

ECHOING ATTITUDES: THE ECHOES OF ECCLESIASTES AND T.S. ELIOT IN  
*LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL AND OF TIME AND THE RIVER*

A Thesis  
by  
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## ABSTRACT

ECHOING ATTITUDES: THE ECHOES OF ECCLESIASTES AND T. S. ELIOT  
IN *LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL* AND *OF TIME AND THE RIVER*. (May 2012)

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This work focuses on Ecclesiastes, works of T. S. Eliot, and *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River* by Thomas Wolfe. This study looks to the idea of social energy as proposed by Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt to create a connection between Ecclesiastes, Eliot, and Wolfe. By examining how Ecclesiastes manifests in the work of Eliot, and Ecclesiastes and the work of Eliot manifest in the works of Wolfe, the three can be connected through a flow of social energy.

In this study Ecclesiastes and Eliot connect to the work of Wolfe, specifically by a comparison of shared and thematically similar language. An examination of direct borrowing and allusions, as well as thematic connections link Eliot and Wolfe through the terms Ecclesiastical and Prufrockian, which are defined.

In a reading of *Look Homeward, Angel* the study examines images, characters, and language and how those elements echo Ecclesiastes and Eliot. Aspects of the novel directly use or borrow content or attitude from Ecclesiastes and Eliot, as well as offer subtler echoes. This reading of *Look Homeward, Angel* focused on motifs of death, miscommunication, and afterlife, as well as specific tone and language.

*Of Time and the River* in a similar manner offers direct echoes and more subtle echoes to Ecclesiastes and Eliot. This reading of *Of Time and the River* focuses on Eliot's use of October, Wolfe's Ecclesiastical take on death, and the symbol of the river. These connections create a relationship of similar, but unique influence between Ecclesiastes, Eliot, and Wolfe.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to the bard of October, Thomas Wolfe, as well as all the educators who inspired and prepared me. Anyone who has ever shared their knowledge with me has had a meaningful part in the contents herein.

I would like to dedicate this work to Dr. Leon Lewis for his friendship and guidance in this process and in life. Always, Leon has advised me with tact and inspired me with his gentle and humble wisdom.

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents, Kim and Steve Johnson, who have always cultivated my love of knowledge. They are forever my guidance, inspiration, and courage. I dedicate this to my brother, Kyle Johnson, who amazes me and pushes me to work harder every day. And also to Margaret Clark, my dearest dear.

And I also dedicate this work to the Omnipotence, who gives our very breath.

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## Introduction

In their introduction to *Practicing New Historicism*, Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt write that the heart of their work is “to imagine that the writers we love did not spring up from no where and that their achievements must draw upon a whole life-world and that this life-world had undoubtedly left other traces of itself” (12-13). Gallagher and Greenblatt further elaborate on their goals when they write:

We are intensely interested in tracking the social energies that circulate very broadly through a culture, flowing back and forth between margins and center, passing from zones designated as art to zones apparently indifferent or hostile to art, pressing up from below to transform exalted spheres and down from on high to colonize the low. (13)

These social energies that Gallagher and Greenblatt examine are linked to the “inventive energies” that they also seek to uncover (12). Inherent in all of these words from Gallagher and Greenblatt is an internal certainty that no text ever arrives uninfluenced by some other text, somewhere, in some time. This idea creates a situational echo throughout literature by which any text is built upon the DNA of other texts. This echo throughout literary time and space can occur in numerous ways, whether through shared images, words, or ideas. Examining Ecclesiastes, works of T.

S. Eliot, and works of Thomas Wolfe, reveals how literary images, words, and attitudes flow throughout the pulse of literary time.

In his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” Eliot suggests that

Whereas if we approach a poet without his prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. And I do not mean the impressionable period of adolescence, but the period of full maturity. (100)

Eliot wrote these words seventy-nine years before Gallagher and Greenblatt wrote theirs, but the words separated by so much time and space help to prove their own meaning. Eliot’s words say much the same thing as the words of Gallagher and Greenblatt, and in the same way we can experience this echo, we can see the echoes through the time and space of Ecclesiastes and Eliot in the work of Wolfe.

Wolfe wrote in *Look Homeward, Angel* that “Each moment is the fruit of forty thousand years” (3). In this line, Wolfe further expounds upon the words of Gallagher, Greenblatt, and Eliot, by connecting each minute with millions of minutes before it. In *The Story of a Novel*, Wolfe explains his methods in writing *Of Time and the River* and explains that his idea of time presents his characters “as acting and as being acted upon by all the accumulated impact of man’s experience so that each moment of their life was conditioned not only by what they experienced in that moment, but by all that they had experienced up to that moment” (51-52). Wolfe sees time and experience as communal and universal. In these words, he defines human experience as forever connected to the experiences before it. In a similar manner,

Ecclesiastes and the works of Eliot inform and shape *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River*.

Ecclesiastes works in many ways in opposition to the rest of the Bible, but its message and ideas find their way into numerous other works. Eliot is considered the quintessential voice of a generation lost in the declining value of the individual, and in the realized speed and efficiency with which those individuals could be distinguished. Wolfe, a contemporary of Eliot, found fame and infamy through largely autobiographical works that sought to speak Wolfe's own pains and questions into the lives of others.

In the introduction to his book *The Loneliness at the Core: Studies in Thomas Wolfe*, C. Hugh Holman writes that "*Look Homeward, Angel*, in 1929, was the record of the collective childhood and young manhood of every sensitive provincial American boy" (xv). Holman quotes William Styron, who, in 1968, wrote:

It would be hard to exaggerate the overwhelming affect that reading Wolfe had upon so many of us...the sudden exposure to a book like *Look Homeward, Angel*, with its...sense of youthful ache and promise and hunger and ecstasy which so corresponded to that of its eighteen-year-old reader . . . was like being born again into a world as fresh and wondrous as that seen through the eyes of Adam. (xvi)

These reactions put into words the effects that Wolfe had on many of his readers.

*Look Homeward, Angel* was required reading in many high school classrooms for decades after its publishing, and Wolfe became a literary celebrity, and won a

Guggenheim Fellowship. Wolfe's celebrity and appeal to readers has declined today, but his work is not lost or irrelevant.

Wolfe brings to light a unity between his work, Ecclesiastes, and Eliot's work when he writes, "We are loyal to the destiny of waste and death," a line that echoes through the currents of both Ecclesiastes and the works of Eliot (Kennedy and Reeves 56). This attitude echoes throughout all of these works, and Wolfe's quotation starts an argument that these works prove the ideas of Gallagher and Greenblatt. These works, which are separated by continents and centuries, all hold pieces of the others. Ecclesiastes holds ideas that functioned profoundly to Eliot, who included them in his work. The ideas that influenced Eliot found their way to Wolfe, as Wolfe read Ecclesiastes and Eliot, and created his own works that showed the hybrid influence of Wolfe's preceding influences, particularly Ecclesiastes and Eliot. Through an examination of Ecclesiastes and its direct inclusion and effects in Eliot and Wolfe, through an exploration into the connections between Wolfe and Eliot, through an examination of Wolfe's linguistic and attitudinal similarity to Ecclesiastes, and through close reading of Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River*, the "social energies" Gallagher and Greenblatt identify are perpetuated.

Chapter 1: “All they had experienced to that moment”

Part I: “All of our life goes up in smoke”

Ecclesiastes seems to be a biblical anomaly. While most strands of Christianity teach an encouraging view of the world wherein people should seek to do God’s work and help others daily, Ecclesiastes says, “There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour” (2.24). Ecclesiastes is a paradox, and one that provides a totally different set of limitations, as well as opportunities for Christians, readers, and writers. While the Bible is known by idioms such as the Good Book, the Living Word, and the Word of God, Alicia Ostriker calls Ecclesiastes “The most brilliantly pessimistic tract of all time” (7). Ostriker goes on to call Ecclesiastes “a dense mix of prose and poetry,” which “contains a treasury of quotations rivaling Shakespeare” (7). These comments on Ecclesiastes link it in several ways to writers in the early twentieth century. Both Eliot and Wolfe wrote works that could be considered “brilliantly pessimistic,” and both use a mix of prose and poetry in crafting their works.

But before fully addressing of the effects of Ecclesiastes on Eliot and Wolfe, there must be proper attention paid to some essential elements of this complex biblical text. The King James Version (KJV) of *The Bible* will be used for quotations from Ecclesiastes in this study. This choice was made because it was the most

popular, widely read version available during the time when Eliot and Wolfe were alive and writing, as well as the Presbyterian background of Eugene Gant, which is alluded to in *Look Homeward, Angel*. Wolfe writes of Eugene that “He had all the passionate fidelity of a child to the laws of the community: all the filtered deposit of Sunday Morning Presbyterianism had its effect” (86). We also read of Eugene that “On Sunday for several years, he had bathed, brushed, arrayed his anointed body in clean underwear and shirting and departed, amid all the pleasurable bustle of Sunday morning, for the Presbyterian Sunday School” (113). Also, Wolfe quotes from the KJV of Ecclesiastes 3.21 on the title page of *Of Time and the River*. The KJV is quoted in this study for its relevance to the texts and its use in the texts, but other translations are helpful in examining concepts and method in Ecclesiastes.

The adjective Ecclesiastical links ideas, characters, and images to the themes and melancholic attitude of Ecclesiastes. These themes of Ecclesiastes include the understanding that life is hard, the comfort with and acceptance of mortality, the devotion to lost causes, a melancholic look on the world, and the belief that death is a respite from the hardships of life on earth. Eliot and Wolfe connect to these themes repeatedly throughout their work, and the use of this adjective will echo these themes.

The author’s choice of narrative vehicle is an essential element of any written work, and the narrative voice of the KJV Ecclesiastes is the Preacher. The full title of the book reads “The Book of Ecclesiastes or, the Preacher.” This is a title and definition in one, as the sole act of reading the title explains the meaning of Ecclesiastes. The first verse gives readers clues as to who or what the Preacher is: “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (1.1). The Preacher

offers all of the sage wisdom of Ecclesiastes and the son of David, but the term Preacher is not consistent across all translations. In the Hebrew bible, the title of the book is Qoheleth, a feminine noun defined by Ostriker as “[deriving] from a Hebrew term meaning ‘assembly’ or ‘gathering,’ and so may mean ‘one who addresses an assembly’” (7). Ostriker suggests that this meaning gives rise to the KJV Preacher, and what some translations call “the Teacher” (7). Ostriker offers another idea as to how to view the narrator, “remembering how often the author speaks of *seeing*, and how his favorite phrases include ‘I saw under the sun’ and ‘I said in my heart,’ I would like to call the author the Witness” (7). Regardless of the terminology, the Preacher offers the words and idea of Ecclesiastes. “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” mimics the role of the Preacher.

Eliot offers a preliminary connection to the Preacher in his epigraph to “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.” The quotation used is from Dante’s *Inferno* (27.61-66), and one English translation reads, “If I thought that my reply would be to one who would ever return to the worlds, this flame would stay without further movement, but since none has ever returned alive from this depth, if what I hear is true, I answer you without fear of infamy” (Eliot, *Norton* 2610). The speaker here is Guido da Montefeltro, who is in hell being punished for his sins on earth. In this moment, Guido functions as an Ecclesiastical “Preacher” offering his wisdom and experience to Dante. But this wisdom and experience are offered to a man whom Guido thinks will never leave, and because Dante will never leave, no one on earth will learn what he has to say. This framing creates a situation in which a Preacher offers his knowledge to a man who shares his fate. In Ecclesiastes, the Preacher and

readers know that they will all share the same fate, and this fact is a central part of the Preacher's message. Eliot mimics this relationship as Guido seeks to share information with Dante, a man of shared, mortal fate. Ironically, Prufrock himself becomes the Preacher in the lines of the poem, and sees himself as falling into a shared fate drowned with "sea-girls wreathed in seaweed red and brown" (line 130). This line suggests that although he sees his own drowning, he will make it out alive as Dante did. Eliot introduces the Preacher's idea with his epigram, and he continues it with Prufrock as speaker.

Prufrock is the Preacher of his text, and a Witness, as he offers his wisdom and experiences to the reader. Prufrock voluntarily takes on the role of Witness when he says:

I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,  
 I am no prophet-and here's no great matter;  
 I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,  
 And in short, I was afraid. (lines 82-87)

The Preacher is, of course, very different from Prufrock, but their purposes are similar. Both Prufrock and the Preacher are the narrators of their own stories, providing a level of clarity and acquaintance with the subject, but also a lack of objectivity, especially as Witnesses. Readers quickly receive the words of Prufrock and the Preacher in their respective texts. Prufrock starts with an invitation: "Let us go then, you and I,/ when the evening is spread out against the sky/ Like a patient etherized upon a table" (lines 1-3). This invitation immediately addresses the reader and seeks to create a joint journey. Similarly, the Preacher seeks to address and



engage the reader, but the Preacher offers his experience to our benefit, instead of asking us to join him or her on a journey. The introductory voice offers us the Preacher, and then lets him take the reins of the narration: “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (Eccles. 1.2). The initial lines of each work offer the narrators’ experience. Wolfe provides an interesting spin on the Preacher’s role, as the narrator of *Look Homeward, Angel* is a third-person narrator, but he reveals the innermost thoughts of Eugene. Eugene’s experience and the experiences of his family are offered to us through the anonymous Preacher of *Look Homeward, Angel*. And unlike the clearly identified, or at least more specifically identified, narrators in Prufrock and Ecclesiastes, Wolfe’s narrator offers the core of the experience from Eugene, through an omniscient narrator. This narrator’s intense knowledge of Eugene’s inner workings and his most elemental and essential feelings gives readers a narration that provides almost everything that a first-person through Eugene would provide. The narrator of *Look Homeward, Angel* is indeed a witness, as all omniscient narrators are, but Wolfe creates a situation wherein his Witness/narrator becomes something more. Eugene repeatedly senses something that he cannot find or know—something which is lost, which is foreign, which is forgotten. To harken to Wolfe’s title, there are angels everywhere in *Look Homeward, Angel*, as Ben and Eugene struggle to find, relate, and deal with their respective angels. In one of the moments in *Look Homeward, Angel* where it seems that the narrator and Eugene are the same, Wolfe writes, “Come lower, angel; whisper in our ears” (244). This other something that is not the narrator, but certainly is a witness, speaks to Eugene as he is walking his paper route:

Waken, ghost-eared boy, but into darkness. Waken, phantom, O into us. Try, try, O try the way. Open the wall of light. Ghost, ghost, who is the ghost? O lost. Ghost, ghost, who is the ghost? O whisper-tongued laughter. Eugene! Eugene! Here, O here, Eugene. Here, Eugene. 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.

A voice, sleep-strange and loud, forever far-near, spoke. (244-245)

This speaker is the other, the voice, the forgotten thing which Eugene searches for. This voice is at once familiar and foreign. The voice is neither the narrator, nor Eugene, but seems to contain elements of both. It is inside of Eugene, and it is a part of him. The voice is offered to us by the narrator, who also hears it, so it becomes part of the narrator solely by the fact that it is heard. But the narrator also conveys the voice, so he recognizes and constructs the voice by listening and recording what it has to say to Eugene. This voice is a merger of the narrator and Eugene, and it is a variation on the Preacher model set up in Ecclesiastes. The Preacher has witnessed, or experienced, all he tells us, and he offers us his idea of what is good in life, taking on a portion of what should be God's role. These hybrid voices occurring create new relationships and new meaning for the narrators and the characters.

The term *vanity* is also essential to the understanding of Ecclesiastes.

Immediately, and with tireless repetition, the Preacher bombards the reader with the word *vanity*. The Preacher's first word is vanity, which emphasizes its importance. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines vanity as "That which is vain, futile, or

worthless; that which is of no value or profit (vanity).” This definition works well with the Preacher’s second verse of speech to the reader which reads, “What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?” (Eccles. 1.3). The Preacher is not attempting to be coy or mysterious with his use and repetition of the word *vanity*, but different translations suggest some mystery about the function and meaning of the word *vanity* and the other words that fill its spot in other translations. In the place of the KJV’s *vanity*, the New International Version (NIV) uses the word *meaningless*, so the NIV verse 1.2 reads, “‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless’” (NIV, Eccles. 1.2). Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* is a translation of the Bible into his idea of modern language. Peterson’s version of this verse reads, “Smoke, nothing but smoke. (That’s what the Quester says.) There is nothing to anything--it’s all smoke” (Peterson 1162). Ostriker points out that the Hebrew word used in this role is *hevel* (7). She argues that vanity succeeds in “signifying both vain self-conceit and meaningless void. But the Hebrew *hevel* is even more subtly layered, and carries even more pathos in its empty cup.” Ostriker offers possible definitions for *hevel* as vapor, mist, breath, wind, emptiness, or void.

While the KJV is the translation most aligned with Eliot and Wolfe, the multiple treatments of Ecclesiastes 1.2 are quite telling. These four translations use *vanity*, *meaningless*, *smoke*, and *hevel* for the same idea. A first difference to be noticed is that *vanity*, *smoke*, and *hevel* are all nouns, while *meaningless* is an adjective. All four of these words stand for the same idea, but the words have different meanings, creating a complication. The key concept to all four translations is

an absence. *Vanity* is worthless or futile, similar to *meaningless* and *hevel*, which suggests a lack of meaning and importance or relevance. *Smoke*, on the contrary, is something. It may be an ethereal and indefinable substance, but it exists, it can be seen and smelled, and by this existence is different from the ideas of vanity and meaningless. All four translations suggest that the works and events of human life make no difference to the outcome of life, and that they have no significance, especially after a person is deceased and forgotten.

These ideas of the transient and disposable nature of human life pervade Eliot's poetry. Vanity drives Prufrock to almost all of his action in the poem. Eliot writes of Prufrock's appearance: "And indeed there will be time/...Time to turn back and descend the stair, With a bald spot in the middle of my hair" (lines 37-40). He describes his dress: "My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,/ My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin" (lines 42-43). As Prufrock describes himself, he anticipates reactions in line 41: "(They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!')"

and in line 44: "(They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!)." These irrational and manufactured reactions show how Prufrock's vanity affects his daily life and his internal psyche. Prufrock is so in tune with his detractors and critics, whether they exist outside of his imagination or not, that he knows their responses before they are uttered. Prufrock's vanity is a visual and imagistic vanity, but the image he seeks to portray is as fleeting and disappearing as any other human effort. The adjective Prufrockian seeks to tie ideas, characters, and images to Prufrock's defining characteristics, which include an obsession with the opinions of others, a perpetual sense of failure, an awkwardness that affects all aspects of life, an

inability to connect with women, a fear of death and age, and a melancholic fatalism that allows Prufrock to rely on other people and forces to shape his own life.

Ecclesiastes seeps its way into Eliot's words as Eliot also employs the idea of smoke in Prufrock. The "yellow fog" and "yellow smoke" take on cat-like qualities:

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,  
 The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes  
 Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,  
 Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,  
 Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,  
 Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,  
 And seeing once that it was a soft October night,  
 Curled once about the house, and fell asleep. (lines 14-22)

The cat tendencies that Eliot gives to the fog and smoke make it fleeting, short lasting, and imprecise. Cats can appear and disappear without detection; like smoke, they can work their way into almost any crevice or crack, and linger but not last. The sleep of the fog implies its disappearance, much like the disappearance of ephemeral worldly gain and accomplishments that Ecclesiastes points out.

Both vanity and smoke appear vividly and explicitly in *Look Homeward, Angel*. In a moment of his high-minded rhetoric, Wolfe articulates Gant's philosophy:

And he would grow broodingly philosophic, speaking of the vanity of human effort, the last resting-place in earth of rich and poor, the significant fact that we could "take none of it with us," ending perhaps with "Ah me! It all comes to the same in the end, anyway. (54)

These lines could have come from the mouth of the Preacher, as they fall in line directly with the values and ideas that the Preacher expresses. Indeed, Gant is an Ecclesiastical figure in his realization of the vanity of human effort, and he offers his own personal philosophy which recounts, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the language of Ecclesiastes. The vanity of Gant, and the vanity of *Look Homeward, Angel* echo the vanity of Ecclesiastes, and the idea of smoke has a similar link.

Wolfe also employs the Ecclesiastical imagery and idea of smoke as vanity. In a moment of seeming merger between Eugene's thought and the narrator's thoughts, we read "Smoke. *Fumus fumus*. All of our life goes up in smoke. There is no structure, no creation in it, not even the smoky structure of dreams" (244). In a very direct echo of Ecclesiastes, Wolfe writes in *Of Time and the River*, "for us, as for every other man alive, all passes, all is lost, all melts before our grasp like smoke" (701). The usage of smoke helps to inform Peterson's use of smoke in his translation of Ecclesiastes. Smoke exists, but it has no structure; it curls and bends at the pleasure of the wind. Smoke exists, but in its inability to be static and solid, it is fleeting and ephemeral. Wolfe's connection of smoke to dreams is also enlightening. Dreams exist; we all have them and know that we have them, but we can never explain a dream accurately, not only because of the inability of language to be precise, but also because our own perception and understanding of the dream is smoke-like in its disappearing and malleable nature.

Part II: “Let us go then, you and I”

Just as Ecclesiastes echoes in the works of Eliot and Wolfe, Eliot’s words and ideas also echo in Wolfe’s work. Ecclesiastes resounds in the works of Eliot and of Wolfe. Wolfe not only knew Ecclesiastes, but he knew Eliot, and Eliot’s use of Ecclesiastes was another echo that reached Wolfe. The echo of Ecclesiastes is felt in Eliot’s poetry especially in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and *The Waste Land*. A line from *The Waste Land* provides an effective and authoritative statement on Eliot’s style of crafting poetry. Lines 20-22 of *I. The Burial of the Dead* suggest Eliot’s style and method of poetry: “Son of Man,/ You cannot say, or guess, for you know only/ A heap of broken images.” The structure of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and *The Waste Land* are both devised of heaps of broken images. *The Waste Land* has five sections, all with multiple scenes or events. Wolfe adopts a similar tactic of storytelling. Eliot’s collage of images gives the reader a fractured impression of an incomplete reality. Through his collage style, Eliot echoes Ecclesiastes in brief allusions, or altered mentions.

Ecclesiastes appears in the footnotes for “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” and once in *The Waste Land*. In Prufrock, Eliot uses Ecclesiastes directly in his refrain “And indeed there will be time,” in line 23 and in line 37 (2611). This refrain echoes Ecclesiastes 3.1 which reads, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” This refrain also occurs in a modified echo

when we read “In a minute there is time/ For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse” (lines 46-47). The focus on time suggests that Prufrock uses time to make excuses for himself. Ecclesiastes 3 goes on to say that there is a time for birth and death, and for everything in between. Eliot mimics this format, as he writes:

There will be time, there will be time

To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;

There will be time to murder and create,

And time for all the works of days and hands

That lift and drop a question on your plate;

Time for you and time for me,

And time yet for a hundred indecisions,

And for a hundred visions and revisions,

Before the taking of a toast and tea. (2611).

For Prufrock, time means that he does not have “to force the moment to its crisis” (2612). Time means that he can continue barely existing without “disturb[ing] the universe” (2611). This direct usage of Ecclesiastes, and the mimicked form show Eliot’s knowledge of the text, and *The Waste Land* also displays knowledge.

Eliot makes several direct references to Ecclesiastes in his poetry. Starting in line 23 of *I. The Burial of the Dead*, Eliot offers the reader his taste of Ecclesiastes:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow

Out if this stony rubbish? Son of man,

You cannot say, or guess, for you know only

A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,



And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,

And the dry stone no sound of water. (38-39)

Eliot again calls on Ecclesiastes in *V. What the Thunder Said*: “If there were the sound of water only/ Not the cicada/ And dry grasses singing” (49). These images allude to Ecclesiastes 12.5 which reads, “Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.” This verse comes in the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes, in which the Preacher calls for the reader to “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Eccles. 12.1). Eliot borrows the Ecclesiastical image of what happens in old age. As in much of Eliot’s poetry, his style of collage using “heap[s] of broken images” portrays feelings and ideas to the reader. Eliot’s broken images come from many different sources, but he uses Ecclesiastes in these instances because of the resonance the biblical tract has with readers.

Eliot’s words and idea echo in Wolfe’s work as Wolfe includes direct lines from Eliot, and utilizes the collage style, creating heaps of broken images to portray meaning and feeling. Although Eliot’s influence in Wolfe’s writing is undeniable, the two had an interesting connection during their lives. Eliot’s literary stature was well entrenched before Wolfe’s was. Eliot had published *Prufrock and Other Observations* in 1917, and *The Waste Land* in 1922, both years before *Look Homeward, Angel* was published in October of 1929. John L. Idol Jr. suggests that “Wolfe has his eye on

Eliot's poems and criticism as early as his playwriting studies under George Pierce Barker at Harvard" (15). Direct references and usages of Eliot's poetry can be found in *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River*. No matter how influential Eliot was to Wolfe's work, Wolfe had a less than favorable view of Eliot's influence on others. Idol writes that "Sometimes [Wolfe] admitted that Eliot was justifiably admired, but he was bothered by the fact that many people gave too much weight to Eliot's criticism and end by becoming parrots when they tried their own critical voices" (19). Wolfe coined his own term for these Eliot disciples by calling them "wastelanders" (Reeves 8). Wolfe expanded on his theory of Wastelandism in a letter to Alfred Dashiell:

I mean the futility boys and girls, the stealthy lasses, the elegant mockers, the American T. S. Elioters. They are a low but vilely cunning lot of bastards and they will not see their cheap little stock in trade--I mean the what-is-the-use-we-are-a-doomed-generation, life-here-is-a-barren-desert, we-can-do-nothing--they will not see this little business cursed without a hissing and jeering retaliation. It is all they have, and even vermin will bare their teeth and bite if their stale cheese is menaced, even bawds and pimps will fight to protect the commerce of the drab who feeds them. (Idol 20)

Wolfe grew tired of others' interpretations of Eliot, but by compiling Eliot and using his works as a source, he showed that he still had respect for Eliot the poet and critic. In his notebooks, Wolfe called Eliot "The critic with the greatest subtlety" (113). In one of his numerous lists within his notebooks, Wolfe counted Eliot in his list of

“‘Great’ American Poets of the Period 1914–1929” (321). And in a much more ambiguous list, “The ‘Modernist People (In English) [sic],” Wolfe includes Eliot (Kennedy and Reeves 337). Eliot’s vast Modern influence, which was the catalyst for Wolfe’s Wastelanderism, created Wolfe’s negative feelings towards Eliot. Additionally, there was a component of Wolfe’s Wastelanderism that resented American expatriates, included among those, Eliot.

While Wolfe was at times painfully aware of Eliot, Eliot “had not been acquainted with Mr. Wolfe” and “had not read a line of Wolfe’s fiction” (Reeves 7). While working on his dissertation at the Sorbonne in 1953, George M. Reeves made a visit to Eliot in London to ask what Eliot knew of Wolfe. Eliot told Reeves that he had come across Wolfe in *Editor to Author*, a volume of letters by Wolfe’s editor at Scribner’s, Maxwell Perkins. Once he had a better knowledge of Wolfe, Eliot “noted with apparent satisfaction that Wolfe had traveled much in Europe and had not isolated himself as “that other Southern writer,” William Faulkner (7). Ironically that Wolfe held Eliot’s expatriate experience against Eliot and his followers, but Eliot admired Wolfe for traveling, something that Wolfe did frequently. But while Eliot’s travels kept him away from the United States, Wolfe’s travels created within him an immense pride for his country and a desire to return there. This happened first when Wolfe left his native South for Harvard: “As a Southerner away from home, Wolfe developed a new awareness of his region. Although he sometimes emphasized the cultural limitations of the Southern writer, he was always ultimately ready to be the defender of and the spokesman for his region” (Kennedy and Reeves 4). Through all of Wolfe’s travels, he developed a deeper sense of what he thought America was

because of his intensive efforts at remembering his childhood for *Look Homeward, Angel*, and because he was an ocean away from what he knew as home (Kennedy and Reeves 71). Wolfe's nationalism could not allow him to fully support Eliot, an expatriate, who, to Wolfe, was guilty of failing "to draw upon his heritage as an American" (Idol 23).

Eliot and Wolfe had their differences, but the traits, words, and ideas that they share are much more important. Idol writes that "Sometimes Wolfe's eye was not particularly attentive, for his missed clues and overlooked facts which would have told him that he and Eliot often stood closer than Wolfe believed they did [sic]" (15-16). Wolfe and Eliot certainly share a proximity in their association with *Ecclesiastes*, which filters through Eliot into Wolfe. Wolfe had his own understanding of and uses for *Ecclesiastes* that were separate from Eliot's, but they both share the attitude of the book in their modern works. Gallagher and Greenblatt see some of the characteristics of modern fiction as randomness, dissolution, fragmenting of consciousness, and the use of multiple perspectives (44). Eliot and Wolfe both display these traits, which function effectively with *Ecclesiastes*. Gallagher and Greenblatt also point out a phenomenon of new historicism that finds its way into Eliot's and Wolfe's works. They write that "new historicism...fosters the weakening of the aesthetic object" (11). This is not a goal of new historicists, but a byproduct of taking into account the value of all texts while greatly expanding the definition of what a text is. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"; *The Waste Land*; *Look Homeward, Angel*; and *Of Time and the River* are all considered literature and high art, but in creating these works, Eliot and Wolfe use common images and situations.

Readers see the oyster shells and cheap hotels that Prufrock saw; we see the concerns of working class Britons in *II. A Game of Chess*, and in Wolfe's writing we see the whoring, drinking, working, living, and dying of the common man in Altamont, Boston, New York, and Europe. Eliot and Wolfe helped bring the images of everyday life into the consciousness of high art and literature.

There are three layers to the waterfall of influence in this study. Ecclesiastes affected Eliot, who, in turn, influenced Wolfe. No doubt, Ecclesiastes influenced Wolfe directly as well, which can be seen by Wolfe's use of Ecclesiastes 3:21 in his epigraph to *Of Time and the River*. Eliot does not use this particular line from Ecclesiastes, but Wolfe does, and this shows how the fluid influence between these texts exist, but functions differently for Eliot and Wolfe. This grouping creates a like-minded triumvirate that seeks to understand the plight of humanity in a cruel and unforgiving world. Through the echoing attitudes that Eliot and Wolfe express, we can see and understand the universal suggestions, coping strategies, and sympathies that Ecclesiastes has to offer.

## Chapter 2: Discovering the Line

In *Look Homeward, Angel*, Thomas Wolfe's opening salvo to the literary world, he lives in the arena of his own construction, the arena of the "Mythmakers" (325). Eugene, in many cases, is a proxy for Wolfe and Wolfe's experiences, so when Wolfe writes about Eugene, his words applies to the author and his protagonist: "He was not a child when he reflected, but when he dreamt, he was; and it was the child and dreamer that governed his belief. He belonged, perhaps, to an older and simpler race of men: he belonged with the Mythmakers" (325). As a Mythmaker, Wolfe creates or hones stories, and is a part of the storytelling class. In this novel, Wolfe's first influential endeavor as a Mythmaker, he creates a groundwork that introduces the reader to his style, methods, characters, and attitude. This novel is the beginning of the Gant narrative, which is the story of the Gant family with a focus on its youngest son, Eugene. This narrative is continued in *Of Time and the River*. *Look Homeward, Angel* is the text in which Wolfe's relationship with Ecclesiastes and Prufrock begins. As the first book of a multi-book series, *Look Homeward, Angel* is the canvas wherein Wolfe first paints his own image with language. In his *The Story of a Novel*, published in 1936, Wolfe wrote, "I am not a professional writer; I am not even a skilled writer; I am just a writer who is on the way to learning his profession and to discovering the line, the structure, and the articulation of the language which I must discover if I do the work I want to do" (1-2). Wolfe's language in *Look*

*Homeward, Angel* sets the tone and the images for the Gant narrative. In this book, Wolfe introduces a series of words, images, and ideas that link him to Ecclesiastes.

Wolfe's echoing of the Ecclesiastical mood comes in several different forms. One of the most prominent forms is in Wolfe's language shared with or influenced by Ecclesiastes. Wolfe uses words from Ecclesiastes, as well as words that share a common theme and feeling with the words of Ecclesiastes. A key feature of Wolfe's prose is his repetition of individual words, or of refrains of loaded images and terms. Wolfe repeats these words multiple times in multiple situations in *Look Homeward, Angel* as he moves through the experiences of Eugene and the Gant family. The Ecclesiastical words that Wolfe uses can be grouped into several distinct categories. The categories for this study will include *death*, *denial* (as in what is denied instead of denial as a psychological phenomenon), *entrapment*, and *isolation*. Wolfe echoes Ecclesiastes also in three specific themes that occur and reoccur through the narrative. Attached to Ben is the idea of a minor key, which musically echoes the melancholy of Ecclesiastes. An idea that affects the narration of the story and Eugene's struggle is the forgotten language, which is also echoed in Ecclesiastes. Another idea that occurs with unavoidable repetition is the thematic and symbolic idea of Autumn, and more particularly, the month of October. These themes and words illustrate concrete and thematic elements that Wolfe echoes from Ecclesiastes.

Death is an ever-present entity in the novel, and Wolfe uses a grouping of words that allow little respite from the omnipresence of mortality. Ecclesiastes deals extensively with death and offers, "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean"

(Eccles. 9.2). These lines pose death as a subject and event that occurs to all. Death is not billed by the Preacher as an overwhelming triumph or defeat, but as an ambivalent force that overtakes all humans. This attitude is echoed in *Look Homeward, Angel*, as death is a recurring topic and experience for the Gant family. Whether actual deaths, as in the case of Ben, or the episodes with Horse Hines, or the threats and rituals of impending deaths, seen with the continual grappling of the Gant family to deal with the aging and dying process of Gant himself, death constantly affects the mentalities and psyches of the characters, and influences the overall tenor of the novel.

The *death* grouping of words in the story of the Gant family in *Look Homeward, Angel* includes *death, shadow, ghost, buried, and last*. Death occurs throughout the novel. Eugene undergoes symbolic deaths in the loss of his childhood, his virginity, and his innocence. When Eliza moves into Dixieland, “Eugene gained another roof and lost forever the tumultuous, unhappy, warm centre of his home” (107). This death represents the death of a psychic security of place and people that define a home. A few years later, after Eugene started attending the Leonards’ school, “The time had passed when [Eliza] could tousele him on the bed in a smother of slaps and kisses, crushing him, stroking him, biting and kissing his young flesh” (197). Eugene’s virginity and innocence die at the same time upon his trip to Exeter. He has previously denied deflowering a woman in Charleston, but he executes the sexual deed for the first time in the company of a prostitute. In the process of this exchange, for Eugene, “The lost bright wonder died” (342). In the death of this wonder, Eugene



has lost his innocent perception of sex, and he will move forward a wiser and less naïve person.

The term *shadow*, like the term *ghost*, echoes the idea of death, and the word itself creates an aura of absence and departure from the mortal life. Ecclesiastes presents the life of a man as a shadow: “For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow” (Eccles. 6.12). Similarly, this language explodes in the discussion of Gant and his death. Wolfe writes that “The shadow of his [Gant’s] death lay over their lives” (404). This shadow looms when the family learns of Gant’s cancer, and when Ben dies unexpectedly. Helen voices her attempts to deal with the continual shadow of Gant’s death, and her efforts to ease his passing, that were interrupted by Ben’s death: “I’ve nursed him like a slave for six years, and he’ll be here when I’m gone. Every one was expecting papa to die, but it was Ben who went. You can never tell. After this, I’m through” (481). After overhearing a lunch counter conversation between Horse Hines, the undertaker, and a collection of townspeople, Eugene tries to grasp the ideas of death and embalming; “The ghost of old fear, that had been laid for years, walked forth to haunt him” (274). Eugene encounters the idea of death that, like a specter, hangs over him, and indeed all living things, always. Wolfe uses the term *ghost* in other ways, also, as when Eugene accompanies Jim Trivett to the brothel in Exeter and “In him the ghost, his stranger, turned grievously away. O God! I shall remember, he thought” (341). *Ghost* becomes a lost aspect of Eugene’s self that he cannot control, and this lack of control brings him back to thoughts of human futility and mortality, highlighted by Eugene’s first encounter with a prostitute, which results in venereal disease. Wolfe

goes further: “Eugene was haunted by his own lost ghost: he knew it to be irrecoverable. For three days he avoided every one: the brand of his sin, he felt, was on him. He was punished by every gesture, by every word” (343).

*Buried* is another term that echoes death, beginning with the subtitle of *Look Homeward, Angel: A Story of the Buried Life*. Wolfe establishes the power of the term before we read the first words of the novel. *Buried* falls in line with *shadow* and *ghost*, as all three deal with the parts of the characters that are unknown and uncontrollable. Eugene’s life, as indicated by the title, is *buried*. Because of his isolation that comes from the structure and composition of his family, and because of the hidden and solitary nature of the activities, processes, and events that give his life meaning. The idea of the buried life links Wolfe back to Eliot through Matthew Arnold. In the footnotes of his article “The Proem of *Look Homeward, Angel*,” Terry Roberts writes that “Wolfe’s source for his subtitle, Matthew Arnold’s poem “The Buried Life,” also stresses loss of language as a central theme” (87). Roberts suggests that Wolfe not only got his subtitle from Arnold, but also that the central idea of Arnold’s poem served as a major underpinning for the themes of *Look Homeward, Angel*. Craig Raines entitled the Introduction to his book *T. S. Eliot* “Eliot and the Buried Life.” Raines writes that “Eliot inherits this theme, the theme of the ‘buried life,’ from his awkward critical and poetic father figure, Matthew Arnold” (xx). In a statement that links Eliot and Wolfe further, Raines offers that “The buried life in Eliot has a headstone with many names, different names for a familiar compound ghost” (xxi).

The word *last* and idea of the last occur throughout the book in an Ecclesiastical connection. Eugene is always the last. He is the last child of Gant and Eliza, and he is the last sibling with the opportunity for fame and fortune. This is a precarious position for Eugene, as he receives both encouragement and pressure from his parents, who financially support his academic endeavors, and ire from his siblings who feel that they did not receive the opportunities that Eugene received. Ben speaks this idea: “You’re the last hope, ‘Gene. Go and finish up, if you have to steal the money. The rest of us will never amount to a damn. Try making something out of yourself. Hold your head up!” (373). At Eugene’s graduation from the state university, Gant tells him, “Well, son, the rest is up to you now, I believe you’re going to make something of yourself” (500). Eliza echoes this, as well as the statements of her other children: “Well, son, I want you to go ahead now and try to be Somebody. None of the others ever had your opportunity, and I hope you do something with it. Your papa and I have done the best we could. The rest is up to you” (500). Eugene is the last chance for the Gant name to succeed, and by doing so, would acquire the vanity and meaningless accomplishments of life that have evaded his family. Eugene’s family desires for him to succeed to shed a positive light on them, and as the Preacher of Ecclesiastes warns, both the success and the reputation of the family are “vanity and vexation of spirit” (Eccles. 1.14).

These words unite Wolfe’s prose and story with Ecclesiastical language in the recognition, handling, and, at times, infatuation with death. Ecclesiastes is a book of extreme melancholy because of its tone and its fixation with death. Similarly, *Look Homeward, Angel* relentlessly confronts death. In Ecclesiastes and in *Look*

*Homeward, Angel*, death is viewed as positive in contrast with the hardships and loneliness of life. Ecclesiastes says, “As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind” (5.16). We also read that this toil comes to nothing: “‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Everything is meaningless’” (12.8). For Ecclesiastes, death is a departure from the meaningless life of the world, and for the Gants, death is not so different. After Ben’s death, Helen remarks, “Thank God, he’s out of it now” (467). Very soon after Ben’s death, in an attempt to cope, Eugene realizes aloud that “By God! That’s one thing Ben’s out of. He won’t have to drink mama’s coffee anymore” (467). This is a tongue-in-cheek attempt at grief, but in a small microcosm, this statement, and Luke’s characteristic “Whah-whah-whah!” paints a picture of the Gantian perception of death. No one in the family enjoys Eliza’s coffee, which is a “cold weak wash” that reflects Eliza’s never dying attempts to save money. Her attempts are toils in the wind, and all of her family realizes and attempts to tell her, but Ben, in this case, the “lucky” one, no longer has to live and attempt to drink Eliza’s coffee, or to exist in a meager household built on her blind thrift. After Gant’s death:

They were tired, but they all felt an enormous relief. For over a day, each had known that death was inevitable, and after the horror of the incessant strangling gasp, this peace, the end of pain touched them all with a profound, a weary joy. (467)

In Ecclesiastes, death is a victory over the meaningless life in that the dead no longer have to toil, and instead go home to what many sects of Christianity call their “Great Reward.” Ecclesiastes takes a different tone towards the afterlife by avoiding much of

the gilded imagery of Heaven, and representing the afterlife as an absence from this world. For the Gants, not particularly a religious lot, viewing Ben's death as an escape from the world is reward enough.

Wolfe uses another grouping of words that center on the idea of denial. Inherent to this novel and Ecclesiastes is the idea of the hardships of life. The Preacher attempts to see what comes of great physical and material triumph in the world, and learns that there is "no profit under the sun" (Eccles. 2.11). The words and ideas in this grouping all allude to and tie into the idea of denial, and these words include: *lost, hunger, lust, exile, waste of loss, foreign*, and the idea of the South.

The term *lost* may be one of the most frequent terms affecting the reading of *Look Homeward, Angel*. Wolfe introduces this term in the proem, a prose-poem that creates a stockpile of images and ideas that will reoccur throughout the novel. As Roberts suggests, for someone reading the novel for the first time, the proem seems like a haphazard attempt at throwing some loose images together. But once the reader gets into the novel, the proem becomes an invaluable tool for explaining many of Wolfe's recurring images and ideas. Wolfe writes in the proem, "*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?*" (1). The last line of the proem provides the first encounter with one of the essential and repeated statements and ideas of the novel. Wolfe writes, "*O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again*" (1). The word *lost* is used multiple times in the proem, and these usages, along with numerous others in the book, refer to "the waste of loss," what is lost and

was never had. This idea of *lost* is that the essence of something utterly essential to life was lost somewhere and sometime before we could find it. The waste of loss is that we never had the chance to find what was lost. This echoes of the vanities of Ecclesiastes, all of which fade away. *Lost* also occurs in a more conventional way in the novel, as Eugene remembers experiences, people, and images that he has lost. As Eugene copes with the loss of Laura, one of his greatest losses, upon encountering his old friend, “Pap” Rheinart, “Eugene looked at that good shy face , remembering the lost years, the lost faces. And there was sorrow in his heart for what would come no more” (395). The loss experienced almost continually in *Look Homeward, Angel* connects to the vanity of Ecclesiastes, as the Preacher writes, “I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit” (Eccles.1.14). Indeed, Eugene and Wolfe acknowledge that the substance of their lives and their family history is lost, forgotten, and never to return again.

Two key words that are closely linked, and essential to the denial grouping of Wolfe’s words are *hunger* and *lust*. In Ecclesiastes, the Preacher experiences everything under the sun that he thinks will bring him joy and satisfaction in the life of vanity. His hunger and lust help pave the way for one of the most iconic statements in Ecclesiastes that tells readers “to eat, and to drink, and to be merry” (Eccles. 8.15). The Gant family follows these directions, but seldom seems to find merriment. A key hunger experienced by all members of the Gant family is the “hunger for voyages” (4). The first instance of this hunger comes with Gant’s father: “He left five children, a mortgage and—in his strange dark eyes which now stated bright and open—something that had not died: a passionate and obscure hunger for voyages” (4).

This Gantian hunger for voyages functions as an intangible inheritance along the family line. After a conversation between Helen and Eliza, Wolfe writes, “they thought of the Gant men who would always know hunger, the strangers on the land, the unknown farers who had lost their way. O Lost!” (242). In his fifty-sixth year, Gant took his “last great voyage” to California, but before that, his hunger for voyages had seen him go from Gettysburg as a boy to Baltimore, to Sydney, NC (Wolfe’s fictional Raleigh, NC), to Altamont (Asheville). Eugene also experiences this hunger as he leaves his mother for his first trip without her, to Charleston, SC: “He was again, she felt, a little farther off. The hunger for voyages was in his face” (296). In an admittance, Eugene answers Ben’s question in the final chapter by saying that what he wants to find is “Myself, and an end to hunger, and the happy land” (520). Like Gant, Eliza also possesses a hunger. Regarding property, Eliza possesses “a strange meditative hunger” (11). Eliza is hungry for land and focused on how to gain it. Eugene shares Eliza’s hunger for an achievement, but instead of property, Eugene’s “strange and meditative hunger” is for fame and accomplishment through writing.

Eugene’s and Gant’s ravenous eating habits also reflect this theme. Wolfe writes that “Gant ate ravenously and without caution,” and that “He had a Dutch love of abundance” (56). After Ben’s death, Eugene and Luke go to the diner, and Eugene asks, “Have you got any young roast whale left?” and later when he makes his real order, “Bring me one of your this week’s steaks [. . .] well done, with a meat axe and the sausage grinder” (471). Eugene has inherited his father’s desire for abundance and grandiose absurdity, and his orders here attest to that. Wolfe evokes the idea of

hunger in his subtitling of *Of Time and the River: A Legend of Man's Hunger in His Youth*. This subtitle alludes to the focus of the novel, which is Eugene's voyage into the world away from his family.

Hunger and lust are connected feelings, and the hunger of the Gant men turns into lust in several forms. Gant is repeatedly dragged home from the brothel, and is goaded into selling his precious stone angel to a Madame, a familiar acquaintance, for one of her deceased prostitutes (221). Eugene also visits brothels in Exeter, Newport News, and with women in his mother's home. Eugene's lust continues in *Of Time and the River*, where we learn:

He would get up in the middle of the night to scrawl down insane catalogs of that he had seen and done:—the number of books he had read, the number of miles he had traveled, the number of people he had known, the number of women he had slept with, the number of meals he had eaten, the number of towns he had visited, the number of states he had been in.

And at one moment he would gloat and chuckle over these stupendous lists like a miser gloating over his board, only to groan bitterly with despair the next moment, and to beat his head against the wall, as he remembered the overwhelming amount of all that he had not seen or done, or known. (92)

These lusts show how Eugene longs for the experience of the Preacher in Ecclesiastes, but lacks the age, experience, or means to make it all happen. The lust from Eugene's endless lists and whoring are only symbols of the lust that Eugene



possesses for the experiences of life throughout his story in *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River*.

Lust takes another form amidst death, especially around the death of Ben. During Ben's funeral, "Behind the world's great mask of grief, the eyes of the mourners shone through with a terrible and indecent hunger, and unnamable [sic] lust" (480). In the wake of death, mourners gather around the deceased for the overflow of emotion and the subtle but clear reminder that they are alive. Eliza experiences a similar emotion takes place as she clings to Ben in his death: Eugene sees that Eliza "was watching her own death, that the unloosening grip of her hand on Ben's hand was an act of union with her own flesh, that, for her, Ben was not dying—but that a part of *her*, of *her* life, *her* blood, *her* body, was dying" (463-464). In Wolfe's text, a living person sees her own fate in the dead, and lusts after the life experience that is left. This echoes a memorable verse from Ecclesiastes that states, "a living dog is better than a dead lion" (Eccles. 9.4). The hunger and the lust for life lives in the Gant family, and Wolfe reveals how a similar hunger and lust functions in all of humankind.

The denial grouping of Wolfe's words can be further organized in subgroups, and just as hunger and lust were a denial subgroup, so are the terms and idea of *exile* and foreign experiences dictated by the Civil War. Wolfe introduces this idea early in the proem of *Look Homeward, Angel*, writing that "*Naked and alone we came into exile*" (1). Wolfe defines this exile as "*the unspeakable and incommunicable prison of this earth*" (1). In the first words of the novel, Wolfe creates a schematic of his ideas and images: he forcefully evokes this idea and this picture of exile. The idea of exile

brings connotations of punishment, and for Wolfe, and Ecclesiastes, the painful aspects of life function largely as a punishment. Ecclesiastes 2.23 reads, “For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his hearth taketh not rest in the night.” This position is echoed in Wolfe’s references to exile. In his first moment of intense drunkenness, alone while his family is Christmas shopping in town, Eugene sits in Dixieland, his mother’s boarding house, and “He sat down upon the hard missions settle, and listened to the cold drip of silence. This is the house in which I have been an exile” (412). Eugene feels like an exile in his daily life, in his isolation from his family, and from the people around him, and Wolfe seeks to universalize that feeling. Examining one of his main focuses in the Gant narrative, particularly in *Of Time and the River*, Wolfe writes in *Look Homeward, Angel*: “Only this earth endured, upon whose lonely breast he read Euripides. Within its hill he had been held a prisoner; upon its plain he walked, alone, a stranger. O God! O God! We have been an exile in another land and a stranger in our own” (352). The narrator adopts a tone that includes himself, the characters in the novel, and the American readers in expressing our struggles as Americans in a time when the United States was struggling to recreate its identity, and still fighting the effects of the growing pains of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

Place is an imperative element of *Look Homeward, Angel*, as place, in this case the South, creates a denial and definition of Eugene’s fate. Altamont, where most of *Look Homeward, Angel* takes place, is a town in the state of Old Catawba. These fictive locations are thinly veiled versions of Asheville and North Carolina, and Eugene is thinly veiled as Wolfe. In the novel, Eugene continually struggles with his

identity as a Southerner and his understanding what the South is. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the idea of an exile still fit into the Southern consciousness.

Wolfe evokes North versus South inclinations recalling Gant's childhood in Gettysburg, the site of one of the bloodiest battles in the Civil War, or any American military effort. At this junction of fractured brotherhood, Gant encounters the first of the Pentland clan that he would become tied into after his marriage to Eliza. Wolfe describes Gant's realization:

One day in April, as with fresh awakened senses, he stood before his shop, watching the flurry of life in the square, Oliver heard behind him the voice of a man who was passing. And that voice, flat, drawling, complacent, touched with a sudden light a picture that had lain dead in him for twenty years.

“Hit's a comin'! Accordin' to my figgers hit's due June 11, 1886.”

Oliver turned and saw retreating the burly persuasive figure of the prophet he had last seen vanishing down the dusty road that led to Gettysburg and Armageddon. (8)

This event makes Gant a crossover between the North and the South, while his son identifies only with Gant's Southern identity. As a Southerner, Eugene faces the experience of being a foreigner in his home land, and the effects of the short but profound existence of the Confederate States of America. The South “burned like Dark Helen in Eugene's blood” (127). C. Hugh Holman wrote of Wolfe and the South that “all knowledge of her darkness and damnation could not stifle his love for the lost and ruined and burning Helen in his blood” (19). Eugene's “feeling for the South

was not so much historic as it was of the core and desire of dark romanticism.” While in Charleston, SC, Eugene walks along the Battery, or “the borders of ruined Camelot” (302). Eugene overflows with Southern pride at the exact location where Southern pride fired on Fort Sumter and started the Civil War. Eugene “looked greedily at the wrought-iron gateways; the old lust of his childhood for iron-scrap awoke,” and he declared, “Those are old Southern mansions.” A traveling companion remarks that “They’ve let the place run down. It’s no bigger now that it was before the Civil War.” In a moment of stream-of-consciousness that seemingly connects that narration and Eugene’s thoughts, we read the reaction: “No, sir, and by heaven, so long as one true Southern heart is left alive to remember Appomattox, Reconstruction, and the Black parliaments, we will defend with our dearest blood our menaced, but sacred, traditions” (303). Eugene feels the sting of being a beaten and defeated exile in his own land. It is not only the connection to the South’s past that makes him feel exiled in his own land, but also this wrinkle in history and place plays a large role. The lost cause of the South became a “vanity and vexation of spirit” as the once promising plan, army, and nation failed. The attraction to the loss and the defeat of the South is very much like the attraction to death found in Ecclesiastes and the Gant family story. Eugene’s attachment to the South and his idealization of its past, are more Ecclesiastical traits in *Look Homeward, Angel*, because they show his attachment to an entity that is dead and gone, but at the core of his identity.

The idea of exile shares a kindred spirit with another grouping of words, a grouping that is built around the idea of isolation. The isolation words, which are some of the most prevalent in *Look Homeward, Angel*, are *loneliness, alone, naked,*

and *stranger*. Each of these words relates to individual isolation, a key idea of modernist literature, and a link both to Prufrock and to Ecclesiastes. Again, readers can look to the poem for an early exposure to these words. The same statement that introduced the exile of humanity also introduces the isolation words: “*Naked and alone we came into exile,*” and later in the poem, we get the question, “*Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone?*” (1). These words initially echo Ecclesiastes in their insistence that we come into the world in one condition and leave it in the same condition. The Ecclesiastes version of this idea comes in: “All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all return again” (Eccles. 3.20) Wolfe proposes that as we are made of dust and will return to dust, we also enter and leave the world naked and alone. He shares in this sentiment with Ecclesiastes 5.15 which is partially directly quoted in the poem: “As he came forth of his mother’s womb, naked shall he return to go as he came.” Each human is forever isolated through an inability to precisely communicate through words, and we see with Eugene that he is constantly misunderstood by his family and acquaintances, and he feels forever unable to be known. Eugene articulates these feelings when he cries to his ultimate love interest, Laura James: “Laura! My dear! My sweet! Don’t leave me alone! I’ve been alone! I’ve always been alone!” (379). Laura is the first person in Eugene’s life that he has felt knew him and understood his life and his spirit, but this too is vanity as Laura deceives him by keeping her engagement secret and leaving him alone.

*Loneliness* shares the same root as *alone*, and in *Look Homeward, Angel* it plays an almost interchangeable role with the term *alone*. Wolfe projects Eugene’s

future loneliness when recounting Eliza's reaction when Eugene first leaves home for school:

Something taut snapped in her; she remembered his furtive backward glance, and she wept. And she did not weep for herself, but for him: the hour after birth she had looked in his dark eyes and had seen something that would brood there eternally, she knew, unfathomable wells of remote and intangible loneliness: she knew 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 the world. O lost. (66)

Eliza's observation reflects Wolfe's understanding of the loneliness of humanity. This creed of loneliness plagues the members of the Gant family through the rest of *Look Homeward, Angel*. The loneliness continues for Eugene during his first year at the state university when "He was alone. He was desperately lonely" (329). This trend continues as, during a Christmas vacation home from school, Eugene explodes in a verbal assault and confronts his family for their influence, or lack thereof, on his life and their attitudes towards him. During an outburst of emotion Eugene exclaims, "Alone. I have done an apprenticeship here with you for seventeen years, but it is coming to an end" (420). Indeed, the apprenticeship was coming to an end, but the loneliness Eugene felt in that moment, through Ecclesiastes and the lens of the poem, will never leave him.

Loneliness is inherent in an exile, and is also impossible to be detached from the idea of the stranger. The language of the poem again defines images and ideas for

the remainder of the book, this time in the case of the stranger, while asking the question, “*Which of us is not forever a stranger and alone?*” (1). This initial tempering of the text by the first words of the schematic proem allows us to experience the existence of a stranger by highlighting our own union with the idea. When Gant first meets Eliza, he says to her, “I’m a stranger in a strange land” (10). Again, Wolfe sets the tone for his bloodline, as Gant’s identity as a stranger is passed along to his children. Wolfe provides insight into Gant’s reflection on his life at the turn of the twentieth century when, “He saw more clearly than ever that he was a stranger in a strange land among people who would always be alien to him” (19). These feelings are passed on to Eugene, and at a seemingly young age, Eugene questions the essence of life as a stranger:

Lost. He understood that men were forever strangers to one another, that no one ever comes really to know any one, that imprisoned in the dark womb of our mother, we come to life without having seen her face, that we are given to her arms a stranger, and that, caught in that insoluble prison of being, we escape it never, no matter what arms may clasp us, what mouth may kiss us, what heart may warm us. Never, never, never, never. (31)

Although these thoughts presumably occur to Eugene when he is an infant, an age when such thought and understanding are unlikely, Wolfe offers another thesis. This declaration is a plain and clear definition of Wolfe’s idea of the stranger. Wolfe’s thesis on the stranger matches a statement by the Preacher from Ecclesiastes: “As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the

womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all” (Eccles. 11.5). This Ecclesiastical echo is essential to Wolfe’s own definition of the stranger. The ultimate stranger in the book, though, is Ben. Only in Ben’s death does his family realize how much of a stranger he was to them. In a passage after Ben’s death, Wolfe writes, “he lived here a stranger, trying to recapture the music of the lost world, trying to recall the great forgotten language, the lost faces, the stone, the leaf, the door” (465).

Eugene’s destiny, as well as the destiny of all humanity as proposed by Wolfe and illuminated in Ecclesiastes, is isolation and loneliness. Wolfe represents loneliness as destiny, and loneliness presents *destiny* as another term that echoes throughout the Gant narrative. The first line of the first chapter of *Look Homeward, Angel* introduces us to this idea:

A destiny that leads the English to the Dutch is strange enough; but one that leads from Epsom into Pennsylvania, and thence into the hills that shut in Altamont over the proud coral cry of the cock, and the soft stone smile of an angel, is touched by that dark miracle of chance which makes new magic in a dusty world. (3)

This idea of destiny is attached Gant’s journey to Altamont, and that destiny gives birth to Eugene, and the story of this novel. This idea of destiny continues as Wolfe offers that “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” (3). Continuing this thread, Wolfe further elaborates by writing, “Each moment is the fruit of forty thousand years. The



minute-winning days, like flies, buzz home to death, and every minute is a window on all time” (3). According to Wolfe, the journey of time, space, and lives from Crete to Texas lingers, and with this image Wolfe illustrates how factors beyond any human’s control created Eugene, and to a large degree created his destiny. In this idea, Wolfe echoes a position from Ecclesiastes which states, “He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to end” (Eccles. 3.11). Wolfe writes that “The fusion of two strong egotisms, Eliza’s inbrooding and Gant’s expanding outward, made of him a fanatical zealot in the religion of Chance” (160). In the following paragraph, Wolfe’s rhetorical musings recall the first chapter of prose in the novel and also posit that “Through Chance we are each a ghost to all the others, and our only reality; through Chance, the huge hinge of the world, and a grain of dust; the stone that starts an avalanche, the pebble whose concentric circles widen across the seas” (160). Destiny, determined by factors greater than any human, can be odd, different, unexpected, and bizarre; in Eugene’s case, as Wolfe reveals, all of humanity’s, destiny is a lonely entity.

A related idea, entrapment, forms the thematic chord for the next grouping of words. Ecclesiastes establishes a tone of entrapment illustrated in language like that found in verse 2.23. “For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh no rest in the night.” Clearly the Preacher sees this as the life of humans, a life that is indeed trapped until the release of death. Wolfe echoes this entrapment in a number of words. The words that compose the entrapment grouping are *prison*, *prison-pent*, *caged*, *hill-born*, *hill-haunted*, and the idea of humans being mastered by

the mountains. Wolfe bases much of this imagery on life, land, and place, and he starts, again, in the proem.

The very first of Wolfe's words that we read are some of his most powerful. His proem in *Look Homeward, Angel* highlights important ideas for the rest of the novel, and one of those central ideas is a prison. To again quote the proem, Wolfe gives us our first introduction to the idea of a prison when he writes, "*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 the earth*" (1). Wolfe repeats the word *prison* twice in this paragraph. Wolfe's idea of earth as a prison is linked to the Ecclesiastical idea of life on earth being "unspeakable and incommunicable." Exile must be included when the idea of prison is applied. Indeed, the idea of an exile is tied very closely to the idea of prison, as both are punishment-based separations. Returning to the questions of the proem, Wolfe asks, "*Which of us has not remained prison-pent?*" (1). For Wolfe, the obvious answer to the question is that no humans have remained forever *prison-pent*. In the proem, Wolfe asserts that not only are we prisoners of flesh, but that we cannot escape being *prison-pent* throughout the course of our lives. A key component to these questions and the setting of the book are the places of birth for Wolfe and Eugene.

The landscape and geography of Altamont present an entrapment to citizens of the town. Ted Mitchell writes that "The influence of the city and its surrounding mountains is unmistakable stamped on [Wolfe's] life and literary career" (15). Wolfe was born and lived his childhood in Asheville, NC, which Wolfe represents as

Altamont in *Look Homeward, Angel*. Just as much of the Gant narrative can be understood as autobiographical, much of the description of Altamont can be viewed as a description of Asheville. In his *Thomas Wolfe: An Illustrated Biography*, Mitchell shows how thinly veiled Wolfe's place and street names were. Asheville's Woodfin Street became Altamont's Woodson Street; Patton Avenue became Hatton Avenue; and Montford Avenue became Montgomery Avenue (124). But while Wolfe changed street names, he did not change the description of the mountains surrounding Asheville. In some of his most powerful and direct language, Wolfe writes, "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. Old haunt-eyes faces glimmered in his memory" (158). Wolfe repeats this language in an examination of America: "O God! O God! We have been an exile in another land and a stranger in our own. The mountains were our masters: they went home to our eye and our heart before we came to five. Whatever we can do or say must be forever hillbound" (352). Imperative to this language and to this grouping are the imprisoning features that the hills possess. Wolfe describes these mountains when Eugene goes on a hike with Laura: "But the hills were lordly, with a plan. Westward, they widened into the sun, soaring up from buttressing shoulders. The town was thrown up on the plateau like an encampment: there was nothing below him that could resist time" (375). An encampment on a plateau accurately describes Asheville. To get to Asheville from the east, the eastern escarpment of the Blue Ridge Mountains must be scaled. After this climb, a plateau appears, and Asheville rests on this plateau. And as Wolfe points out, the mountains do rise to the west of downtown

Asheville. Standing where W. O. Wolfe's (Gant's) monument shop stood, a person can look west and see the prominent Mt. Pisgah and other massive mountain ranges. Wolfe describes this through the gazing of Pett Pentland from just outside Gant's shop: "With far-seeing statesmanship he looked westward toward Pisgah" (235). The influence of these mountains can be felt through more of Wolfe's language.

From this idea of the surrounding mountains, Wolfe creates appropriate terminology. From the poem we get the term *prison-pent*, which evokes imagery of imprisonment in life, and in flesh. We read of Eugene that "The prison walls of self had closed entirely round him; he was walled completely by the esymplastic power of his imagination [sic]" (167). The prison motif continues as Eugene grows older and struggles to adapt to life within the world and within himself: "He...wished desperately...that somehow, bloodily, he might escape the stifling prisonhouse of his life" (117). As Eugene fights the urges of early sensuality in Charleston, Wolfe writes, "Their hearts were filled with the lonely thunder of the sea. She kissed him. They were hill-born" (305). As we have read before, Wolfe writes of Americans, "Whatever we can do or say must be forever hillbound" (352). As Ben is trying to escape his family in the eastern parts of Old Catawba, Eugene visits him at Easter. During this encounter, Wolfe writes, "[Eugene] glanced at his brother quickly and grinned, with a sly charm of rare confession. But his fierce eyes were desperate and lonely. Hill-haunted? For-home?" (424). In this scene, Ben has tried to get away, but is haunted by the hills of home. The Gants, especially Eugene, and Wolfe faced entrapment by the physical and personal walls around them.

Several larger ideas also exhibit Ecclesiastical echoes. It is also useful to compile a few single idea groupings of terms, for ideas and/or terms that possess more meaning and depth than the previous grouped terms. One of these singular groups is Wolfe's idea of the "forgotten language." Wolfe wrote in his notebooks, "I weary of the old forms—the old language—It has come to me quite simply these last three days that we must mine deeper—find language again in its primitive sinews" (Kennedy and Reeves 98). Wolfe was searching for a more elemental and authentic form of language, a primitive language that he tags in *Look Homeward, Angel* as the *forgotten language*. This term links Wolfe's text to Ecclesiastical thought, but it also provides a basic thread through the text. In Ecclesiastes 1.11 the Preacher writes, "There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after." This echoes Wolfe's usage and definition of the term *lost* as given in the proem. In the heavily packed proem we first encounter the forgotten language. Wolfe writes:

*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? (1).*

Wolfe's idea of *forgotten* as posed by this paragraph is not so much forgotten as not possessed and lost. As examined before, Wolfe's *lost* is not so much a loss of possession, but never having possession or knowledge of something, in this case, the forgotten language, or some sort of code for life and living. This definition works along with verse 1.11 by proposing the idea that what is lost once was, and was

forgotten. The language of the poem poses that all humans are searching for the forgotten language with no idea of a time or place when they may find it, or when it may have occurred or disappeared. The reason the key blazing images of *Look Homeward, Angel* are so effective to people who have read the novel, and so baffling to new readers, is that they are part of the forgotten language. These symbols are not so much symbols, but images of memories left behind as allusions to a lost lexicon that we all seek. A stone, a leaf, and a door could mean or represent any of a million possibilities, but we do not know, and cannot know precisely what they mean. Here Prufrock enters with his cry, "It is impossible to say just what I mean!" (line 104). Wolfe feels that there is some forgotten language with some solution to life, but it is forgotten, and we are lost. Until Ben has gone and come again, and Eugene visits with him on the square that Wolfe's, and Eugene's, forgotten languages come to any sort of resolution. Tying the loose ends of the stone, the leaf, and the door, and addressing the forgotten language, Eugene sounds off:

And no leaf hangs for me in the forest; I shall lift no stone upon the hills; I shall find no door in any city. But in the city of myself, upon the continent of my soul, I shall find the forgotten language, the lost world, a door where I may enter, and music strange as any ever sounded. (521)

At first glance, this is an opposite solution, or end goal from the philosophy of Ecclesiastes. In an echo of Whitman, Eugene decides that he can find all that he wants and needs upon the continent of himself. This decree of a self search and attempt at some sort of answer echoes the Ecclesiastical axiom to eat, drink, and be

merry. If this search brings Eugene merriment, does it not fit the Ecclesiastical call? This final tying up of loose ends, which is one of the only literary decisions and maneuvers in the novel, presents a final solution for Eugene in his life, and an ontology for him in his future, which is continued in *Of Time and the River*.

Another of the singular groupings considers the minor key. Wolfe provides a description of Ben on the porch at Dixieland: “In the darkness he sat, talking a little, humming a little, laughing occasionally in his thin minor key, quietly, with a cigarette between his forked ivory fingers, drawing deeply” (241). Wolfe includes the minor key here as just a small descriptor, but in doing so creates an image that defines Ben’s character and sets the tone for the novel. The idea of a minor key in this passage, especially applied to Ben, suggests an aura of melancholy. This aura suggests Ecclesiastes, a text of total and complete melancholy. The simplest summing up of Ecclesiastes could read “life is hard—hang in there until it’s over,” and what could be much more melancholy than this? This subtle connection may be entirely unintended by Wolfe, but it is so natural and meaningful that it cannot be ignored. A major scale in music consists of the seven notes of a key, scale degrees one through seven, and a repetition of the tonic of the scale (or the beginning note an octave higher) for the eighth note. A natural minor scale is the same except for one minor change. In a natural minor scale, the third scale degree is flatted a half step. This means that the pitch is dropped one half of a note. This one change creates a minor scale. The flattening of one scale changes a major scale to a minor scale, and can create a whole new musical meaning. Minor chords, notes, and keys are used to create tension that may be scary, startling, or unsettling, and eventually resolve back into the tonic, or

sometimes major scale. Ben is a minor key because of his melancholy, his isolation, and his less than satisfactory existence. Wolfe proposes that Ben's laugh is in a minor key, but I propose that Ben is a minor key in all aspects of his life, and that Ben is the minor key engine that drives the minor key tone of the novel. *Look Homeward, Angel* is a novel of much struggle, death, and toil, and the only peace that comes is when Ben's minor key is resolved into death, or, the major key that ends all tension, or in this case, toil and strife. The idea of the minor key is the all but perfect linking piece between Ecclesiastes; *Look Homeward, Angel*; and Ben. Ben also allows the reader to find another essential theme of the novel.

Ben's melancholy echoes the Ecclesiastical month, October. The last of the groupings is tied into many of the aforementioned terms and ideas. The final solitary grouping focuses on the idea of Autumn, and in particular, October. On October 3, 2011, Wolfe's birthday, *The Winston-Salem Journal* published an article entitled "October Ode: Saluting a fine month and its literary master," which brings light to Wolfe's affinity towards October. The article not only lends credence to Wolfe's reputation in regard to October, but it also defines October in a manner befitting this discussion. The article states that "October is always a special time that divides the hot frenzy of summer and the icy weariness of late fall. It's the sweetest month for many of us." Accompanying this and other statements is a quotation from *Of Time and the River*, a book perhaps more obsessed with October than *Look Homeward, Angel*. This statement successfully positions October as, among other things, a month of dichotomies. October can offer the last heat of summer and the first cold of winter. It can be radiantly beautiful and crystal clear, or saturated with fog and chill.



October is also a time of life and death. Some of the most famous words of Ecclesiastes are directly applicable to the discussion of October and the natural autumnal processes. In verses 3.1-2, the Preacher writes, "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which is planted." October is this time for many natural plants and processes. It is a time of harvest, which in and of itself is a dichotomy. Plants are taken from their life source, killed, to be eaten and to be fuel for other living things. In October the leaves reach their peak of beauty, and then dry and crumble. October is the month of melancholy, a month in a minor key, and a month of Ben. Autumn or October are mentioned no less than a dozen times explicitly in *Look Homeward, Angel*. It is no accident that October is such a prevalent feature in a novel of the sweetness and pain of life, and how they come together. We learn that "It was gray autumnal November: the mountain forests were quilted with dry brown leaves" when the Gants return from the World's Fair in St. Louis after Grover's death (49). Grover was Ben's twin, and perhaps the two were ill-fitted to live apart, but both died in the autumnal season of melancholy and dichotomous change. Writing of the change, Wolfe offers us an image of the life and death dichotomy: "Summer died upon the hills. There was a hue, barely guessed, upon the foliage, of red rust. The streets at night were filled with sad lispings: all through the night, upon his porch, as in a coma, he heard the strange noise of autumn" (396). Wolfe continues describing his autumn to us, "But oh, the brave autumn and the songs they sang;...the mellow days, the opening gates of desire, the smoky sun, the dropping patter of leaves" (77). Wolfe, a writer of great sensuous detail, was perhaps

at his finest and most effective when describing autumn and October. Another excellent example illustrates Wolfe's autumnal articulation: "Later, as the golden sun was waning redly, and there was nothing in the room but the smell of chalk and the heavy buzz of the old October flies, they would prepare to depart" (91). Connecting Ecclesiastes, the minor key, and autumn, Wolfe wrote of "the sad autumnal music" (176). Fitting the melancholy minor music, the family learns that Gant is dying of cancer in the month of October (306). October is not only important for its details, but also for what Wolfe makes happen in the month, such as the news of Gant's cancer, and Ben's death. It is the only month whose coming is noted: "October began, and a season of small cold rain. The earth was a sodden reek of mud and rotten leaves" (447). After Ben's death, Wolfe offers a refrain of "It was October," emphasizing the potency of Ben's death to Eugene. October is the minor key month, the month of death and life, the month of beauty and pain, and Wolfe's month of Ben. The repetition of the terms *autumnal* and *October*, as well as their imagery, are others of Wolfe's Ecclesiastical echoes that enforce not only the book's influence on him, but also the mind frame of his craft, and of his own life.

Chapter 3: “The city of myself”

*Look Homeward, Angel* was Wolfe’s first novel, and in it lies, to borrow a term from Wolfe, the “alexin,” or the chemical beginning, of the Gant narrative, and of Wolfe’s themes and style. This novel first introduced W. O., Eliza, Helen, Luke, Ben, and Eugene Gant, as well as the numerous other characters. In *Look Homeward, Angel*, the influences of Ecclesiastes and Eliot are visible in separate and related ways. By examining *Look Homeward, Angel*, the reader can see how the flow of social energy between Ecclesiastes and Eliot works in the fiction of Wolfe. Wolfe’s work exhibits Ecclesiastical and Prufrockian echoes, and through an analysis of *Look Homeward, Angel*, these echoes continue to manifest.

In *Look Homeward, Angel*, Wolfe employs ideas, images, and themes from Eliot and Ecclesiastes. Wolfe’s employment of Eliot in the novel manifests itself in direct allusion to specific parts and pieces of Eliot’s poetry. Wolfe echoes Prufrock’s image of “a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen” (line 105) when he writes of Eugene’s feelings towards Dixieland:

his spirit was stretched out on the rack of despair and bafflement as there came to him more and more the conviction that their lives could not be more hopelessly distorted, wrenched, mutilated, and perverted away from all the simple comfort, repose, happiness, if they set themselves deliberately to tangle the skein, twist the pattern. (112)

The endnotes to the poem clarify that a magic lantern was a “type of slide projector that dates back to the seventeenth century; images were painted onto glass and projected on a wall by the light of a candle” (Stade 89). This suggests a distortion of the original image, in a similar way to Eugene’s feeling of living distortion by the family’s involvement in Dixieland. Further echoing this image-based entertainment phenomenon, we read of Eugene that

His life coiled back into the brown murk of the past like a twined filament of electric wire; he gave life, a pattern, and movement to these million sensations that Chance, the loss or gain of a moment, the turn of the head, the enormous and aimless impulsion of accident, had thrust into the blazing heat of him. (159)

These lines echo Prufrock, revealing the similarities in ideas and images used by Eliot and Wolfe.

Amongst all his rhetoric, Gant is the vehicle that carries an allusion to Prufrock’s lament in line 120: “I grow old...I grow old.” The novel depicts Gant’s fiftieth birthday in the year of Eugene’s birth; his sixty-fifth year, and the constant ticking of fate’s clock in his life. In Chapter 21 Wolfe simply writes of Gant that “He grew old” (236).

Prufrock ponders how he should presume when he is “formulated, sprawling on a pin,/ When [he is] pinned and wriggling on the wall” (lines 57-58). Margaret Leonard, Eugene’s teacher, applies a similar limitation and pressure to Eugene as he leaves her tutelage. She tells Eugene: “We wanted to keep you with us for another

year, but since that cannot be, we are sending you out with our hopes pinned to you. Oh, boy, you are fine. There is no atom in you that is not fine” (326).

Wolfe, Eliot, and Andrew Marvell collide as we learn Eugene’s inner feeling about his interactions with females. Prufrock asks in lines 90-93, “Would it have been worth while,/ To have bitten off the matter with a smile,/ To have squeezed the universe into a ball/ To roll it toward some overwhelming question.” Eugene mimics this language in his internal feelings: “when he embraced young girls and women he felt a desperate frustration: he wanted to eat them like cake and to have them, too; to roll them up into a ball; to entomb them in his flesh; to possess them more fully than they may ever be possessed” (492).

While Wolfe alludes to “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” he also offers allusions to *The Waste Land*. After Ben’s death, Gant “sat in the darkness at the foot of the bed, leaning forward upon his cane, escaped from the reverie of his own approaching death, into the waste land of the past, blazing back sadly and poignantly the trail across the lost years that led to the birth of his strange son” (463-464). Wolfe again alludes to Eliot’s masterwork amongst his continual documentation of the seasons. Wolfe borrows directly the very first line of *The Waste Land* as Eugene strolls through Altamont and gives detailed descriptions and insights on people and places. The proprietor of Eugene’s school, John Dorsey Leonard, “fastened his brutal grip with keen hunger into the boy’s thin arm. April is the cruelest of months. Eugene winced, moved away, and then stood quietly, checked by the memory of the old revolt from awe” (269). These inclusions of Eliot’s work in *Look Homeward, Angel* show how Eliot’s work resonated with Wolfe and became manifest in Wolfe’s work.

The themes and characters of the novel continue to show the exchange between Eliot and Wolfe, but also the exchange between Ecclesiastes and Wolfe.

Eugene's father, Gant, fills a place in the narrative that mimics the experiences and wisdom of the Preacher. Readers' first exposure to any character in the novel is to William Oliver Gant, who at different times is known as Oliver and W. O., but comes to be known only as Gant. The second character we come to know in much detail is Eliza, who quickly weds Gant. The relationship between these two very different people is a ripe vessel to show the relationship grown from the collision of Ecclesiastes and Eliot in *Look Homeward, Angel*. After a lifetime of travel and toil, Gant finds himself in the mountain town of Altamont. In this town he finds the final stop of the voyage of his life, and "In the haunting eternity of these mountains, rimmed in their enormous cup, he found sprawled out on the hundred hills and hollows a town of four thousand people" (7). In this town, Gant first encounters Eliza at his shop on a spring afternoon. Foreshadowing the many years to come in their turbulent and shifting relationship, her first words to Gant point out a key difference in the two of them: "I tell you what, I wish I was a man and had nothing to do but lie around all day on a good easy sofa" (8). This is Eliza's opening shot in a decades-long debate between the two about the nature and purpose of labor in their lives on earth. While still engaged in this same conversation, after Gant has bought the books Eliza is selling, Wolfe reveals more detail on their personal ideologies of ownership. After counseling Gant on what she would do if she were him, Wolfe defines a large part of character Eliza's:

She continued to talk about property with a strange and meditative hunger. The town seemed to be an enormous blueprint to her: her head was stuffed uncannily with figures and estimates—who owned what lot, who sold it, the sale-price, the real value, the future value, first and second mortgages, and so on. (10)

Gant's counter to Eliza's suggestion and Wolfe's depiction of Eliza's mindset, contrast sharply: "I hope I never own another piece of property as long as I live—save a house to live in. It is nothing but a curse and a care, and the tax collector gets it all in the end" (10). Eliza counters by asking Gant, "You want to lay something away for a rainy day, don't you?" to which he replies, "All the property I need is eight feet of earth to be buried in" (11). This Ecclesiastical decree on the merits of property is at the heart of Gant's philosophy that he will maintain until his death. Here, Gant sides with the Preacher's idea that all he needs in this world is the dirt in which he will be buried. This different perception of property acquisition is only one of the insurmountable differences between Gant and Eliza, and as Wolfe writes, "For from the first, deeper than love, deeper than hate, as deep as the unfleshed bones of life, an obscure and final warfare was being waged between them" (16). This warfare becomes final even before Eugene is born, and this warfare will shape his life forever.

Wolfe reveals that Eliza's and Gant's perceptions on property come from their previous experiences in life. The "poverty and privation" of Eliza's childhood years "had been so terrible that none of them ever spoke of it now, but the bitter steel had sheared into their hearts, leaving scars that would not heal" (12). The effects of these years on Eliza and her siblings was "to develop in them an insane niggardliness, and

insatiate love of property, and a desire to escape from the Major's household as quickly as possible." The experience of her childhood made Eliza a firmly independent and resourceful woman. She desires to be able to live her life and support herself, and this desire does not mesh at all with the Gant's disdain of property. Gant has built lives for himself in Baltimore and in Sydney, and watched those lives wither away with the death of his first wife Cynthia, and with his own destructive tendencies. The effects of these experiences on Gant create a man with little desire to build wealth that he will inevitably squander again. In this elemental flaw of Gant's and Eliza's relationship, we can feel an echo from Prufrock. Prufrock quotes the "one, settling a pillow by her head," and "settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,/ And turning towards the window" (lines 97, 107-108). She utters the lines inversely at the end of successive stanzas: "That is not what I mean at all./ That is not it, at all" and "That is not it at all,/ That is not what I meant, at all" (lines 97-98, 114-115). These lines reflect a major miscommunication between a man and a woman. While the nature and precise genesis of the miscommunication is unknown, and in the case of the poem, rather unimportant, such a miscommunication exists between Gant and Eliza, and it is a miscommunication whose nature and precise genesis are imperative.

Gant and Eliza took their vows of marriage with the familiar intent of a happy and rewarding life together, but their differences make that nearly impossible. Wolfe expounds upon these differences in regards to the organizational differences of the two:



Moreover, [Gant's] own feeling for order was so great that he had a passionate aversion for what was slovenly, disorderly, diffuse. He was goaded to actual fury at times when he saw how carefully she saved bits of old string, empty cans and bottles, paper, trash of every description: the mania for acquisition, as yet an undeveloped madness in Eliza, enraged him. (40)

These lines provide further proof of the misunderstanding, perhaps not spoken, between Gant and Eliza, of the chance of Ecclesiastical providence for throwing the two into such an ill-fitting union. While Eliza is thrifty with her money and her dealings, her own appearance and the cleanliness of her own spaces are unimportant to her. Gant, purely the opposite, is a creature of ritual. In Chapter 6 we read that “The family was at the very core and ripeness of its life together. Gant lavished upon it his abuse, his affection, and his prodigal provisioning. They came to look forward eagerly to his entrance, for he brought with him the great gusto of living, of ritual” (51). During this time, the time of Eugene’s early childhood, Gant rouses the house by building massive fires and waking the family, and then starting the day with breakfast and his comical rhetoric (40-41). Throughout the novel, Gant is a man with his affairs together. Gant’s organization and structure recalls the preparations Prufrock considers as he prepares to meet the world. Both Gant and Prufrock seek order. Gant thrives on his importance in a system, while Prufrock longs for some semblance or order and routine in a world that Eliot represent as greatly fragmented.

Whereas Eliza is slovenly and frugal to a fault, Gant is orderly and occasionally frivolous. Interestingly, “Gant, for all his hatred of land ownership, was

proud of living under his own shelter, and indeed proud in the possession of anything that was sanctified by his usage, and that gave him comfort” (54). We learn that this is quite the opposite of Eliza: “He liked to carry large sums of money in his pocket, a practice of which Eliza disapproved, and for which she reprimanded him frequently” (54). The misunderstandings and differences between Gant and Eliza perpetuate themselves as Gant purposefully aggravates Eliza, and Eliza purposefully nags him. This give-and-take between the two shows that they have separated in their union to their own corners of deep and intimate knowledge of one another. Wolfe reveals how the romantic rift has grown between the two:

Sometimes . . . his good humor grew so victorious that he would attempt clumsily to fondle her, putting one arm stiffly around her waist, while she bridled, became confused, and half-attempted to escape, saying: “Get away! Get away from me! It’s too late for that now.” (53)

Gant’s flirting, but half-hearted attempts at romance, and Eliza’s half-hearted attempts to escape his fondling, show that they still have some of the spark that got them together, but that the spark has dwindled enough to the point where they no longer have the ability or the care to act on it. Eliza, in a melancholic echo of Ecclesiastes, reminds Gant that they had a chance to engage in a meaningful romance, but that time has come and gone. Their relationship has lost all its potential; they have served their procreative purpose and no longer have much use at all for one another. This realization, which usually comes at a time of Gant’s playfulness, shows that they both share in the Ecclesiastical reality that their life together has turned out far

differently from how they planned it, and they have lost all possibility of returning to the time of promise and opportunity in their relationship.

The doomed relationship between Gant and Eliza eventually morphs into more of a business partnership. Well before the birth of Eugene, this partnership becomes solidified: “Year by year, above his howl of protest, he did not know how, they gathered in small bits of earth, paid the hated taxes, and put the money that remained into more land. Over the wife, over the mother, the woman of property, who was like a man, walked slowly forth” (16). Eliza is the purchaser in the partnership, while Gant is the provider. When Eliza purchases Dixieland, and Gant’s health declines, the roles change. After Gant has developed terminal cancer, Eliza suggests that he sell his monument shop on the Altamont square, and to this he offers a hurt and clinging reply: “Merciful God! That’s my last refuge on earth. Woman, have you no mercy? I beg of you, leave me to die in peace: it won’t be long now. You can do what you please with it after I’m gone, but give me a little peace now. In the name of Jesus, I ask it!” (396). Gant replies with typical bombastic style and pomp, but his words reflect his realization, that he will die, and that he should seek peace in his final time. As their relationship progresses through time, the sick Gant leaves the home built by his hands, and surrenders his male dignity by moving into Dixieland, the house that his wife bought and expanded without his aid (442). The home on Woodson Street where all of the Gant children were born, and where Wolfe depicts Eugene’s first memories, is also sold (505). In Gant’s age and sickness, he must become subservient to Eliza, his wife who has become his provider. This is a reversal for Gant, who, early in the novel, “could not bear to be thought incapable of the

support of his family” (42). As their accustomed roles disintegrate, Gant and Eliza see that their lives have turned into something that they didn’t mean at all.

In a final admission of this Prufrockian miscalculation, Gant and Eliza remark on the present state and past potential of their relationship. Gant reaches out, calling Eliza by her name for the first time in “thirty years.” “Well. Eliza, you’ve had a hard life. If I’d acted differently, we might have got along together. Let’s try to make the most of what time’s left. Nobody is blaming you. Taking it all in all, you’ve done pretty well” (466). This painful admission of his fault, reflects Gant’s realization that little time is left yet when they can at least cohabit admirably. Eliza replies by saying, “There are a great many things I’d like to do over again... We never know” (466). These painful lines by a married couple in union for over three decades amount to an admission of failure on both their parts to create a successful relationship. In realizing the finality of life after their son’s death, Eliza and Gant show an Ecclesiastical recognition of what is to come, and make a pact as Ecclesiastes suggests, to get on together in a respectful and appropriate relationship.

An unavoidable Ecclesiastical theme that resonates throughout *Look Homeward, Angel* is death. Near-deaths, the journey to death, and actual deaths recur throughout the novel. The motif of death swirls throughout the novel like Prufrock’s yellow, cat-like fog. The three major figures of death in the novel are Gant and the physicians Coker and McGuire. Gant first mentions death when he informs Eliza on his philosophy on property, and this necessity for enough property only to be buried in sets the tone for Gant’s mortal obsession. One of Gant’s letters to Helen reveals the beginnings of his dance with death: “Bob Greely dropped dead Tuesday morning as

he was coming out of the Citizen's bank. I had known him for twenty-five years. He'd never been sick a day in his life. All, all are gone, the old familiar faces. Old Gant will be the next" (261-262). Here we see Gant's melancholic, matter-of-fact, and Ecclesiastical recognition of his own death. As Gant grows older and sicker, his impending death affects the rest of his family. Gant's death is imminent, unavoidable, and certain, and Wolfe writes that "The shadow of his death lay over their lives" (404). While Helen is with her father seeking his treatment in Baltimore, she asks for a life expectancy, to which the surgeon answers:

My dear girl! I have no idea. The man's a miracle. Do you know that he's Exhibit A here? Every surgeon in the place has had a look. How long can he last? I'll swear to nothing—I no longer have any idea. When your father left here, the first time, after his operation, I never expected to see him again. I doubted if he would last the winter through. But he's back again. He may be back many times. (403)

Gant's coming death continually fails to come, and it wears heavily on his family, who are all surprised when Ben dies before he does. As Ben is dying, Gant selfishly exclaims "Mer-ci-fil God! That I should have to bear this in my old age," and "O Jesus! I can't bear it! Why must you put this upon me? I'm old and sick, and I don't know where the money's to come from" (460). Enraged at Gant's selfish cries, Helen, the child who loves him the most, responds with acid in her words: "You damned old man you, I could kill you! How dare you talk like that when your son's dying? I've wasted six years of my life nursing you, and you'll be the last one to go!" Helen responds again, speaking the thoughts of the entire family: "After this, I'm through!

I've been looking for you to die—and Ben's the one who has to go" (460). As the novel progresses, Gant falls deeper into his chasm of self-pity, and he pulls the spirits of his family down with him. A telling section of the novel displays Gant's post-Ben life:

Gant was dead. Gant was living, death-in-life. In his big back room at Eliza's he waited death, lost and broken in a semi-life of petulant memory. He hung to life by a decayed filament, a corpse lit by infrequent flares of consciousness. The sudden death whose menace they had faced so long that it had lost its meaning, had never come to him. (504)

Gant does not die in *Look Homeward, Angel*, but the looming specter of his death lies everywhere. Ecclesiastes 2.14 declares that "one event happeneth to them all." Gant's attitude toward death, and his family's unavoidable immersion into his death, serve as Ecclesiastical echoes of verse 2.14, as well as the struggle and turmoil of life with a hope for the peace of death. However, *Look Homeward, Angel's* most effective and lasting proclamations on death come from the men who know it best, the physicians, McGuire and Coker.

McGuire and Coker are both friends of the family who know the Gants well, and both physicians share an Ecclesiastical attitude toward life and death that their profession has given them. Both men have their fingers on the pulse of the Gant family, and both are spokesmen for the philosophy of death in *Look Homeward, Angel*. McGuire, a surgeon and an alcoholic, offers one of his pearls of morbid wisdom as he is being whisked away to drunkenly conduct surgery. As Coker

attempts to drag drunken McGuire from the lunch room, Ben asks “Oh, for God’s sake, who’s the victim? I’ll send flowers” (144). McGuire cannot deny the truth and immensity of his philosophy as he answers, “. . . all of us sooner or later. Rich and poor alike. Here to-day and gone to-morrow. Doesn’t matter . . . Doesn’t matter at all” (144). McGuire expresses the knowledge of death that every person has, but that not all admit to. Drunkenness provokes McGuire to sarcasm, as he calls himself a “self-made butcher,” a “carpenter,” an “interior decorator,” “a mechanic, a plumber, an electrician, a butcher, a tailor, and a jeweler” (147). By deeming himself all of these things, McGuire makes light of his profession. Seeing death and life has desensitized him and helped him to drunkenly make a joke of it all. McGuire also gives a sardonic description of what he does: “I throw away everything I can’t use, and use everything I throw away. Who made the Pope a tailbone from his knuckle? Who made the dog howl? Aha—that’s why the governor looks so young. We are filled with useless machinery, Dick. Efficiency, economy, power!” (147). McGuire trivializes life and his profession because of his experience and all of its sobering effects on him and his view on life. Unlike McGuire, Coker acknowledges the seriousness of the situation of death.

Coker appears in many of the lunch room scenes, but he is also the physician present for Ben’s military physicals and death. Ben twice tried to get into the military, because, in a tone and manner much like his father, he says, “I’m tired of pushing daisies here. I want to push them somewhere else” (292). During the course of the examination, Ben becomes riled, questioning what the world is about. He asks Coker: “Where do we come from? Where do we go? What are we here for? What the hell is

it all about?...For God's sake, speak up, Coker. Don't sit there like damned tailor's dummy. Say something, won't you? (293). Coker responds, "What do you want me to say? What am I? a mind-reader? A spiritualist? I'm your physician, not your priest. I've seen them born, and I've seen them die. What happens to them before or after I can't say" (293). This is not what Ben wants to hear, but in this statement, Coker offers an Ecclesiastical philosophy. Coker has seen birth and death, both of which are partially his business, and he has seen many lives, but he cannot prescribe life to Ben. There is a bond between Ben and Coker, and it is appropriate, given his comments on the nature of life, that he should be the one to see Ben into his death. When Coker knows that Ben's time had come, Helen asks how long he has known, and Coker replies:

For two days. From the beginning. For ten years! Since I first saw him, at three in the morning, in the Greasy Spoon, with a doughnut in one hand and a cigarette in the other. My dear, dear girl, we can't turn back the days that have gone. We can't turn back life 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. (461)

These words strike at the very heart of the novel and its desperate attempts to grasp life and find satisfaction in it. Throughout the course of the novel, the narrator and Eugene seek to deal with the questions of how to live life and how to find satisfaction in it, but as Coker says, life in itself is irreplaceable, and worth its value because of its existence if nothing more. The moment of Coker's philosophy comes, fittingly, at the



time of Ben's death, for Ben is the most melancholic, the most tormented, and the most Ecclesiastical figure that the novel offers.

The Ecclesiastical connection continues as Ben Gant's "minor key" resonates throughout *Look Homeward, Angel*. Whereas Gant, McGuire, and Coker are the novel's spokesmen, Ben embodies death and its complicated nature in the novel. As Coker elaborates to Helen, he sees Ben's lifestyle and his attitude, and can tell that Ben is forever doomed in this life. Ben can be considered the second most successful Gant child behind Eugene, as he performs his job well and carries a sterling reputation around the town of Altamont for his work ethic and skills. But from the beginning, Ben struggles with the undying questions of life, just as the speaker in *A Game of Chess* from *The Waste Land* does when he or she asks, "What shall I do now? What shall I do?" (42). As he is being examined by Coker for draft eligibility, Ben asks, "In Christ's name, Coker, what's it all about? Are you able to tell me? What in heaven's name are we here for? You're a doctor—you ought to know something" (292). Ben's questioning statement reveals Ben's ideal of self-responsibility and his confidence in Coker as a physician to have some clue as to what life is about. Also evident is Ben's morbid and challenging sense of Prufrockian irony and humor. More of this attitude can be seen when Coker answers Ben's question about his readiness to enter war: "Yes. You're alright, Ben. You're one of the most alright people I know" (294). Instead of taking this compliment for its worth, Ben "read the true answer in Coker's veined and weary eyes," and replies, "Thanks, Coker. You're a lot of help. I appreciate what you've done a lot. As a doctor, you're a fine first baseman" (294).

Ben's rejection from the military paralyzes him psychologically and influences his attitude on death. In an Ecclesiastical moment of self-awareness, Ben speaks to Eugene:

I've had nothing out of my life. I've been a failure. I've stayed here with them until I'm done for. My lungs are going: they won't even take a chance on me for the army. They won't even give the Germans a chance to shoot at me. I've never made good at anything. By God! What's it all about? Can you figure it out, 'Gene? Is it really so, or is somebody playing a joke on us? Maybe we're dreaming all this. Do you think so? (444-445)

Ben's comments here echo and give credence to Ecclesiastes 2.23: "For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity." In some of the most powerful language in the book, Ben places a value upon his own life that is so low that "They won't even give the Germans a chance to shoot at [him]." Not only is Ben unhappy and unfulfilled in his life, but when the war comes, an opportunity for meager men to become heroes, Ben is denied a chance to seek his glory.

Ben's weak lungs make him susceptible to the influenza epidemic of 1918, and this illness kills him and brings about the climax of the novel. When Eugene and Luke go to the Greasy Spoon for food after Ben's death, they meet Coker and McGuire, and the discussion reveals an echo of Eliot. Ben, while working and living, while entertaining Mrs. Pert, and while spending afternoons and early mornings at the lunch room, has "measured out [his] life in coffee spoons" (Eliot, *Norton* 2611). No

matter how he lived his life, Ben's death rocks the Gant family, and it challenges them all in new and different ways. Wolfe uses refrains in the chapters after Ben's death to further imply the melancholic and Ecclesiastical mood. Ben's death takes place in October. Wolfe's brother, who was the model for Ben in *Look Homeward, Angel*, died on October 19, 1918. Wolfe mimics this date in the novel, and links Ben's death to the time of blazing brilliancy and decaying death, October. Wolfe repeats the phrase "It was October" on numerous occasions after Ben's death in the novel, and these words emphasize the beauty, pain, and death of October, the autumnal and Ecclesiastical month.

Some of Wolfe's most elevated prose comes around the Ecclesiastical death, such as the concluding lines in Chapter 35:

We can believe in the nothingness of life, we can believe in the nothingness of death and of life after death—but who can believe in the nothingness of Ben? Like Apollo, who did his penance to the high god in the sad house of King Admetus, he came, a god with broken feet, into the gray hovel of this world. And he lived here a stranger, trying to recapture the music of the lost world, trying to recall the great forgotten language, the lost faces, the stone, the leaf, the door. (465)

This line declares the importance of life in the book; although Ben was unhappy in life, and he felt that he was a failure, he existed, and existence should be remembered and cherished. We cannot believe in the nothingness of Ben because he was something, and his existence lingers in the lives and minds of his family and friends. This echoes Ecclesiastes 4.16: "There is no end of all the people, even of all that have

been before them.” Wolfe offers his more precise take on this verse at the end of Chapter 37. Another refrain occurs, almost constantly, which is “We shall not come back again,” which is added to the October refrain also: “It was October, but we shall never come back again” (486). Wolfe initially opposes Ecclesiastes 4.16, but he offers another proclamation on death. Wolfe again echoes Eliot, and at the same time as he echoes Ecclesiastes 4.16 is saying that “There is no end”:

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. (486)

Amidst all of this is the echo of Wolfe’s lament from the proem, “O lost!” But Ben is not lost in the way that Wolfe’s “forgotten language” is lost, and Eugene and Wolfe see how he will re-emerge and forever be with them. Ben’s death is the climax of the novel, and although Wolfe hewed this narrative out as an unguided recounting of his life and experience, the death of Ben functions as the peak in action for the section of life which *Look Homeward, Angel* covers.

The novel’s resolution again echoes Ecclesiastes 4:16 as Ben returns to Eugene on the steps of their father’s monument shop in the square. This final chapter is a complete anomaly for a book dealing very much with the real essence and experiences of life. In this chapter, the specter of Ben returns and the angels on the steps of Gant’s shop move freely. Wolfe plays with the reader in this chapter, as Ben

denies that he is dead, and Eugene is prompted to ask, “Then, which of us is the ghost, I wonder?” (516). Suddenly Eugene sees images of himself “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” (518). In this moment, Eugene sees an “army of himself and Ben” living their past moment. In this moment, with his dead brother and walking angels, Eugene finds a piece of the lost face and the forgotten language. But this sense of profound vision and comfort is lost as Ben asks Eugene, “what do you want to find?” (520). Eugene replies, “Myself, and an end to hunger, and the happy land. O Ben, brother, and ghost, and stranger, you who could never speak, give me an answer now!” Ben offers a sobering reply, “There is no happy land. There is no end to hunger.” Eugene continues to question Ben, asking him “Where is the world?” and Ben answers “*You* are your world.” This response allows Eugene to start making connections and to eventually realize he must turn inward to find what he is looking for. Ben’s return allows Eugene to hear his brother’s words and realize that only he can make his life what he wants it to be.

An overwhelming Ecclesiastical philosophy of death emerges as the family reacts to Ben’s death. Ben’s transition to a new world is an ending, but also a beginning to an inverse experience of his life. Eugene, disgusted with the frugal weakness of his mother’s coffee, exclaims, “By God! That’s one thing Ben’s out of. He won’t have to drink mama’s coffee anymore” (467). Shortly after this comment, Helen makes one of a similar nature: “I never got to know him until these last days. He was that best of the lot. Thank God, he’s out of it now.” Eugene continues this train of thought as he “thought of death now, with love, with joy. Death was like a

lovely and tender woman, Ben's friend and lover, who had come to free him, to heal him, to save him from the torture of life" (467). These comments and thought create a new perception of death. Eugene associates Ben's angel with death, but his association creates a positive, kind, and gentle image of death (243). The family helps create an image of death that falls in line with Eugene's philosophy of life.

Eugene's oft-stated philosophy on life reflects his family's post-Ben idea of death. Both Wolfe and Eugene articulate Eugene's philosophy, confusing the roles of author and protagonist. While Eugene is in Charleston on vacation, Wolfe writes "his pulse throbbed as he listened to the lonely thunder of the sea. He saw strange dusky faces, palm frondage, and heard the little tinkling sounds of Asia. He believed in harbors at the end" (304). Eugene repeats this philosophy in the last chapter at the height of his conversation with Ben after Ben asks Eugene what he seeks to find. As quoted before, Eugene replies, "Myself, and an end to the hunger, and the happy land. For I believe in harbors at the end. O Ben, brother, and ghost, and stranger, you who could not speak, give me an answer now!" (520). Eugene believes in harbors at the end. He never clearly defines what constitutes such a harbor, but his statement provides insight into his feelings on life and death. When Eugene says "at the end," he does not only mean at the end of life, but also the end of the journeys that the Gant men hunger for, and the end of stages in his life. The term "harbor," implies a final destination, one achieved through strife and a journey, and a place safe from the waves of life that welcomes his to whatever home he has earned. In creating such an image, Wolfe and Eugene propose that they believe in a reward at the end. Eugene fittingly expresses this to Ben, who, to Eugene, has found his reward of peace and

absence from the vanity, meaningless travail, and smoke of life. An Ecclesiastical harbor at the end of some venture would be merriment and satisfaction from work and completion of that work, and an Ecclesiastical harbor at the end of life would be an escape from life into the peace of the afterlife with God in heaven. Ecclesiastes 12.7 offers its own version of a harbor: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” Wolfe does not go this far to echo Ecclesiastes, but in his proposed idea of harbors at the end, he creates a similar peace and satisfaction to come at the end of voyages, and of life.

Chapter 4: “Always the rivers run”

*Of Time and the River* was Wolfe’s follow-up to the success of *Look Homeward, Angel*. His second novel was released in 1935, some six years after Wolfe became known to the literary world through *Look Homeward, Angel*. *Of Time and the River* continues the Gant narrative started in *look Homeward, Angel* with a much deeper focus on Eugene, as implied by the full title of the novel, *Of Time and the River: A Legend of Man’s Hunger in His Youth*. This second installment that Wolfe offers the public was the second of a planned six novels. Robert Penn Warren rendered the schematic of this plan in his essay “A Note on the Hamlet of Thomas Wolfe,” and laid out the plan for his readers. The books were to occur as follows: *Look Homeward, Angel*, 1884-1920, *Of Time and the River*, 1920-1925, *The October Fair*, 1925-1928, *The Hills Beyond Pentland*, 1838-1926, *The Death of the Enemy*, 1928-1933, and *Pacific End*, 1791-1884 (205). This plan fell through for Wolfe after he left Scribners and his editor, Maxwell Perkins. Many gave Perkins the credit for editing Wolfe’s work, and in a letter to Perkins, Wolfe wrote:

You know and I know that beginning with “Look Homeward, Angel,” and mounting steadily there has been a constantly increasing objection and opposition to what I wanted to do, which phrased itself in various forms, but which had the total effect of dampening my hope, cooling my enthusiasm and almost nullifying my creative capacity. (Smith)



Finally making the decision to end his partnership with Perkins, Wolfe then moved to Harper & Brothers and Edward T. Aswell, who would publish posthumously Wolfe's *The Web and the Rock*, *You Can't Go Home Again*, and *The Hills Beyond* (Smith).

The transition between publishers and editors ended the Gant narrative, and because of this, *Of Time and the River* is the final book that deals with the themes and storylines of the Gants that Wolfe started in *Look Homeward, Angel*. Wolfe had initially planned for the title of the book to be *The October Fair*, but Perkins suggested that from the enormous manuscript of *The October Fair*, which Wolfe writes "was, at that time, something over 1,000,000 words in length," they take the first of two cycles in the manuscript, "which described the period of wandering and hunger in man's youth," and make *Of Time and the River*. (Wolfe, *Story* 75,77).

October dominates the book, just as it does in *Look Homeward, Angel*, but a title dedicated to two other major ideas in the novel, time and the river, proved more pertinent. The novel has eight books, with each having a name alluding to an archetype or seminal figure in literature. The book titles are: Book One, Orestes: Flight Before Fury; Book Two, Young Faustus; Book Three, Telemachus; Book Four, Proteus: The City; Book Five, Jason's Voyage; Book Six, Antaeus: Earth Again; Book Seven, Kronos and Rhea: The Dream of Time; and Book Eight, Faustus and Helen. These titles, which rely so heavily on allusion, follow in the style and method of Eliot, as Eliot's writings feature collages of broken images from numerous influential writings. Eliot's influence occurs in numerous other places, each adding another layer to the flow of social and literary energy between Eliot and Wolfe, as

well as other important aspects of the text including the death of Gant, Eugene's new experience, October, and the River.

Wolfe wrote *The Story of a Novel* after Perkins remarked to him that it was a shame that Wolfe had not kept a journal of the process of editing his work (Wolfe, *Story 1*). In *The Story of a Novel*, Wolfe shares many of his ideas, methods, and beliefs about writing, and in it he offers the readers of *Of Time and the River* some of the key ideas that he wished to include in the novel. Wolfe published *The Story of a Novel* in 1936, a date that allowed him to share vital information about *Of Time and the River* in ways that he could not share about *Look Homeward, Angel* seven years after its publication. *The Story of a Novel* was written with the ideas and objective of *Of Time and the River* clear in Wolfe's mind, as he had moved on from the composition process of *Look Homeward, Angel*. In *The Story of a Novel*, Wolfe offers the "central idea" in *Of Time and the River*:

[T]he deepest search in life, it seemed to me, the thing that in one way or another was central to all living was man's search to find a father, not merely the father of his flesh, nor merely the father of his youth, but the image of a strength and wisdom external to his need and superior to his hunger, to which the belief and power of his own life could be united. (39)

This central idea of the search for a father manifests itself amidst Eugene's experiences with the death of his father, and his attempts to define his post-Gant existence.

Wolfe sheds light on the sense of time that he felt in writing *Of Time and the River* in *The Story of a Novel*. In *Of Time and the River*, Wolfe poses three “time elements inherent in the material,” present time, past time and time immutable (51). For Wolfe, present time in the novel is “an element which carried the narrative forward, which represented characters and events as living in the present and moving forward into an immediate future.” Past time is a time

which represented these same characters as acting and being acted upon by all the accumulated impact of man’s experience so that each moment of their lives was conditioned not only by what they experienced in that moment, but by all that they had experienced up to that moment” (51-52).

The third element of time is time immutable, which Wolfe sees as “the time of rivers, mountains, oceans, and the earth; a kind of eternal and unchanging universe of time against which would be projected the transience of man’s life, the bitter briefness of his days” (52). In these elements of time, Wolfe not only continues the theme of death from *Look Homeward, Angel* and validates the title of the novel, but he also invokes Eliot’s words in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” and his own words in *Look Homeward, Angel* and *The Story of a Novel* by suggesting that present time is always acted upon by past time, just as present literature is acted upon by past literature.

*Of Time and the River* reveals more of the influence that Eliot’s writing had on Wolfe. As in *Look Homeward, Angel*, Wolfe uses Eliot in small exact allusions, as well as broader and more suggestive allusions. One exact use of an Eliot term comes when Wolfe writes of old men, “Yes. Words echoed in their throat but they were

tongueless. For them the past was dead: they poured into our hands a handful of dry dust and ashes” (148). In *I. The Burial of the Dead* in *The Waste Land*, line 30, Eliot writes “I will show you fear in a handful of dust.” Both uses of the term *dust* mimic Ecclesiastes 3.20, which reads, “All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.” Ecclesiastes, Eliot, and Wolfe use this exact term, *dust*, and in doing so, continue to illustrate the levels of influence that these texts have on one another. All three use the same term, but to different ends. The fact that a shared usage exists illustrates how the energy flows between Ecclesiastes, Eliot, and Wolfe and informs each of the other texts.

At the start of Chapter 52, Wolfe relies heavily on the words of Eliot, and in doing so continues to provide examples of Eliot’s influence in his own work. The first line of the chapter reads “‘Where shall I go now? What shall I do?’” (468). This line echoes Prufrock and his eternal questioning. Prufrock asks twice, “how should I presume?” in lines 54, 61, and 68, and in line 69 he asks “And how should I begin?” Continuing his reliance on Eliot in this paragraph, Wolfe writes, “He only knew that he would prowl again, again, each night, the thronging passages of rat’s alley where the dead men were” (468). This is another direct and precise echo, and it echoes lines 115-116, “I think we are in rat’s alley/ Where the dead men lost their bones.” Wolfe takes some of the dead men’s action away, but this is a direct echo of *The Waste Land* that Wolfe uses to reflect Eliot’s meaning. Both uses of the term “rat’s alley” allude to a sordid urban space, and both allude to the newly small value of dead men and their bones after the mass extermination of millions in World War I, both of which find their way into the alley. Wolfe’s words would have resonance with his readers

because they were published and commented on years before *Of Time and the River*, and because of Eliot's popularity and importance. Wolfe links his own images and meaning to already loaded words.

Wolfe employs a more subtle use of Eliot in a conversation between Gant and Eliza shortly before Gant's death. Eliza implores Gant, "for all we know, the best years of our life are still ahead of us—so we'll both go on and profit by the mistakes of the past and make the most of what time's left" (266-267). Gant's reply comes with a preface from Wolfe that mimics the epigraph of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Wolfe writes, "And quietly, kindly, without moving, and with the impassive and limitless regret of a man who knows that there is no return, he answered: 'Yes, Eliza. That is what we'll do.'" In this exchange, Gant knows he will die, just as Guido da Montefeltro knows he will not return to the world, and assumes that Dante will not return to the world. This exchange between Gant and Eliza recognizes of their mistakes in that past, and a commitment to move on in a future that is extremely limited. Gant knows he will die, and that this pact with Eliza is futile, but, like da Montefeltro, he consents to Eliza's pact. Gant's consent is easily given because he knows his impending death will release him of any duties associated with the pact, but in his reflective, dying state, he also sees his error, and agrees to start anew in the time he has left.

Gant's death, like Ben's death in *Look Homeward, Angel*, drives the action in the first half of *Of Time and the River*. The death experience for Gant and his family is one of drawn out misery and turmoil. His family has been awaiting his death at any moment for years, and the toll that this had taken on them will resonate forever. In a

moment of truth amidst Eugene's tapestry of fable woven for Genevieve and her family during his time at Harvard, Eugene says of his father, "He's still dying" (199). This line may be offered in a tongue-and-cheek moment, but it encapsulates the feelings of Eugene and the members of his family, who are all essentially waiting for Gant to die. Wolfe ponders this prolonging of an inevitable outcome in the first line of Chapter 19: "Shall a man be dead within your heart before his rotten flesh be wholly dead within the ground, and before the producing fats and syrup cease to give life to his growing hair?" (200). This is the question that Gant's family members struggle to answer during the dying process. Gant has no chance of survival, but no one can predict when the end will come. Gant's slow procession to death is hardest on his daughter, Helen. Throughout the Gant narrative, Helen is the Gant who gets the sweetest of her father's love, and the Gant who is supremely and eternally devoted to his care. She questions McGuire about how long her father will remain alive, and he replies:

You've asked me a thousand times. I've told you that I didn't know. He may live another month, he may be here a year from now—how can we tell about these things, particularly where your father is concerned. Helen, three or four years ago I might have made a prediction. I did make them—I didn't see how W. O. could go on six months longer. But he's fooled us all—you, me, the doctors at Johns Hopkins, every one who's had anything to do with the case. The man is dying from malignant carcinoma—he has been dying for years—his life is hanging

by a thread, and the thread may break at any time—but when it is going to break I have no way of telling you. (210-211)

This extended quotation from McGuire illuminates the whole situation with Gant's illness. The man is an anomaly. His family and doctors had him dead and buried long ago, but he is still alive. During the same conversation, McGuire warns Helen of her own situation in regard to Gant's death: "Look here! . . . You've got to pull yourself together. You're becoming a mental case—do you hear me?" (211). McGuire points out that Helen turns to "drugs, patent medicines, corn licker—anything that has alcohol in it" to soften the edge of her predicament (211). Helen experiences the travail of Ecclesiastes as she gives her all in caring for her father; believing that he can exist longer, she diminishes her life. Like Eugene's youthful devotion to the South in *Look Homeward, Angel*, Helen's devotion to her dying father reflects an Ecclesiastical denial of the truth. Helen speaks her own delusion when she says, "We have expected him to die so many times—we have been fooled so often—and now I can't believe that it will ever happen" (213). Helen comforts for herself when she asserts that "Papa was a wonderful man," and McGuire replies, "he was—he was one of the most remarkable men I ever knew. And this is what makes it all the harder now" (212). McGuire continues the articulation of his philosophy on death started in *Look Homeward, Angel* when he says:

There's nothing very bad about his dying. Death seems so terrible to you because you know so little about it. But I have seen so much of death, I have seen so many people die—and I know there is really

nothing very terrible about it, and about the death of an old man  
ravaged by disease there is nothing terrible at all. (213)

McGuire is linked to Gant through the two men's lives and their deaths. When Gant dies in the night, another death rattles the town of Altamont: "For Hugh McGuire had been found dead at his desk at six o'clock that morning, the news had just spread through the town, and now, when people saw the wreath upon Gant's coffin, there was something in their hearts they could not utter" (271). McGuire had sent the wreath that the townspeople saw, and they knew that he must have sent it very shortly before his own death. Wolfe offers no more on the connection between the deaths of Gant and McGuire, their proximity implies his own commitment to the greatness of W. O. Gant.

Gant dies, but the image of his ever-powerful hands lingers. In another echo of Eliot, Wolfe paints an indelible image of Gant's hands. Much of this imagery comes after Gant's death, which offers a strong echo from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Wolfe echoes lines 28-30, which read, "There will be time to murder and create,/ And time for all the works and days of hands/ That lift and drop a question on your plate." The emphasis on time in this stanza of the poem echoes the third chapter of Ecclesiastes. Gant has died, for which there is time, and he made his living carving stone with his hands, for which there was also a time. Mimicking Eliot's "patient etherized on a table" in line three, Wolfe writes, "Gant lay in the splendid coffin, with his great hands folded quietly on his breast. Later, the boy could not forget his father's hands" (271). Wolfe continues:



The hands had given to the interminable protraction of his living death a kind of concrete horror that it otherwise would not have had. For as his powerful gaunt figure waned and wasted[. . .]his gaunt hands, on which there was so little death could consume, lost none of their former rock-like heaviness, strength and shapely power. (271)

For Eugene, these hands evoked his father's "manual power, hunger, fury, savage abundance and wild joy, the whole enchanted structure of that lost life of magic he had made for them." The question that is dropped on Eugene's plate reflects Wolfe's central theme. Now that Eugene has lost his mortal father, he must still search for "the image of a strength and wisdom external to his need and superior to his hunger" (Wolfe, *Story* 39). Wolfe expounds upon Eliot's use of hands by making Gant's hands one of the central images of this novel. The hands represent who Gant was in life and death, and for Eugene, they encapsulate all that his father was and all that he created, whether that creation was tangible or not. Wolfe wrote that *Of Time and the River* was the legend of man's hunger in his youth and that it was about man's search for a father. This father was not intending to be a worldly father, but the loss of Gant, like the loss of W. O. Wolfe, the inspiration for Gant, left a hole that could never be filled inside Eugene. In Chapter 39, Wolfe calls for the father; he writes; "all things that live upon this earth return, return: Father, will you not, too, come back again?" (332-333). Wolfe's call echoes the words of Ecclesiastes 4.16 that "There is no end of all people." This calling for the father continues, and then Wolfe offers a rationale: "For we are ruined, lost, and broken if you do not come, and our lives, like rotten

chips, are whirled about us onward in darkness to the sea.” In Gant’s death, Eugene loses a father, and in that loss, he begins looking for another.

After Ben departs from the final chapter of *Look Homeward, Angel*, Eugene sets off on a Gantian voyage to new lands. Through this voyage, Eugene will seek to satisfy the hunger of his youth. In satisfying that hunger, Eugene gains new knowledge and experience, and moves from the role of a youth into a role much closer to that of the Preacher from Ecclesiastes. The Preacher tells us:

I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be executed therewith. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. (Eccles. 1.13-14)

Eugene’s voyage into the world mimics the Preacher’s attempts to see all and do all, whether it be to eat all the food or sleep with all the women (92). Consequently, Wolfe describes Eugene’s life as the “Faustian life.” Later in *Of Time and the River*, Eugene’s life becomes an attempt “to compact the accumulated experience of eternity into the little prism of his flesh, the small tenement of his brain, and somehow to use it all for one final, perfect, all-inclusive work” (660). Eugene’s mania for experience and knowledge lead him to extreme measures. The beginning of Chapter 17 reads, “Often during these years of fury, hunger, and unrest, when he was trying to read all the books[. . .]time would pass him by incredibly,[. . .]until he had made the substance of all life his own” (175). Eugene keeps lists to distinguish his experience from inexperience:

He would get up in the middle of the night to scrawl down insane catalogs of all the he had seen and done:—the number of books he had read, the number of miles he had traveled, the number of people he had known, the number of women he had slept with, the number of meals he had eaten, the number of towns he had visited, the number of states he had been in. (92)

In his maniacal attempt to know all and see all, Eugene becomes a hybrid of the Preacher and of Faustus. In Chapter 75 Wolfe includes sections of his own notebooks, depicted as the notebooks of Eugene. Wolfe again merges narrator and protagonist, and the confusion suggests a connection between the philosophies of Wolfe and Eugene. At one point in the notebook entries, we read a key moment of recognition for Eugene in his attempts to experience everything. Eugene writes, “But I have never had so firm a conviction that our lives can live upon only a few things, that we must find them, and begin to build our fences. All creation is the building of fences” (680). In this moment, Eugene realizes in his own writing that he cannot live the life of Faust. He cannot see everything, do everything, and know everything, and now, he must begin to erect his fences demarcating where he wants to go, what he wants to do, and what he wants to know.

An early step to Eugene’s building of fences comes in his experiences at Harvard. Eugene is disappointed by the discussion in Professor Hatcher’s famous seminar. In these seminar discussions, in which Eugene sought the satisfaction for knowledge fresh and new, he realizes that “The supposed advantages of discussion with one another, the interplay of wit, and so on, above all what was called ‘the

exchange of ideas,' but what most often was merely the exchange of other people's ideas," are not what he finds (113). Wolfe offers an insight into the experience: "Thus, it often happens, when one thinks he had extended the limits of his life, broken the bonds, and liberated himself in the wider ether, he has done no more than to exchange a new superstition for an old one, to forsake the beautiful myth for an ugly one" (114). Eugene's first voyage out of the South is north to Harvard, where he imagines that his mind will meet the satisfaction of new and worthy knowledge, but his experiences there lead him into the process of building fences for his own efforts and goals.

Eugene constructs his defining fence when he sounds off all his frustration and anger towards Francis and Ann. Eugene has spent much of his time, money, and effort to keep up with Francis in his European gallivanting, and he reaches a breaking point. In a moment of ultimate rage, Eugene exclaims, "You call me a big hulking lout—and I feel more, know more, see more, have more life and power and understanding in me in a minute than the whole crowd of you will ever have" (789). In this moment, Eugene realizes he must build a fence between himself and these people for whom he had been pretending. He has sacrificed his goal and resources to their fancy, and a time has come when his experience must be driven by his own goals and desires. This outburst leads again to Eugene's isolation; he again realizes his most important fence, the one that he realized he must build in the conclusion of *Look Homeward, Angel*, is the fence separating himself from the world. By building a fence around himself, Eugene is able to see a set of ideas and ambitions that meet only his goals, and seek to please no one but himself.

Wolfe continues to use the month and the idea of October in *Of Time and the River* in echoes of Ecclesiastes and Eliot. Wolfe initially wanted to call *Of Time and the River*, *The October Fair*. In perpetuating his idea of time immutable, the time of rivers and mountains, Wolfe uses October, and the earth's endurance. A major refrain in the novel emerges in Chapter 4: "And October has come again, come again" (52). On the same page, Wolfe continues, "And we have heard the sorrowful silence of the river in October—and what is there to say? October has come again, and this world, this life, this time are stranger than a dream." The words "October has come again," come again and again as Wolfe relies more heavily on the Ecclesiastical idea of October in *Of Time and the River* than he did in *Look Homeward, Angel*. Wolfe also attaches this idea of October to his concept of America. He writes that America "is the place of the howling winds, the hurrying of the leaves in old October," and that it is also "the place of all the fierce, the bitten colors in October" (155). After Gant's death, Wolfe writes of Eugene that "It was October and that year, after years of absence and of wandering, he had come home again" (327). Eugene "could not think that his father had died, but that he had come home in October." Wolfe continues to use the October idea when he writes, "October is the season for returning: the bowels of youth are yearning with lost love" (332). Again echoing this idea, Wolfe also writes, "October is the season for returning: even the town is born anew," as well as "All things on earth point home in October." These uses of October show how essential Wolfe felt the Ecclesiastical month of October was to the message he was trying to convey. Wolfe uses October as the month in which Gant dies, and the month that Eugene returns home. October is a time of birth and death, return and departure,

in an echo of the times for everything in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, and in Prufrock's use of Ecclesiastes.

After all of these employments of October in the Gant narrative, one passage strikes to the heart of the usefulness of October in Wolfe's telling of this tale. In Chapter 46, Wolfe writes:

As the sparkling and winey exultancy of October, with its grand and solemn music of death and life, of departure and return, moved on into the harsh, raw, green implacability of winter, one could observe the death of joy and hope, the barometric rise of hate and fear in the venom in the city's life. (421)

In these lines, Wolfe alludes to Ecclesiastes 3 and to Eliot's usage of it. He gives October the adjectives *sparkling* and *winey*, both of which evoke a brilliancy and an almost guilty satisfaction and pleasure to be had in a beautiful *exultancy*. Wolfe also makes note of the death and life, and departure and return of October. In this passage, Wolfe evokes the heart of what October is, and in doing so, further links the story he has to tell with Ecclesiastes and Eliot.

One connection between Wolfe's "time immutable" and October is Wolfe's river. Wolfe and Eugene understand the impact of a river, as they both spend their childhood near the French Broad River that runs through Asheville. Wolfe does not name the French Broad in *Look Homeward, Angel*, but the river is mentioned in *Of Time and the River* when Wolfe, who in the novel inserts himself occasionally in first person, implants the actual names of rivers of his home. Wolfe mentions in the same passage the Swannanoa, the Nantahala, and the French Broad rivers, all of which are

in close proximity to Asheville. These names of rivers come in a part of the novel where Wolfe explores the significance of rivers and of their names. Wolfe comments on the power of rivers in a section in which he directly alludes to Eliot in *III. The Fire Sermon of The Waste Land*, which includes the words of line 178: “Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.” Wolfe repeats this line with the substitution of “gently” for “softly” three times. This usage again calls on the words of Eliot, and brings about an iconic name of a prominent river. For Wolfe, the name of any specific river is unimportant, but the suggestion of power and reputation that comes with the names of great rivers allows his reader to feel the power, strength, and longevity of his rhetorical river. After using the names of great rivers, Wolfe repeats the refrain, “By the waters of life, by time, by time” and adds to it “and of the yellow cat that smites the nation, of the belly of the snake that coils across the land”; thus he personifies the river, reminds the reader of the forgotten language, and enforces the importance of the idea of rivers in the novel. Wolfe makes the river an aspect of his time immutable, and a massive and unavoidable symbol in his second novel.

Wolfe illuminates his use of the river when he writes of the river that it is  
as dark and as mysterious as the great, unceasing river, the thing that  
waits and does not speak and is forever silent and that knows forever,  
and that has no words to say, no tongue to speak, and that unites six  
million celled and lonely sleepers at the heart and night of silence.

(533)

In this statement, Wolfe personifies the river as a being that knows forever, that unites all people, and that is forever silent. Wolfe’s river echoes the Ecclesiastical rivers of

verse 1.7: “All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.” Wolfe echoes this language in Chapter 58 whose first lines read, “The Hudson River joins the harbor. And then the harbor joins the sea. Always the rivers run” (506). This language uses the central idea of the river in *Of Time and the River* not only to evoke Ecclesiastes, but also to reflect Eugene’s belief in harbors at the end from *Look Homeward, Angel*. In echoing Ecclesiastes, Wolfe also echoes himself. The language around the certainty of rivers running also calls back to Prufrock’s self-assuring words that “Indeed there will be time” (line 23). Wolfe and Prufrock articulate the same principle here: entities bigger than humans have always continued and will continue to run their course despite the lives and trouble of humans. It is this idea--“Always the rivers run”--that unites Ecclesiastes, Eliot, and Wolfe in the central theme and pillar of *Of Time and the River*. The “time immutable” of the river always runs. For Wolfe, the river is time, and it is the voyage home of all people, to which there is no end. Ecclesiastes 4.16 completes Wolfe’s metaphor of the river. It reads, “There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them.” Wolfe’s river, like the flowing current of people and lives in Ecclesiastes, is never ending, and it is the essential counterweight to understanding our own mortality.

Thomas Wolfe’s work, like T. S. Eliot’s, is a heap of broken images, but whereas Eliot is a poet of precision, Wolfe is a writer of magnitude. Both of these men sought to write the story of their time and people, and both found inspiration from an ancient biblical tract. Ecclesiastes, with its overt melancholy and its wise Preacher, serves as a base for both Wolfe and Eliot, on which they construct their



offerings to the world. The echo of words, themes, and ideas from Ecclesiastes and Eliot in the works of Wolfe is proof of the flow of influence that uses previous ideas, thoughts, and themes in new but related ways. Wolfe's work shows, as Eliot wrote in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," that the Wolfe's ancestors "assert their immortality most vigorously" in his noteworthy creations. Ecclesiastes, Eliot, and Wolfe all share similar words and attitudes, and all three were created in different times and places. The energy of these texts lingers, and crosses time and space to manifest itself in new and different works. Wolfe's similarities to Ecclesiastical language, and the influence and existence of Ecclesiastes and Eliot in his work, reveal that once even a word is entered into the vast and sprawling body of literature, that single word possesses an energy that can shape the artistic and creative endeavors of another writer centuries and worlds apart.

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