

Studies in English, New Series

Volume 9

Article 4

1-1-1991

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Recommended Citation

Bassett, John E. (1991) "Of Time and the River: Critics and Reviewers," *Studies in English, New Series*: Vol. 9 , Article 4.

Available at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new/vol9/iss1/4

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**OF TIME AND THE RIVER:
CRITICS AND REVIEWERS**

John E. Bassett

North Carolina State University

Thomas Wolfe kept his readers waiting more than five years after *Look Homeward, Angel* for his second novel, and even at that *Of Time and the River* was published in 1935 only after a great deal of editorial and authorial anxiety. Because of the attention given to the first book, and its popularity, *Of Time and the River* was heavily publicized by Scribner's and was widely reviewed. Carol Johnston has skilfully analyzed the publicity from Scribner's, which marketed the author, as great American novelist, as much as it did the book; and she has studied the text and subtext of Bernard DeVoto's incisive critique of Wolfe's novel in a 1936 article reviewing *The Story of a Novel*.¹ The consensus on the book's reception has been that while generally positive it was dominated by reviews—favorable and unfavorable—critical of Wolfe's undisciplined romantic overwriting and faulty sense of form.² Significantly, however, the known reviews come almost entirely from New York newspapers, national journals generally centered in New York, or Wolfe's home state of North Carolina. I have tried to unearth as many unlisted reviews of the novel as possible, particularly in daily papers around the country, and to learn whether the overall critical reaction to *Of Time and the River* is indeed accurately reflected in the set of reviews heretofore studied. I have located thirty-three such "new" reviews, increasing by seventy-five per cent the data base for the project. The evidence indicates that reviewers outside New York (and perhaps North Carolina) were less ready to criticize Wolfe's shortcomings, less restrained in praising his virtues, and more inclined to claim him as "a" or "the" great American novelist.

In the checklist below each review is marked, to account for tone as well as specific criticisms, on a scale from favorable to unfavorable (F, F-, M, U+, U). There was roughly a 3:1 ratio of favorable to mixed or negative reviews in the South, Midwest, and West combined. Among reviewers in the Northeast and in national magazines and journals combined, there was a ratio of about 3:2 on the favorable side. Generally the reviews in national journals were more sophisticated and incisive, and they do tend to be "mixed"—praising characterizations and lyrical passages but, like DeVoto's article, highlighting the need for cutting, for restraint, and for moderation of purple prose, and citing problems in the author's handling of his young protagonist. At the same time Wolfe's fiction did strike the emotional chords of middle

America's book reviewers, who in the Depression years were seeking a romantic affirmation of the American Experience, and often connected Wolfe with Whitman.

Perhaps that is why there were so few outright negative articles. Of course, book reviews tend to be positive; that is, if a book is terribly bad, or negligible, it may well be left off the review page. A few standard review sections did ignore *Of Time and the River*, probably from its intimidating length as much as from negative perceptions. I have found only eight clearly negative reviews. Two—by Sean O'Faolain and Peter Quennell—came from Britain; two came from Wolfe's home state, where beginning with *Look Homeward, Angel* he inspired both pride and outrage; two—by Clifton Fadiman and Florence Codman—were in national magazines and did speak well of Wolfe's talent and potential; and two were anonymous. The "mixed" reviews included four anonymous items; a New York review by Franklin P. Adams; and reviews in the following journals: *Saturday Review of Literature* (Henry Seidel Canby), *New Outlook* (Robert Cantwell), *New Republic* (Malcolm Cowley), *Atlantic Monthly* (Paul Hoffman), *North American Review* (John Slocum), *American Review* (Robert Penn Warren), *Virginia Quarterly Review* (Howard Mumford Jones), *Yale Review* (Helen MacAfee), and *Newsweek*. In many ways their consensus reflects judgments of the novel today. Warren and Jones emphasized the book's faulty structure, Cowley and Canby the cases of overwriting and purple prose, Slocum and Hoffman the author's failure to handle his main character well; but all also praised supporting characterizations, the lyrical quality of many sections, and the remarkable descriptive passages. These negative and mixed reviews total twenty-two. Next to them can be placed some fifty-seven positive reviews, about thirty-five of them strongly favorable. These do include, by the way, eleven from newspapers in the New York City area, as well as articles from Chicago, Milwaukee, Omaha, Detroit, Washington, Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, and other towns around the country. Below is an annotated list of known reviews. Future studies of the broad response to Wolfe's posthumous books may indicate whether the romantic attraction to this bardic novelist of the Depression years continued, for the "artist tragically dead while still in his youth," in the time of anxiety marked by the start of World War II.³

NOTES

¹Carol Johnston, "The Critical Reception of *Of Time and the River*," *Thomas Wolfe Newsletter*, 11 (1987): 45-54.

²For example, see David Herbert Donald, *Look Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe* (Boston, 1987), pp. 314-317; Richard S. Kennedy, *The Window of Memory: The Literary Career of Thomas Wolfe* (Chapel Hill, 1962), pp. 273-274; and Elizabeth Nowell, *Thomas Wolfe: A Biography* (Garden City, 1960), pp. 256-262. Kennedy says that it "was the literary event of 1935." Wolfe "was swept into an important position in American literature." The fullest source for reviews is Paschal Reeves, *Thomas Wolfe: The Critical Reception* (New York, 1974). Also to be consulted are John S. Phillipson, *Thomas Wolfe: A Reference Guide* (Boston, 1977); and Elmer D. Johnson, *Thomas Wolfe: A Checklist* (Kent, Ohio, 1970).

³In the list below an asterisk (*) designates a review I have not found listed previously. The item designated with (PR) is listed by Reeves, but not yet read by me.

Reviews of *Of Time and the River*

- A., R. "Confused Traveler." *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 6 April 1935, p. 11. M He "writes beautiful English...He satirizes superbly." The best sections are those with "Abe Jones and the Pierce family and Robert Weaver." No one "will ever forget" Uncle Bascom or the Countess." The Gant family parts are "overwritten" and the "utterly unnecessary title" is not clarified by "page after page of harping on those two nouns."*
- Adams, Franklin P. "The Conning Tower." *New York Herald Tribune*, 9 March 1935, p. 11. M He "could do better if he would discipline himself to write less repetitiously and not be so carried away, as he seemeth to be, by the sound of his voice...But Lord! what a colossal book."
- Ames, Richard Sheridan. "Wolfe, Wolfe!" *American Spectator*, 3 (January 1935), 5-6. A pre-publication praise of Wolfe as a writer not packaged by the usual critical schools, perhaps "the real thing, at last."
- Anon. "Wolfe's New Book." *Asheville Times*, 12 March 1935, p. 4. A favorable editorial that says in "the judgment of competent reviewers...Thomas Wolfe in this book now takes his sure place among the great writers."

- Anon. Review. *Booklist*, 31 (April 1935), 268. U "The introspection, the lack of plot, and the chaotic profusion of words make it difficult reading and limit its appeal."
- Anon. "Thomas Wolfe's New Novel Proclaims His Ambitious Scheme to Interpret Every American Experience of Life." *Dallas Morning News*, 17 March 1935, Sec. 3, p. 10. F He "has the soul of a poet," and although at times "the lyric impulse of the novelist-poet is kept in a sort of subordination to the narrative purpose," then "the poet defies restraint and becomes the master of the page." (The review carries no by-line, but the page is edited by John H. McGinnis and Alice Kizer Bennett.)*
- Anon. "Author of the Month." *Digest and Review*, July 1935. (PR)
- Anon. "Wolfe's Vast Novel Puzzles." *Kansas City Star*, 9 March 1935, p.14. M "Some of the writing is superb. Some of it is so silly as to out-Stein the capricious Gertrude." Against a certain amount of "trivia one must cite the strange quality of universality the book has...How can one pigeonhole such a book?" (Associated Press review, dateline New York)
- Anon. Review. *Literary Digest*, 16 March 1930, p. 30. F "If there is a certain lack of restraint, of decorum, of selectivity in his furious prose, there still is an aliveness which is peculiarly American." This is as "contemporaneously alive and unblushing as Walt Whitman in its proclamation of the poetry of America."
- Anon. "Thomas Wolfe's 'Of Time and the River' a Large Novel Full to Brim With Life." *Milwaukee Journal*, 10 March 1935, Sec. 5, p. 3. F Although wordy and repetitious in places, "Wolfe is a writing fool. He writes with magnificent unrest, with a driving power few writers possess." To "read it is an experience which must be akin to that of hurtling through space." (Possibly by Floyd Van Vuren, editor of the page who commented briefly on the novel 24 March 1935, Sec. 5, p. 3.)*
- Anon. "Books and Authors: A Masterpiece." *Newark Evening News*, 26 March 1935, p. 12. F It is "an undoubted masterpiece, sometimes rugged, sometimes repellent, sometimes wearisome, but so rich in noble qualities and in its burning quest for the truth of life, so plentiful in character and profound in reflection that it seems destined to take its place among the best that our literature has produced."*
- Anon. "Pilgrimage: Gant Continues His Quest for Life's Answer." *Newsweek*, 16 March 1935, p. 40. M More "blue-penciling would have helped. Mr. Wolfe is prone to over-write in his descriptive rhapsodies. The last part is far less solid than the

first.... Most of the prose is as full of details as a patriotic poem by Walt Whitman and as sonorous as orchestral music."

- Anon. "'Of Time and the River' Carries on Epic of America." *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, 16 March 1935, p. 8A. F- "Parts of it are exquisitely and rhapsodically beautiful but...there are passages of tedious boredom and unintelligibility." There "are moments of such burning intensity that the reader is fairly carried away with the mastery of his pen...Much of the overpowering effectiveness of his style is predicated upon this tendency to overwrite and exaggerate the simple things in life...There is a bursting vitality about the book." (Probably by Adalyn Faris McKee, editor of the page.)*
- Anon. Review. *Saturday Review* (London), 160 (17 August 1935), 56. F He "manages never to allow his readers' interest to flag."
- Anon. "Unselective Bulk." *Springfield Republican*, 31 March 1935, p. 7e. U+ It does not fuse its huge "amount of heterogeneous material. It does not discriminate and select." It makes the "error of attempting to employ 'true experience' directly as the immediate basis of fiction, instead of indirectly and mediately, as the source rather of greater creative understanding."
- Anon. "U. S. Voice." *Time*, 11 March 1935, p. 77. F- It "occasionally falters in execution, but...is written with a surer hand than the first."
- Anon. Review. *Wisconsin Library Bulletin*, 31 (June 1935), 78. M The style runs "from utter lack of taste to heights of sheer beauty. A work of genius of sorts but not a novel to be recommended for unrestricted circulation."
- Beck, Clyde. "Thomas Wolfe: Novelist Who Sees All, Tells All." *Detroit News*, 17 March 1935, Arts Sec., p. 17. F "It is so far out of the ordinary that it almost defies description...a Wagnerian music-drama without sound." It is "a vast and sprawling prose epic." He tells all. He "will lecture you about hats" and he "will also lecture you on literature." Is it "a great novel? Well, much as I have been taught about the canons of art; about economy of utterance and the deadly sin of repetition—I am afraid it is."*
- Bellmann, Henry. "The Literary Highway." *Charlotte Observer*, 10 March 1935, Sec. 3, p. 8. U He is "the most undisciplined, the wildest and most unfocused talent." The "book is a huge welter of impressions, rages, disgusts..., and the effect of the whole is irritating and confusing. The writing itself is a strange jumble of good and bad." He reports conversations with "a miracle of accuracy," but follows with "over-written, lurid, purple-patchy" rhapsodies. His "mannerisms are disconcerting and disagreeable"

- (using the same word twenty times on a page, an outpouring of adjectives). He “understands amazingly little of what he has seen.” A follow-up article appeared on 17 March 1935, Sec. 3, p. 10: “One admires the sincerity,” but “one laments the inadequate result.” (Although Bellamann regularly wrote reviews for the *Observer*, these items carried a dateline of New York.)*
- Bourne, William. “An Epic of Passion and Hunger.” *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, 14 April 1935, Magazine, pp. 10-11. F His goal “is to be known as America’s greatest novelist, and with each book he publishes he appears to take gigantic strides toward its realization....His book is at times disjointed and he wanders off on tangents, but he has done a great job of reporting his own life.” Few “of his vividly described scenes have not passed before his eyes. But he has made them epic.” (An adjacent column by Frank S. Hopkins comments on Bourne, who knew Wolfe as a boy in Asheville.)*
- Bowerman, Sarah. “Thomas Wolfe’s Big Novel.” *Washington Sunday Star*, 17 March 1935, Part 4, p. 4. F This “shows a great advance in maturity over his earlier novel.” His “work is strong meat. His attack on life is fierce, bitter, denunciatory. He finds in it so much that is obscene, but also much of magic.” His “eating scenes rival those of Dickens.”*
- Brickell, Herschel. “Books on Our Table.” *New York Post*, 8 March 1935, p. 7. F It is “a rare and memorable experience. Maybe it’s genius; anyway, it’s something strange and powerful we stand in the presence of in this book.” It is “the saga of a lusty youth burning with a love of life.”
- Bridgers, Emily. “The Fulfillment of Thomas Wolfe.” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 17 March 1935, p. 5. F It is “an amazing and a beautiful book,...so abundant in life, so varied in incident and mood....With his amazing, voracious, and magnificent use of words,” he “has put down on paper more of the capacity for living than most men experience in a lifetime.”*
- Butcher, Fanny. “Thomas Wolfe Receives More Lavish Praise.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 April 1935, p. 14. F Wolfe is “an undeniable American genius....There is something epically American” about this book, even though it is also akin to the great “lusty novel of English literature.”*
- Calverton, V. F. “Thomas Wolfe and the Great American Novel.” *Modern Monthly*, 9 (June 1935), 249-50. F- At his best he is “of the highest order that American literature has produced, and, like Hemingway, it is only in terms of Melville, Whitman, and Poe

that he can be compared." As "a descriptive genius" he surpasses Melville and is close to Conrad. The work does fail "to get outside of itself, outside of the personal into the plane of the impersonal, where the personal lives more as an objective than as a subjective force." Wolfe must work "toward that end" to "make his American saga...into the greatest fiction America has produced." There is some "over-writing" but he can write powerfully.

- Canby, Henry Seidel. "The River of Youth." *Saturday Review of Literature*, 11 (9 March 1935), 529-30. M Wolfe's concern is the "curse of impotence" in America, "an impotence of expression." This is "one of the most American books of our time." This is "better organized, more poetical" and "sharply realistic" than his first book. It is "a picaresque novel" of the poet "seeking a spiritual home." But Wolfe "cannot control the theme," and his method gets lost between fiction and fact. It is "an artistic failure" yet an "important book."
- Cantwell, Robert. Review. *New Outlook*, April 1935, p. 10. M It is "a fine book" and "suggests the emergence of a great talent; it has power, life, beauty...but it is also repetitious, overwritten, confused, chaotic, and downright bad." Parts of the book "are rich and lyric," and the "accuracy of his observation" in parts is impressive. In a follow-up article (May 1935, p. 10), Cantwell said that in spite of "its weakness and occasional tiresome bombast," it is "the most original" of the new Southern novels.
- Catton, Bruce. "It's Very Long—But It's Very Good, Too." *Durham Sun*, 25 March 1935, p. 4A. F- "All things considered, it is a magnificent book—one of the best American novels of our generation, perhaps—but it seems to me that it would be much better if Mr. Wolfe had continued to cut it in half." It has "a great quantity of splendid prose, it voices a robust Americanism...and it presents some scenes and characters that are quite unforgettable."*
- Chamberlain, John. "Books of the Times." *New York Times*, 8 March 1935, p. 19; and 12 March 1935, p. 19. F- It is "the most satisfying reading that has come this way in a long time," but mostly because of its secondary characters and scenes. "The character of Eugene...is constantly letting the reader down," for Wolfe lacks "the clarity of vision" and distance he needs for his main character. If he can mature as Proust and Joyce did, "he will be America's greatest novelist." (Chamberlain also reviewed the novel for *Current History*, April 1935, p. iii.)
- Clarke, Eleanor. Review. *Common Sense*, May 1935, p. 27. F- It lifts "out of the bog of formula...the pride and love and nostalgia

- of millions of Americans." The hero is "valuable for his gigantic energy and humor" but "often maudlin." There are "many overeloquent passages," but "the sprawling of this book is that of America, and Eugene's hunger includes the longing of Americans."
- Codman, Florence. "The Name is Sound and Smoke." *Nation*, 140 (27 March 1935), 365-66. U+ "He is lost in a murky film, in a tangled gossamer of his own emotions. His feelings have got the better of him" and "destroy the truth of his vision." He needs more balance between intellect and feelings, yet grounded "in this confusion is an admirable and sympathetic talent....No more vitalizing talent has appeared in America this century."
- Colum, Mary M. Review. *Forum*, 93 (April 1935), 218-19. F It is "one of the best books ever produced in America...and the most successful attempt since Joyce and Proust to instill new blood and life into that withered literary form, the novel." There is "nothing of that empty realism and that craze for recording stereotyped physical facts which...did so much to demote the novel."
- Cowley, Malcolm. "The Forty Days of Thomas Wolfe." *New Republic*, 82 (20 March 1935), 163-64. M The best passages are those about Bascom Pentland, the Harvard drama class, Oswald Ten Eyck, the death of Gant, the disintegration of Starwick. At his best Wolfe "is the only contemporary American writer who can be mentioned in the same breath with Dickens and Dostoevsky." But "the bad passages are about as numerous and as extensive as the good ones." When Wolfe writes about Eugene, "he almost always overwrites." Although Eugene has "warmly human traits, they scarcely add up into a character." The book would be better "if the author had spoken in the first person from beginning to end." He needs "some other theme" and hero to write a truly great novel. A response to this review came as a letter by William Howard, "Praise for Thomas Wolfe," 82 (1 May 1935), 343.
- Cronin, A. J. "The Book of the Day: A Book in Which a Man Reveals His Soul and Writes With His Soul." *New York Sun*, 11 March 1935, p. 22. F This is "a great long novel, but the novel might have been greater still had it been less long." There is much "waste tissue." He has an "effective and individual sense of place." This is "a true spiritual experience . surging with the aspiration of a man who lives...with courage and fears."
- Currie, George. "Passed in Review." *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 11 March 1935, p. 18. F He is the "prose minstrel among novelists." It is "a gorgeous literary experience."*

- Daniel, Frank "Of Time and the River." *Atlanta Journal*, 31 March 1935, Magazine, p. 12. F- It is "an unrestrained, bewildering, overpowering book, but it is the unedited version of a book which would almost certainly be a greater, more forceful and much more readable one." His "method is exhausting, but it certainly is not boring." His eloquence "is sweeping and, eventually, fascinating."*
- Dewey, Edward Hooker. "The Storm and Stress Period." *Survey Graphic*, 24 (May 1935), 255. F- "The book has exuberance, grandeur, and excess," but would benefit from "judicious pruning." He writes "with heart and mind and sinew, and nothing can destroy his power."*
- F., H. C. "Power and Beauty in Wolfe's Book." *Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel*, 24 March 1935, p. 7B. F "With eloquence, persistence, intensity of tone and unique power of repetition," he "pounds into the reader's mind the thoughts of loneliness, of wandering, of the relentless moving of the hands of time. With the deft phrase and the exact, though oft repeated word, he makes men and women spring" to life.*
- Fadiman, Clifton. "Thomas Wolfe." *New Yorker*, 9 March 1935, pp. 68-70. U+ "The actual material is familiar to the point of banality; it is what the author does to it that is important." At times the reader is "bludgeoned into sharing" a conviction that the experiences are novel. Even if not a master of language he is eloquent, his style "wondrous, Elizabethan. At its worst it is hypertheroid and afflicted with elephantiasis." The book needs "a blue pencil" especially on characterizations. His people "are either giants or piddlers, the confusing thing being that he works with the same enthusiasm on both." With admiration for Wolfe, "I still cannot swallow gluttons of eternity" or believe in Eugene. Its ideas "are confused and sparse." He has brilliant gifts but "too much cosmos" in his ego.
- Gannett, Lewis. "Books and Things." *New York Herald Tribune*, 8 March 1935, p. 17. F He is "almost the wildest and most copious of contemporary writers...a mighty, furious Paul Bunyan, with the passionate love of America of a Walt Whitman and the enraged adolescent idealism of a Shelley."
- Glicksberg, Charles I. "Thomas Wolfe." *Canadian Forum*, (January 1936), 24-25. F It is "imbued with an extraordinary vitality and it is instinct with lyricism and splendor." His "faculty of vision, this Faustian metaphysical longing," makes the book "a vast and fearful allegory of the modern soul." He does need to learn restraint.

- Govan, Gilbert E. "Thomas Wolfe Fulfills the Promise of 'Look Homeward, Angel,' in an Even Greater Novel, 'Of Time and the River.'" *Chattanooga Times*, 17 March 1935, Magazine, p. 15. F "It is a grand book....It is rich in imagination and faithful in its realism. The reader" participates "in an emotional experience far beyond the ordinary." It has "every quality that the first book had, combined with a sureness of touch that it lacked."*
- Grimes, George. "Thomas Wolfe Reveals Anew His Great Welter of Power as a Writer." *Omaha Sunday World-Herald*, 10 March 1935, p. 7E. F It is "a continuously moving tale" with "unforgettable scenes....It is a baffling book, but one powerfully gripping."*
- H., H. H. "Books on Review." *Durham Sunday Herald-Sun* 17 March 1935, Part 1, p. 5. F "His prose is rich, ripe, distilled, full of meaning and poignancy....This is a book of profound enchantment, power that rings with beauty, an epic of man's intense study in the manswarm."*
- Hall, Theodore. "No End of Books." *Washington Post*, 8 March 1935, p. 9; and "Spring Fiction Proves of Varied Hue," 24 March 1935, p. 8B. F There is "an immense wealth of characters" and "hugely live and vigorous dramatic scenes" and a "heart-deep nostalgia for 'the grand and casual landscape of America.'" It is better than his first book. "Not one writer now exceeds Mr. Wolfe in his tremendous grasp and power."*
- Hansen, Harry. "The First Reader." *New York World Telegram*, 8 March 1935, p.27. F It "marks the flowering of a writer who may help to bring the terse, telegraphic style to an end." It has "some of the finest prose of our time." Judged "as a soliloquy on life," it is "one of the most eloquent, most thoughtfully and verbally satisfying novels of our time." He "casts a spell over the reader."
- Harkins, Herschel S. "Tom Wolfe's Book." *Asheville Citizen-Times*, 2 June 1935, p. 3B. F "It is the greatest thing I have ever read." He "writes powerfully," and the plot is "the plot of existence and eternity." (This is an unreservedly favorable review by a student, from Asheville, at Davidson College.)
- Hart, Philomena. "The Angel of the Homeward Look: Of Time and the River." *Providence Sunday Journal*, 10 March 1935, Sec. 6, p. 4. F It is "so vital an experience to the reader that its publication is surely one of the great literary moments of our time." It is "irresistible, overwhelming and galvanic."*
- Hoffman, Paul. "The Man of the Month: Thomas Wolfe." *Atlantic Monthly*, August 1935, p. 6. M In the lyrical sections much "is beautiful,...full-throated, sonorous, and vital; and much...is

- inferior, hyperbolic and adolescent. And so it is an uneven book, and in its excessive length badly proportioned." His device "of telling his story in the third person" does not work well. Something is "lacking in that confused and heightened figure." The distortions were less bothersome in the first novel.
- Hollis, E. E. "The Fury of Living." *Salt Lake Tribune*, 14 April 1935, Magazine, p. 5. F- It is "a gigantic, formless, torrential book, a rushing spate of words that overflows the confines of a novel. It expresses an enormous power, enormous vitality, and is a force so uncontrolled that the novel loses all sense of direction or harmony or continuity. "It is "often repetitious,...but one feels through it all a dynamic energy."*
- Hosking, James. "Larger than Life." *Detroit Free Press*, 10 March 1935, Part 3, p. 14. F His "unique style...raises his characters above the common denominator. With this prose that never talks but always shouts or stammers, there results not realism but contemporary life cast in a larger mold...There is a depth, a sweep and an overpowering richness in this book that catches up...the million aspects of contemporary America."*
- Jack, Peter Monro. "Mr. Wolfe's Pilgrim Progresses." *New York Times Book Review*, 10 March 1935, pp. 1, 14. F- Its "tremendous capacity for living and writing lifts" it "into the class of great books." He has "the stamina to produce a magnificent epic." The North Carolina parts and the train parts are best. Characters at Harvard or in New York are more often caricatures.
- Jones, Howard Mumford. "Social Notes on the South." *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 31 (July 1935), 455-56. M Wolfe, for all "his virtues of strength, vividness, and sympathy, is utterly lacking in a sense of structure." This "might be described as a Gargantuan rhapsody interrupted from time to time by scenes from a novel." These scenes "are for the most part of remarkable power and insight." He "surpasses most living writers in the sheer power to see." He "has not yet learned repose, as Tolstoy, whom he resembles, learned repose."
- Jones, Webster A. "Thomas Wolfe and John Knittel Wrote Brilliant Long Novels." *Portland Sunday Oregonian*, 31 March 1935, Magazine, p. 14. F "Much of the writing is superb. Some of the pages are drivel. Altogether it is a powerful story."
- Jordan-Smith, Paul. "Thomas Wolfe's New Novel Part of a Great Series." *Los Angeles Times*, 17 March 1935, Part 2, p. 6. F He uses "realism and romance," but "everything is subjected to his purpose: the making of America's spiritual Odyssey...No man has

ever told the story of youth's tragi-comedy in such golden words; no man has understood it more profoundly....He has both thought and felt his way into the network of tender and terrible relationships. He is alive to both irony and pity." It is "a magnificent book."*

- Kantor, Seymour. Review. *Washington Square Critic*, May 1935, pp. 15-16. F Here is "the most prodigious talent that America has yet produced." Yet his handling of Eugene is faulty, and at times there is too much trivia or excessive rhetoric.
- L., S. "Man's Hunger." *Review of Reviews*, 91 (May 1935), 4. F "He writes of America with enthusiasm, with richness and breadth." This is a "must" book "for the coming summer," although "sometimes the reader yearns for a blue pencil."
- Loveman, Amy. "Books of the Spring." *Saturday Review of Literature*, 11 (6 April 1935), 602, 612. F It has "magnificent stretches of writing, arresting passages of description, and the revelation of a gargantuan zest for life." In the same issue is Ann Preston Bridgers, "Thomas Wolfe: Legends of a Man's Hunger in His Youth," pp. 599, 609, a biographical and anecdotal essay on Wolfe.
- MacAfee, Helen. Review. *Yale Review*, 24 (Summer 1935), vi, viii. M He "has plenty of force" but it is "still undirected." He has "a faulty conception of the best means to emphasis.... Expansion...becomes wearisome" with so little subtlety.
- Maslin, Marsh. "Reading with the Bookworm." *San Francisco Call-Bulletin*, 23 March 1935, p. 6. F- "You will be dizzied, angered, bored, shocked, but you will not put it down." He "will remind you of Whitman...in his wild but more discriminating love of America."*
- Milner, Rosamond. "'Knowest Thou the Land...?'" *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 21 April 1935, Sec. 3, p. 4. F- The "book will be more apt to live as great writing than as a great novel." It has "abundance of creative vitality" but "would be a better book for...less wearying repetitions of certain words and phrases." It needs pruning and there are "many very shallow stretches."*
- Morgan, Marshall. "A Legend of Man's Hunger in His Youth." *Nashville Banner*, 17 March 1935, Magazine, p. 8. F "In this powerful and half-savage novel...Thomas Wolfe has attained full stature....Here is the power and sincerity of Dreiser, the male tenderness of Galsworthy, the merciless fury of Lewis, the sly humor of Cabell, the earth-love of Whitman....This intense lyrical quality is the outstanding characteristic."*

- O'Faolain, Sean. "Fiction." *Spectator*, 155 (23 August 1935), 300. U
It "is an extraordinary farrago of realistic descriptions, subjective musings, and implorations of the universe in a wild Whitmanesque bellowing." There is "little room to admire it except as an awful curiosity."
- P., M. K. "The Genius of Thomas Wolfe." *Jacksonville Sunday Times-Union*, 24 March 1935, p. 10. F He "is worthy and capable of this gigantic undertaking." This work "magnificently points the way to splendor in American literature." *
- Paterson, Isabel M. "Turns with a Bookworm." *New York Herald Tribune Books*, 24 February 1935, p. 18. F- He is "a lavish writer" who manages "to keep up the excitement" but with too many "superlatives" and characters "roaring, whining, stuttering and gasping." This is preferable "to the nullities of 'behavioristic' fiction."
- Patterson, Alicia. "The Book of the Week." *New York Sunday News*, 10 March 1935, p. 68. F It is "a proud successor to 'Look Homeward, Angel,' which some consider the greatest novel of our time." There is "an appreciation of the power of the ties of blood....Parts of the book will amuse you. Parts you may find pretty grim." If "you have any feeling for American literature you must read it—carefully."*
- Perry, Jennings. "A Colossal Book, Brevet of Genius." *Nashville Tennessean*, 17 March 1935, Magazine, p. 7. F "We know of no author who has been able to capture so much of the eternal parade of sensation." To Wolfe "the need to feel is a passion, to interpret a 'must.'" The impact of his prose "is solid, jarring." This "is meaty, purposeful and dynamic narration. It is writing imbued with vitality."*
- Pinckard, H. R. "Thomas Wolfe Shows Genius and Prolivity." *Huntington Herald-Advertiser*, 31 March 1935, Sunday sup., p. 1. F- "With all its power, its fire, its human drama, its superb and virtually endless panorama of characters, it is still a heavy and sometimes labored document" that "is capable of boring you." It is "a novel you must read" and "one of the most important books of the year." There are "mental pyrotechnics the brilliance of which is not altogether visual."
- Quennell, Peter. "New Novels." *New Statesman and Nation*, 10 (24 August 1935), 253. U+ It is a "vast, emphatic, violent yet curiously vacuous book."
- Rascoe, Burton. "The Ecstasy, Fury, Pain and Beauty of Life: Thomas Wolfe Sings and Shouts in His Gargantuan New Novel." *New*

York Herald Tribune Books, 10 March 1935, pp. 1-2. F He has "a magnificent malady: it may be called gigantism of the soul." He is "lush and exuberant, word-drunk like an Elizabethan." Today "it is thrilling to contemplate and to read the teeming novels of Thomas Wolfe," so unlike other books being published. He writes at times "like an intoxicated Gargantua," at other times like a "virile and elephantine Proust."

Robinson, Joseph. "Of Time and the River: The Progress of Youth." *Savannah Morning News*, 31 March 1935, Sec. 2, p. 10. F His "linked rhapsodies" if at times "too long drawn out," do show the author "at his poetic best. Here he is Whitman Redeivus." His "passion for detail is not unlike that of Proust." He "seems an almost uninhibited writer" and "pays no heed to what were once the laws of decorum." There is a "more mature imagination and craftsmanship" than in the first novel. "There are characters that are Dickensian in their life-like qualities."*

Robinson, Ted. "In 'Of Time and the River' Thomas Wolfe Tries to Pen the Great American Novel." *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 17 March 1935, Women's Sec., p. 15. F "I enjoyed this novel—all of it. The author's lyrical style, his passionate earnestness... There are strongly drawn characters" such as Bascom. The "only thing that may keep Thomas Wolfe out of the very first rank" is that his aims and techniques "are all too obvious."*

Russell, Phillips. "The Literary Lantern." *Durham Sunday Herald-Sun*, 17 March 1935, Part 1, p. 5. He "has constructed an American comedie humaine. It is not only Balzacian, but Hugoesque, in its inclusiveness and lack of selection." As before there "is the lumpy formlessness" and "a sackful of short stories...not always well mortared together." But he "writes largely and symphonically" on "the loneliness of the individual."

Scott, Evelyn. "Colossal Fragment." *Scribner's*, June 1935, pp. adv. 2, 4. F- He "is representative of our national individualistic bent at its faulty but often splendid best." His "real mission is to transcribe our national intoxication with vast dimensions in the language of his own spirit." The "sum of this turbulent writing...is an impression of young inexhaustible vitality." But reflective "without the mental discipline for illumining his own moments of blindness, he mingles platitude with poetry."

Selby, John. "'Of Time and the River' Contains Exactly 912 Pages." *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver), 17 March 1935, Society Sec., p. 4. F- "Some of the writing is...superb. Some of it is so silly as to out-Stein the capricious Gertrude.... Against such trivia one

- must cite the strange quality of universality the book has." (A nationally syndicated review.)*
- Slocum, John. Review. *North American Review*, 240 (June 1935), 175-77. M American criticism puts too much pressure "on the young artist to shout America," and Wolfe's prose suffers from this problem. He "shows a great mastery of conversation and an ability to delineate unforgettable characters in a few vivid strokes," but main characters "tend to become caricatures." Yet with his ability he may "go farther toward expressing romantic America than any novelist living today."
- Starkey, Marion L. "Along the Course of Time and the River." *Boston Evening Transcript*, 9 March 1935, Book Sec., p. 1. F- It "is chiefly distinguished for its outpourings of poetic vision." He "is still too immature" in some ways. But he has a "truly marvelous poetic gift," an "unquenchable wonder at the miracle of living," and "honesty." He needs "restraint" and "discipline" and "wisdom." He remains "one of the most remarkable and promising phenomena in American literature...the unbroken colt of American letters."
- Stone, Geoffrey. "In Praise of Fury." *Commonweal*, 22 (10 May 1935), 36-37. F- In "the end, it is magic that Mr. Wolfe offers; he would get in touch with some force at once limitless and personal." It is "a desperate pantheism and magic whose end is unbounded power....By the very confusion which his failure to select engenders, Mr. Wolfe reflects the often-noted confusion of our times," though the value of the result is more documentary than artistic.
- Sugarman, Joe. "Thomas Wolfe Hungers On." *Carolina Magazine*, April 1935, pp. 22-24. F- The "fusion of the grotesque and the daring in incident and language is one of Wolfe's most skillful accomplishments." Its organization is striking, "despite its apparent formlessness," for it is based on patterns of "forward motion" and "bellows- like motion." Individual characters are not equal to those in the first book, but there are "groups which are genuinely artistic creations." Stylistically it is bold but at times excessive.
- Terry, John S. "Calls Wolfe's Novel 'Book of America' and Work of Great Genius." *Charlotte Observer*, 17 March 1935, Sec. 3, p. 10. F "The grandeur, beauty, terror, and unuttered loneliness of America are portrayed with the master's touch." The reader "will realize what America is, as he can realize it from no other book....Like Dickens and Tolstoi, Wolfe has the power to reveal as

- an individual every character he mentions. Wolfe's "method is more profound" than that of Faulkner, Cabell, and Hemingway.
- Wade, John Donald. "Prodigal." *Southern Review*, 1 (July 1935), 192-98. F Despite his faults "he has the virtues of stupendous gusto and energy" and he is "proof of a man's ability, in our time in America, to write in the grand manner with sustained strength." There is some "downright bad rhetoric and there is a considerable amount of trite phraseology." Generally "the story is conveyed with subtlety as well as vigor...There is a sweeping command of language and vocabulary, and a majesty of style. There is a large and beautiful mysticism."
- Warren, Robert Penn. "A Note on the Hamlet of Thomas Wolfe." *American Review*, 5 (May 1935), 191-208. M "The root of Mr. Wolfe's talent is his ability at portraiture." Eliza, old Gant, Ben, and Helen "are triumphs of poetic conception," though Bascom Pentland is "more static and anecdotal." The method "collapses...when applied to Starwick." Thus far he has produced "fine fragments" and "many sharp observations" but shows the limitations "of an attempt to exploit directly and naively the personal experience and the self-defined personality in art."
- Williams, Sidney. "Thomas Wolfe and the Odyssey of Eugene Gant." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 March 1935, p. 9. F- He "must disappoint those who expected of the book before us the refinement of minted gold. He still sees life in superlatives." It is "a loosely ordered and amazingly vivid tale.... When bogged in composition," he is like Cesar Franck, who would simply "play 'The Pilgrims' Chorus' with thunderous effect."*
- Wilson, Elizabeth. Review. *Bluets* (Asheville), May 1935, pp. 31-32. F His "descriptive powers are little short of uncanny....His portrayal of character is vigorous and forceful." Plot "is subordinated to a long and brilliant series of studies taking up the various angles...of character." His "pen point of sharpest steel" is "dipped in the most vitriolic of acids."