and archetypal motifs (the quest for transcendence and the search for a father) in the novel, the phrase expresses a sense of continuity, unity, and identification with the history of mankind as a whole that is fundamental to Wolfe's notion of the soul's regeneration and the cyclical nature of time.
The clearest model for cyclical time proposed by Wolfe in *Look Homeward, Angel* is the eternal circuit of the seasons. Throughout the novel, Eugene toys with the possibility that the dead make "their strange and lovely return" to life in the form of "blossom and flower" (*LHA*, 423. Cf. 186, 275; Hagan, 1982: 10). And when his brother Ben dies, Eugene is temporarily consoled by the conviction that like nature, which has also died that fall, Ben will be reborn in the spring:

What things will come again? O Spring, the cruelest and fairest of the seasons, will come again. And the strange and buried men will come again, in flower and leaf the strange and buried men will come again, and death and the dust will never come again, for death and the dust will die. And Ben will come again, he will not die again, in flower and leaf, in wind and music far, he will come back again. (*LHA*, 486)

Eugene's faith in regeneration as a possibility for human beings, however, evaporates as the spring arrives, nature is reborn, and he sees no sign of Ben's return: "The Spring comes back. I see the sheep upon the hill. The belled cows come along the road in wreaths of dust, and the wagons creak home below the pale ghost of the moon. But what stirs within the buried heart? Where are the lost words? And who has seen his shadow in the Square?" (*LHA*, 496). On the night before he leaves for Harvard, Eugene thinks of "the marvellous hills . . . blooming in the dusk," in contrast to the race of men, to whom such rebirth is denied: "We shall not come again. We never shall come back again" (*LHA*, 513). Finally, in the climactic vision of the novel's last
chapter, Eugene sees "the fabulous lost cities, buried in the drifted silt of the earth. . . . [while] amid the fumbling march of races to extinction, the giant rhythms of the earth remained. The seasons passed in their majestic processionals, and germinal Spring returned forever on the land" (LHA 519).

Romantic love is the final abstract concept in which Eugene attempts to place his faith. Through his relationship with Laura James, Eugene tries to counteract the inexorable forward flow of time; temporarily, he succeeds:

The house grew solidly into quiet, like a stone beneath the moon. They looked, waiting for a spell and the conquest of time. . . . "What time is it?" Eugene asked. For, they had come to a place where no time was. Laura held up her exquisite wrist, and looked at her watch. "Why!" she exclaimed, surprised. "It's only half-past twelve!" But he scarcely heard her. "What do I care what time it is!" he said huskily, and he seized the lovely hand, bound with its silken watch-cord, and kissed it. Her long cool fingers closed around his own; she drew his face down to her mouth. . . . "My dear! Darling! Do you remember last night?" he asked fondly, as if recalling some event of her childhood. (LHA, 368-378)

Amidst the exultation of this passage, however, there is a suggestion of the disenchantment to come. Even in this "timeless valley" (LHA, 380), Wolfe notes, Laura's hand remains "bound with its silken watch cord." Eventually, Laura leaves Eugene and returns to her family and fiance, and their achievement of a world beyond time proves subject to the laws of time itself. It is an experience that can never be repeated, and that fades ceaselessly into the past:

Come up into the hills, O my young love. Return! O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again,
as first I knew you in the timeless valley, where we shall feel ourselves anew, bedded on magic in the month of June. There was a place where all the sun went glistening in your hair, and from the hill we could have put a finger on a star. Where is the day that melted into one rich noise? . . . Quick are the mouths of earth, and quick the teeth that fed upon this loveliness. You who were made for music, will hear music no more: in your dark house the winds are silent. Ghost, ghost, come back from that marriage that we did not foresee, return not into life, but into magic, where we have never died, into the enchanted wood, where we still lie, strewn on the grass. Come up into the hills, O my young love: return. O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again. (LHA, 380)

The problem with love as a means of counteracting time is that it requires dependence on another person for its fulfillment. Imperfect and temporary as it is, however, Wolfe suggests that the experience of timelessness through love has been a valuable one for Eugene, and one that he will never completely lose:

They clung together in that bright moment of wonder, there on the magic island, where the world was quiet, believing all they said. And who shall say -- whatever disenchantment follows -- that we ever forget magic, or that we can ever betray, on this leaden earth, the apple-tree, the singing, and the gold? 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. (LHA, 380)

As this quotation suggests, it is the power of his own mind that offers Eugene the clearest opportunity for resolution of the contradictions inherent in his vision of time. At the very beginning of his novel, Wolfe asserts that "every moment is a window on all time" (LHA, 3); and Eugene's apprehension of certain 'moments' in time during which past, present, and future blend into one timeless,
transcendental instant elicits his recognition of time's relativity itself as a possible key to escape from relativity, and thus to fusion with time immutable. As Eugene returns home with his father from the Altamont theater, he senses that

the town, rimed with frost, lay frozen below the stars in a cataleptic trance. The animacy of life hung in abeyance. Nothing grew old, nothing decayed, nothing died. It was triumph over time. If a great demon snapped his fingers and stopped all life in the world for an instant that should be a hundred years, who would know the difference? . . . He thought that Troy should be like this -- perfect, undecayed as the day when Hector died. . . . Great vacant ways, unrested, echoed under his lonely feet; he haunted vast arcades, he pierced the atrium, his shoes rang on the temple flags. (LHA, 228)

Two important instances of the transcendent moment in Look Homeward, Angel occur in the Altamont town square, in front of the porch of Gant's monument shop. The first scene involves Gant himself, who, standing on the porch of his shop, looks out on the square and sees all the life around him frozen, as in a picture:

The firemen and Fagg Sluder had seen Gant, whispered, and were now looking toward him; a policeman, at the high side- porch of the Police Court, leaned on the rail and stared; at the near edge of the central grass-plot below the fountain, a farmer bent for water at a bubbling jet, rose dripping, and stared; from the Tax Collector's office, City Hall, upstairs, Yancey, huge, meaty, shirtsleeved, stared. And in that second the slow pulse of the fountain was suspended, life was held, like an arrested gesture, in photographic abeyance. (LHA, 223).

This scene is for Gant an effort to stem the tide of time -- an unsuccessful one, since he himself continues to "move deathward in a world of seemings" (LHA, 223) -- and it also
foreshadows the final scene in the novel, in which Eugene meets the ghost of Ben on the porch of his father's shop:

The square lay under blazing moonlight. The fountain pulsed with a steady breezeless jet: the water fell upon the pool with a punctual slap. No one came into the Square. . . . On the stone porch of the shop, the angels held their marble posture. They seemed to have frozen, in the moonlight. (LHA, 514)

These two moments of frozen time recall and anticipate one another, and emphasize not so much the similarities as the differences between them.

Moments of intuition such as these and others in Wolfe's novels have been compared to the sense of timelessness experienced by mystics at moments of ecstasy, in which the experience of time's duration is not so much dissolved, as suspended (Mendilow, 137). More importantly for Wolfe's purposes, and for Eugene's in his quest to transcend time, these moments are an invaluable guide to the place where relative and immutable time intersect (Hagan, 1982: 13). As means of transcendence in and of themselves, however, their limitations are obvious. First of all, such moments are almost by definition temporary and intermittent; they can never be counted upon to provide constant or permanent transcendence (Hagan, 1982: 11). Secondly, because these moments are not only temporary but involuntary and unpredictable, their net effect is often to reinforce and intensify one's sense of entrapment in time (Holman, 28): "His mind picked out in white living brightness these pinpoints of experience and the ghostliness of all things
else became more awful because of them." (LHA, 159). As Hugh Holman notes, furthermore, the "frozen moment" of an epiphany implies stasis (53); and for both Eugene and Wolfe, stasis suggests stagnation, which is as much to be feared as the change enforced by the flow of time. Much like Eugene's recollections of a pre-natal paradise, these moments of intuition can help to inspire Eugene's quest for escape from time, but are insufficient in themselves to satisfy it (Hagan, 1982: 13).

Crucial to the experience of these transcendent moments in the novel, and to the effort to make them outlast the moment of their perception, are the twin faculties of memory and foreknowledge. In his study of time in literature, Hans Meyerhoff explains the power of memory to effect the interpenetration of past and future moments with the present: "The causal connections between events within memory do not constitute an objective, uniform, consecutive order of 'earlier' and 'later' as they do for events in nature. Instead they exhibit, as Bergson said, a quality of 'dynamic interpenetration,'" a quality "by which past, present, and future events are dynamically fused and associated with each other" (22). The elements of memory, then, partake of time's relativity; and as a result, the recollection of a single event in memory can take place "under the aspect of eternity" (Meyerhoff, 54). As Bergson explains, "by allowing us to grasp in a single intuition multiple moments of duration, it [memory] frees us from the
movement of the flow of things, that is to say, from the rhythm of necessity" (1911, 303). Thus, "at the touch of memory, the irreversible flow of time is reversed; the past and future become the present; the lost, far and lonely are found" (Hagan, 1982: 11).

Wolfe himself was blessed (or, his critics would say, cursed) with "a very tenacious, a very literal, vivid, concrete memory, . . . characterized in a more than ordinary degree by the intensity of its sense impressions, its power to evoke and bring back the odors, sounds, colors, shapes, and feel of things with concrete vividness" (Autobiography, 30). As part of his inheritance from his mother's family, furthermore, Wolfe was imbued with a belief in the ability to see the future (Donald, 149). It is not surprising, then, that in Look Homeward, Angel virtually every major character, and a great many minor ones as well, experience the fusion of past and future time in the present. The one character who is most closely and consistently identified with this type of experience is Eliza Gant, Eugene's mother: "She liked to take her time, and came to the point after interminable divagations down all the lane-ends of memory and overtone, feasting upon the golden pageant of all she had ever said, done, felt, thought, seen, or replied, with egocentric delight" (LHA, 9). It is from his mother that Eugene inherits his ability to exploit the relativity of time in order to transcend it through memory and foreknowledge: "His powerful clairvoyance, the wild Scotch
gift of Eliza, burned inward back across the phantom years, plucking out of the ghostly shadows a million gleams of light -- a little station by the rails at dawn, the road cleft through the pineland seen at twilight. . . . His life coiled back into the brown murk of the past like a twined filament of electric wire" (LHA, 159). In another burst of clairvoyance, Eugene sees "his life down the solemn vista of a forest aisle, and he knew he would always be the sad one: caged in that little round of skull, imprisoned in that beating and most secret heart, his life must always walk down lonely passages" (LHA, 31). Thus Eugene, like his mother and like Wolfe himself, makes use of memory and clairvoyance "to keep the past and future within his reach, and to bridge all gaps in time" (Rubin, 1975: 285).

Taken by itself, memory shares the same limitations that curtail the effectiveness of Eugene's moments of transcendent intuition, the other method by which he tries to exploit the relativity of time. The way of memory as depicted in the character of Eliza, for example, is closely identified with the nostalgic passivity and stagnation that causes Eugene the same sense of fear and horror inspired by the constant forward flow of time:

And as the wind howled in the bleak street, and Eliza wove a thousand fables of that lost and bitter spirit, the bright and stricken thing in the boy twisted about in horror, looking for escape from the house of death. . . . Eugene heard the whine of the bleak wind about the house that he must leave, and the voice of Eliza calling up from the past the beautiful lost things that never happened. (LHA, 482)
In old Gant, similarly, the "lust of memory" is associated with death, with "the ravenous hunger of the will which tries to waken what is dead" (LHA, 230). It is this lust that inspires his habit of searching the newspapers "greedily for news of death" (LHA, 230). Images of sterility and death are also conjured up by Wolfe's description of Colonel Pettigrew, the old Confederate officer, who lives his life entirely through memory (LHA, 288). This stagnating effect of the will to memory is manifested in the habit of both Eugene and his mother to save even the most inconsequential relics of the past: "she [Eliza] saved bits of old string, empty cans and bottles, paper, trash of every description: the mania for acquisition [was] as yet an undeveloped madness in Eliza" (LHA, 40); "extravagant with money, and unable to husband it, [Eugene] saved everything else even when his spirit grew sick at the stale and dusty weariness of the past" (LHA, 501).

Furthermore, although memory is capable of greater duration than moments of intuition, and is also more consistent and predictable as an agent of temporal interpenetration, it is, nevertheless, still subject to time and thus temporary. For William Jennings Bryan, for instance, the memory of his youth is followed by the sting of his return to time:

The years of his glory washed back to him upon the rolling tides of rhetoric -- the great lost days of the first crusade when the money barons trembled beneath the shadow of the Cross of Gold, and Bryan! Bryan! Bryan! burned through the land like a comet. Ere
I was old. 1896. Ah, woeful ere, which tells me youth's no longer here. *(LHA, 282)*

Similarly, in his notebooks Wolfe writes of the memory of his brother Ben: "I see him in this setting, so curiously cheerful and exciting in spite of the darkness, he seems to me to be a manifestation of permanence; an object of fixed reality in my life, on which I may place my hands at any moment. And he is gone. And so you have gone in the night, Ben. And the day opens without you" *(Notebooks, I: 54).*

Memory alone, to sum up, is insufficient as a means of transcending time. Some way of preserving and animating the elements of memory is required to release its entrapment in temporality.

In *Look Homeward, Angel,* this animating force turns out to be the creative imagination, while the art produced by the union of memory with imagination preserves the moment of transcendence for all time. Wolfe suggests the potential of the creative imagination to merge with a powerful memory in the creation of an art that transcends time in a number of ways. His development of Eugene's character, for instance, emphasizes the elements of his personality -- his precocious interest in language, his ravenous love of reading, his maturing critical powers and taste, his rich fantasy life, and his actual writings *(Hagan, 1981: 279-80)* -- that indicate an artistic vocation. Eugene's parents also provide powerful examples of the way memory can unite with imagination to form an art that aspires to transcend time. Both are accomplished storytellers; Eliza creates countless
imaginary experiences from the facts of her past, while old Gant holds the boarders at Dixieland spellbound with the self-created legends of his experience:

They [the boarders] fed hungrily on all the dramatic gusto with which, 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. (LHA, 224)

As a child, Eugene recognizes in the artistry of his father's carvings the power to transcend time:

As Eugene saw him, he felt that this was no common craftsman, but a master, picking up his tools briefly for a chef-d'oeuvre. "He is better at this than any one in all the world," Eugene thought, and his dark vision burned in him for a moment, as he thought that his father's work would never, as men reckon years, be extinguished, but that when that great skeleton lay powdered in earth, in many a tangled undergrowth, in the rank wilderness of forgotten churchyards, these letters would endure. . . . He mourned for all the men who had gone because they had not scored their name upon a rock, blasted their mark upon a cliff, sought out the most imperishable objects of the world and graven there some token, some emblem that utterly they might not be forgotten. (LHA, 83)

His father's artistry points out to Eugene the potential of art as a means of transcendence; his failure to achieve it constitutes for Eugene both a challenge that he must meet, and a warning of the negative possibilities inherent in artistic striving -- frustration, disillusionment, and degradation. Gant's defeat as an artist occurs when he sells the marble angel on his porch, the symbol of his unfulfilled aesthetic aspirations, to adorn the grave of 'Queen' Elizabeth's prostitute: "He was silent,
thinking for a moment of the place where the angel stood. He knew he had nothing to cover or obliterate that place -- it left a barren crater in his heart" (LHA, 221-2). Afterwards, Gant feels himself irrevocably trapped in time:

They [Gant and Elizabeth] walked slowly to the front through aisled marbles. Sentinelled just beyond the wooden doors, the angel leered vacantly down. . . . and for a moment, as they stood at the porch edge, all life seemed frozen in a picture. . . . And in that second the slow pulse of the fountain was suspended, life was held, like an arrested gesture, in photographic abeyance, and Gant felt himself alone move deathward in a world of seemings. (LHA, 222-223)

That Eugene is fated to learn from, but not to repeat, Gant's failure is suggested by the setting of the novel's final chapter, in which Eugene finally becomes aware of his vocation. The scene explicitly parallels that of his father's ultimate defeat; both take place on Gant's porch, facing the Altamont town square, and emphasize the pulsing jet of the fountain. Whereas Gant's vision is one of stasis in which he alone moves "deathward," however, Eugene's involves movement and action. The angels on Gant's porch are animated through the power of Eugene's imagination -- "With a strong rustle of marble and a cold sigh of weariness, the angel nearest Eugene moved her stone foot and lifted her arm to a higher balance. The slender lily stipe shook stiffly in her elegant cold fingers" (LHA, 515) -- while his past is conjured up in a moment not of stasis, but of constant movement:

[There] he stood, peopling the night with the great lost legion of himself -- the thousand forms that came, that passed, that wove and shifted in unending change,
and that remained unchanging Him. And through the Square, unwoven from lost time, the fierce bright horde of Ben spun in and out its deathless loom. (LHA, 518)

Another important model of artistic striving is Horse Hines, the grotesquely comic undertaker who takes an absurd artistic pride in his ability to reanimate the dead Ben:

"There are artists, boys, in every profession," Horse Hines continued in a moment, with quiet pride, "and though I do say it myself, Luke, I'm proud of my work on this job. Look at him!" he exclaimed with sudden energy, and a bit of color in his gray face. "Did you ever see anything more natural in your life?" (LHA, 477)

The tone of this scene is comic, and it is evident that Wolfe means his readers to laugh, as Eugene and his brother Luke do, at Hines' ludicrous artistic pretensions. At the same time, however, Hines' attempt to give the appearance of life and health to Ben's corpse, however ridiculous, is genuinely artistic; like all true artists, Hines is struggling to triumph over time and death. (Hagan, 1981: 280). Even as he laughs at Hines, Eugene seems to recognize this fact: "Eugene staggered across the floor and collapsed upon a chair, roaring with laughter while his long arms flapped helplessly at his sides. 'Scuse!' he gasped. 'Don't mean to -- A-r-rt! Yes! Yes! That's it!'" (LHA, 477).

Eugene's realization of his vocation as an artist in the novel's final chapter follows closely upon this revelation, and should be viewed, at least in part, as a product of it.

This last chapter is remarkably difficult to interpret. Richard Kennedy explains that the obscurity is, in part, a result of the immense difficulties facing Wolfe and his
editor, Maxwell Perkins, in cutting and reworking his gigantic manuscript into a publishable novel:

The scene that suffered most in the cutting was the final scene in the square with the ghost of Ben. Perkins was right in calling for a more swiftly paced close to the book. But the scene as it now stands contains references that do not make sense in the present context; it has some abrupt transitions that leave a wish for further explanation in the reader's mind; and all in all, its meaning is not easily perceptible. Wolfe's problem was probably this: he had, in the first place, had difficulty expressing his ideas clearly; then when parts of the scene had to be removed, he felt he could not supply transitions without writing as much as had to be cut. Thus he added almost nothing to connect the passages that remained. (176)

Nevertheless, many commentators have argued that Eugene's quest to conquer time is resolved in this chapter through his discovery of art as a vocation. The most persuasive of these scholars is John Hagan, who argues that Eugene is rescued from the "'terrible vision'(519)" (Hagan, 1981: 281) of his future failure in the quest for transcendence by heeding Ben's advice; under Ben's "tutelage" (Hagan, 1981: 282), Eugene learns that he must find his timeless other-world inside himself. He accomplishes this by discovering, in the combined power of his imagination and memory to call back the past, raise the dead (Ben), and animate the angels, the "metaphorical equivalent" of the pre-natal paradise (Hagan, 1981: 283). Based upon this achievement, Hagan goes on to predict Eugene's successful transcendence of time and death through art:

By thus symbolically dramatizing the power of art to triumph over the flux of life and render it timeless and beautiful, the first three sections of Chapter 40
implicitly provide the reader with the answer to the question which, in the last section, Eugene fails to get from Ben: what he will ultimately discover . . . will be the enormous creative resources of his imagination and memory -- in short, nothing less than his vocation as an artist. . . . With the forthcoming discovery of his artistic vocation, then, Eugene will have achieved, in the only way possible for him, his quest for liberation from time and death. (1981: 283-4)

Hagan and those who agree with him are right to maintain that Eugene identifies a solution to the time problem in Chapter 40; in their haste to provide Wolfe's novel with a sense of resolution, however, they ignore the evident strain of uncertainty in Eugene's solution:

Eugene now knows that "his gateway to the lost world" really lies behind him in the experiences he has already had and those waiting to be shaped by his hand (p. 297). Thus, although in the last paragraph of the novel, the town Square already seems "far and lost" to him, and he has become "like a man who . . . turns his eyes upon the distant soaring ranges," (p. 522) he . . . will ultimately "look homeward" in the broadest sense of all by immortalizing the family, the town, the region, and his own life there in art. (Hagan, 1981: 285)

It is difficult to understand how Hagan can maintain this blithe, untroubled optimism in the face not only of the last paragraph of the novel -- which Hagan dismisses in the quotation above based upon no other evidence than his own prediction about what Eugene "will ultimately" do after the novel has ended -- but also of the several paragraphs that precede it. First of all, Eugene's resolution is achieved primarily through the influence of Ben. As a being from beyond the grave whose wisdom is thus presumed to be absolute and unquestionable, Ben's cryptic pronouncements are supposed not only to elicit but also to validate
Eugene's solution. But in fact, Ben's pronouncements are far from clear -- he never mentions imagination, memory, art, or the lost paradise -- and Eugene's interpretation of his words is usually wrong, as Ben repeatedly points out (e.g. \textit{LHA}, 515; 516; 517; 520, 521, etc.). How, then, can anyone be sure that the interpretation of Ben's words that prompts Eugene's final solution is the correct one? Ben himself never confirms that it is; he fades out of sight, in fact, just as Eugene is asking him to do so: "'I shall haunt you, ghost, along the labyrinthine ways until --- until? O Ben, my ghost, an answer?' But as he spoke, the phantom years scrolled up their vision, and only the eyes of Ben burned terribly in darkness, without an answer. . . . a wind stirred lightly in the Square, and, as he looked, Ben, like a fume of smoke, was melted into dawn" (\textit{LHA}, 521). Eugene's request for confirmation goes unanswered.

As a result of Ben's silence, Eugene himself remains at the very end of the novel unsure of his "solution." The angels on Gant's porch, which had been moving in tribute to the creative power of Eugene's imagination, are once again "frozen in hard marble silence" (\textit{LHA}, 521); the "whistle wail" of the train, which has throughout the novel evoked for Eugene time's ceaseless rush into the future, breaks through the silence of the morning (\textit{LHA}, 522). And finally, in the last paragraph, Eugene seems to abandon his resolution to continue his quest for transcendence "in the city of myself" (\textit{LHA}, 521). He focuses not on the continent
of his own soul, or even on the town of his past (which, incidentally, is not easily recoverable but "far and lost"), but rather upon "the distant soaring ranges," a phrase which implies the external voyages he had forsworn in the declaration of his aesthetic creed (LHA, 521).

Ignoring the contradictions and uncertainty in Eugene's aesthetic solution to the problem of time not only produces the errors in interpretation found in Hagan's article, but also denotes a failure to understand, on a fundamental level, Wolfe's purpose as a creative artist. The rules governing a novel's aesthetic form were of concern to him only as a means to an end. This end was the truthful and accurate representation of his experience; and although he was willing to make many concessions to such concepts as unity, coherence, and resolution when he felt that they served this ultimate goal (as is evidenced by his acquiescence to and participation in the drastic editing required to make "O Lost" into Look Homeward, Angel), fidelity to his own experience was always his foremost concern. The aesthetic solution to the problem of time is one that was suggested to Wolfe not only by his reading of Proust (Meyerhoff, 44-45), Joyce (Church, 1968: 92; Rothman, 276), the Romantics (Holman, 163; Muller, 22) in general and Wordsworth (Abrams, 75; 82) in particular, but also and more importantly by his own experience. As he writes of his travels in Europe, "I would sit there, looking out upon the Avenue de l'Opera and my life would ache with the whole
memory of it; the desire to see it again; somehow to find a word for it; a language that would tell its shape, its color, the way we have known and felt and seen it"
(Autobiography, 32). And yet I don't think Wolfe was ever completely comfortable, as Proust and others were, with art as a means of transcending time. If he had been, the obsession with questions of time would not have continued to plague him, as all of the writing he produced after Look Homeward, Angel show that it did. Rather than faking complete confidence in a final solution of the problem for the sake of an aesthetically pleasing resolution, Wolfe offers us in the final chapter, as he has done throughout the novel, the truth of his experience, with all its contradictions and uncertainties.

It is tempting to dismiss these contradictions and uncertainties as indicative of the carelessness, immaturity, and vagueness of Wolfe's thought. Yet it is important to remember that in Look Homeward, Angel Wolfe is never concerned with the delineation of a mature, fully formed character, but rather with tracing his hero's development from birth through childhood and adolescence to the brink of manhood. The process of a person's development, presented realistically, is not a ceaseless forward progression (like, for example, time), but instead a constant process of becoming, consisting of progressions and regressions, of leaps forward interrupted by tumbles back, that achieves final resolution only at death. The uncertainty and
ambiguity in Wolfe's presentation of the aesthetic solution is consistent not only with this sense of life as becoming, but also with the contradictions and ambiguities that recur in his representation of his time experience and of Eugene's search for a solution throughout the novel. Thus, it is rather a testament to the consistency and authenticity of his final vision, than a criticism of it, to note that it is marred by contradiction and uncertainty; as Wolfe's novel repeatedly demonstrates, in a life that is a process of becoming there is no final conclusion, no absolute certainty. Order exists only "in enchantment" (LHA, 160).

In coming to terms with the conclusion of Look Homeward, Angel, one is reminded of the letter Wolfe wrote to Horace Williams some nine years before the novel was published: "'How can there be unity in the midst of everlasting change?' In a system where things forever pass and decay, what is there fixed, real, eternal? I search for an answer but it must be demonstrated to me. Merely saying a thing is not enough" (Letters, 18). Wolfe's greatest strength as a writer, and perhaps his greatest weakness as a novelist, was his uncompromising desire to represent the truth of experience as he saw it, his unwillingness to accept unexamined solutions for the sake of aesthetic perfection. For Wolfe as a thinker, a writer, and a human being, merely saying a thing was never enough.
Notes

1 See Church, 1953: 250, 253-4, 256, 259; Church, 1968: 86, 89, 90, 94-6, 99-101; Donald, 279; Holman, 30; Huntley, 34, 38-39; Frohock, 238; Albrecht, 240; Muller, 75-6, 164-5; Rubin, Jr., 1955: 33, 51; Rubin, Jr., 1953: 294-5; Meyerhoff, 44-5, 54-7; and Mendilow, 137-8. Surprisingly, it is difficult to make a strong case for Wolfe's familiarity with Proust's work at the time that he was writing Look Homeward, Angel. His voluminous notebooks make no mention of Proust through October of 1929, when Wolfe's own book was published; and among the many letters Wolfe wrote to friends and associates while in the process of writing and revising Look Homeward, Angel, his only mention of Proust is in a letter written to Henry T. Volkening in August of 1929, barely two months before the novel was published: "Maine was lovely and cool," he reports, "I fished, corrected proofs [of LHA], and read John Donne and Proust all day long . . . ." (Letters, 194). That this reading of Proust's novel at such a late stage in his work on Look Homeward Angel was Wolfe's first exposure is supported by circumstantial evidence -- his next book, Of Time and the River, shows the influence of Proust much more concretely and obviously than does its predecessor. The many traces of Proust's influence on Wolfe's first novel, then, can be most safely attributed to secondhand knowledge of the time concepts in Proust's classic, probably obtained through discussions with fellow
students at Harvard, or with teaching associates at New York University, where Wolfe taught English composition and introductory literature classes intermittently during the writing of Look Homeward, Angel.

Some have argued that Wolfe derived his understanding of time directly from Henri Bergson, the French philosopher whose theories about time Proust adopted and represented creatively in Remembrance. According to Richard Kennedy, the time concept in Look Homeward, Angel almost certainly has its source in the philosophy of Bergson, although Wolfe made no mention of Bergson in his letters or notebooks until several months after the book was published (Kennedy, 145). Among the books in Wolfe's library was a copy of a group of selections from Bergson, entitled Henri Bergson, choix de texte avec etude du systeme philosophique, ed. Rene Gellouin (Paris, n.d.), as well as a copy of Bergson's essay Dreams. While there is no evidence that Wolfe actually read either of these, it is of course possible that he did (Kennedy, 145). Also, the pocket notebooks that Wolfe kept during the summer of 1928 contain several reminders to buy books by or about Julien Benda, Bergson's philosophical opponent. That he finally did buy and read Constant Bourquin's Julien Benda, ou le point de vue de Sirius, and that he sided with Bergson in their debate, is indicated in a letter to his mistress, Aline Bernstein, written on July 25, 1928 (Kennedy, 145). Kennedy concludes that although Wolfe's philosophy of time as expressed in Look Homeward, Angel has
its source in Bergson, there is no evidence that Wolfe
tapped this source directly; the ideas that he derived from
Bergson "may not have come directly from Bergson's writings,
but from an article or the conversation of a friend."
(Kennedy, 145). Margaret Church, citing the evidence of
Wolfe's familiarity with the work of William James from his
reading at the American Library in Paris, concludes that it
was James, whose writings on the subject of time were very
much influenced by Bergson, and not Bergson himself, who was
the source of the "Bergsonian" ideas and formulations in
*Look Homeward, Angel* (Church, 1968, 95).

2 For discussions of Wolfe's connection to the
Romantics, see Donald, 149-50; Holman, 26-7, 132, 163;
Muller, 22; Kennedy, 129, 145-7, 161; Rubin, 1970: 107-116;
Rubin, Jr., 1955: 54-75; and Stearns, 195-205. Of the
Romantic poets, Wolfe was most heavily influenced by
Coleridge and Wordsworth. In *Look Homeward, Angel* Wolfe
honors Coleridge as "that incomparable romanticist" (*LHA,*
127), and in the conduct of his artistic life paid Coleridge
the compliment of imitating his practice in the keeping of
notebooks, recording his ideas, judgments, moods, projects,
and reading notes in a cryptic, introspective style similar
to that employed by his idol (Kennedy, 64). Wolfe read most
of the better known poems of Coleridge and his
contemporaries at school in Asheville, North Carolina, and
during college at Chapel Hill; it was at Harvard, however, that Wolfe had his most significant encounter with the Romantics. There he studied Coleridge in depth under John Livingston Lowes, who was at that time immersed in his study of Coleridge's poetic process, using the 1795-98 Notebook as his principle source. The result of Lowes' research was his celebrated critical treatise, *The Road to Xanadu*, portions of which he read to the class in which Wolfe was enrolled (Kennedy, 64). Wolfe himself attested to the "great effect" (Letters, 30) Lowes' ideas about Coleridge had on him, and demonstrated in the term paper he wrote for the seminar his understanding of Lowes' theory of "the deep well of unconscious cerebration" that went into the creation of Coleridge's greatest poems. In a footnote to his published work, Lowes credited Wolfe with discovering the sources for some of Coleridge's ideas (Donald, 72).

Although Wolfe evidently thought much more highly of Coleridge than of Wordsworth, "one searches in vain for anything like the quantitative or qualitative echoings of Coleridge that we find of Wordsworth" (Rubin Jr., 1955: 60) in *Look Homeward, Angel*. The text of the novel is full of echoes from Wordsworth's poems, particularly the "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" and "Tintern Abbey." Coleridge was the focus of the course in the Romantic poets that Wolfe took from Lowes at Harvard, but Wordsworth's major poems were also covered, and Wolfe was already familiar with them from his previous schooling. Among the quotations Wolfe
jotted in his notebooks for possible use on the dedication and title pages of *Look Homeward, Angel* was a couplet from Wordsworth's Immortality Ode: "The rainbow comes and goes/And lovely is the rose" (ll. 10-11). (Kennedy, 145).

3 The best discussion of Wolfe's debt to Joyce is in Church, 1968. See also Donald, 161-3; Albrecht, 240; Rothman, 263-89; Beja, 133-4, 140, 144-5; Natanson, 81-2; Kennedy, 135-6; Meyerhoff, 16-17. Wolfe's direct knowledge of the works of Joyce, particularly *Ulysses*, is quite certain. In *The Story of a Novel*, Wolfe's account of his beginnings as a writer and of the writing of his first two books, he recalls that, "like every young man, I was strongly under the influence of the writers I admired. One of the chief writers at that time was Mr. James Joyce with his book *Ulysses*. I was a great deal under his spell. The book I was writing was much influenced, I believe, by his own book" (Autobiography, 8). Wolfe encountered his famous idol on two separate occasions during the composition of *Look Homeward, Angel*, and he recorded both experiences excitedly in his notebook and in letters to friends (*Notebooks I*, 179). In March 1927, furthermore, while working on his novel in New York, Wolfe took a break from his labors to visit Boston, where he engaged in "'a bit of high grade burglary'" (Donald, 161) of his uncle's house in order to recover his smuggled copy of *Ulysses*, which was then banned in the United States. On several occasions,
Wolfe referred to *Look Homeward, Angel* as his "*Ulysses* book" (Donald, 161). Joyce, moreover, was the one literary influence Wolfe was willing to admit in answer to critics of his first novel: "As to my own book, I own up to the Joyce — I read the works of that talented gentleman very assiduously and if some flavour of them has crept into my book I cannot deny it" (*Letters*, 89).

4 In a letter that Wolfe wrote on January 12, 1929, to his childhood teacher, Margaret Roberts, he describes his feeling of exultation at the news that Scribners had decided to publish his novel: "Isn't it glorious that this should have happened to me when I was still young and rapturous enough to be thrilled by it? It may never come again, but I've had the magic -- what Euripides calls 'The apple tree, the singing, and the gold!'" (*Letters*, 166). In *Look Homeward, Angel*, Wolfe uses Euripides' phrase to convey the gloriousness of the lost past, asking rhetorically if "we can ever betray, on this leaden earth, the apple-tree, the singing, and the gold?" (*LHA*, 380). As for Wordsworth, Monroe M. Stearns has pointed out the remarkable similarity between Wolfe's "a stone, a leaf, an unfound door" and a series of images found in *The Prelude*: "Which, from a tree, a stone, a withered leaf,/To the broad ocean and the azure heavens" (Book III, 11. 163-4; Stearns, 202).
Wolfe does not mention Einstein in his letters or notebooks prior to the publication of *Look Homeward, Angel*. Nevertheless it is likely that Wolfe, a college professor who conversed and kept company with intellectuals, was at least aware of the scientific debate surrounding Einstein's theory, which Julie M. Johnson maintains was "widely popularized and debated in the years before" 1929 (230). While Wolfe was at Harvard in the spring of 1921, furthermore, Einstein embarked on a tour of the U.S., visiting Boston and other intellectual centers. The newspaper accounts of Einstein's visits invariably included popularized versions of his theories.

This is not to argue, however, that Einstein was the primary philosophical influence on Wolfe's idea of time's relativity. Even if Wolfe were aware of Einstein's work, the importance in his novel of an immutable, unchanging element of time -- "the time of rivers, mountains, oceans, and the earth" (*Autobiography*, 51) -- suggests that he did not believe in the absolute relativity espoused in the scientific theory. The philosophy of Bergson, with its concept of absolute duration, independent of and transcending the relativity of mortal time, is much closer to Wolfe's own:

Duration simply means that we experience time as continuous flow. The experience of time is characterized not only by successive moments and multiple changes but also by something which endures within succession and change. It was Bergson's
contention, re-echoed in the literary treatment of time, that this quality of continuous flow or duration does not find an adequate correlate in the physical concept of time. . . . This flow can be perceived only by rejecting intellectual formulations and yielding to the direct "intuition" of experience. When this is achieved, when we "sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts," we are enabled to arrive at a new understanding of the relations of the tense, once we appreciate the indivisible continuity of change. (Meyerhoff, 14-15, 149)

7 See Beja, 128-9, and Bishop, 63, 65.
Works Cited


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