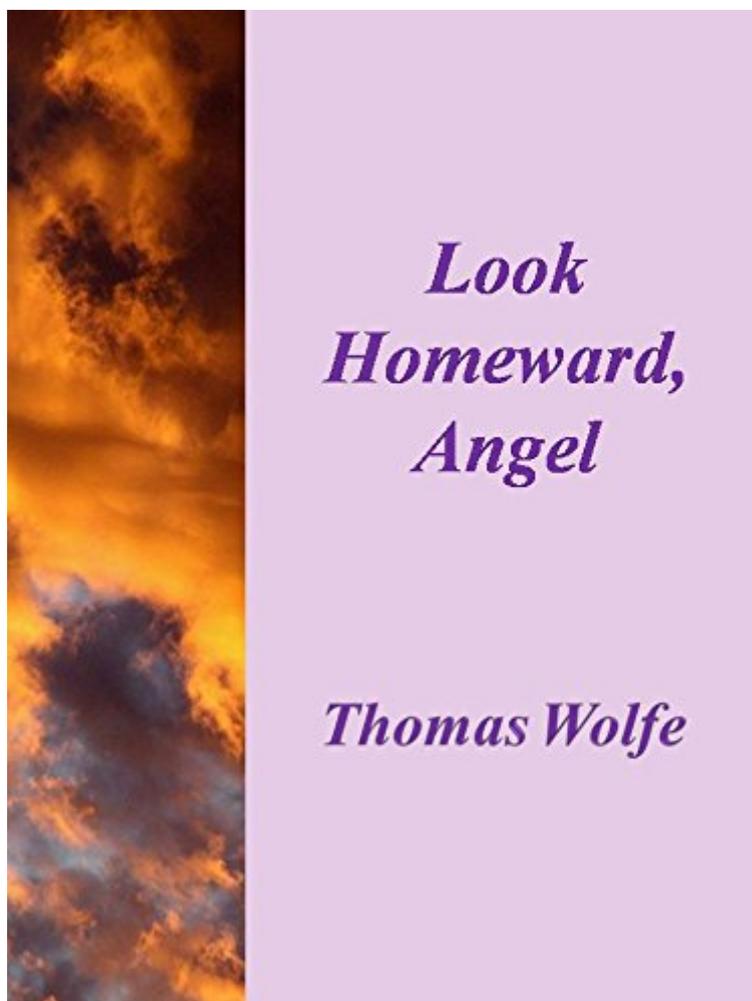


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Look Homeward, Angel



Synopsis

Thomas Clayton Wolfe (October 3, 1900 – September 15, 1938) was an American novelist of the early twentieth century.[1]Wolfe wrote four lengthy novels, plus many short stories, dramatic works and novellas. He is known for mixing highly original, poetic, rhapsodic, and impressionistic prose with autobiographical writing. Thomas Wolfe published his first novel, about a young man's burning desire to leave his small town and tumultuous family in search of a better life, in 1929. Wolfe said that *Look Homeward, Angel* is "a book made out of my life," and his largely autobiographical story about the quest for a greater intellectual life has resonated with and influenced generations of readers, including some of today's most important novelists.

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Customer Reviews

"Look Homeward Angel" is undeniably a young man's story and as such, I wonder if it appeals to men more than it does to women. It's hard to imagine how the novel's countless aches and awkward blunders would fail to resonate with any man's youthful recollections. When readers in Wolfe's hometown castigated him for his venial characterization of the people he grew up with,

Woolfe pointed out that none of his characters represented any one particular person. Instead, their qualities were so real and so vivid that readers felt they instantly recognized them. And so it was with me, although I was born decades after Woolfe's death and raised in a different part of the country. The dialog, drama, and emotional undercurrents of "Look Homeward Angel" were strangely and overwhelmingly recognizable. This is the genius of Woolfe. My favorite parts of the novel vary considerably. I love the prose poem in the very beginning of the book. I also love the protagonist's descriptions of seemingly ordinary activities such as walking through a pasture on a fall evening. Such passages have the unnerving quality of being accessible yet somehow ineffable. A part of you is walking through the field with Eugene Gant taking in the cold wind, the smells of smoke and cow manure under the grim sky. Another part of you is asking why that experience feels so real and immediate even though you've never had it before. Woolfe took a microscope to ordinary people and somehow rendered them great. He did not accord them the stature of epoch heroes or contemporary celebrities. Instead, he rendered their feelings and actions as immediate as their surroundings.

I was much taken with LOOK HOMEWARD, ANGEL when I read it as a young man, particularly the chapter on the death of Ben Gant. It was one of the most moving things I had read at the time and I never forgot it. With more years behind me than in front of me, I was curious to see what effect this novel would have on me on a rereading. I found this tome this time to be long, wordy, at times bombastic, with far too many "O Lost's." Mr. Wolfe never misses an opportunity to do long lists, often sounding like Walt Whitman on a bad day. And why on earth would he name Chapel Hill, North Carolina "Pulpit Hill" in the novel? On the other hand, sometimes Wolfe writes pure poetry; and the novel pulses with life. He has captured a town (Asheville, North Carolina early in the 20th Century) with all its prejudices, idiosyncrasies but hopes as well and has created a family we will never forget, the Gants. Anyone who knows anything about Thomas Wolfe understands that they are a thinly veiled version of his own family: the bigger-than-life patriarch of the family Gant who has bouts with the bottle; his wife Eliza, obsessed with making a dime at whatever cost; and their children-- Daisy, Helen, the sailor Luke, the twins Grover and Ben and Eugene, based on Wolfe, himself. These characters are as much of the literary history of the United States as Willie Loman, Rabbit Angstrom, the Compson family et al. Yes, Wolfe's account of the death of Ben Gant at the age of 26 of double pneumonia will tear your heart out. After the Gant family members have spent excruciating days at his deathbed, Eugene has this beautiful words: "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?

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