THOMAS WOLFE

WHENDOTHE

ATROCITIELS

BEGIN ?

JOANNE MARSHALL MAULDIN

"Her (Mauldin's) account of Thomas Wolfe and his legacy becomes a biography that is more than a biography. For most readers, it will be a page-turner, and for the Wolfe scholar, the books earns a place as an essential companion."

—JOSEPH M. FLORA, past president of the Thomas Wolfe Society

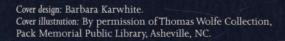
In 1937, after years of living alone in New York City, a manic-depressive Thomas Wolfe returned to his native Asheville, North Carolina, a city he had both ridiculed and brought notoriety to through his novel, Look Homeward, Angel, eight years earlier. Wolfe returned to his hometown with caution, with the need to both rejuvenate and compile material for his next novel. It is this visit that sparks Wolfe's trademark conclusion, "You can't go home again." Joanne Marshall Mauldin provides an in-depth look at the final two years in the life of the brilliant, yet troubled writer in Thomas Wolfe: When Do the Atrocities Begin?

By adding new information and insight, Mauldin challenges much of the existing biographical material on the writer and offers a fresh view on the final years of his life. Mauldin offers a candid account of the life of Thomas Wolfe from the time of his visit to North Carolina in 1937 until his untimely death in 1938. This examination also goes beyond Wolfe's life and extends into the period after his death, revealing details about the reaction of family and friends to the passing of this literary legend, as well as the cavalier publishing practices of his posthumous editors.

Mauldin's narrative is unique from other biographical accounts of Thomas Wolfe in that it focuses solely on the final years in the life of the author. Her unbiased approach enables the reader to draw his or her own conclusions about Wolfe and his actions and state of mind during these last two years of his life.

JOANNE MARSHALL MAULDIN is an independent scholar. Her articles have appeared in Southern Exposure, The Thomas Wolfe Review, and Pembroke Magazine. She is the owner of Levelheaded Editing Services.



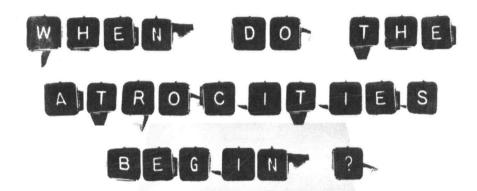


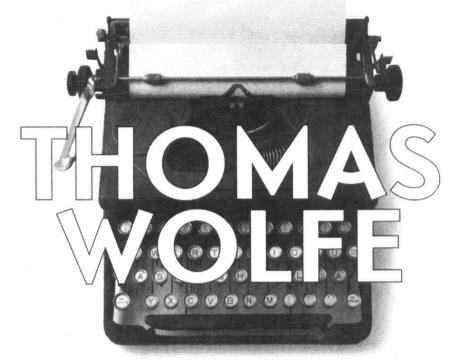


MAULDIN

W H E N D O T







JOANNE MARSHALL MAULDIN

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THOMAS WOLFE

For Richard S. Kennedy and Ella D. Kennedy and For Aldo P. Magi and Lucy Conniff

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Welcome to Our City

Throughout 1937, Thomas Wolfe's penultimate year on earth, he was bone-weary. He was in desperate need of a quiet place to rejuvenate in order to continue composing his self-saga. "I am not just pretending I am tired—" he wrote his brother Fred, "I am, actually, honestly and genuinely—nervously, physically and mentally." I

There had been few lulls in Wolfe's life. Every year was chaotic and frenzied. During this period of unusual weariness, he concluded it was time to cut loose from the web—Maxwell Perkins, his best friend and editor—and from the rock—New York, his residence for fourteen years—and head south. He had not ventured home for over seven and a half years—not since his first book, Look Homeward, Angel, blew the lid off every coffin in the cemetery and the door off every closet in Asheville. Pockets of resentment still seethed beneath the surface. Although his exile was self-imposed, in truth, he would be welcomed more because he was at the height of his fame than because his literary indiscretions were forgiven.

Wolfe's first venture into the South was a weeklong stopover in New Orleans, where, fêted until he dropped, he managed, finally, on 10 January to mail a twelve-thousand-word letter informing Perkins he was leaving Charles Scribner's Sons—probably—after nine years and four books. He also mentioned his mixed feelings about plans to visit Asheville.

It will be strange to be back home again. I had but recently met you when I was there last. I was unknown then, but within a few weeks after my visit home a storm of calumny and abuse broke out that made

me long for my former oblivion. Now that storm has apparently died down. They are willing to have me come back. So much has happened in those seven years. I've seen so many people that I know go down to ruin, others have died, others have grown up, some have lost everything, some have recovered something. People I knew well I no longer see. People who swore eternal love are now irrevocably separated. Nothing has turned out as we thought it would turn out. Nothing is the way we thought it was going to be. But Life, I now begin to see, moves in a great wheel; the wheel swings and things and people that we knew are lost, but some day they come back again. So it is a strange and wonderful event for me to be going back home.²

After a brief stay in Atlanta, Wolfe made his first North Carolina landing since Angel's publication with stopovers in Southern Pines, Raleigh, Chapel Hill, and Warrenton. But still apprehensive, he had bypassed Asheville. A week later he wrote Fred: "I should have liked to come to Asheville and intended to do so, but when I called you up from Atlanta there seemed to be some excitement and confusion about my coming, or whether I wanted to come or not, so I was too tired to argue the point and decided to pass my visit up until some other time." In a huff, Fred, easily agitated, had gone to the station and had seen his brother's face as his train had passed through.

Presumably Fred, or his sister Mabel, or his mother sent Tom a copy of an Asheville Times editorial on 22 January.

BIG BAD WOLFE COMES HOME

Asheville especially and the state generally rejoice over the new honor coming to Tom Wolfe in the placing of his name on the department of literature roster of the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

We observe with pleasure that our precocious, distinguished, overgrown boy novelist is back home in the Old North State, no longer fearful of being tarred and feathered because of certain idiosyncrasies in his writing manner of speech.

Tom admits that he has learned "a lot of things" since his first book appeared. This may be a sign that someday Wolfe's common sense will begin to approximate his undeniable but sometimes rather morbid brilliance.

Tom seems to feel that Asheville is still stunned and smarting under his descents into speech commonly vulgar, as he describes people in the hometown—and in his own home. And do we not detect a sign like that made by a bad boy who has just been caught snowballing the silk hat off the visiting preacher's head?