

FEATURES

The University remembers its most famous son

Look homeward, Thomas Wolfe

By JERRY NOWELL
Staff Writer

"But Tom, don't you think you should dress up for dinner at the chancellor's house?"

"No. When you're a genius you don't have to be immaculate!"

So goes one of the many tales of Thomas Wolfe's very successful, though slightly ec-

centric, college career at the University of North Carolina.

Wolfe, North Carolina's preeminent literary genius, graduated from UNC in 1920. While a student here he was associate editor of *Magazine*, associate editor of *The Tar Heel*, a member of the Student Council, the Athletic Council, the German Club, the Di Society and the Carolina Playmakers and served as the class poet, among other things.

He also accomplished the formidable task of writing and starring in a play, "The Return of Buck Gavin" for the Carolina Playmakers. In the 1920 annual, Wolfe's classmates said of Wolfe: "He can do more between 8:25 and 8:30 than the rest of us can do all day, and it is no wonder that he is classed as a genius."

From UNC, Wolfe went on to receive his M.A. from Harvard, teach at N.Y.U., and write such highly acclaimed novels as *Look Homeward Angel*, *The Web and the Rock*, and *You Can't Go Home Again*.

An Asheville native, Wolfe fictionalized both that town and Chapel Hill in his semi-autobiographical *Look Homeward Angel*, calling them Altamont and Pulpit Hill.

Wolfe is commemorated on campus in several ways including a bronze sculpture near New East by UNC art professor Richard Kinnard. The work was presented to the university by the class of 1966 and depicts an angel figure looking over his shoulder, and bears only the inscription from Wolfe's forward to *Look Homeward Angel*: Oh lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again.

The North Carolina Collection in Wilson Library maintains a permanent display of Wolfe memorabilia, a portrait, two sculptures, and various editions of all his published works. There is also an extensive collection of photographs, clippings, correspondence and manuscripts available to scholars.

Local Thomas Wolfe fans bemoan the fact that UNC was unable to purchase Wolfe's literary manuscripts when he died in 1938. As a result, a private collector, William

Wisdom, purchased them for \$5000 and gave them to Harvard University. Some observers feel that part of the reason may have been that many North Carolinians still feel bitter about some of the less than favorable descriptions of North Carolina and its residents in Wolfe's writings.

Francis Weaver, Assistant University Archivist and a member of the Thomas Wolfe Society said, "I think part of the reason we couldn't raise the money is that he may still have been regarded a sort of an outcast."

Richard Walser, professor of English at NCSU, a member of the Thomas Wolfe Society, and author of a book about Thomas Wolfe's undergraduate years at UNC said, "I think that is rumor or gossip." He said that UNC made every effort to raise the money to purchase the manuscripts and that the "little pockets of resentment" were ineffectual by 1938.

Both Weaver and Walser stressed the fact that economic conditions in 1938 made any kind of fund raising very difficult.

Even without the literary manuscripts, UNC's Thomas Wolfe Collection is growing steadily. In the near future it will be housed in the new "Thomas Wolfe Room" when Wilson Library is converted into the Special Collections Building.

UNC professor Joseph Flora said in a paper on Wolfe that "Thomas Wolfe's four years at the University of North Carolina were very important in the formation of the writer that was to be." Likewise, Wolfe's memory and spirit live on in Chapel Hill and are very important in the development of the university that is to be.



Tar Heel/Frank Clarkson

Thomas Wolfe memorial behind New East

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