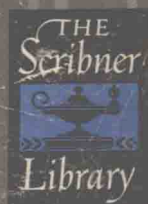


\$1.95

LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL

A NOVEL BY

THOMAS WOLFE



LOOK HOMEWARD,
ANGEL

A Story of the Buried Life

by
THOMAS WOLFE

With An Introduction
by MAXWELL E. PERKINS

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

New York

Copyright 1929 Charles Scribner's Sons; renewal copyright
© 1957 Edward C. Aswell, as Administrator, C.T.A. of the
Estate of Thomas Wolfe and/or Fred W. Wolfe.

Copyright 1952 Charles Scribner's Sons.

*All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced
in any form without the permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.*

J-10.64[Col]

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The essay on Thomas Wolfe by Maxwell E. Perkins is reprinted
from the *Harvard Library Bulletin*, Vol. I, No. 3 (Autumn
1947), by permission of the President and Fellows of Harvard
College.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

SCRIBNER LIBRARY BOOKS

FICTION

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| M. DAVENPORT | <i>Of Lena Geyer</i> (SL 31) |
| S. FITZGERALD | <i>Babylon Revisited and Other Stories</i> (SL 22) |
| S. FITZGERALD | <i>The Great Gatsby</i> (SL 1) |
| S. FITZGERALD | <i>Tender Is the Night</i> (SL 21) |
| S. FITZGERALD | <i>The Beautiful and Damned</i> (SL 90) |
| S. FITZGERALD | <i>This Side of Paradise</i> (SL 60) |
| J. GALSWORTHY | <i>The Man of Property</i> (SL 3) |
| E. HEMINGWAY | <i>A Farewell to Arms</i> (SL 61) |
| E. HEMINGWAY | <i>For Whom the Bell Tolls</i> (SL 4) |
| E. HEMINGWAY | <i>In Our Time</i> (SL 56) |
| E. HEMINGWAY | <i>The Snows of Kilimanjaro and Other Stories</i> (SL 32) |
| E. HEMINGWAY | <i>The Sun Also Rises</i> (SL 5) |
| R. HUMPHRIES | <i>The Aeneid of Virgil</i> (SL 6) |
| R. LARDNER | <i>Haircut and Other Stories</i> (SL 53) |
| A. MENEN | <i>The Prevalence of Witches</i> (SL 39) |
| A. MENEN | <i>The Ramayana</i> (SL 78) |
| H. MUNTZ | <i>The Golden Warrior</i> (SL 91) |
| A. PATON | <i>Cry, The Beloved Country</i> (SL 7) |
| A. PATON | <i>Too Late the Phalarope</i> (SL 79) |
| M. RAWLINGS | <i>The Yearling</i> (SL 40) |
| G. SANTAYANA | <i>The Last Puritan</i> (SL 23) |
| R. SHERWOOD | <i>Abe Lincoln in Illinois</i> (SL 52) |
| C. SNOW | <i>The Affair</i> (SL 54) |
| C. SNOW | <i>The Conscience of the Rich</i> (SL 24) |
| C. SNOW | <i>The Light and the Dark</i> (SL 92) |
| C. SNOW | <i>The New Men</i> (SL 33) |
| C. SNOW | <i>Strangers and Brothers</i> (SL 80) |
| C. WESTON | <i>Indigo</i> (SL 55) |
| E. WHARTON | <i>The Custom of the Country</i> (SL 62) |
| E. WHARTON | <i>Ethan Frome</i> (SL 8) |
| E. WHARTON | <i>The House of Mirth</i> (SL 41) |
| E. WHARTON | <i>Roman Fever and Other Stories</i> (SL 93) |
| T. WOLFE | <i>Look Homeward, Angel</i> (SL 9) |

LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL

TO A. B.

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

THOMAS WOLFE¹

When in the spring of 1947 William B. Wisdom, of New Orleans, presented to the Harvard College Library his distinguished collection of Thomas Wolfe, it was at once apparent that the person above all others to provide an introduction to it was Maxwell E. Perkins, '07, of Charles Scribner's Sons, editor of Wolfe's first novels, and allied to Wolfe by the closest ties of profession and of friendship. Mr. Perkins gladly consented to prepare an article; he was engaged upon it at his sudden death on 17 June 1947. Although the article was to have been expanded by another three thousand words, with a more detailed discussion of Wolfe as a person, as it stands it has the effect of a self-contained statement. It is published as the last writing of Maxwell Perkins and as an expression of the memorial which he planned to compose to Thomas Wolfe.

I think that there is not in any one place so nearly complete a collection of an author's writings and records as that of Thomas Wolfe's now in the Harvard Library. When he died on that sad day in September 1938, when war was impending, or soon after that, I learned that I was his executor and that he had actually left little—as he would have thought, and as it seemed then—besides his manuscripts. It was my obligation to dispose of them to the advantage of his beneficiaries and his memory, and though the times were bad, and Wolfe had not then been recognized as what he now is, I could have sold them commercially, piecemeal, through dealers, for more money than they ever brought. I was determined that this literary estate should remain a unit, available to

¹ The article is printed in the form received from Mr. Perkins's secretary two days after his death, with some slight modifications in punctuation and with the addition of a title. [Note by the Editor of the *Harvard Library Bulletin*.]

writers and students, and I tried to sell it as such; but at that time, with war clouds gathering and soon bursting, I could find no adequate buyer.

Then Aline Bernstein, to whom Wolfe had given the manuscript of *Look Homeward, Angel*, sold it by auction for the relief of her people in misfortune, on the understanding that it would be given to Harvard. Not long after that William B. Wisdom, who had recognized Wolfe as a writer of genius on the publication of the *Angel*, and whose faith in him had never wavered, offered to purchase all of his manuscripts and records. He had already accumulated a notable collection of Wolfiana. His correspondence showed me that he thought as I did—that the point of supreme importance was that these records and writings should not be scattered to the four winds, that they be kept intact. And so the whole great packing case of material—letters, bills, documents, notebooks and manuscripts—went to him on the stipulation, which I never need have asked for, that he would will it all to one institution. Since *Look Homeward, Angel* was already in Harvard, since Tom Wolfe had loved the reading room of the Library where, as he so often told me, he devoured his hundreds of books and spent most of his Harvard years, Mr. Wisdom made a gift of all this to Harvard. And there it now is.

Though I had worked as an editor with Thomas Wolfe on two huge manuscripts, *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River*, I was astonished on that Spring evening of 1935 when Tom, about to sail for England, brought to our house on East 49th Street, because Scribner's was closed, the huge packing case containing all his literary material. Tom and I and the taxi man carried it in and set it down. Then Tom said to the man, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Lucky.' 'Lucky!' said Tom—I think it was perhaps an Americanization of some Italian name—and grasped his hand. It seemed a good omen. We three had done something together. We were together for that moment. We all shook hands. But for days, that huge packing case blocked our hall, until I got it removed to Scribner's.

The first time I heard of Thomas Wolfe I had a sense of foreboding. I who love the man say this. Every good thing that comes is accompanied by trouble. It was in 1928 when Madeleine Boyd, a literary agent, came in. She talked of several manuscripts which did not much interest me, but frequently interrupted herself to tell of a wonderful novel about an American boy. I several times said to her, 'Why don't you bring it in here, Madeleine?' and she seemed to evade the question. But finally she said, 'I will bring it, if you promise to read every word of it.' I did promise, but she told me other things that made me realize that Wolfe was a turbulent spirit, and that we were in for turbulence. When the manuscript came, I was fascinated

by the first scene where Eugene's father, Oliver W. Gant, with his brother, two little boys, stood by a roadside in Pennsylvania and saw a division of Lee's Army on the march to Gettysburg.

But then there came some ninety-odd pages about Oliver Gant's life in Newport News, and Baltimore, and elsewhere. All this was what Wolfe had heard, and had no actual association with which to reconcile it, and it was inferior to the first episode, and in fact to all the rest of the book. I was turned off to other work and gave the manuscript to Wallace Meyer, thinking, 'Here is another promising novel that probably will come to nothing.' Then Meyer showed me that wonderful night scene in the cafe where Ben was with the Doctors, and Horse Hines, the undertaker, came in. I dropped everything and began to read again, and all of us were reading the book simultaneously, you might say, including John Hall Wheelock, and there never was the slightest disagreement among us as to its importance.

After some correspondence between me and Wolfe, and between him and Madeleine Boyd, from which we learned how at the October Fair in Germany he had been almost beaten to death—when I realized again that we had a *Moby Dick* to deal with—Wolfe arrived in New York and stood in the doorway of my boxstall of an office leaning against the door jamb. When I looked up and saw his wild hair and bright countenance—although he was so altogether different physically—I thought of Shelley. *He* was fair, but his hair was wild, and his face was bright and his head disproportionately small.

We then began to work upon the book and the first thing we did, to give it unity, was to cut out that wonderful scene it began with and the ninety-odd pages that followed, because it seemed to me, and he agreed, that the whole tale should be unfolded through the memories and senses of the boy, Eugene, who was born in Asheville. We both thought that the story was compassed by that child's realization; that it was life and the world as he came to realize them. When he had tried to go back into the life of his father before he arrived in Asheville, without the inherent memory of events, the reality and the poignance were diminished—but for years it was on my conscience that I had persuaded Tom to cut out that first scene of the two little boys on the roadside with Gettysburg impending.

And then what happened? In *Of Time and the River* he brought the scene back to greater effect when old Gant was dying on the gallery of the hospital in Baltimore and in memory recalled his olden days. After that occurred I felt much less anxiety in suggesting cuts: I began then to realize that nothing Wolfe wrote was ever lost, that omissions from one book were restored in a later one. An extreme example of this is the fact that

the whole second half of *The Web and the Rock* was originally intended to be the concluding episode in *Of Time and the River*. But most, and perhaps almost all, of those early incidents of Gant's life were worked into *The Web and the Rock* and *You Can't Go Home Again*.

I had realized, for Tom had prefaced his manuscript with a statement to that effect, that *Look Homeward, Angel* was autobiographical, but I had come to think of it as being so in the sense that *David Copperfield* is, or *War and Peace*, or *Pendennis*. But when we were working together, I suddenly saw that it was often almost literally autobiographical—that these people in it were his people. I am sure my face took on a look of alarm, and Tom saw it and he said, 'But Mr. Perkins, you don't understand. I think these people are *great* people and that they should be told about.' He was right. He had written a great book, and it had to be taken substantially as it was. And in truth, the extent of cutting in that book has somehow come to be greatly exaggerated. Really, it was more a matter of reorganization. For instance, Tom had that wonderful episode when Gant came back from his far-wandering and rode in early morning on the trolley car through the town and heard about who had died and who had been born and saw all the scenes that were so familiar to Tom or Eugene, as the old trolley rumbled along. This was immediately followed by an episode of a similar kind where Eugene, with his friends, walked home from school through the town of Asheville. That was presented in a Joycean way, but it was the same sort of thing—some one going through the town and through his perceptions revealing it to the reader. By putting these episodes next to each other the effect of each was diminished, and I think we gave both much greater value by separating them. We did a great deal of detailed cutting, but it was such things as that I speak of that constituted perhaps the greater part of the work.

Of Time and the River was a much greater struggle for Tom. Eventually, I think it was on Thanksgiving Day 1933, he brought me in desperation about two feet of typescript. The first scene in this was the platform of the railroad station in Asheville when Eugene was about to set out for Harvard, and his family had come to see him off. It must have run to about 30,000 words and I cut it to perhaps 10,000 and showed it to Tom. He approved it. When you are waiting for a train to come in, there is suspense. Something is going to happen. You must, it seemed to me, maintain that sense of suspense and you can't to the extent of 30,000 words. There never was any cutting that Tom did not agree to. He knew that cutting was necessary. His whole impulse was to utter what he felt and he had no time to revise and compress.

So then we began a year of nights of work, including Sundays, and every cut, and change, and interpolation, was argued about and about. The principle that I was working on was that this book, too, got its unity and its form through the senses of Eugene, and I remember how, if I had had my way, we should, by sticking to that principle, have lost one of the most wonderful episodes Wolfe ever wrote—the death of Gant. One night we agreed that certain transitions should be written in, but instead of doing them Wolfe brought on the next night some five thousand words about Eugene's sister in Asheville when her father was ill, and a doctor there and a nurse. I said, 'Tom, this is all outside the story, and you know it. Eugene was not there, he was in Cambridge; all of this was outside his perception and knowledge at the time.' Tom agreed with me, but the next night, he brought me another five thousand words or so which got up into the death of Gant. And then I realized I was wrong, even if right in theory. What he was doing was too good to let any rule of form impede him.

It is said that Tolstoy never willingly parted with the manuscript of *War and Peace*. One could imagine him working on it all through his life. Certainly Thomas Wolfe never willingly parted from the proofs of *Of Time and the River*. He sat brooding over them for weeks in the Scribner library and not reading. John Wheelock read them and we sent them to the printer and told Tom it had been done. I could believe that otherwise he might have clung to them to the end.

He dedicated that book to me in most extravagant terms. I never saw the dedication until the book was published and though I was most grateful for it, I had forebodings when I heard of his intention. I think it was that dedication that threw him off his stride and broke his magnificent scheme. It gave shallow people the impression that Wolfe could not function as a writer without collaboration, and one critic even used some such phrases as, 'Wolfe and Perkins—Perkins and Wolfe, what way is that to write a novel.' Nobody with the slightest comprehension of the nature of a writer could accept such an assumption. No writer could possibly tolerate the assumption, which perhaps Tom almost himself did, that he was dependent as a writer upon anyone else. He had to prove to himself and to the world that this was not so.

And that was the fundamental reason that he turned to another publisher. If he had not—but by the time he did it was plain that he had to tell, in the medium of fiction and through the transmutation of his amazing imagination, the story of his own life—he never would have broken his own great plan by distorting Eugene Gant into George Webber. That was a horrible mistake. I think Edward Aswell, of Harper & Brothers, agrees with

me in this, but when the manuscript that came to form *The Web and the Rock* and *You Can't Go Home Again* got to him to work on, and in some degree to me, as Wolfe's executor, Tom was dead, and things had to be taken as they were.

The trouble began after the publication of *Of Time and the River*, which the reviewers enormously praised—but many of them asserted that Wolfe could only write about himself, that he could not see the world or anything objectively, with detachment—that he was always autobiographical. Wolfe was extremely sensitive to criticism, for all his tremendous faith in his genius as an obligation put upon him to fulfill. One day when I lived on East 49th Street near Second Avenue, and he on First Avenue, just off the corner of 49th, I met him as I was going home. He said he wanted to talk to me, as we did talk every evening about that time, and we went into the Waldorf. He referred to the criticisms against him, and said that he wanted to write a completely objective, unautobiographical book, and that it would show how strangely different everything is from what a person expects it to be. One might say that he was thinking of the theme that has run through so many great books, such as *Pickwick Papers* and *Don Quixote*, where a man, young or old, goes hopefully out into the world slap into the face of outrageous reality. He was going to put on the title page what was said by Prince Andrei, in *War and Peace*, after his first battle, when the praise fell upon those who had done nothing and blame almost fell upon one who had done everything. Prince Andrei, who saved the battery commander who most of all had held back the French from the blame that Little Tushin would have accepted, walked out with him into the night. Then as Tushin left, Tolstoy said, 'Prince Andrei looked up at the stars and sighed; everything was so different from what he thought it was going to be.'

Tom was in a desperate state. It was not only what the critics said that made him wish to write objectively, but that he knew that what he had written had given great pain even to those he loved the most. The conclusion of our talk was that if he could write such an objective book on this theme within a year, say, to the extent of perhaps a hundred thousand words, it might be well to do it. It was this that turned him to George Webber, but once he began on that he really and irresistibly resumed the one story he was destined to write, which was that of himself, or Eugene Gant.

And so, the first half of *The Web and the Rock*, of which there is only a typescript, is a re-telling in different terms of *Look Homeward, Angel*. Wolfe was diverted from his natural purpose—and even had he lived, what could have been done? Some of his finest writing is that first half of *The Web and the Rock*. Could anybody have just tossed it out?

But if Tom had held to his scheme and completed the whole story of his life as transmuted into fiction through his imagination, I think the accusation that he had no sense of form could not have stood. He wrote one long story, 'The Web of Earth,' which had perfect form, for all its intricacy. I remember saying to him, 'Not one word of this should be changed.' One might say that as his own physical dimensions were huge so was his conception of a book. He had one book to write about a vast, sprawling, turbulent land—America—as perceived by Eugene Gant. Even when he was in Europe, it was of America he thought. If he had not been diverted and had lived to complete it, I think it would have had the form that was suited to the subject.

His detractors say he could only write about himself, but all that he wrote of was transformed by his imagination. For instance, in *You Can't Go Home Again* he shows the character Foxhall Edwards at breakfast. Edwards's young daughter enters 'as swiftly and silently as a ray of light.' She is very shy and in a hurry to get to school. She tells of a theme she has written on Walt Whitman and what the teacher said of Whitman. When Edwards urges her not to hurry and makes various observations, she says, 'Oh, Daddy, you're so funny!' What Tom did was to make one unforgettable little character out of three daughters of Foxhall Edwards.

He got the ray of light many years ago when he was with me in my house in New Canaan, Connecticut, and one daughter, at the age of about eight or ten, came in and met this gigantic stranger. After she was introduced she fluttered all about the room in her embarrassment, but radiant, like a sunbeam. Then Tom was present when another daughter, in Radcliffe, consulted me about a paper she was writing on Whitman, but he put this back into her school days. The third, of which he composed a single character, was the youngest, who often did say, partly perhaps, because she was not at ease when Tom was there, 'Oh, Daddy, you're so silly.' That is how Tom worked. He created something new and something meaningful through a transmutation of what he saw, heard, and realized.

I think no one could understand Thomas Wolfe who had not seen or properly imagined the place in which he was born and grew up. Asheville, North Carolina, is encircled by mountains. The trains wind in and out through labyrinths of passes. A boy of Wolfe's imagination imprisoned there could think that what was beyond was all wonderful—different from what it was where there was not for him enough of anything. Whatever happened, Wolfe would have been what he was. I remember on the day of his death saying to his sister Mabel that I thought it amazing in an American family that one of the sons who wanted to be a writer should have been given the support that was given Tom, and that they all deserved great credit for

that. She said it didn't matter, that nothing could have prevented Tom from doing what he did.

That is true, but I think that those mountainous walls which his imagination vaulted gave him the vision of an America with which his books are fundamentally concerned. He often spoke of the artist in America—how the whole color and character of the country was completely new—never interpreted; how in England, for instance, the writer inherited a long accretion of accepted expression from which he could start. But Tom would say—and he had seen the world—‘who has ever made you know the color of an American box car?’ Wolfe was in those mountains—he tells of the train whistles at night—the trains were winding their way out into the great world where it seemed to the boy there was everything desirable, and vast, and wonderful.

It was partly that which made him want to see everything, and read everything, and experience everything, and say everything. There was a night when he lived on First Avenue that Nancy Hale, who lived on East 49th Street near Third Avenue, heard a kind of chant, which grew louder. She got up and looked out of the window at two or three in the morning and there was the great figure of Thomas Wolfe, advancing in his long countryman's stride, with his swaying black raincoat, and what he was chanting was, ‘I wrote ten thousand words today—I wrote ten thousand words today.’

Tom must have lived in eight or nine different parts of New York and Brooklyn for a year or more. He knew in the end every aspect of the City—he walked the streets endlessly—but he was not a city man. The city fascinated him but he did not really belong in it and was never satisfied to live in it. He was always thinking of America as a whole and planning trips to some part that he had not yet seen, and in the end taking them. His various quarters in town always looked as if he had just moved in, to camp for awhile. This was partly because he really had no interest in possessions of any kind, but it was also because he was in his very nature a Far Wanderer, bent upon seeing all places, and his rooms were just necessities into which he never settled. Even when he was there his mind was not. He needed a continent to range over, actually and in imagination. And his place was all America. It was with America he was most deeply concerned and I believe he opened it up as no other writer ever did for the people of his time and for the writers and artists and poets of tomorrow. Surely he had a thing to tell us.

MAXWELL E. PERKINS

TO THE READER

This is a first book, and in it the author has written of experience which is now far and lost, but which was once part of the fabric of his life. If any reader, therefore, should say that the book is "autobiographical" the writer has no answer for him: it seems to him that all serious work in fiction is autobiographical—that, for instance, a more autobiographical work than "Gulliver's Travels" cannot easily be imagined.

This note, however, is addressed principally to those persons whom the writer may have known in the period covered by these pages. To these persons, he would say what he believes they understand already: that this book was written in innocence and nakedness of spirit, and that the writer's main concern was to give fulness, life, and intensity to the actions and people in the book he was creating. Now that it is to be published, he would insist that this book is a fiction, and that he meditated no man's portrait here.

But we are the sum of all the moments of our lives—all that is ours is in them: we cannot escape or conceal it. If the writer has used the clay of life to make his book, he has only used what all men must, what none can keep from using. Fiction is not fact, but fiction is fact selected and understood, fiction is fact arranged and charged with purpose. Dr. Johnson remarked that a man would turn over half a library to make a single book: in the same way, a novelist may turn over half the people in a town to make a single figure in his novel. This is not the whole method but the writer believes it illustrates the whole method in a book that is written from a middle distance and is without rancour or bitter intention.

. . . a stone, a leaf, an unfound door; of a stone, a leaf, a door. And of all the forgotten faces.

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?

O waste of loss, in the hot mazes, lost, among bright stars on this most weary unbright cinder, lost! Remembering speechlessly we seek the great forgotten language, the lost lane-end into heaven, a stone, a leaf, an unfound door. Where? When?

O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again.

