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AN EDITION OF "WELCOME TO OUR CITY",
A PLAY BY THOMAS WOLFE.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Ph.D.,
1979

An Edition of "Welcome to Our City," A Play by Thomas Wolfe

by

Phyllis L. Huffman

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Approved by

Dissertation Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

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Huffman, Phyllis L. An Edition of "Welcome to Our City," a Play by Thomas Wolfe. (1979) Directed by Dr. Charles E. Davis. Pp. 229.

This study presents an edition of "Welcome to Our City," a play written by Thomas Wolfe between 1922 and 1924. In addition to the text of the play, the dissertation includes an introduction and notes to each of the ten scenes.

The text of this edition follows chiefly that of "Welcome to Our City," a typescript dated 1925 that was among the papers of Thomas Wolfe presented to the Harvard University Library by William B. Wisdom. Notations compare the final text to the script of the original play "Niggertown."

The introduction demonstrates that though the play reveals most of the weaknesses of Thomas Wolfe's writing and few of its strengths, the play is important to a comprehensive study of the author's fiction. In "Welcome to Our City" Wolfe for the first time represented characters and situations of his home town, Asheville, North Carolina. This "Altamont" became the backdrop for his story of Eugene Gant. In addition, the play reveals the germinal stages of most of the ideas and themes which Wolfe later incorporated in his novels.

The first part of the introduction traces the writing and production history of the play. Following is a brief synopsis of the major plot line, the confrontation between Whites and Negroes of a small Southern town in the early 1920's. The greater portion of the introduction pertains to the themes of the play, all of which relate to the problem of conflict as it is reflected both in social relationships and individual

personalities. Separate sections examine, in turn, types of particular conflicts.

Under the sub-topic, "Conflict Between Races," Wolfe's racial prejudice is discussed, with the conclusion being that the author's own ambivalence toward the issue accounts for the play's ambiguous tone. The point is made, however, that certain speeches of the play predict the more tolerant attitude of his later work, such as the short story, "The Child by Tiger."

The section called "Conflict Between Agrarianism and Commercialism" explores the play's depiction of the values of the antebellum South as contrasted with the materialistic orientation of the New South. His satire of the proponents of both old and new ways of life demonstrates further Wolfe's internal struggle.

The third sub-section deals with "Domestic Tension" among family members in the play. Certain speeches revealing the failure of communication to draw people together anticipate the unsatisfactory personal relationships vividly portrayed in Wolfe's novels. The play's treatment of the problem of loneliness, alienation, and the resulting quest for absolute fixity in a world of change suggests also the pre-existence myth, which Wolfe used as the controlling metaphor of Look Homeward, Angel.

The final sub-section "Conflict Between Society and the Modern Artist," describes the development of one of the characters, an artist, and concludes that as Wolfe was revising this particular play, he was also working out for himself a theory of art. His aesthetic attitudes,

seen here in their beginning stages, are compared with the views on art expressed in his later writings.

The introduction concludes with a discussion of Wolfe's view of human duality and the manner in which certain motifs of "Welcome to Our City," such as the god-beast dichotomy, anticipate his later affirmation of the dignity of man.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe particular thanks to several people who have aided my research and assisted me in preparing this dissertation. For permission to quote from the unpublished typescripts of "Welcome to Our City," I am grateful to Paul Gitlin, administrator of the estate of Thomas Wolfe. The reference librarians of the Houghton Library, especially Martha Eliza Shaw, have been very helpful in facilitating my access to the Wisdom materials. I am indebted to C. Hugh Holman for suggesting the topic and giving a direction to my initial efforts. For guidance during the early phase of the work, I acknowledge my gratitude to Patrick Ryan. For his sustaining encouragement and editorial assistance, I am especially grateful to Charles E. Davis, chairman of my doctoral committee. I also acknowledge my appreciation to the other members of my committee, who have read my work and provided suggestions.

Permission to quote from the previously unpublished works of Thomas Wolfe must be obtained from the administrator of that author's estate, Paul Gitlin.

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INTRODUCTION

Of the possibly nineteen plays which Thomas Wolfe wrote during the years 1919 through 1925,[1] the one which seems to have the clearest relationship to his narrative fiction is "Welcome to Our City," originally titled "Niggertown." The only publication of this play has been an abridgment, which appeared in the October, 1957 edition of Esquire.[2] This was later translated into German by Horst Frenz.[3] Though the play reveals most of the weaknesses of the author and few of his strengths, it is important to a comprehensive study of his works for two reasons. In "Welcome to Our City" Wolfe for the first time represented characters and situations of his home town, Asheville, North Carolina; this "Altamont" became the backdrop for his story of the life of Eugene Gant. In addition, the play demonstrates the germinal stages of most of the ideas and themes which he later explored in the novels.

The manuscript of Wolfe's final verson of "Welcome to Our City," along with numerous drafts and variants composing some eight hundred pages, is preserved in the Houghton Library of Harvard University as part of the William B. Wisdom Collection. This massive collection of Wolfe's personal library and papers was presented to Harvard in 1947 by William Wisdom, a friend of Wolfe and the leading collector of his manuscripts and memorabilia. The chief manuscripts employed in this study are *46 AM-7 (11), (12) "Niggertown"[4] and *46 AM-7 (13), (14) "Welcome to Our City."[5] The former is the version Wolfe prepared in 1923 for production by his playwriting class at Harvard, the 47 Workshop of

Professor George Pierce Baker.[6] The second manuscript is the last complete form of "Welcome to Our City," which Wolfe submitted to the Neighborhood Playhouse in 1924.[7] Significant comparisons of these texts are provided in the annotations to each scene.

Besides dissertations and isolated journal articles, very little critical attention has been given to Wolfe's unsuccessful career as a dramatist. The most significant published material which treats the play is the article by Richard Kennedy, "Wolfe's Harvard Years," in Richard Walser's The Enigma of Thomas Wolfe.[8] Much of this material is included in Part II of his The Window of Memory: The Literary Career of Thomas Wolfe.[9] A short chapter on "Thomas Wolfe, Dramatist" is included in B. R. McElderry's survey of Wolfe's writings.[10] One other article deserves mention: John L. Idol's "The Plays of Thomas Wolfe and Their Links with His Novels."[11] Idol concludes that Wolfe began as a dramatist to explore many of the issues he treated in the novels, such as "greed, the rise of the lower classes from the South, militarism and violence, boosterism, progressivism, and the mythology of the South" (p. 112).

The most thorough examinations of Wolfe's plays have been in the form of dissertations. In his "Thomas Wolfe: The Dramatic Apprenticeship," Claude W. LaSalle addresses a central question about Wolfe's period of playwriting: "the extent to which it led him to employ, in his narrative fiction, ideas and techniques learned in the drama." Among the topics LaSalle considers are "the growth of Wolfe's symbolism, the continually narrowing range of his themes, his methods of developing character, and his conception of structure." LaSalle concludes

that because "Wolfe worked out in the drama many of the problems which normally beset a beginning novelist . . . he came to the novel as an artist already somewhat formed" (p. xxiii). In 1973 Mary Charmian Green presented "Thomas Wolfe: The Evolution of a Dramatic Novelist, 1918-1929."[12] One part of her study is an examination of the four one-act plays Wolfe wrote at Chapel Hill and the three major plays resulting from his experience at Harvard. She concludes that his style--a peculiar blend of two disparate elements, "dramatic, objective representation" and "subjective, uninhibited assertion"--made drama an inappropriate medium for him (p. 195). In the second part Green analyzes the dramatic intensity of Look Homeward, Angel and relates the success of that novel with Wolfe's training as a playwright.

Melvin F. Groth's "Thomas Wolfe and the Koch Idea"[13] is an examination of the influence of Wolfe's Chapel Hill drama professor, Frederick H. Koch, on Wolfe's plays, both those he wrote for the Carolina Playmakers and for the 47 Workshop. According to Groth, all these works manifest the "Koch Idea," which he defines with descriptions of four tenets: (1) "the Folk Idea" ("Dramatic literature is literature of and by everyday people"); (2) "the Pageant Idea" (Plays should be "epic in scope . . . and epic in means"); (3) "the Language Idea" ("Folk-plays should presume carefully the natural expression of the folk"); (4) "the Idea of the American Dream" (a diversified America shall awaken and see herself "vitally connected . . . in the new dramatic experience . . . self-awareness and success") (pp. 50-54).

Writing and Production of "Welcome to Our City"

When Wolfe left for Cambridge in September, 1920, he told his family that he was going to prepare for a career in journalism. As soon as he arrived, though, he went to Professor George Pierce Baker seeking admission to his course in playwriting, English 47, "The Technique of the Drama, Lectures and Practice." This was the famous "47 Workshop," a kind of theatrical laboratory, which had begun to attract national attention through its distinguished alumni, including Eugene O'Neill. After the intervention of Frederick Koch, himself a graduate of Baker's course, Wolfe finally became a member of the elitist "Baker's Dozen."

Baker's biographer, Wisner Payne, maintains that "for almost fifty years, G. P. B. epitomized the lay forces at work in the evolution of twentieth-century American drama."[14] Begun in 1913, the Workshop had flourished, with little support from the University, as the "pet" project of Baker, its sole creator. His methods, as described by Kinne, represent a combination of gentle discipline and "'rebellious experimentation.'"[15] By the time Wolfe arrived in Cambridge, Baker had a firm procedure for selecting and producing plays written in the Workshop for a hand-picked audience of about two hundred, each of whom was expected to submit a written criticism for the edification of the young playwright. The purpose of these productions, in which each playwright became integrally involved in the set design, stage effects, and acting of his creation, was to give apprentice dramatists opportunities to view their plays exactly as they had written them. Aside from offering suggestions, Baker usually allowed his students to learn from the impact of their plays on the audience.[16] Among the plays produced by the Workshop, some

were dismal failures; but by 1920, when Wolfe became a member of the group, Baker could claim credit for a number of Broadway successes.[17]

During this first year at Harvard, Wolfe completed a one-act play called "The Mountains," an embarrassing effort, which he had begun writing at Chapel Hill. It was produced by the Workshop in the fall of his second year, but the written comments of the audience nearly discouraged him from trying again. Except for experimenting with a few ideas for new plays, during his second year Wolfe concentrated on his graduate studies and earned his M.A. degree in English in June, 1922.

Somewhat daunted in his ambition to be a successful playwright and not firmly committed to an artistic career, Wolfe was about to accept an offer of a teaching position at Northwestern University when he received word that his father was dying. While he was in Asheville for the funeral, Wolfe convinced his mother to finance another year for him at Harvard. So in September, 1922, he returned to Cambridge and registered for only one course, Professor Baker's Workshop. Kennedy reports the beginning events of that term which culminated in the production of "Welcome to Our City" the following spring:

> He brought to class first acts of six different plays within a two-week period. His head was full of ideas, and he was experimenting with assorted techniques. Professor Baker withheld praise for his efforts, merely requesting that Wolfe concentrate on one project and bring in a second act to any one of the plays. This little discipline was evidently the bridle Wolfe needed, and during the term the play "Niggertown" began to emerge, presumably from one of the first-act experiments (Window of Memory, p. 76).

The idea for his new play seems to have crystallized during his visit to Asheville that summer. In September, he wrote to his beloved

teacher Margaret Roberts:

> Coming home this last time I have gathered enough additional material to write a new play, --the second fusillade of the battle. This thing I had thought naive and simple is as old and as evil as hell; there is a spirit of world-old evil that broods about us, with all the subtle sophistication of Satan. Greed, greed, greed,--deliberate, crafty, motivated--masking under the guise of civic associations for municipal betterment. The disgusting spectacle of thousands of industrious and accomplished liars, engaged in the mutual and systematic pursuit of their profession, salting their editorials and sermons and advertisements with the religious and philosophic platitudes of Dr. Frank Crane, Edgar A. Guest, and the American Magazine.[18]

As Claude LaSalle has noted, "Welcome to Our City did not progress through several distinct stages of development, and it is consequently impossible to determine the order in which variants were written" (p. 28). A "Scenario For a Play / In Four Acts / To Be Called / Niggertown / By / Thomas Wolfe," preserved in the Wisdom materials, indicates that at one point Wolfe considered writing the play in four acts, as follows:

Act I		Office of the Altamont Development Co.; eight o'clock in the morning; late August.
Act II	Scene I	Parlor in Jim Johnson house three weeks later; eight thirty at night.
	Scene II	Library in the home of Mr. Rutledge, nine o'clock the same night.
	Scene III	A street in Niggertown--the next morning.
Act III		Offices of the Altamont Development Co, three weeks after
Act IV		the same, a week later.

[Harvard University Library *46AM-7 (11) "Niggertown"]

As Wolfe molded his material, however, he decided to use a series of ten scenes instead of this four-act structure. The above outline contains six of the scenes of the final play. Additions are Scene 1,

an expressionistic view of Niggertown; Scene 4, set in the Altamont Country Club; Scene 7, chiefly a satiric pantomime; and Scene 10, where all the action culminates in a basement shoe-repair shop, owned by a former Negro slave.

Also pertinent to the evolving play is a 116-page handwritten synopsis, which includes a detailed survey of the backgrounds of the major characters that in some cases go back over a hundred years; a full description of the setting including the relationship of the Negro settlement to the panoramic view of the surrounding mountains; and digressions on moral standards, philosophical viewpoints, and social hypocrisies. Most of the characters and situations mentioned in this synopsis have been transformed, sometimes with different emphases, into the dialogue of the play itself.

By January, 1923, Wolfe was able to read to the Workshop a complete draft of "Niggertown."[19] By late spring it was chosen for production by the Workshop players. Repeatedly during the months of reading and revising, Baker called for compression, but in the final written product, Wolfe had his way. Along with the script which he submitted to Baker, he sent a note that included this statement:

> I have written this play with 30 odd named characters because it required it, not because I don't know how to save paint. Some day I'm going to write a play with 40, 80, 100 people--a whole town, a whole race, a whole epoch--for my soul's ease and comfort (Letters, p. 41).

Nevertheless, as the play went into rehearsal, Baker insisted that it be shortened.[20] Philip Barber, Wolfe's classmate in the 47 Workshop, reports that "in its original state it contained more burlesque and lampooning of small-town manners" and that "it was primarily these passages,

which slow up the story, that Baker was determined to eliminate."[21] This attitude and Wolfe's stubbornness precipitated what Barber has described as "a second drama" in the rehearsal room:

> About a week after rehearsals had begun, when the actors were moving about in the scenes, Baker stopped the rehearsal, turned to Tom and suggested that he would like to make such and such cuts, or at least to have the actors replay the scene with the cuts to see whether anything was gained. Tom made a gesture of agreement, promptly followed by reasons why he felt the lines in question should be left in. Baker listened politely, then turned to the actors and read them the cuts. As he read, Tom, now sitting erect, began weaving back and forth in his chair like a polar bear suffering from the heat, and as Baker finished giving the cuts to the actors, Tom sprang to his feet with a tortured yell, and rushed out into the night.
>
> There was a moment's astonished pause. Then Baker matter-of-factly asked the cast to reread the scene, with the cuts. Rather subdued, they did so. At the end Baker said, "Let's keep it that way for the time being," and the rehearsal went on.
>
> Ten or fifteen minutes later Tom walked in, quietly and casually, and took his seat as though he had been out for a cigarette. There was no further reference to that cut, and no visible pain mainifested by Tom when the scene as cut was played the next night.
>
> But this electrifying explosion, this leaping up, hands waving, with a bellow of distress, took place every time a cut was made for the first time. It began to be something we rather looked forward to, since the blow-up was apparently harmless, always followed by Tom's matter-of-fact return to rehearsal (pp. 73-74).

"Welcome to Our City," as the play was then called, was performed in the Agassiz Theater of Radcliffe on the evenings of May 11 and 12, 1923. Richard Kennedy reports that the production of "Welcome to Our City" was "one of the most spectacular productions ever undertaken by the Workshop":

> It made use of seven different arrangements of a unit set and had a cast of forty-four people, with thirty-one speaking parts. . . . The performances were very exciting; yet the play was not a complete success. It was original in its presentation of several strata of town life and in its forthright treatment of race relations; but some of the scenes extraneous to the main action were far too lengthy for their purpose. . . . Since the play was long and the set changes were not made with the necessary speed, the performances, which began at eight, did not end until midnight (Window of Memory, p. 80).

Philip Barber, who served as stage manager, has noted that "the cast was very good" (p. 73). He reports also that since there were no Negro actors in the 47 Workshop, "Baker, with an eye for realism, cast the Negro characters as far as possible with young men of Southern background belonging to the Harvard Dramat" (p. 73). According to Kennedy, "Wolfe himself put on blackface to take part in the crowd scenes" (Window of Memory, p. 80).

Following the usual procedure, the invited guests in the audience were requested to submit written comments for the benefit of the playwright. According to Kennedy, most of the audience comment "was favorable," though "most . . . remarked on the unnecessary length, and some were critical of Wolfe's boldness in putting the realities and brutalities of race conflict on the stage." The experience of one of the guests, as reported by Kennedy, seems prophetic of the impact of Wolfe's later work: "Miss Laura Plonk from Asheville, was astounded as the plot unfolded. After the show, she rushed backstage to Dorothy Sands to exclaim with horror, 'I know every person in the play!'" (Window of Memory, p. 80).

Torn by inward insecurities,[22] Wolfe nevertheless held some belief that his play was worthy. Writing to his mother before the performance,

he expressed his hope of winning the coveted Belmont Prize, which as he explained, was given by the New York producer Richard Herndon for "the best play written in the Workshop." The prize carried, in addition to a small sum, "a contract for a New York production within six months" (Letters to His Mother, p. 39). Another play won the prize, but Wolfe was encouraged by the written comments, not all of which were critical, and by Baker's continued enthusiasm.[23]

Following Baker's advice, Wolfe continued to work on "Welcome" throughout the summer of 1923 in preparation for submitting it to the Theatre Guild. He was invited by his friend Henry Carlton to spend some time with him in Madison, New Hampshire. Kennedy has related the details of that generally unproductive summer:

> Carlton outlined for him a number of plot threads he had introduced and pleaded with him to throw out two or three that were undeveloped. Wolfe would solemnly agree, and after the Carlton family had retired, he would work late into the night. By morning he would have a whole new sequence to insert (Window of Memory, p. 81).

Ultimately Wolfe restored all the cuts Baker had made for the production. In August he returned to New York and took his play to be typed at the Remington Typewriter Office.[24] Meanwhile Baker was placating Julia Wolfe with ebullient letters about her son's future as a playwright.

Wolfe's experience with the Theatre Guild was a frustrating disappointment which ultimately led to a permanent rift with Baker. In December, 1923, the Guild declined "Welcome to Our City," with the offer to reconsider if Wolfe would shorten and tighten. After he was forced to turn to teaching for his livelihood, Wolfe wrote to Margaret Roberts a report of his unhappy association with the New York theatre magnates:

> The Guild held my play for three or four months, as you perhaps know,--held it until I was on the verge of madness and collapse--and finally returned it, after wining and dining me, telling me I was "a coming figure," and so on, and trying to extract a promise that all my future work would be submitted to the Guild for consideration before any other producer got hold of it. Of course, I made no such promise.
>
> Before I left the city, however, one of the Guild directors,--a Jew by the name of Langner, and, I believe, a very wealthy, patent lawyer, had me in to his apartment. He wanted me to cut the play thirty minutes--a reduction I concede it needs. He wanted me, also, to cut the list of characters (this means cheaper production) and to revise--he insisted it needed no rewriting--with a view to "tightening"; that is, to develop a central plot which will run through each scene, and which would revolve around a small group of central figures: Rutledge, the Negro, the girl, etc. Of course this would mean a more conventional type of play. I told him I had deliberately tried to avoid writing such a play; that I had written a play with a plot which centered about the life and destiny of an entire civilization, not about a few people. If I consented to this revision, Langner promised his support and added that he was fairly certain he could place the play. He observed, cheerfully, that he had really asked for very little; that I could make all necessary changes in a week. This was a bit of optimism in which I did not share. However, I promised to make the effort, and departed for Cambridge.
>
> Professor Baker was properly horrified when I communicated the evil tidings. Not only, he said, would the proposed revision greatly cheapen the play, but it was also impossible, since my play had been hailed and praised as a new departure in American drama; its fate was on the rails. Thereupon, he read to me from a book on the American Theatre just published, by Oliver Sayler, in which my play is described at some length as "the most radical and successful experiment ever made in the American Theatre." The Workshop comes in for its share of praise for doing my play (Letters, p. 58).

It would appear from these comments that a humbler and poorer Wolfe was finally willing to make substantive concessions in order to assure a production for his play. He turned to Baker for guidance, but the publicity accorded the Workshop in Sayler's book[25] made Baker reluctant to

risk a drastic cutting that would render "Welcome to Our City" a more conventional play. Feeling for the first time the inclination to comply with Langner's request, Wolfe found no Maxwell Perkins in George Pierce Baker. About this time he concluded that "Professor Baker was an excellent friend, a true critic, but a bad counsellor" (Letters, p. 59).

While toiling at his duties as instructor of freshman English during the spring and summer of 1924, Wolfe continued to promote his play. Trying to cut it to comply with the requirements of length and structure, he merely made it longer."[26] Next he submitted it to the Provincetown Players, which quickly rejected it, and then he dallied with the idea of accepting an offer from D. Appleton and Company to publish it. During the summer of 1924, Wolfe turned his play over to the Neighborhood Playhouse in one final effort. The board of directors split in their decision on the play; Aline Bernstein, one of the members, decided to carry it with her to Europe for consideration by Alice Lewisohn, one of the chief directors.

In October, 1924, Wolfe sailed to Europe, having written to a friend, "I am wholeheartedly and completely tired of my first huge opus. I leave it to all the glory of its imperfections. My world has moved; I am writing a better play--I'll have nothing to do with the old" (Letters, p. 61). Returning to America the following summer after a year's sojourn in Europe, Wolfe met an old Harvard friend on board the Olympic, who introduced him to another passenger, Mrs. Aline Bernstein. Packed in her luggage was the copy of "Welcome to Our City" which she had taken to Europe for another reading. In their shipboard discussions, Wolfe refused once

more to make revisions requested by the company. Upon arriving in America, he discontinued all efforts to find a producer for "Welcome" and turned instead to promotion of his new play, "Mannerhouse," which he had completed in Europe.

Themes of "Welcome to Our City"

"Welcome to Our City" is set in Altamont, a Southern mountain town, during the early years of the 1920's. With the influx of tourists and new residents, attracted to the area by the clear air and mountain scenery, Altamont is beginning to enjoy the fruits of modern commercialism. The excitement of real estate speculation and the optimism of urban consciousness characterize the mood of its citizens. In an effort to improve the town's appearance and thereby capitalize on its growth, the Altamont Development Company has attempted to gain control of the Negro district, located on the most advantageous building spot. Most of the Negroes, who do not own their own dwellings anyway, have agreed to move without resistance.

Allying himself with the realtors, Will Rutledge, a decaying Southern aristocrat, wishes to purchase his ancestral home located in the heart of the Negro settlement. Its present owner, Jim Johnson, a Negro doctor, at first refuses to sell. When he is about to comply, he discovers Rutledge's son Lee attempting to seduce his daughter. Johnson's hostility is contagious and he, together with a Northern rabble-rouser, stirs the Negroes to a riot, returned in kind by angry Whites. A violent confrontation between the races finally erupts, in the midst of which Johnson is killed and the disputed house is burned.

Besides this main plot line, the play contains a large number of very "talky" scenes which have no relationship to the central issue. The dialogues between Rutledge and Jordan, a tubercular writer, are the best examples. Other irrelevant ideas bantered around by the characters are the corruption of politics, new directions in higher education, and the degenerate condition of culture in America. There are scenes, in fact, in which Wolfe expounds his personal biases at the expense of dramatic intensity.

The pervasive tone of discord in "Welcome to Our City" results from various conflicts between groups and individuals within the microcosmic society of Altamont. The tense relationship between the Whites and the Negroes finally erupts as a violent confrontation. Meanwhile, the defender of the established order, Will Rutledge, succumbs to the overpowering influence of the advocates of commercialism. In the rivalries and misunderstandings among the Rutledge family, Wolfe portrays the inevitable results of man's loneliness and isolation from his fellows. Another form of conflict--between those who deny life and those who celebrate it--is suggested by the character of Reeves Jordan, an artist in conflict with society. These numerous conflicts, which jar the sensibilities of the audience from various directions and, in general, imply no satisfactory resolutions, account for the diffuseness of "Welcome to Our City." There is no real protagonist, no one, in fact, who speaks consistently with the authorial voice. Yet from the perspective of Wolfe's purpose, to depict a cross-section of society, the conflicts themselves are fundamental to the meaning of the play.[28]

"Welcome to Our City" was written at a time when Wolfe was consciously rejecting the ideas of monism in the philosophical system of Horace Williams, his philosophy professor at Chapel Hill.[29] In the spring of 1922, he wrote to his former English teacher, Edwin Greenlaw:

> If I'm ever to be a dramatist, I must believe in struggle. I've got to believe in dualism, in a definite spirit of evil, and in a Satan who is tired from walking up and down the earth. These are things I can visualize. When we erase the struggle, our power of visualization seems to fade (Letters, p. 30).

As Kennedy points out, this "very real sense of evil, Wolfe's Presbyterian heritage, keeps cropping up in his writings, from . . . Welcome to Our City . . . to George Webber's Credo in You Can't Go Home Again" (Window of Memory, p. 11). In spite of Wolfe's recognition of man's evil, he heartily accepted as well a faith in mankind based on Platonic idealism. In his dramatic writings, Wolfe was just beginning to explore those ideas of man's spiritual nature that were to spring full-blown in Look Homeward, Angel. As in "Welcome to Our City" these two views of life frequently clash in Wolfe's works, and as Kennedy has expressed it, "the result is by no means a perfect synthesis" (Window of Memory, p. 10).

Conflict Between Races:

Along with the scenario for "Niggertown," which he presented to Baker in 1922, Wolfe submitted what he called a "Prefatory Statement," in which he defended the title for his play. This document is especially useful for determining Wolfe's premise on the question of racial equality:

> I trust that there will be found nothing to provoke mirth in the title I have chosen for my play. Within the limits of that crude word are bound up too much human misery to cause any amusement to thoughtful people who know the situation. It is a word that should not be printed: it should be stained on the page with sweat and blood.
>
> Gradually, I am becoming convinced that there can be no fair criticism of life in the South today which will not include in some tangible and distinctive way, the problem that has been created by the negro. The reasons for this conviction are manifold. I will give a few: First, the Southern negro comprises at least a third of the total population, possibly more than that. It is no unusual occurrence in such states as Georgia, South Carolina, and Mississippi to enter towns where the negro population outnumbers the white. Indeed I believe that the negro population in these states would equal the white. In my own state, North Carolina, it is about a third.
>
> Second: The negro race has no moral or cultural background to give it spine. Let the optimistic call it lack of education, opportunity or what they will, but the fact remains that the race is incapable of making the simplest ethical distinctions. It is not inconceivable that a few years training can remedy this. The background from which a well-developed race must come is the product of centuries of slow and painful upbuilding, with the race consciousness and pride forever crystallizing and coming more and more into the visible foreground. The negro, even in those parts of the country where the laws technically put him on a social par with the white man, still clings to the pathetic delusion that his equality is to be maintained by a series of tawdry protests against segregation in schools, theatres, and moreover it is not true that education creates a moral sense. It sensitizes it perhaps, it gives it subtlety and penetration, but it cannot create it [Harvard Univ. *46AM-7 (11) "Niggertown"].

The reason Wolfe abandoned this title as he progressed with his play is not certain. Philip Barber has written that Wolfe's work was "chastely rechristened for Cambridge audiences" (p. 72). Paschal Reeves also asserts that "in deference to the sensibilities of a New England audience" Wolfe finally chose a less offensive title.[30] The published letters and notebooks, however, contain no reference to any objections

raised to the title "Niggertown." In fact, the Broadway success of another play, Edward Sheldon's The Nigger, written in Baker's course in playwriting, may refute the notion that Wolfe renamed his play to suit his audience.[31]

In deciding to title his play "Welcome to Our City," Wolfe may have desired to emphasize the diversified population of his setting, the city of Altamont, as opposed to a single social group and locale. As important as the Negroes and the section of town known as "Niggertown" are to the plot, they were not Wolfe's chief interest. In a letter to his cousin Elaine Westall Gould, he tried to explain "that the play is not about any problem--least of all the negro problem." Instead, as he continued, he "is concerned with giving a picture about a certain section of life, a certain civilization, a certain society" (Letters, pp.39-40).

As Wolfe deliberately diffused the racial aspects of his play, he met with opposition from his critics in the 47 Workshop, including his teacher George Pierce Baker, who called for greater unity centering on the racial issue. Some time after his reading of "Welcome to Our City," then "Niggertown," to the 47 class in late January, 1923, he submitted his handwritten copy to Baker with a note which included the following:

> I would be sorry to think that a close eye on the relevancy, the direct bearing of each scene and incident on the main problem, that of the negro, would conceal from you the fact that I knew what I wanted to do from the beginning to the end. With what success I did it, I can not even venture a guess. But will you please remember this: a play about the negro, a play in which each scene bore directly upon the negro, a play in which the negro was kept ever before you, might be a better play: it would not be the play I started to write (Letters, pp. 40-41).

In spite of Wolfe's protests to the contrary, however, the racial issue is at the heart of "Welcome to Our City." The problems which Wolfe was addressing, however, are not the usual ones involving the races en masse. He does not urge equality and integration and, in fact, expresses a certain contempt for reformers and instigators. Denying that his play was addressing a problem, he wrote, "I try to settle nothing, I want to prove nothing--I have no use for solutions" (Letters, p. 39).

This kind of delibrate fence-straddling which Wolfe adopted in writing "Welcome to Our City" accounts for the play's ambiguity of tone. The audience can never be certain of Wolfe's attitude toward the relationship of the races mainly because Wolfe himself leaned in both directions. As Claude LeSalle has concluded, "in writing Welcome to Our City Wolfe could not fully commit himself to egalitarianism" (p. 95). Yet the manner in which he evokes sympathy for several of his Negro characters suggests that underlying the biases of his typically Southern, White and middle-class background, an admiration for the human spirit, not restricted by color or nationality, was waiting to be developed.

Paschal Reeves reports that "Wolfe's earliest serious writing about the Negro" exists in a fragmentary essay, "The Negro and the South's Economic Strength," a paper he probably wrote for a course at Chapel Hill or Harvard (Albatross, pp. 8-9). In that essay Wolfe strongly denied any contribution the Negro may have made to the economic growth of the South. Referring to the race as "this black millstone," he cited the primitive nature, indolence, and inefficiency of the black laborers as a deterrent to Southern progress, and he urged against giving "misplaced sentiment"

to "noble Uncle Toms." He was equally pessimistic about the capacity of the Negro to profit from his exposure to White culture: "A magic transportation back to the jungle (a dream in which most Southerners at one time or another indulge) would see completed in twenty years the cycle from savagery to savagery" (quoted in Albatross, p. 9). This passage displays the same attitude which prompted him to write about 1920:

> It has been said that a just and merciful order of things prevents people from really knowing what happens to them. This is certainly true of the negro. But it makes it difficult to write a play about him. It is hard to pierce through his eternal buffoonery to reach his tragedy.[32]

Reeves demonstrates that this concept of the Negro's "racial immaturity" stayed with Wolfe throughout his lifetime and is responsible for the limited view of the Negro character expressed in his works (Albatross, p. 8).

With nine named Negro characters, "Welcome to Our City" is an anomaly among Wolfe's works. Except for brief glimpses of individual characters, however, the portraits of the Negroes in the play bear out Reeves' conclusion. When they cluster in groups, they appear unruly, irresponsible, juvenile. At times, their behavior suggests the raw, uncivilized, and irrational elements of man's nature, which are repulsive and frightening to a society that values subtlety and complexity.

The first scene of the play, an expressionistic presentation of a street in Niggertown, sets the mood of disorder, foreboding, futility. Mystery and savagery lurk beneath the squalor. The buildings are filthy and cheaply constructed, the ground between them strewn with litter. One building is visible only from the rear, the front side

facing a street in the White section. Some shops, such as that of Amos Todd, shoe repairman, are underground. On one side is a pool room, "a dark, fathomless place" where men move "like ghosts" (Sc. 1). On this set the Negroes move about at random, some of them playing simple games, others engaged in noisy chatter. But the meaningless physical activity of the Negroes and the Whites, who join them on the street, does not entirely mask the feelings of despair and world-weariness that are made more pointed by the recurrence of a whistled "foolish, futile little tune" (Sc. 1).

In Scene 8, in which many of these same Negroes reappear, personalities of individuals become somewhat defined against the setting, but in his characterizations Wolfe remains outside. In the lightly sketched characters of Slew-Foot, Pickens Gaffney, Sam Tipton, and their unidentified companions, Wolfe ridicules the buffoonery, ignorance, and savagery of the race. Paschal Reeves has noted that though Wolfe generally sketches living portraits of even his background White characters, he rarely distinguishes the personalities of individual Negroes: he typically characterizes the Negro "as a composite figure and not as separate individuals" (Albatross, p. 22).

According to Wolfe's portrait in "Welcome to Our City," the Negro lacks a sense of moral responsibility; this deficiency accounts for his "racial immaturity," his failure to produce an organized culture, and his resistance to the benefits of education. As the result of this weakness, the Negro is given to displaying aberrant social behavior. For example, Sam Tipton, grandson of Amos Todd, the "Uncle Tom" of the play, has recently been released from prison but already he has resumed his

criminal activities. Both Slew-Foot, also an ex-convict, and Pickens Gaffney have explosive temperaments, which imply constant conflicts with the law. Innuendoes by several Negroes in this scene toward casual sexual attitudes indicate what Wolfe considered to be a general promiscuity among the Black race.

The Negroes' lack of social concern, manifested in anti-social acts, is symptomatic of a deeper problem, according to Wolfe--intellectual dullness. These Negroes do not possess the imagination necessary to envision a cause outside their own creature-comforts and, therefore, resist all efforts at organization and self-improvement. This point is emphasized by the abortive efforts of Sykes, a mulatto from Boston who is in Altamont trying to elicit support for a racist organization. Sykes' competition is a minstrel show, ironically a production by White actors spoofing the behavior of Blacks. But the Negroes are too dull to be insulted; they believe, as Sam says, that "h'it takes de White folks to put on a good minstrel show." Sykes' message, that education is the one thing needed to raise Blacks to equality with Whites, goes unheard; and as the minstrel band sends forth its invitation with gay colors and loud music, Sykes himself is drawn along with the others toward the center of the excitement. Regardless of the efforts to raise the Negroes' educational level, Wolfe contends that the race will remain culturally inferior since their only response to their environment is emotional.

Conscious of the distinction between themselves and the Whites, the Negroes remain on the fringes of civilization and with some cunning have developed means of deriving support from White society without contributing to it. A striking example occurs as Sam eagerly accepts the

leftovers from a White man's lunch. Others of the group gloat over their ability to avoid the curse of work. As Slew-Foot says, "Dey owes a livin', dat's what" (Sc. 8). Others have devised ways of surviving by pandering to the vices of Whites.

The one vocal dissident among the town Negroes is Uncle Amos Todd, the "Uncle Tom" figure who displays complete loyalty and subservience to the Whites. Even though Todd earns an honest living without complaining, he is no less the object of Wolfe's ridicule. The younger Negroes are actually smarter than he since they, at least, know that they are being victimized by the economic system of the Whites, although they lack the discipline to unite successfully against it. Amos, however, has closed his mind to new ideas and, therefore, does not comprehend what is happening to him. Through several incidents Wolfe demonstrates the flaws in his complacency. In Scene 3 he is the pathetic butt of a prank by Sorrell and Rutledge involving his reluctance to accept a paper check in payment for his property. Accepting it at last, he expresses gratitude and blind faith in the men who have cheated him out of his home of forty years. For all his loyalty, Amos is finally killed by a stray bullet from a fracas in which he has taken no part. In one way, he is the complete victim; but on the other hand, his stupidity has kept him from dealing effectively with change.

The other Negro characters in the play are Dr. Jim Johnson and his daughter Annie. These two are antagonists for Will and Lee Rutledge. Annie appears only in Scene 5, but her sexual involvement with Lee functions as the catalyst for the violent confrontation that results in her father's death. A mulatto who is obviously proud of her White features,

the girl has been taught to reject the Negro's social habits. Not belonging to the White group either, however, she is painfully lonely; therefore, so it seems, she has sought acceptance by proffering herself to young White men. Desiring a more genuine relationship, she complains to Lee that he does not acknowledge her on the street. When he responds with an insult, Annie is about to reject him, but she finally decides to go with him when they are discovered by her father. This portrait of Annie Johnson comes close to being a sympathetic one; for a brief moment, however, she reveals the primitive nature that Wolfe associates with others of her race. Underneath her straight hair and light skin, Annie is really a jungle creature; inspired by "the savage rhythm" of the Negro dance music, she cries out like "a wounded animal" (Sc. 5), and then accepts Lee's rough invitation.

Of all the Negro characters, Jim Johnson is the only one rendered in any complexity. In the extensive notes Wolfe made for his play, he supplied nine handwritten pages of background for Johnson's character. Using the methods he was to employ with uneven success in the novels, Wolfe goes back in time to reveal the incidents that have colored the man's life and made him what he now is. Contained in these notes are certain references to a possible miscegenous relationship between the Rutledge and Johnson families. The following is an example:

> Some three years after his return, the old black doctor in the sanitarium dies, himself a victim of the disease he professed to treat, and Jim Johnson, collecting all his resources, came in quickly and bought the house, at a very low price indeed. It was a peculiar circumstance and might have indicated deep tides of passion and reflection in the negro, had anyone connected the purchase with the fact that Johnson's grandfather had been a slave in that household. But no one remembered--save Mr. Rutledge [Harv. Univ. *46 AM-7 (11)].

Neither of the extant versions of "Welcome to Our City" contains such a reference. Wolfe's decision to abandon a blood bond between Rutledge and Johnson may have been unfortunate. Such a relationship would have provided a unifying structure, which the play certainly lacks. He may have decided not to pursue this connection for fear that such a focus would divert attention from his chief concern, the spiritual vacuity of a whole society. It may be that Wolfe simply could not deal with his own feelings about the Negro's sexuality and, therefore, decided not to explore miscegenation as a theme in his play.

Throughout most of the final version of "Welcome to Our City," the Negro doctor arouses audience antipathy. During his meeting with Rutledge in Scene 3, Johnson is haughty and belligerent. "A man's got to sleep high an' look proud, if his color's wrong," he explains. Deliberately antagonizing his opponent Rutledge, Johnson boasts:

> Highest part o' town, I reckon. On a good dark night I can look down an' see de lights in all de niggah shanties. Sho! Mistah Rutledge--I can look down f'um wheah I am, an' see all de lights ovah in de White-Town. Why, I reckon if I had a good strawgn paiah of glasses I could look right into yo' dinin' room, Mistah Rutledge (Sc. 3).

This speech is typical of Johnson's efforts throughout their confrontation to ruffle Rutledge's composure.

As he is shown being victimized by Rutledge's son and misunderstood by the other Negroes, however, Johnson's character is somewhat mitigated. During the closing moments of Scene 5, while he defends his home against violation by Lee Rutledge, Johnson, for the first time, arouses audience sympathy. Later as he addresses a crowd of Negroes who have been displaced from their homes, he appears pathetically lonely. "Stand on

yo' feet an' act like a man, an' take yo' chances," he urges them. But his words go unheard as a minstrel band attracts each one, including even the rabble-rouser Sykes. Walking away "in a direction opposite to that taken by the crowd," Johnson achieves his finest moment (Sc. 8). In this action, he distinguishes himself from the unruly mob of Blacks bent solely on pleasure. Of all the Negroes in "Welcome to Our City," he alone assumes moral responsibility for himself and his family.

Though Johnson's defiance nets no real gain for his race and results ultimately in his own death, he still attains a degree of dignity which Wolfe seems only half willing to admit. Recognizing that Johnson is an anomaly he is not prepared to understand, Rutledge asks, "Why did you choose to become a man?" (Sc. 10). Mixed with these allusions to Johnson's humanity, however, are strong evidences of his sub-human qualities. His demonic laughter frightens Rutledge, who addresses him during the last scene as "Mad-dog." As Johnson dies, Wolfe reports that the Negro "bays twice in his throat like some giant mastiff" (Sc. 10). It is clear that in spite of a certain sympathy, Wolfe could not fully involve the Negro in his developing affirmation of the dignity of mankind.

The conflict between the Black and White races in "Welcome to Our City" appears to result chiefly from those changes imposed by modern conditions and attitudes. In this uncertain climate, neither race can define the identity of the other or even develop a unified image of itself. Something more than this seems to be involved, however. We have seen in his portrait of Johnson that Wolfe himself was incapable of dealing with the duality of the Negro's character. Furthermore, Wolfe could

not determine to what extent Johnson as a Negro should be regarded as equal or inferior to the White characters in the play. At times he seems to be agreeing with a statement made by Hutchings in Scene 9 that "the Negro is racially, morally, intellectually, and physically an inferior . . . a higher species of ape."

Wolfe's probing interest in the Negro character led him to return to the subject years later. While he was at work on the manuscript that became Of Time and the River, Wolfe wrote to Maxwell Perkins of his plan for a chapter to be called "The Congo," about "the wandering negro who goes crazy and kills people and is finally killed by the posse as he crosses a creek" (Letters, p. 243). Such a chapter did not appear in Of Time and the River, but notebook entries for later years reveal that the idea persisted. In 1933, for example, he includes among a list of scenes the phrase "The Nigger Killer."[34]

Ultimately Wolfe worked this concept into "The Child by Tiger," a short story published in The Saturday Evening Post for September 11, 1937.[35] (With minor revision, the story was included as an episode in the youth of George Webber in The Web and the Rock.[36]) "The Child by Tiger" is the story of Dick Prosser, whom Paschal Reeves has identified as "the most important and most memorable of Wolfe's Negro characters" (Albatross, p. 28). As a part of Wolfe's last writing, "The Child by Tiger" provides a means for comparing his final view of the Negro with that attitude he revealed in his early play.

The story treats an issue that is integral to "Welcome to Our City"--the nature of man in a civilized society. Dick Prosser, a Negro, appears to be a well-adjusted and loyal servant to the White society.

He adopts the White culture and religion, he befriends White youth including the youthful narrator, and he conducts his affairs in an orderly, well-disciplined manner which reflects his military background. However, special peculiarities in his behavior hint that malign forces lie just beneath his outward composure. For example, he has a strange way of coming upon people suddenly as though from nowhere; and when he is surprised, he momentarily bares his teeth and his eyes redden. The action of the story centers on Prosser's reversion to irrational conduct and its effect on the quiet and orderly lives of the town's citizens. After an incident with another Negro, Prosser goes on a shooting spree and kills over a dozen men, White and Black. Enraged and frightened, a group of White citizens suddenly throw aside all legal restraints of a civilized government and become a mob. Turning against themselves even, the angry men loot a hardware store for guns and ammunition and pursue Prosser through the snow-covered woods. When they find him, they riddle his body with bullets. Then they bring it back to town and display it as a trophy won during a hunt in the forest.

The narrator's attitude is the focal point of the story. He has been disturbed not merely by a surprising inconsistency in the character of his friend, but also by the rapidity with which a group of law-abiding citizens have been transformed into savages. As he reports at the end of the story, he knows that with this experience "something had come . . . into our lives--that we had never known about before . . . . For we would still remember the old dark doubt and loathing of our kind, of something hateful and unspeakable in the souls of men" (p. 391). In the closing lines, this narrator identifies Dick Prosser as "a token of

the other side of man's dark soul, a symbol of man's evil innocence . . . two worlds together--a tiger and a child" (p. 392). Here the Negro, living amid a society prescribed by Whites, emerges as a symbol for the ambiguity of the entire human race.

The story "The Child by Tiger," with its unequivocal application of theme to the situation of all mankind, indicates how far Wolfe finally was able to progress in acceptance of universal brotherhood. Adopting the perspective of a mature man reflecting on an important experience of his youth, the narrator of the short story has moved a considerable distance from the stance of the confused young author of "Welcome to Our City."

Conflict Between Agrarianism and Commercialism:

In "Welcome to Our City" Wolfe seems to have consciously set up a polarity between the value system of antebellum Southern society and the creed of what had by 1923 begun to be called the New South. An interesting rivalry develops between Will Rutledge, the representative of the Old South and the proponents of the New--Preston Carr, Henry Sorrell, Joseph Bailey, and their entourage of booster types. A struggle between them never really takes place because, as Wolfe cleverly demonstrates, their ends and methods are identical; only their terms are unique.

C. Hugh Holman has concluded that Wolfe "belonged loosely to the New South school, which saw in industrial progress the key to a new and better life and believed that the South must emerge from its retreat to the past into the reality of the modern world."[37] As he goes on to explain, however, "Wolfe was also keenly aware that industrial progress

and the things associated with it could have damaging effects on American and southern culture" (Loneliness, p. 118). One of the difficulties in "Welcome to Our City" is the result of Wolfe's complex attitudes toward this new direction of the South.

The central symbol of the play, the Rutledge ancestral home, evokes a clear division between the opposing views of Southern experience. The first reference to the house occurs in Scene 2 when Bailey, Secretary to the Board of Trade, speaking to Jordan, a newcomer to the city, points to the "old Rutledge home," which stands on the very summit of the town in the middle of the Negro district. Jordan expresses considerable interest in the "fine old house": to him it represents "feudalism--something we call the Old South." In his response Bailey makes clear that nostalgia for the past has no place in the materialistic schemes now consuming the town's energies. Altamont, he declares, is a leader in the progressive efforts of the entire state, which, Bailey attests, is "stepping forward faster than anywhere in the country." To prove it, he boasts, "The largest factory in the world for the manufacture of men's underwear is located within its boundaries." This dialogue, held early in the play, immediately sets forth the tension between two opposing views of Southern history, neither of which, according to Wolfe, is totally valid.

These two views continue to be contrasted in the pairing of Will Rutledge and Henry Sorrell in Scene 3. Commenting on the deal he hopes to close quickly with Johnson, Rutledge expresses his explicit faith in the house as a symbol for his past, a means, in fact, for reviving a dead tradition:

> Yes, Sorrell, for we are buying back a kingdom today, my friend. We are buying back a treasure of memories and romance, so delicate, so rare, so far removed from this obscene push, that I almost hold my breath when ever I think of it. It's not dead! It's not dead! It sleeps--the one thing I yet dream of.

A representative of the New South, Sorrell sees the transaction in light of his own interest--the success of the development; yet, as John Idol has observed, "Sorrell finds himself committed to helping Rutledge, a representative of the Old South."[38] Later in the play both Sorrell and Rutledge resort to the same base methods for accomplishing their uniquely defined purposes.

Background conversations reveal that Rutledge has reason to feel nostalgic about the old house. The property had been owned by Will Rutledge's father, formerly a slaveholder and a prominent citizen in the community. Bailey explains to Jordan in Scene 2:

> Mr. Rutledge inherited the place from his father's estate but the war ate up everything the family had. So Mr. Rutledge had to give the place up when he was a young man. Ever since he's wanted it back. It went against the grain, you see.

The preliminary notes Wolfe made for his play indicate that, as he first conceived him, Rutledge was a member of one of the original families of Virginia which had "held large grants of land by royal charter." The family had branched, "one division remaining in Virginia," the other, Rutledge's own, "migrating to the sparsely settled communities further South" [*46 AM-7 (11)]. The family was indeed a proud one, and this trait helps to account for Rutledge's inordinate passion to possess the symbol of his family's past glory.

In the final version of the play, the distinction between Rutledge's motives and those of the Altamont Development Company are unmistakable. (See Sc. 2, n. 9.) Unlike the realtors, he is not purposely trying to exploit the Negro for material gain. His plans for the house demonstrate the emptiness of his gesture, however. Rutledge has no intention of returning there to live; the very idea seems to give him pain.[39] In Scene 6 Mrs. Rutledge asks about his plans for the house, which appears at this time to be assuredly his. Rutledge answers, "God knows. It's a high place--an odd place. Perhaps Lee will marry someday. I'll give it to him." As he implies, maybe the house can restore a semblance of the social order made possible by strong emotional ties to the land. At a time when Lee has already wrecked his father's plan, his attempt to bring back the past seems all the more futile. Therefore, since Rutledge will not live there and Lee does not value it, the house, should it pass to Rutledge, would remain a shell, merely a reminder of an obsolete past. The burning of that house, which is reported in Scene 10, appropriately signifies Wolfe's contempt for Rutledge's effort to resurrect an old way of life by hallowing its symbols.

Besides the character Rutledge, two others--Old Sorrell and Amos Todd--demonstrate the futility of looking to the old order as escape from the problems and changes brought by the new. Henry Sorrell's father, a filthy, unappealing old man, makes only one appearance in the play--at the opening of Scene 3. When he feels rejected by his son, he complains, "I was good enough to go all through the Civil War and git a bullet hole in the roof o' my mouth big enough to stick yore fist through--but I ain't good enough now to be treated decent when I come

to my own son's office." Gesturing to the location of his wound, he directs his listeners, "Looky thar: Big enough to stick your hull fist through." Old Sorrell gets no sympathy from his son, however, who explains, "But the Civil War was over fifty years ago. We're living in different times today."

Charmian Green has noted that "as comic relief, amidst the other caricatures," Old Sorrell is one of Wolfe's "first delightful flat characters etched in the humours' tradition of Jonson, Smollet, and Dickens" (pp. 112-113).[40] Comic the old man surely is, but Wolfe was in earnest in satirizing what Old Sorrell represents. In a story later incorporated in The Hills Beyond, "Looky Thar" reappears, sporting a wooden leg, in addition to his grotesque wound and tag-line; there Wolfe leaves no doubt of his disapproval. Sitting "in his split-bottomed seat against the courthouse porch," begging sympathy and money from the townspeople, the old vagrant represents "shiftlessness, ignorance, filth, lechery, and professional veteranism."[41] The presence of this character in both his early play and in some of his last writing signifies that Wolfe held no lingering illusions about the "lost cause" of the Confederacy.

Amos Todd, an old Negro "Uncle Tom," also attracts Wolfe's ridicule. Todd seems to feel comfortable in the role of servant because, as Wolfe implies, it gives him a buffer against a world he cannot understand. But his sense of security is false since it ill-equips him to recognize present threats to his way of life. Todd distrusts anything unfamiliar and stubbornly resists change. That is why he refuses to heed the gnawing wariness with which members of his own race regard the Whites.

This blindness results finally in his own undoing. When his grandson Sam Tipton rushes into his shoe-repair shop, shouting for him to leave immediately to avoid danger, Todd boasts, "I ain't gwine to budge. De White folks ain't got no grudge agin me" (Sc. 10). Insisting upon staying in his shop until closing time, Todd is killed in a confrontation between Whites and Blacks in which he has no part. As bystanders remark, the clock in Todd's shop is running slow; the symbolism, though trite, completes the idea: By failing to adapt to the laws of survival in a new age, Todd has assisted in his own death.

By satirizing those who mistakenly believe in their own narrow conception of past value systems and by showing the futility of any attempt to resurrect the ideals of a previous generation, Wolfe conveys his opposition toward idealization of the Old South. On the other hand, he rejects the crassly materialistic methods of the New South proponents who are ruthlessly shoving the region into the industrial age. In some ways, in fact, he is even more caustic in his criticism of businessmen, boosters, and politicians.

Whereas he renders Rutledge and Amos Todd with some sympathy, Wolfe frankly ridicules the inane Bailey and the calculating Sorrell. The men have moved into their positions of power and wealth--not through any superiority of intellect or sensitivity to the needs of others--but by a well-developed pragmatism and a firm sight on the goal of material wealth. This point becomes especially evident in the dialogue of Scene 3 between Sorrell and McIntyre, a schoolteacher who has lost his position for teaching the theory of evolution. Sorrell concedes to McIntyre, his former teacher and now his client:

> I didn't take the Latin any longer than I had to, and I think you were wrong about the Greek. . . . Well, I suppose I'm doing about as well as those that took all that stuff. . . . I don't believe most of those fellows amount to much anyway (Sc. 3).

Wolfe's own response to this philistine view becomes patently clear when he lambasts the whole tribe of materialists in Scene 4 of the play. There he shows them gathered for a society ritual at the Altamont Country Club. They talk of the new direction of higher education, of efforts to show the people "the practical value of training at the University, the dollars and cents advantage." They prate about the "great recreational value of the fine arts"; and they plan how "to sell people the idea of culture"--how to "put the whole thing on a paying basis." According to Bailey, the statistician, the tourist appeal of arts attractions will have fantastic benefits for the population and economy of the city, and the group makes plans to capitalize on such ventures. This dialogue alludes to what Wolfe saw happening in his own town. In a letter to his brother Frank, two years before "Welcome to Our City" was written, he wrote, "There's a good play in Asheville--a play of a town which never had the ordinary, healthy, industrial life a town ought to have but instead dressed itself up in fine streets and stuck hotels in its hair in order to vamp the tourist populace" (Letters, p. 14). This metaphor strikes the very problem Wolfe recognized as paramount in modern life--hypocrisy.

The hypocrite who receives Wolfe's deepest frown in "Welcome to Our City" is Governor Preston Carr. During his first appearance in Scene 4, Carr demonstrates his utter dullness with every word so

that when Bailey, intending to be complimentary, pronounces the Governor as "the simplest of men," the audience is prepared for the dramatic irony. As he prepares for bed during Scene 7, Carr appears in an elaborate pantomime: after removing all that cosmetic art has provided to enhance his appearance, including toupee, false teeth, shoe-risers, shoulder pads, braces, and abdomen supporter, he finally kneels to say his prayers, seeming "no more than a small, pudgy, and rather terrified boy." Yet there is something frightening about the success of such a man. According to Wolfe's description, Carr possesses "an absolute and unscrupulous will to get what he wants most; he will pander, bargain, compromise and cheat, and never lose the smile from his face" (Sc. 4).

In addition to exposing the artificiality of modern business and politics, Wolfe takes a few swipes at the modern church. In Scene 3 Sorrell advises young Lee Rutledge that "Church membership is a business asset these days, and you can't afford to overlook it." The futility of the church as an institution is manifestly clear in Scene 9 when the Reverend Smallwood utters the vapid jargon of his profession--"We must take life as it comes to us. We must reclaim our poor, strayed sheep"; yet he resists being distracted by the sound of rioting coming through an open window.

These caricature portraits of "Welcome to Our City" were conceived while Wolfe was very much influenced by the attitudes of H. L. Mencken and the "Smart Set" (Window of Memory, p. 191). It is not surprising either that they resemble the characters of Sinclair Lewis, who, according to Kennedy, was one of his early literary heroes" (p. 192). John Idol has demonstrated that another of Wolfe's models during these

years was Jonathan Swift, though as Idol points out, "he was not Swift's aptest student."[42] One of Wolfe's letters indicates that at a time when he was deeply involved in his playwriting activities, he called upon the name of Swift as inspiration to refute the "claptrap" and nonsense veiled behind intricacies," in the arguments of the modern sophists" (Letters, p. 26).

Though Wolfe's satire of the leaders of Greater Altamont is sometimes more tedious than entertaining, he manages through this group of one-dimensional caricatures to convey his complete disapproval of their insincerity and corrupted values. These men represent, in Wolfe's view, the direction of the modern South as the region prepared to compete commercially with other areas of the country. Indirectly they signify Wolfe's disgust with the American way of life in which all values are subordinated to monetary considerations. Though he never ceased to be repelled by greed, hypocrisy, and other such evils of a capitalistic economy, Wolfe softened his attitude toward America during his later years. Richard Kennedy reports that shortly after the publication of Look Homeward, Angel in 1929, Wolfe declared to a lecture audience:

> I do not believe . . . that all small towns are alike. I do not believe that business men, clergymen, and realtors are alike. I have not found what life I have known through the country standardized (quoted in Window of Memory, p. 192).

When, as a graduate student, he produced the flat portraits of the booster characters in "Welcome to Our City," however, Wolfe was unable to recognize the complex reaction of the average man, especially the Southerner, to his sudden immersion into an industrial economy.

Both groups of characters in "Welcome to Our City"--the ones who idealize the ways of the Old South and those who extol material progress--fail to gain Wolfe's complete approval. In some of the speeches of Will Rutledge, however, there are suggestions that Wolfe identified to some extent with the longing for order and tradition associated with the antebellum South. For example, in his exchange with Jordan in Scene 2, Rutledge laments the modern man's loss of belief. There is nothing, he says, "to die for," and "we have not even a hell left that we can go to." In the final scene Rutledge becomes nearly admirable when he is able to put aside his personal disillusionment and affirm his human bond with his son. This response seems to be the only thing left after violence has corrupted both the dream of the past and the vision of the future.

The tendency evident in "Welcome to Our City" to recognize the values of a society in which ties to land and to each other are meaningful shows Wolfe leaning a little in the direction of the major tenets of the Nashville School. Though he satirized the Agrarians unmercifully in The Web and the Rock, dubbing them the "New Confederates" (TW&TR, p. 242), according to Hugh Holman Wolfe was probably much closer to them in ideology than he was willing to recognize (Loneliness, p. 117). Floyd C. Watkins has observed, "Though Wolfe never accepted the Agrarian vision of a Utopian past in the South, in You Can't Go Home Again he did trace the modern depression and sickness to something 'around' the time of the Civil War.'"[43] Passage after passage of the posthumously published works bristles with condemnation of inhumane commercialism; in spite of his attraction to New York, Wolfe frequently decried the

the loneliness of the city, the emptiness of wealth, and the tawdriness of modern materialism.

Wolfe's letters, especially those written during his period of wandering in Europe, illustrate, sometimes poignantly, his growing appreciation for his native region. In 1933, for example, he wrote to his mother:

> It seems to me that life at home has changed a great deal since I was a child and that a great deal of the old simple unpretending spirit of people has changed. I do not think that it is a change for the better and the new life is one I do not care to live (Letters to His Mother, p. 40).

Looking back to his home, Wolfe seems to have realized, not many years after he left it, that the place he knew as a child had already vanished --that, in fact, he could never "go home again." Like Rutledge in his early play, he longed for some way to recapture the sense of order and place he had felt during childhood. At the same time, however, he recognized the absurdity of trying to erect or sustain meaningless symbols of that past order or to deny the reality of change.

Domestic Tension:

In addition to portraying group rivalries in Altamont, "Welcome to Our City" depicts another conflict that strikes more deeply at the center of society--the conflict between family members. The domestic tension among the Rutledges dramatizes man's essential loneliness, even within strong personal relationships. These conflicts also bring into focus the yearning for some kind of absolute to order and explain life --a feeling which in some ways anticipates Wolfe's use of the preexistence myth in Look Homeward, Angel.

The source of discontent between Will Rutledge and his son Lee is not made clear in the play, but the reasons for their friction are less important than the resultant isolation each feels from the other. By reclaiming the family home-place, a symbol of his paternal role, Rutledge hopes to re-establish a union with his son that has been lost through misunderstandings and rivalries. Both men in their own ways are struggling for a mode of communication and a sense of purpose that will bind them together. Lee, for example, admits, "We've missed something somewhere--we've no bundles to hold to," and he asks, "Isn't it a pity that there's not something useless and wrong that we could believe in?" Responding to Lee, Rutledge refers to the old house--"a beginning," he says, "Shall we try it? . . . Two men can live together in this world if they've a single bond--whether it be loyalty or dishonor." His words being misconstrued by his son, he concludes:

> The first god was a man: the first thing he created was a son; but the kings of the earth have lost their language --we face each other, shamed and stricken like dumb mutes --and Fatherhood, the one true parent of the spirit, has no speech" (Sc. 3).

Rutledge's reference to the failure of speech between father and son proves prophetic of the bond which he and Lee finally do share. When they are unexpectedly drawn together in Scene 6, as the result of Lee's insult to Johnson, they discover that in order to maintain loyalty to each other, they cannot speak. Describing their new relationship, Rutledge declares, "There is no language greater than silence"; thus they swear to "act and live as if this day had never happened. . . . except for silence" (Sc. 6).

Since Johnson, the man Lee has wronged, is one of the main instigators of the Negro unrest which erupts finally as a riot, the relationship of Lee and Will Rutledge has serious implications beyond their own home. Both become caught up in the inexorable tide of events that results finally in the loss of life and property. The climax of their "single bond" of "dishonor" offers no real solace for either man since it implies a lifetime burden of guilt. Acting more from revenge than a sense of duty, Lee, wearing the uniform of the state militia, shoots and kills Johnson. Afterwards when he and his father try again to meet, they continue to misunderstand each other. As Rutledge says, they are "partners in secret and unspeakable woe" (Sc. 10).

In addition to showing the strained relationship of Will and Lee Rutledge, the play also hints at a problem of incompatibility between the older Rutledges. During their midnight discussion in Scene 6, both husband and wife express their loneliness, their sense of being left out of the other's life, and their rivalry for the affections of their son. Lacking the proper language, both partners speak in phrases unintelligible to each other. Not really a conversation at all, the incongruent dialogue symbolizes their alienation from each other. (See Sc. 6, n. 13.)

In his depiction of the insecurities and isolation of the Rutledge family, Wolfe provides the first glimpse of some of the themes that became the fabric for his novels, especially the problem of loneliness and the search for a father. Hugh Holman identifies

these as the fundamental concerns of Thomas Wolfe, and both, he says, are related to the failure of communication (Loneliness, p. 26).

Certainly this failure of speech to assuage loneliness is the basis for the unsatisfactory domestic relationships depicted in the novels. Between husband and wife, mother and child, brother and sister, man and mistress, love refuses expression; thus, their only ties are painful. They go through their days locked in the terrible prison of self--alone and unable to speak. The lonely young protagonist struggles to free himself from the inevitable confusion resulting from these vain efforts to communicate, and he determines, in the words of Eugene Gant, to "get me some order out of this jungle of my life."[44]

These two related themes, loneliness and the search for a father, are integrally related to the doctrine of pre-existence, which is an important theme in all Wolfe's prose fiction. Richard Kennedy has demonstrated how this theme works in Look Homeward, Angel:

> In dealing with individual man's place in the universe of Necessity and Chance, Wolfe makes use of the Platonic myth of pre-existence. In the Platonic scheme as set forth in the Phaedo, Meno, Timaeus, and other dialogues, man's spirit leaves the real and unchanging world of immortality and enters a mortal body at the time of birth. During its temporary exile in the imperfect world of grief and change, man's spirit yearns to return to the divine world of reality (Window of Memory, p. 129).

The sense of being cut off from one's spiritual origins, imprisoned in flesh with no means to articulate and share one's innermost feelings and craving contact with a tangible symbol of lost permanence--this is

the premise which underlies the proem preceding the first chapter of Look Homeward, Angel.

It is interesting to note, however, that Wolfe had already begun to express these thoughts in his public writing before he turned to prose fiction. The domestic conflict of "Welcome to Our City" provided him with an example of man's isolation from his fellows and his longing for some concrete assurance of fixity in the midst of a changing world. The disconnected dialogue between Mr. and Mrs. Rutledge is an excellent example:

> RUTLEDGE: Except we lose--we lose what we have never had. And that, wife, is the greatest loss. . . .
>
> MRS. RUTLEDGE: Sometimes I think I shall put out my hand, and touch you--but I couldn't; it's too far. (A wind stirs the curtain.) I never feel the wind now, but somehow I could cry.
>
> RUTLEDGE: I have grown old, but sometimes I think that I remember heaven, and dawn, and a sea breaking.
>
> MRS. RUTLEDGE: When I was just a little girl, all the little girls were prim, and wore pigtails, but all the little boys, even the rough, loud ones, were lost gods. When spring came, the little girls were glad because it was warmer, and they raised their voices; but the boys had lonely eyes.
>
> RUTLEDGE: I have sown my life on barren land--I had strength once, but I have ploughed no furrow. God sent me out into a desert.
>
> MRS. RUTLEDGE: Then, the poor gods, the lost lonely gods, who cannot find the way.
>
> RUTLEDGE: I have not asked to be taught, but to remember.

The fact that Wolfe began to use the motifs associated with pre-existence theories before he consciously employed allusions to Wordsworth's poetry points to the centrality of this idea in his own thinking.[45] It also suggests that Wolfe's conclusions about man's dual nature--his base instincts and his spiritual longings--were already formed by 1924--not as some critics have declared, after the Depression years in Brooklyn and his travels in Nazi Germany.[46] Those experiences must have confirmed what he already felt--that ultimately the only bond between men is a sordid one and the only possible communication is silence. From this knowledge of man's cruelty, however, there comes the means for renewal. This is the message of Wolfe's last work, You Can't Go Home Again; it is also the message of one of his first works, "Welcome to Our City." Realizing that his bond with his son Lee has unexpectedly become one "of dishonor," Rutledge declares, "We are joined in this blasted and deserted place--but we are joined" (Sc. 10). Wolfe does not develop this suggestion of solidarity in the play, but the fact that it is there makes less surprising his later affirmation of the human community. Like Rutledge, George Webber pronounces a brotherhood, based not on blind faith in man's essential goodness but on knowledge of the flawed nature of the human condition.[47] And that is Wolfe's continuous answer to his quest for a spiritual father, an ordering principle, as well as a means to transcend this world of shadows.

Conflict Between Society and the Modern Artist:

The years during which Wolfe was writing plays for Professor George Pierce Baker at Harvard were decisive ones in determining his commitment to art as a profession. While he was at work on "Welcome to Our City" and especially during the period immediately following the 1923 Workshop production of the play, he began to crystallize his thoughts about his potential career as a writer and to formulate some idea of what his artistic purpose would be. Addressing an audience at Purdue University in 1938, Wolfe recalled his sensitivity to his father's disappointment that he had not chosen to become a lawyer. "For that reason alone," he reported, "it was difficult to admit, even to myself, the stirring of a desire to write."[48] Coming from a very conservative, middle-class background, Wolfe could hardly conceive of himself as "a writer"--in his youthful imagination, "a very remote kind of person, a romantic figure" (Purdue, p. 39).

When he enrolled in the 47 Workshop, he did so without a clear reason for being there. In his later view, he was "still marking time" (Purdue, p. 41). As "Welcome to Our City" gained acceptance with Professor Baker and the Workshop students, however, he developed a strong enough conviction in his abilities to declare in one letter to his mother, "I'm going to be an artist" (Letters to His Mother, p. 44). In another letter he reported, "I feel the sap rising in me, I cannot, with all humility, help but feel that the thing is bound to come, and come with a rush when it does" (Letters to His Mother, p. 39).

Wolfe's early statements of artistic purpose reflect the influence of the over-refined aestheticism of his associates at Harvard. As he reported in the Purdue address in 1938, these apprentice playwrights had adopted the romantic view of the artist:

> We talked about "the artist" a great deal too much; looking back, it seems to me that the creature we conceived in our imagination as "the artist" was a kind of aesthetic Frankenstein. Certainly, he was not a living man. . . . Instead of loving life and believing in life, this artist we talked about hated life and fled from it; for that, indeed, was the basic theme of many of the plays we wrote--the theme of the sensitive and extraordinary person, the man of talent, the artist--crucified by life, misunderstood and scorned of men, pilloried and driven out by the narrow bigotry and mean provincialism of the town or village, betrayed and humiliated by the cheapness of his wife, finally, crushed, silenced, torn to pieces by the organized power of the mob (Purdue, p. 44).

Absorbing the talk, and to some extent imitating the mannerisms of his fellows, Wolfe also, as he reported, began "to prate about 'the artist' and to refer scornfully and contemptuously to the bourgeoisie--the Babbitts and the Philistines" (Purdue, p. 44). From the comfortable isolation of Cambridge, Wolfe could write to his mother scathing commentaries of his Asheville acquaintances such as the following:

> I will step on toes, I will not hesitate to say what I think of those people who shout "Progress, Progress, Progress"--when what they mean is more Ford automobiles, more Rotary Clubs, more Baptist Ladies Social Unions. I will say that "Greater Asheville" does not necessarily mean "100000 by 1930," that we are not necessarily 4 times as civilized as our grandfathers because we go four times as fast in automobiles, because our buildings are four times as tall. What I shall try to get into their dusty little pint-measure minds is that a full belly, a good automobile, paved streets, and so on, does not make them one whit better or finer,--that there is beauty in this world,--beauty even in this wilderness of ugliness and provincialism that is at present our country, beauty and spirit which will make us men instead of cheap Board of Trade Boosters, and blatant pamphleteers. I shall try

> to impress upon their little craniums that one does not have to be a "highbrow" or "queer" or "impractical" to know these things, to love them, and to realize they are our common heritage there for us all to possess and make a part of us. In the name of God, let us learn to be men, not monkies [sic] (Letters to His Mother, pp. 42-43).

The rewriting of "Welcome to Our City," which he did for a year and one-half after he left Harvard, reveals a significant change in his attitude toward the proper role of the artist in relation to society. By the time he decided to set aside the play in 1924 in order to proceed with other more productive work, Wolfe had developed a new perspective on his writing which he maintained throughout his career.

A major revision Wolfe made to the play was to develop more fully the character of Reeves Jordan. Changed from a mere writer for the magazines, Jordan of the revised play is "the author of numerous plays, novels, and biographies." John Idol has observed that this character was "Wolfe's first attempt to dramatize the reaction of the artist caught up in the conflict between commercialism and artistic sensitivity."[49]

In comparison to his role in the original play, in which he appeared only once, Jordan of the final version fulfills a vital function: to demonstrate the limitations of a negative and escapist aestheticism (See Sc. 2, n.4). His dialogue with Bailey in Scene 2, for example, aligns him clearly with the romantic misfits like Rutledge, who insist that conditions in the modern world are intolerable. His meetings with the defunct Southern aristocrat, all of which were additions to the original (Sc. 2, 6, 9), establish a firm parallel between the two men. As expatriates in Paris, both have absorbed the jargon and attitudes of

the "lost generation." So standardized are their responses to social and literary topics that they can actually complete each other's sentences. Alienated and frustrated, even suspicious of their own worth, they have re-entered society. Rutledge has now acquired family, profession, and social position, but lacking happiness, he searches for meaning in an empty symbol of a past order. Jordan has also come back into the mainstream of America and he, too, has chosen an empty abstraction for his god. In Scene 6 he declares his loyalty not "to victory, to prosperity, to success," but to "everlasting Defeat." In his last appearance in the play, Jordan reports his decision to return to Paris where he expects a "gaudy finish" (Sc. 9).

There are several reasons for rejecting the view of Melvin Groth that Jordan is the spokesman for Thomas Wolfe, a prototype of the artist as character, later named Eugene Gant and George Webber.[50] First of all, Jordan has none of the nobility of spirit, the positive search for meaning, which characterizes the later artist-hero. Secondly, Jordan actually degenerates during the course of the play to the level of his opponents, the materialists. Taking leave of Rutledge in Scene 9, he reveals his decision to write a popular book, one that will "gather in the parading Yanks." Commenting on Jordan's surrender, Rutledge remarks, "The vulgar posture wins, if we say 'beauty' long enough." In his last speech Jordan submits to the ultimate corruption of his art: he becomes a mere fortune-teller. Leaving Rutledge finally, he warns, "Beware the Ides. . . . I watched the flight of the birds last night."

Rather than a spokesman for Wolfe, Jordan actually represents the antithesis of the kind of artist Wolfe had chosen to become himself. His increased role in the play marks Wolfe's public rejection of the philosophy of "escapism" promoted by his Harvard acquaintances and his growing conviction of the artist as "first and foremost a living man . . . a man who belongs to life, who is connected with it, and who draws the sources of his strength from it" (Purdue, p. 43). Jordan's infirmity, in fact, symbolizes what Wolfe felt was the incapacity of negation to combat the evils of modern life. Choosing to withdraw from the struggles of living men and to concentrate on mere abstractions, Jordan fails in his duty to minister to the woes of mankind and uplift the human spirit.

From several passages in "Welcome to Our City," Wolfe seems to feel that the cultural vacuum caused by aesthetic escapism leaves society without a clear sense of direction and purpose. Though men like Sorrell and Bailey are certainly stupid and culpable, the presence of the ineffectual artist, Jordan, helps to explain how such people could have gained power and influence. In their eyes, gaining money has risen to first place and all other pursuits have been relegated to inferior slots. The fine arts, for example, are valued for their "great recreational value," and a good book is one that can "rest the mind." In the thriving city of Altamont, "culture" is viewed as an opportunity for economic gain. As Sorrell says, "You've got to sell people the idea; put the whole thing on a business basis" (Sc. 4).

The presence of Jordan also helps to explain the inclusion in Scene 6 of Mrs. Rutledge's description of her activities with the drama

league. A satire on the "little theatre movement," this section also demonstrates the perversion of art by dilettantes and amateurs. Without effective leadership from the artists themselves, art in the modern age has become a mere hobby or pastime.

Wolfe's contempt for such critics of life as Reeves Jordan intensified as he turned from playwriting and the influence of the Harvard environment. His strongest direct statement appeared in a letter to Alfred Dashiell in 1930. There he denounces "the lost generationers, the bitter-bitters, the futility people, the cheap literary fakes, the elegant mockers, the American T. S. Elioters" as "a low but vilely cunning lot of bastards"; and he declares:

> I shall always love life and hate death, and I believe that is an article of faith. The futility people hate life, and love death, and yet they will not die; and I loathe them for it (Letters, pp. 273-275).

The effete aestheticism which Wolfe criticizes in the form of Reeves Jordan in "Welcome to Our City" receives even more severe treatment in the novel Of Time and the River. In the "Professor Hatcher" segment, Wolfe satirizes his former teacher and classmates of the 47 Workshop. About Professor Hatcher (Baker) Wolfe wrote:

> He gave them a language they could use with a feeling of authority and knowledge, even when authority and knowledge were lacking to them . . . and in the end, it led to nothing but falseness and triviality, to the ghosts of passion and spectres of sincerity, to the shoddy appearances of conviction and belief in people who have no passion and sincerity, and, too, were convinced of nothing, believed in nothing, were just the disloyal apes of fashion and the arts.[51]

Concluding his description of Eugene Gant's experience at Harvard, Wolfe gave this view of their failure: "False, trivial, glib,

dishonest, empty, without substance, lacking faith,--is it any wonder that among Professor Hatcher's young men few birds sang?" (OT&TR, p. 135).

In the same novel Wolfe returned to this subject as he related Eugene's debauch in the company of Francis Starwick, who had been Hatcher's student assistant. Here it is evident that Wolfe's anger and loathing were becoming too strong for satire. Of all Eugene's associates at Harvard, Starwick showed the most promise; when he sees him again, Eugene discovers that his former friend has succumbed to the negation he preaches. Arguing with Eugene about the wisdom of continued effort, Starwick sounds a little like Jordan in "Welcome to Our City," whose God has become "everlasting Defeat" (Sc. 6):

> What does it matter? Why do you go, dear spirit, and exhaust your mind with these frantic efforts, these useless desires to add another book or play to the mountains of books and plays that have already been written? Why should we break our hearts to add to that immense accumulation of dull, fair, or trivial work that has already begun? . . . What is great--what is priceless--what we would give our lives to do--is so impossible--so utterly, damnably impossible? And if we can never do the best,--then why do anything? (OT&TR, p. 17).

After temporarily being caught in Starwick's web, Eugene finally rejects him and his philosophy of resignation.

As the older George Webber, Wolfe's protagonist encounters an even more dangerous form of nay-saying in the person of his editor, Foxhall Edwards. His editor Fox is different from "the elegant, refined, and snobified Concentrated Blotters of the Arts" (YCGHA, p. 485). He "does not hate life; he is rather passionately involved with life," the narrator reports (p. 493). Yet there is something missing: "Fox has

no hope, really; he is beyond despair" (p. 491). Though he does not "hate life," neither does he "hug it like a lover" (p. 493).

Richard Cracroft demonstrates that "Wolfe's answer to Edwards is woven throughout the optimism of You Can't Go Home Again: in "the simple faith of Nebraska Crane . . . the positive life and attitudes of Mr. Katamoto . . . the faith of Else von Kohler" and especially in the affirmations of George Webber himself.[52] During their last meeting George's German mistress instructs him: "You are artist. And the Artist is religious man. . . . Be great one that I know. Be religious man" (YCGHA, pp. 658-664). In his farewell letter to Fox, George pronounces his newly defined faith:

> The essence of religion for people of my belief, is that man's life can be, and will be, better; that man's greatest enemies . . . fear, hatred, slavery, cruelty, poverty, and need--can be conquered and destroyed. . . . They cannot be destroyed by the philosophy of acceptance--by the tragic hypothesis that things as they are, evil as they are, are as good and as bad as, under any form, they will ever be. . . . With the courage of the truth within us, we shall meet the enemy as they come to us, and they shall be ours. And if, once having conquered them, new enemies approach, we shall meet them from that point, from there proceed. In the affirmation of that fact, the continuance of that unceasing war, is man's religion and his living faith (YCGHA, p. 738).

These attitudes which Wolfe later developed toward life and art clearly relate to those expressed by several characters in "Welcome to Our City." The plan shows that even while he was deeply influenced by the decadent atmosphere of the early 1920's, Wolfe was already formulating a strong objection to it. Refusing to be shut off from the world, he was all the more determined to become immersed in it. Writing to his mother about his decision to become "an artist," he declared, "I will go

everywhere and see everything. I will meet all of the people I can. I will think all the thoughts, feel all the emotions I am able, and I will write, write, write" (Letters to His Mother, p. 44). It was this kind of impulse which led him ultimately to renounce all forms of negation and to embrace more firmly a faith in mankind.

Conclusion

The lingering question of "Welcome to Our City" is the same one that goaded Wolfe throughout his career--what is the nature of man? Like the novels, the play proposes no emphatic definition but rather portrays the conflict within man of angelic and bestial qualities. The view of man as a ruined god is inherent in the ponderous speeches of Reeves Jordan, a would-be philosopher. Jordan, who has vowed to worship only "everlasting Defeat" (Sc. 6), describes for Rutledge the likeness of his god to man:

> What a piece of work is a god! How valiant in despair! How mighty in defeat! In all his pained and thwarted beauty, how like a man! The ruin of the sun, the broken shard of overthrown light, on tiger feet he carries his fierce flame through the victorious dark! (Sc. 6).

This theme is struck also by Rutledge's wife, who, lamenting over the loss of love in her marriage, explains that men are "poor gods, lost lonely gods, who cannot find the way " (Sc. 6).

On the other side, however, the raw reality of man's base behavior, his propensity for savagery, his cruelty and irrationality point to evil as a prime ingredient in man's origin. Numerous elements of the play, including the crafty maneuvers of the Whites--the realtors, politicians, businessmen, even the clergy--reveal human selfishness and cruelty. But

it is chiefly in his portrayal of the Negroes that Wolfe emphasizes the brutality of the human animal. For example, the jungle-like atmosphere of "Niggertown," created in Scene 1, suggests a colony of sub-human creatures motivated merely by passion and whim. Indeed the most obvious use of the god-beast dialectic occurs in Wolfe's presentation of the Negro Johnson. There is no question during his meetings with Rutledge that Johnson's civilized manners barely mask a much stronger inclination toward demonic madness.

In spite of the savageness evident in Johnson's character, his final actions make clear that he alone of all the characters understands what it means to be a man. As he advises his fellows, becoming a man involves affirming one's own belief in opposition to others--at great risk. So in spite of the "dogs of madness gnawing at his laughter" (Sc. 3), Johnson turns out to be the most vigorously idealistic of any of the characters in "Welcome to Our City." His active assertion surprises and bewilders Rutledge, who asks over Johnson's dying body, "Why did you choose to become a man?" (Sc. 10). The nobility of Johnson's act of will may go unnoticed chiefly because, as I have pointed out, Wolfe could not fully accept the Negro's humanity. Nevertheless, the seeds are present here for the development of Wolfe's final affirmative response to innate evil. Johnson's willingness to take a chance at redressing his wrongs makes him a kind of hero in the author's total scheme, since the ultimate evil, as Wolfe was able to express it later, is "nay-saying"--resignation, acceptance, complacency.

Richard Kennedy has stated that "this activism, this belief in continual striving, is an offshoot of Wolfe's biological view of life,

which could be called vitalism, or the philosophy of emergent evolution or creative evolution" (Window of Memory, pp. 8-9). Kennedy goes on to explain these terms as they relate to Wolfe:

> Vitalism, emergent evolution, and creative evolution, all somewhat alike and all somewhat vague, are theories more poetic than scientific. They personify the organic principle of growth and reproduction as Nature, Life, Life Principle, Life Force, Procreant Urge, and the like; and they all are optimistic views of evolutionary "progress". . . . In Wolfe's view the evolution of life is purposive and man participates in its forward march, although the purpose is unknown and man's specific role is unstated (Window of Memory, p. 9).

Kennedy maintains that many of Wolfe's attitudes of vitalism were influenced by the works of George Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, which he read avidly during his apprenticeship period at Harvard. Unlike these writers, however, Wolfe could not foresee mankind's eventual escape from the limitations of his corporeal nature (Window of Memory, p. 10). He believed that evil was too much a force to be reckoned with to propose any facile answers.

Man's dual nature accounts, then, for the continual conflicts within himself and among his fellowmen. But to resist meeting these struggles would deny the god-like qualities within him. Frequently, as "Welcome to Our City" demonstrates, the ultimate sacrifice for engaging in struggle is death, but sometimes that is the only way to assert one's humanity. In this respect, Johnson has his counterpart in the suicide, C. Green of You Can't Go Home Again. Another creature of low estate, Green is "a man-mote in the jungle of the city. . . [,] just a cinder out of life" (YCGHA, pp. 468-469) who finally jumps to his death in a street in Brooklyn. Green's antagonist is the standardization of modern life.

which would keep him nameless; however, by choosing to splatter his brains on the pavement of "Mobway" among all the "Standard Concentrated Blotters," he "willfully and deliberately violates every Standard Concentrated Principle of Blotterdom" (YCGHA, p. 478). With a sense of awe, Wolfe's narrator reports:

> He has messed up the sidewalk, messed up another Standard Concentrated Blotter, stopped traffic, taken people from their business, upset the nerves of his fellow Blotters--and now lies there, all sprawled out, in a place where he has no right to be. And, to make his crime unpardonable, C. Green has--Come to Life! . . . No longer is he just "another guy"--already he has become a "special guy"--he has become "The Guy." C. Green at last has turned into a--Man! (YCGHA, p. 479).

In his response to the death of this unknown man, Wolfe articulates a view of living--and of dying--for which as a twenty-two-year-old student he was evidently searching. In You Can't Go Home Again, Wolfe's narrator ultimately recognizes the victor in man's final conflict as the Nothingness of Death, but to Wolfe a fate far worse than death awaits those who become consumed into this Nothingness while still alive. To his friend and mentor, Foxhall Edwards, George Webber writes what is generally viewed as Wolfe's final philosophy:

> There is no greater wisdom than the wisdom of Ecclesiastes, no acceptance finally so true as the stern fatalism of the rock. Man was born to live, to suffer, and to die, and what befalls him is a tragic lot. There is no denying this in the final end. But we must, dear Fox, deny it all along the way (YCGHA, p. 737).

The chief value of "Welcome to Our City" lies in its demonstration of Wolfe's initial gropings toward this wonderful statement of belief in man's power to be.

Notes

[1] In ascertaining this number, Claude LaSalle has included all complete versions of the plays. Claude William LaSalle II, "Thomas Wolfe: The Dramatic Apprenticeship," Diss. University of Pennsylvania 1964, p. xxii; hereafter cited in text as LaSalle.

[2] Thomas Wolfe, "Welcome to Our City," Esquire, 48 (October, 1957), 58-82.

[3] Horst Frenz, trans., Wilkommen in Altamont! Herrenhaus: zwei Dramen. Die Herren von der Presse: eine Szene, by Thomas Wolfe (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1962). Frenz's introductory essay, "Thomas Wolfe als Dramatiker," appeared first in Die Neueren Sprachen, 4 (1956), 153-157.

[4] Thomas Wolfe, "Niggertown," 1922-1923, Harvard University Library *46AM-7 (11) and (12). All further references to this group of manuscripts and typescripts appear in the text.

[5] Thomas Wolfe, "Welcome to Our City," 1925, Harvard University Library *46AM-7 (13) and (14). All further references to this group of typescripts appear in the text.

[6] Though the production was actually titled "Welcome to Our City," the typescript retains the original title. This version is referenced throughout this study as "Niggertown" to distinguish it from the later version.

[7] An original and one carbon copy of the typescript exist in the Harvard University Library, both of which are from the typing of August-September, 1923. Another copy was presented to Harvard by Aline Bernstein (Harvard University Library *46AM-155 F). The Thomas Wolfe Collection at the University of North Carolina also has a complete typescript of "Welcome to Our City."

[8] Richard S. Kennedy, "Wolfe's Harvard Years," in The Enigma of Thomas Wolfe, ed. Richard Walser (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), pp. 18-32. [Based on Richard S. Kennedy's "Thomas Wolfe at Harvard, 1920-1923," Harvard Library Bulletin, 4 (Spring, 1958), 172-190; (Summer, 1958), 304-319.]

[9] Richard S. Kennedy, The Window of Memory: The Literary Career of Thomas Wolfe (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), pp. 59-108; hereafter cited in text as Window of Memory.

[10] B. R. McElderry, Jr., Thomas Wolfe (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964), pp. 34-44.

[11] John L. Idol, Jr., "The Plays of Thomas Wolfe and Their Links with His Novels," Mississippi Quarterly, 22 (Spring, 1969), 95-112.

[12] Mary Charmian Green, "Thomas Wolfe: The Evolution of a Dramatic Novelist, 1918-1929," Diss. University of North Carolina 1973; hereafter cited in text as Green.

[13] Melvin Frederick Groth, "Thomas Wolfe and the Koch Idea," Diss. Indiana University 1975; hereafter cited in text as Groth.

[14] Wisner P. Kinne, George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 2.

[15] George Pierce Baker, quoted by Kinne, p. 218.

[16] Kinne, pp. 215-220.

[17] In October, 1920, Wolfe wrote to his mother, "Nearly every year a play is taken by Baker from his class and put on Broadway, some of the most famous successes of recent years having been written here," C. Hugh Holman and Sue Fields Ross, eds., The Letters of Thomas Wolfe to His Mother (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 11; hereafter cited as Letters to His Mother.

[18] Elizabeth Nowell, ed., The Letters of Thomas Wolfe (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1956), p. 33; hereafter cited as Letters.

[19] In late January, 1923, Wolfe reported to his mother:

> I read or write steadily: I will read my complete play to class Wed (day after to-morrow. . . . I have spared neither myself nor that of which I wrote:--in a sense I feel I have expressed dramatically the modern South; what will be the merits of the play I cannot attempt to say (Letters to His Mother, pp. 37-38).

[20] Pencilled casting notes for the Workshop production, probably in Baker's handwriting, are recorded in Harvard University Library *46AM-7 (12); Wolfe's notes for revisions to be made after a timed reading by Baker are included in "Comp. Lit. 7" *46AM-8 (3).

[21] Philip W. Barber, "Tom Wolfe Writes a Play," Harper's Magazine, 216 (May, 1958), 73; hereafter cited as Barber.

[22] A "Diary Note" prior to the Workshop performance in Wolfe's handwriting demonstrates the intensity of his doubt:

> Friday, May 11, at 5:55 in the afternoon with the first Workshop performance of my play less than two and one quarter hours distant I want to record here, for my personal satisfaction, my belief that the play which I have written has no better show than that of the snowball in the infernal regions. I have only hopes that the cast and producing organizations will give a performance superlatively better than any they have previously given. And even then? And even then??
>
> "Hope springs eternal"--but let me resolutely abandon it now and henceforth [Harvard University Library *46AM-7 (14)].

[23] In a letter to his mother of June 8, 1923, Wolfe wrote, "Baker thinks I'll sell it. . . . He says its [sic] a better play than the last they [New York Theatre Guild] put on and ought to have a greater popular success" (Letters to His Mother, p. 46).

[24] Philip Barber has related the following anecdote about this stage of Wolfe's progress on "Welcome to Our City":

> The next I heard of Tom was the following fall, I was sitting in Baker's office when he looked up from a letter he was reading and said:
>
> "Listen to this from Tom Wolfe:
>
> "'I have been having "Welcome to Our City" copied to submit to the Guild. The young stenographer who is copying it for me has just come to the first cut that you made. She broke into laughter at the comedy lines. Needless to say I am putting back everything in the play that you cut out, so it will be exactly as it was before production'" (Barber, p. 74).

[25] Oliver M. Sayler, Our American Theatre (New York: Brentano's Publishers, 1923), p. 128.

[26] In his letter of application for a Guggenheim fellowship, Wolfe wrote: "'Welcome to Our City' was seriously considered by two theatres--one asked me to 'cut' it since it was an hour too long. This I tried to do, but made it longer" (Letters, p. 210).

[27] I have arrived at this date by references to the population size of Altamont by 1930 (Sc. 2), the little theatre movement (Sc. 6) and the ending of World War I (Sc. 8).

[28] Claude LaSalle has suggested the thesis of this study with the following statement: "That conflict is inherent in the condition of man is, I submit, the basic abstract principle which underlies the work" (LaSalle, p. 93). LaSalle does not develop this idea.

[29] Kennedy, Window of Memory, pp. 52-53.

[30] Paschal Reeves, Thomas Wolfe's Albatross: Race and Nationality in America (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1968), p. 11; hereafter cited as Albatross.

[31] In October, 1920, Wolfe wrote to his mother of a successful Broadway play called The Nigger that was written in Baker's class (Letters to His Mother, p. 11).

[32] Richard S. Kennedy and Paschal Reeves, The Notebooks of Thomas Wolfe (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), I, 7; hereafter cited as Notebooks.

[33] Paschal Reeves reports that in all four of Wolfe's major works only twenty-four Negro characters are named and of these only two are prominent (Albatross, pp. 22-23).

[34] Notebooks, II, 607.

[35] Thomas Wolfe, "The Child by Tiger," in The Saturday Evening Post Treasury, ed. Roger Butterfield (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), pp. 383-392.

[36] Thomas Wolfe, The Web and the Rock (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1939), pp. 122-156; hereafter cited as TW&TR.

[37] C. Hugh Holman, The Loneliness at the Core: Studies in Thomas Wolfe (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), p. 117; hereafter cited as Loneliness.

[38] Idol, "The Plays of Thomas Wolfe and Their Links with the Novels," p. 100.

[39] Scene 3: Sorrell inquires, "Will you go back there to live now?" Rutledge responds, "My God, man, why did you say that?"

[40] Green has followed a statement by Kennedy about "Welcome to Our City": "Here, too, he brings in for the first time some of the 'humourous' characters, in the Jonson-Smollett-Dickens tradition, that he was to draw with such success in his novels" (Window of Memory, p. 78).

[41] Thomas Wolfe, The Hills Beyond (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1941), pp. 335-341.

[42] John L. Idol, Jr., "Thomas Wolfe and Jonathan Swift," South Carolina Review, 8 (November, 1975), 42.

[43] Floyd C. Watkins, "Thomas Wolfe and the Nashville Agrarians," Georgia Review, 7 (Winter, 1953), 423.

[44] Thomas Wolfe, Look Homeward, Angel (New York: Scribner's, 1929), p. 422; hereafter cited as LHA.

[45] Monroe M. Stearns has analyzed Wolfe's use of the Romantic-Platonic theory of existence, especially noting the symbols he used from Coleridge and Wordsworth. "The Metaphysics of Thomas Wolfe," in The Enigma of Thomas Wolfe, ed. Richard Walser (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1953), pp. 195-205. Louis D. Rubin, Jr. has traced the influence of Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" on the works of Wolfe. Thomas Wolfe: The Weather of His Youth (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1955), pp. 54-75.

[46] Several critics have maintained that late in his life Wolfe underwent a change in which he became more sensitive to economic inequity and human cruelty: Edwin B. Burgum, "Thomas Wolfe's Discovery of America," The Virginia Quarterly Review, 22 (Summer, 1946), 436; Maxwell Geismar, Writers in Crisis: The American Novel 1925-1940 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1942), pp. 224-225; Louis D. Rubin, Jr.,

Thomas Wolfe: The Weather of His Youth, pp. 90-91. "Welcome to Our City" suggests, however, that Wolfe's social consciousness was very keen even during his youth.

[47] Thomas Wolfe, You Can't Go Home Again (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1940), pp. 739-743; hereafter cited as YCGHA.

[48] William Braswell and Leslie A. Field, eds., Thomas Wolfe's Purdue Speech "Writing and Living" (Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Studies, 1964), p. 43; hereafter cited as Purdue.

[49] Idol, "The Plays of Thomas Wolfe and Their Links with the Novels," p. 106.

[50] Groth asserts, "In Jordan, Wolfe doubtlessly had two things in mind: for the first time in his plays the writer as persona emerges; this is clearly a matter of self-identification" (Groth, p. 161).

[51] Thomas Wolfe, Of Time and the River (New York: Scribner's, 1935), pp. 134-135; herafter cited as OT&TR.

[52] Richard H. Cracroft, "A Pebble in the Pool: Organic Theme and Structure in Thomas Wolfe's You Can't Go Home Again," Modern Fiction Studies, 17 (Winter, 1971), 551.

WELCOME TO OUR CITY

A Play in Ten Scenes

By Thomas Wolfe

Editor's Note

The text presented here follows closely that of "Welcome to Our City" [(Harvard University *46AM-7 (14)]. This is the final version of the play which Wolfe submitted to the Neighborhood Playhouse in 1924. The typescript was included in the papers presented to Harvard University in 1947 by William B. Wisdom. Annotations have been provided to summarize and quote significant revisions from the earlier version of the play, originally called "Niggertown" [Harvard University *46AM-7 (12)], which Wolfe completed at Harvard while a student in the 47 Workshop of Professor George Pierce Baker.

The spacing of the original play has been changed to provide greater legibility and consistency. Stage directions appear in three forms reflecting different uses: those beginning a speech (presented as a phrase without capital and period), those appearing within the text of a speech (presented as a complete sentence with capital and period) and those separating speeches (also presented as a complete sentence with capital and period). Any variations in the paragraphing of lengthy stage directions have been noted. Speakers' names, which were typed originally in the center, have been moved to the left, indented five spaces from the margin and typed in all capitals. Stage directions which open scenes were originally typed on the right side only without parentheses. In this edition these have been presented in a form consistent with other stage directions.

Wherever changes have been made in words, word-forms, or the order of words, explanatory comments appear in the notes. Because of

the numerous typing errors and inconsistencies in the text, the following emendations have been made without editorial comment: normalization of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, correction of obvious typographical mistakes, and regularization of scene identifications as Arabic numerals.

In both "Niggertown" and "Welcome to Our City," Wolfe left unpunctuated the term "Niggertown" and the slang expressions referring to the Negro race. Quotation marks have been added to these terms as they appear in stage directions. In the speeches, where they are not used in a special sense, they have been written in their original forms. Wolfe consistently left the terms designating race in the lower case. For this edition these words, including "Negro," "Black," and "White," have been written with capital letters.

Except for changes to provide consistency, designations of speakers appear as Wolfe left them in the typescript of "Welcome to Our City." His references to most of the Black characters by their first names only have been maintained.

The typescript of "Welcome to Our City" includes four emendations which may have been made in Wolfe's handwriting. All of them, which evidently correct typographical errors, occur in Scenes 1 and 2. Since numerous other typing errors appear throughout the remainder of the scenes, these handwritten corrections do not indicate conclusively that Wolfe proofread the final typing of the play. (See Sc. 1, n. 3 and Sc. 2, n. 10, n. 21, n. 22.)

Included after the title page is a list of characters, showing the order of their appearance. This list was not contained in the typescript of the play.

Characters
(In Order of Their Appearance)

Henry Sorrell
J. C. Dunbar
Burton Webb
Preston Carr
Essie Corpening
Helen Neely
Dan Reed
Reeves Jordan
Joseph Bailey
Will Rutledge
Old Sorrell
Amos Todd
Lee Rutledge
McIntyre
Jim Johnson
Hutchings
Bull Patton
Doggie Sorrell
Mary Todd
Mrs. Wheeler
Annie Johnson
Mrs. Rutledge
Pickens Gaffney
Slew-Foot
Sam Tipton
First Negro Man
Second Negro Man
Third Negro Man
Fourth Negro Man
Fifth Negro Man
The Man - Sykes
Tyson
Smallwood
Grimes
Webster
Kendall
Sergeant
Young Man

SCENE 1[1]

(A street in "Niggertown." One looks across at a ragged line of white-washed shacks and cheap ones and two-story buildings of brick. In the center is a vacant lot between the buildings. It is littered with rubbish, bottles, horseshoes, wagon wheels, and junk of every description.

A group of young Negro men is pitching horseshoes in one part of the lot. In another, two young men are playing ball. Still elsewhere, another group is pitching pennies at a line drawn in the earth. To the right, there is a filthy looking restaurant. Through its dirty windows may be seen a long, greasy counter piled with quantities of fried food--chicken, fish and meat. There are smeared glass cases, as well, which contain thick, pasty-looking pies.

A Negro man and a stout Negress are in attendance within.

Next door--divided only by a flimsy board partition--is a pool-room. It is a dark, fathomless place, in which men, seeming like ghosts move through dense clouds of tobacco smoke around the green tables, under shaded lamps which cast wedges of sickly light upon them.

Farther up to the left, on the opposite side of the lot, is a moving picture theatre, housed in a cheap building of whitewashed brick. The front of the theater is plastered with immense garish posters. One shows a woman jumping from a bridge onto a moving train; in other a horseman is taking a prodigious leap across the gap that yawns between two towering cliffs. A tinny automatic piano plays, ceases with a spasmodic jerk, hums ominously, and, without warning, commences again.

At the extreme left is the side of a large brick building, which apparently fronts on a street in the White section. It is pierced by windows, doors, and steps which lead down respectively into a barber shop, a pressing club, and a shoe-repair shop.

On the street are clustered groups of young Negroes, some in shirt-sleeves and suspenders, others more fashionably attired in box coats with heavy stripes, flaring peg-top trousers and club-foot shoes of a screaming yellow. Young Negro women, attired in slouchy finery, in which lavender predominates, and wearing coarse white stockings and down-at-the-heel shoes, stroll by. The men make remarks which the girls answer freely. There is much ogling back and forth, much laughter, a great deal of noise.

They are creatures of sudden whim, and do unexpected things. Gales of merriment seize them; one will suddenly commence a shuffling dance, and as suddenly end it. There is much rough horseplay among the young men on the lot.

Up and down the street pass many people. Most of them are young. Now and then, a more dignified or prosperous looking citizen walks by. A stout, middle-aged Negro, wearing a long frock coat of good cloth and an expensive white vest, with a heavy gold chain, passes. He addresses people right and left, bestowing genial greetings or benedictions with a fat hand.

These circumstances, coupled with a pious smirk and the oiled smugness of his bearing, cause us to suspect he is a minister of the gospel. His thick lips are wreathed in smiles of sacrificial humility. They move and murmur constantly. We do not hear what he is saying to the people, but his mouth ever fashions and pronounces the word "brother." And as he walks, from somewhere in the distance, a foolish futile, ever-recurrent little tune is whistled, to which he appears to keep step in his march onward across the stage. He comes; he passes; and he goes; a leaping spark of rumor stills the crowd, and treading on the heels of silence, the mortal kings and captains of this earth march slowly past.)

MR. HENRY (H. C.) SORRELL (Dictating at once to two stenographers): She's a bargain, she's a buy; and she's a daisy! It can be done, if you have Vision--the motto of this office. Twenty-two hundred dollars a front inch until Thursday; price advances to three thousand then.[2]

MR. J. C. DUNBAR: Done! I take it! How much down?

MR. HENRY SORRELL: $2.47--the rest in thirty days.

(Money is passed.)

MR. BURTON WEBB: I'll give you twenty-five hundred, Jim. How much for a binder?[3]

MR. J. C. DUNBAR: $1.63.

MR. BURTON WEBB: The trade's on. (Money is passed.) She'll hit three thousand before the summer's over.

GOVERNOR PRESTON CARR: The state is a mighty empire, self-sufficient to all her needs. We are going Forward, not Backward; Service, Vision, Progress, Enterprise, the well-known Purity of our Womanhood. We can't lose! I'll give three thousand now.

MR. BURTON WEBB: Sold to Governor Preston Carr for three thousand dollars a front inch. Give me $2.30, please, Governor.

(Money is passed.)

MR. HENRY SORRELL: I offer $3,500, Governor. What do you do?

MR. PRESTON CARR: Mr. Sorrell gets it. $3.11, please.

(Money is passed.)

MR. HENRY SORRELL: Buy and sell. Keep the ball rolling. Trade quick. That's the way to make it.

(They pass, and go.)

MISS ESSIE CORPENING (twenty-three, mulatto, her saffron skin annointed, her slow cat's body wound in silken green; to Mr. J. C. Dunbar): Hello, Jimmy.

(She enters with graceful loin movement the dark stair corridor above the drug store.)

(J. C. Dunbar, a laggard behind the host, drops farther back, turns, bangs, returns; with prankish schoolboy grin he enters the corridor, hiding his face with his hat.)

MR. J. C. DUNBAR (voice half up-stairs, neighing and palpitant): Ess-see - who-o do-o you-u lo-o-ve?

(The foolish, futile ever-recurrent little tune is whistled over again. The people, suspended in their acts, now break to movement. And suddenly, above the tumult of the crowd, one feels a great throbbing in the upper air, which is filled with the noise of whistles, the piercing blast of a siren, and the heavy, booming strokes of the courthouse bell. It is six o'clock.

Soon the workmen begin to come by. They are big, strong men, with stooped, burly shoulders, and there is in their manner a solid weariness.

They march heavily and solidly on, each bearing a dinner pail or a lard bucket in his hand. They pay no attention to those on either side of them. Their hands and faces are covered with the dust of lime and cement, trenched and engraved by little streams of sweat, and their shoes and the bottoms of their trousers are stiff with mortar.

One of their number--a young Negro--turns aside, going into the pool-room. Another pauses to talk to a Negro in the vacant lot. The rest go solidly past, with an implacable, an animal power, paying no attention to those on either side of them.)

CURTAIN[4]

Notes to Scene 1:

[1] Scene 1 is an expressionist presentation of a street in the Negro settlement. The stage directions call for the use of light and color, sound, and physical movement to convey an atmosphere of meaningless activity. These devices suggest the influence of Wolfe's teacher, George Pierce Baker, who urged the use of experimental staging (Kinne, p. 215).

[2] This speech and those which follow to the end of the scene do not appear in "Niggertown."

[3] A word was crossed out here and rewritten as "binder," probably in Wolfe's hand.

[4] The comprehensiveness of the scene, gathering in one small space for a short duration all the important aspects of the city, prefigures Chapter 14 of Look Homeward, Angel, which describes the awakening of Altamont (LHA, pp. 137-158).

SCENE 2[1]

(The offices of the Altamont Development Company at eight-thirty o'clock on a morning late in summer. The office is bright, clean, and well-furnished, with appointments, for the most part, of yellow maple. Doors leading to the outer corridor and to other offices in the suite pierce the left and right walls, respectively. There is a long table in the center of the room which is littered with popular magazines, tourist guide books, and folders and real-estate pamphlets. There is a desk with a roll-top, against the wall to the right, as one enters from the corridor, and a stenographer's table with a typewriter in a similar position above the opposite door. There is a stand, which supports a jar of distilled water, below the door leading to the inner room.

Along the walls, suspended on rows of wires, are photographs of various properties--houses, bungalows, and farms. It is possible, also, to see blue-prints, under glass the wheel insignia of the Rotary Club, and a long, narrow picture of that body assembled in annual convention, at Atlantic City.

Conspicuous for the prominence of their position are two pennants, one of which bears the legend: "Boost For Greater Altamont," the other: "100,000 by 1930."

In the back wall there are three large, sunny windows, which overlook the market-place to the left, and a broad sloping square of pavement, used by draymen, peddlers and country people as a parking place for their wagons.

The opposite side of this square is bordered by a few cheap houses, and one-story buildings of brick. Behind this, the land dips sharply down to a little valley, where it rises again along the slopes of a smooth, evenly-terraced hill. The hill is sown thickly with small, rickety shacks. Crooked streets of red clay wind crazily about the place; it is scarred by narrow paths worn hard by careless feet. At the summit there is a little knoll surmounted by a fine, old house in the colonial style, somewhat worn and weather-beaten, it is true, but surprisingly imposing in its surroundings. This section is the Negro settlement, merging finally into the fringes of the pine woods which flank the high, blue hills beyond.

During the course of the scene, the mist of the morning which now mercifully hides this place, lifts and disperses, and the whole settlement finally lies out under a bright sun.[2]

The office has been opened by MISS NEELY, the stenographer, a girl of twenty-three years. She is tall, blonde, slender, emphatically Southern in her speech and manner. She is just completing a conversation over the telephone.)[3]

MISS NEELY: Then you will be here at 10:15? Yes. Mr. Sorrell will be expecting you. Yes. Good-bye.

(She hangs up the receiver. DAN REED, the office man, has just entered. He is a fat, stupid-looking Negro, with a round, heavy, but very good-humored face.)

DAN: Mawnin', Miss Helen.

MISS NEELY: Good morning, Dan. Mr. Sorrell left word that you should come to his house as soon as you get here.

DAN (going): Yes'm.

MISS NEELY: And, oh, Dan. Will you get the mail from the box when you come back? Here's the key.

(She gives it to him.)

DAN: Yes'm.

(He goes out. MISS NEELY hastily looks over a memorandum, as her employee's clerk picks up a sheaf of open letters, and comes down to her table, where she prepares to set to work.

There enters now an emaciated looking man of advanced middle age. He is of medium height and has thin, sharp features, and sparse, greying hair. His skin is white, but there are red spots on his cheeks. He is troubled by a little, dry cough, which bothers him frequently, and after a spell of coughing, he wipes his mouth and the end of his tongue carefully, and gazes intently into his handkerchief.)

THE MAN: Good morning.

MISS NEELY: Oh, good morning, Mr. Jordan? That's the name, isn't it?

JORDAN: Yes. That's right. Is Mr. Sorrell in?

MISS NEELY: No, but I expect him any minute now. I know he wants to see you. Won't you wait?

JORDAN: Thank you. If it won't be long, I'll wait.

(He sits down and has an attack of coughing which keeps him busy with his handkerchief.)

MISS NEELY (casually, preoccupied with the memorandum): And how is your asthma this morning?

JORDAN: Bronchitis![4]

MISS NEELY: Of course! I knew it was one or the other.

(She calmly proceeds with her work, putting a sheet of paper on her machine.)

JORDAN: I had a very bad night of it.

MISS NEELY: Really? I'm very sorry to hear it.

JORDAN: It was that miserable rain, you know. It always affects me in this way. Think of it! Three solid days of rain! Do you have weather like that often?

MISS NEELY (hastily): Oh, goodness, no! It's very seldom we have anything like it. It's high and dry here, you know. (Rather proudly.) We are 2,300 feet above the sea level.

JORDAN: Yes, I know. Several people have told me. (A pause, while she bends over to puzzle out some shorthand notes.) You know, your people seem to have an extraordinary amount of information about the town.

MISS NEELY; Oh, everyone here is a booster for Greater Altamont. You'll get the fever, too, if you stay long.

JORDAN: And what does Greater Altamont mean?

MISS NEELY: 100,000 by 1930. That's the goal we've set outselves.

JORDAN: And after that, what? 200,000 by 1940, I suppose.

MISS NEELY: Why, yes. That's just it. You see, you are catching on already.

JORDAN (dryly): Yes. I think I get the idea.

MISS NEELY: Oh, it's easy to learn. And you've no idea how perfectly thrilling it is! It's like a big game in which everybody takes part. Everyone's working and boosting to make the town bigger and better.

JORDAN: The bigger, the better?

MISS NEELY: Why, of course. That's one of our slogans: Altamont--Bigger, Better, Brighter!

JORDAN: The town apparently is growing rapidly.

MISS NEELY: You've no idea how rapidly it has grown since the people woke up. It used to be such a sleepy, unprogressive sort of place. But everything's on the move now, I can tell you. Mr. Sorrell says we have a great future.

JORDAN: I am sure you will have only the biggest and best of everything--even of futures.[5]

MISS NEELY: "It can be done!" That's the motto of this office. Mr. Sorrell says if you believe a thing hard enough, it will come true.

JORDAN: Why, come! The man's a philosopher.

MISS NEELY: He gave a talk at a Rotary Club Luncheon, and afterwards they adopted it as a slogan. "If you believe it, it's so." Mr. Sorrell really is a very progressive man.

JORDAN: With this inspired leadership I don't see how you can fail to reach your goal.

MISS NEELY: But you are going to be one of us, aren't you?

JORDAN (with a smile): What must I do to become one "of you"?

MISS NEELY: Oh, that's easy. Just buy that pretty little house Mr. Sorrell showed you yesterday in Rutledge Park.

JORDAN: I would like to join your club but your initiation fees are a bit steep, you know.

MISS NEELY (as if repeating a memorized formula): Oh, but you can't lose on an investment in Altamont real estate. It keeps going up. And Rutledge Park is the most desirable section in the city. Mr. Sorrell said you could make a good turnover in six months if you wanted to.

JORDAN: Unfortunately, I am not interested in making a good turnover. What I am after is a home to live in. (With a certain waspish good humor.) I realize this puts me under suspicion here, but I assure you my species is not entirely extinct yet.

MISS NEELY: Oh, no. There are lots of people, nice people, too, right here in Altamont, who buy homes to live in.

JORDAN: You arouse my interest. I had not expected to find any so close at hand. I must look them up.

MISS NEELY: Of course, nearly everyone you meet does seem to be investing in something or other. Law used to be the great profession for the young men. Now they become real estate men, that is, realtors.

JORDAN: I see. Every man his own agent.

MISS NEELY: What is your business, Mr. Jordan? Or have you retired?

JORDAN: I am a broken-down writer looking for a roost. There you have me.

MISS NEELY: How perfectly thrilling! Do you write for the magazines?

JORDAN: Once upon a time, forty or fifty years ago, I did.

MISS NEELY: And have you written any books?[6]

JORDAN: A great many, my dear. I am sure you must have read some of them.

MISS NEELY: What are the titles?

JORDAN: I, my dear young lady, am the author of numerous plays, novels, and biographies, including The Americanization of Calvin Coolidge, The Education of Henry Mencken, The Temptation of Saint Gaudens, and The Theatre of Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow.

MISS NEELY: Mercy! It must be perfectly gorgeous to be a writer. I know you're awfully good at it.

JORDAN: I thought so, too, once, twenty years ago. Now, I'm an antique--like Shakespeare.[7]

MISS NEELY: Twenty years! Think of that. You must have made a fortune. I hear they pay five cents a word sometimes.

JORDAN: Few men in my profession buy homes in Rutledge Park, even after twenty years. You know the prices out there are really outrageous.

MISS NEELY: But it's a very exclusive place, you see. Mr. Sorrell says that the price brings the right kind of people. It keeps out the Jews, he says.

JORDAN: I gather that it would. But please don't let me keep you from your work any longer.

MISS NEELY: I really don't know what can be keeping Mr. Sorrell. I can call his home, if you like?

(She reaches toward the telephone.)

JORDAN: Please don't trouble. He's doubtless on his way here now. Besides, I'm in no great hurry.

MISS NEELY: Then, just make yourself at home. This week's Life is on the table.

(She proceeds with her typing. JORDAN looks over the litter of magazines on the table, tosses them aside, and, in a moment, strolls over to the windows where he stands looking out.)

JORDAN (under his breath, but audibly): What a pity!

(There enters now a short, florid little man, who fairly bounces along with his energy and good spirits. He belongs to the great order of professional "boosters"; a "live wire," as possessing the desirable qualities of "snap" and "ginger." The man is JOSEPH BAILEY, the Secretary of the Altamont Board of Trade. Show him a sunset, and he will translate it into terms of climate; a range of mountains, and his mind leaps directly to statistics concerning hotels and tourists. So long have a "ready smile" and a "hearty handclasp" for everyone been part of his stock-in-trade that he really imagines he was born with a genius for good fellowship and kindliness. Active, vigorous, bustling, shallow, wholly engrossed in his little world of a tourist paradise, his constitutional insincerity is the most sincere and honest thing about him; once you learn to accept him on his own inflexible level, you can observe him with all the awful fascination occasioned by a piece of mechanism which seems, at times, supernaturally to transcend itself. He bears carefully under one arm an enormous silver cup, only the bottom of which is visible; the top is wrapt securely in brown paper. Though the morning is young, he wipes his forehead with a handkerchief as he enters! He is one of these persons who perspire freely.)[8]

BAILEY (cheerfully): Oh, good morning, Helen.

MISS NEELY: Oh, good morning, Mr. Bailey!

BAILEY (delivering himself rapidly): You are always the first on hand, I see! Good! Good! The sluggards who stay in bed miss half of life, I tell you! The glory of the Dawn is lost upon them. Oh, it is a joy to be abroad on a morning like this, filling your lungs with God's clean air, purified by an altitude of 2,300 feet. As I walked along this morning listening to the chirping of the little birds in the trees,

I said to myself: "How good it is to be alive! How glad, how fortunate I am, to be living here in Nature's Wonderland, drinking its crystal water, breathing its bracing air, enjoying its healthful and--(With a glance toward the stranger.) health-restoring air. How little do we realize the treasures which are ours. Helen, where can I put this cup?

MISS NEELY: Oh, it's Mr. Sorrell's cup, isn't it? Please take the wrapper off and let me see it.[9]

(She attempts to take it off.)

BAILEY: Ah, ah, ah, mustn't touch. Better get Mr. Sorrell to show it to you.

MISS NEELY: Put it here, then, on Mr. Sorrell's desk. This is Mr. Jordan, a prospective buyer. Mr. Jordan, this is Mr. Bailey, the Secretary of our Board of Trade.

JORDAN: I am glad to know you.

BAILEY: Welcome to our city! You will find the heart of Altamont as deep as a well, as wide as a barn door.[10] That is the slogan which the Kiwanis Club has adopted. I am glad to know you, sir.

(They shake hands.)

BAILEY: As I came in, I chanced to hear you say "What a pity!" Tell us what is a pity and we will change it for you.

JORDAN: I'm afraid you can't. That is your Negro settlement, isn't it?

(He points out the window.)

BAILEY: Oh, <u>that</u>. My dear sir, I quite agree with you. It is an eyesore. "A Blot on the Scutcheon" as the Civitans call it.

JORDAN: I was thinking it was a pity that it should be here in the very heart of things, so to speak. You all seem to take such a pride in your city.

BAILEY: And justly so, I think. There is no cleaner or more beautiful town of its size anywhere.

JORDAN: The thing I don't understand is how you could have allowed it to happen. I think you have let the Negroes have the best building site in your city.

BAILEY: You have hit the nail on the head! That is exactly what has happened! We awoke to our error too late.

JORDAN: I should say the town is pretty well built up. Any other development will have to take place at a considerable distance from the center of things.

BAILEY: Our progressive business men have decided that it is never too late to mend. I think I am violating no confidence when I tell you that steps are even now under way to do away with the Negro settlement.

JORDAN: Do away with it?

BAILEY: That is, move it to a less conspicuous spot. Out of sight, out of mind, you know. In that way all this section will become available for a first class residential district, finer even that Rutledge Park.

JORDAN: That strikes me as a rather tremendous undertaking.

BAILEY: The best interests of the community demand it. We no longer allow anything to stand in the way of progress in Altamont. As Mr. Sorrell[11] himself said, the remedy in a case of this sort is surgery.

JORDAN: Your Mr. Sorrell[12] seems to have an iron in almost every fire. Is he concerned in this new development?

BAILEY: Yes, indeed! He's the heaviest share-holder. (To the typist.) By the way, Helen, have they talked business with that nigger yet?

MISS NEELY: I got him on the phone this morning. He's coming in at ten o'clock.

BAILEY: That's splendid! Now things ought to move along. (To Jordan.) We have a nigger doctor here who's quite a fellow in many ways. He has his own car, you know, and holds his head up above the other darkies.

MISS NEELY: I think it's perfectly disgusting! You should see the air his wife and daughter put on. They have a chauffeur, and go flying around just like White folks.

BAILEY (chuckling): Do they? Well! You know I've always said the nigger is the original missing link. He's like a monkey in many respects. He apes all the tricks of the white man. But Johnson's a good darkey and knows his place. Everyone here has a good word for him. I understand he's doing good work down there, too. You know, they live together like pigs. You have to hold your nose when you go through the place.

JORDAN: Yes, I've heard conditions were pretty bad.

MISS NEELY: Oh, they're savages!

BAILEY: This darkey, by the way, is living in the old Rutledge home, the big house there at the top of the hill.

(He points out the window.)

JORDAN: Yes, I have noticed it. A fine old house. It seems out of place in these surroundings.

BAILEY: The surroundings grew up around it. Mr. Rutledge inherited the place from his father's estate but the war ate up everything the family had. So Mr. Rutledge had to give the place up when he was a young man. Ever since he's wanted it back. It went against the grain, you see.

JORDAN: Yes, I can understand that it would. (There is a pause.) Then, there's something almost personal about the business, isn't there?

BAILEY (hesitating): Well, yes. But you can hardly blame the old boy for wanting the place back. His father was a shareholder and a big man here in his day. The house has quite a history.

JORDAN (thoughtfully, gazing out the window): I wonder what he's going to do with it now: Do you think he'll go back there to live?

BAILEY: Oh, no! He has a big, fine house of his own, a regular show-place.

MISS NEELY: I shouldn't think he'd want to, now, anyway.

BAILEY: This is the last deal that stands in the way of the Development now. The company owns the whole works; what they didn't own they bought.

JORDAN: Then they are ready to go right ahead?

BAILEY: Oh, yes. They'll lose no time now. The whole scheme is coming out in tomorrow's papers. In fact, Mr. Rutledge hinted at it last night at the banquet. (Importantly.) Of course, only a few of us who were on the inside, so to speak, knew what he was driving at.

JORDAN: Yes. I read some account of the affair in the paper; a banquet in his honor, I believe?

BAILEY: Yes, sir. The Associated Civic Clubs, you know. They were all there: the Rotary, The Kiwanis, the Civitans, the Baptist Ladies Social Union, the Y. M. C. A., the Junior and Senior Baracca,

and Philathea, the Federated Woman's Clubs, the Fortnightly Discussion Society, the Friday Quill Club, and the Drama League. There were over five hundred people present. I never saw such enthusiasm! The scene beggared description![13]

JORDAN: Yes, so the paper said. Now that I think of it, you took a leading part in the program yourself, didn't you?

BAILEY (modestly): Oh, not exactly. Just a filler-in, you know.

MISS NEELY: That's only his modesty. He was toastmaster.

BAILEY (coyly): Oh, I wish you hadn't mentioned that. It was nothing. (With a modest laugh.) Why, ha, ha,--I don't know yet why they singled me out.

MISS NEELY: And he presented the cup, too. That was the biggest event of the whole evening.

JORDAN: Oh, really? This cup?

(He indicates the package.)

BAILEY: Yes, sir. This is our Citizenship Cup. We originally intended to award it yearly to the citizen who has been of the greatest service to the community for the past year.

JORDAN: And Mr. Sorrell[14] got it this year?

BAILEY: No, sir. Not this year, but for all time. He has permanent possession of it now. We saw nothing else to do; when a man has done as much for the town as he has, there should be no strings tied to his honors. As I said in my little speech.

JORDAN: That was very well said.

BAILEY: He has been the moving spirit--I used that phrase last night.

JORDAN: It's a good one. Spirit, surely, should not be without locomotion.

BAILEY: Yes, I think so, too. (Oratorically and with appropriate gestures.) He has been the moving spirit in every constructive program of progress and growth which has changed this fair city of ours from a one-horse hamlet to the glittering gem of the Appalachians, the Mecca of the tourist, North and South. (Lowering his voice.) How was that?

JORDAN: Splendid, it should have brought the house down.

MISS NEELY (earnestly): Oh, it did, Mr. Jordan. I thought they'd never get done clapping.

BAILEY: You've really no idea how much that one man has done for this place. Rutledge Park alone has brought hundreds of people here to settle--first-class people, too, nothing shoddy about them. They all have their own cars.

MISS NEELY: I can remember when the Park was nothing but old bare fields and meadows; it hasn't been long.

BAILEY: Why it hasn't been ten years. That's nothing! I can remember when the ground this building stands on was used as a cow pasture. And then one man comes along and shows us what we can do with a little enterprise--and look at us! We're growing faster today than any town in the state.

JORDAN: I think I understand your enthusiasm. Your friend Sorrell has not only made money, he has shown other people how to make it.

BAILEY: That's it exactly. He had Vision.

JORDAN: I beg your pardon?

BAILEY: I say he had vision, the thing big businessmen, and poets, and all those people have, you know.

JORDAN: Oh.

BAILEY: Yes. And faith, that's what it was--faith.

JORDAN: The thing preachers and all those people have?

BAILEY: Yes. And imagination! He had that, too.

JORDAN: Really, I don't see why someone hasn't written him up for The American Magazine.[15] There's material here for another outpouring of the Industrial Muse, the Romance of Big Business, and that sort of thing, you know?

BAILEY (excitedly): Helen, why haven't we thought of that? It's a wonderful idea; think of the publicity. Who could we get to do it for us?

MISS NEELY: Why not ask Mr. Jordan? He's a writer.

BAILEY: You? Why this is wonderful--an act of Providence. You're the very man!

JORDAN (feebly): No, no, you'd better ask someone else. I don't do this sort of thing.

(At this moment SORRELL comes in. He is a rather countrified-looking man in the thirties, sleek, shiny, self-satisfied and bearing himself with smug good humor and affability. BAILEY rushes toward him quivering and incoherent with excitement.)

BAILEY: Sorrell, Sorrell. The American Magazine, faith, vision, imagination, publicity, think of it!

SORRELL (impatiently): Oh, tell me some other time, Joe, I'm very busy this morning. I'm already late for an engagement with this gentleman. Good morning, sir. (Shakes hands with JORDAN.) I'm very sorry to have kept you waiting.

JORDAN: The time has passed very pleasantly with Mr. Bailey.

SORRELL: Joe's a good fellow, but he goes in the way sometimes.

BAILEY: He calls me Joe and I call him Henry. That's the way it is between us. We're both members of the Rotary Club, you know, and everyone calls each other by his first name.

JORDAN: That's very friendly of you.

BAILEY: Isn't it?

SORRELL: Helen, were there any calls?

MISS NEELY: No, sir. I got that man Johnson on the phone. He said he'd be here at ten-fifteen.

SORRELL: Good. (He looks at his watch.) That gives me over an hour. (To Jordan.) If you'll excuse me for a few minutes while I make a telephone call--

JORDAN: Certainly. I've been hearing the history of Altamont, I find it very interesting.

SORRELL: Oh, you'll find Joe full of facts and figures. He'll tell you anything you want to know. He's our little walking encyclopedia. (To Miss Neely.) I'm calling Mr. Rutledge. I'll use the other phone.

(He goes into the inner office and closes the door behind him.)

BAILEY: Now--where are you staying, Mr. Jordan?

JORDAN: For the present, at the Inn.

BAILEY: The Inn, I must get that down. (He takes out a notebook and makes a jotting.) Beautiful place, the Inn. It cost over three quarters of a million dollars and that was ten years ago, when materials were low. I want to come around sometime and have a good long chat with you.

JORDAN: I shall be delighted, of course.

BAILEY: I want to take you out and show you all the points of interest. I have a car, you know.

JORDAN: Oh, really?

BAILEY (comfortably): Yes, I have a car, I couldn't get along without it now. Now, about the article for The American Magazine, how soon could you have that ready for us?

JORDAN: I think you'd better find someone else, who has all the facts.

BAILEY: Oh, I can furnish all the facts.

JORDAN: Yes, but, you see, this sort of thing is not in my line. (He hesitates.) Besides, I'm here to rest. My health is not good.

BAILEY (staring at him intently): Oh!

JORDAN (hastily): Chronic bronchitis, you know.

BAILEY: Oh!

JORDAN: Nothing pulmonary, you understand? The doctor assures me of that.

BAILEY (still staring): Yes, of course. Oh, yes. Certainly not. (Briskly.) Well, sir, you have come to the right place. We have lots of people who come here with chronic bronchitis. There's nothing like our climate for it.

JORDAN: Yes, high and dry, the doctor says. What is the exact altitude?

(This proves fatal. BAILEY inflates his chest, throws one foot briskly forward, and delivers himself as follows:)

BAILEY: Altamont, a city of some 30,000 souls, is situated on the crest of a plateau 2,300 feet above the level of the ocean. Toward the setting sun stretches away the illimitable vistas of the western peaks, and the towering summits of the Pisgah range, lapt continually in fleecy clouds; to the South the blue glory of the Black Mountain presents

itself to the dazzled eyes of the spectator, to the West the sheer wall of the Blue Ridge charms and enthralls. Wooded peaks of unparallelled majesty and beauty. Crystal streams, as yet unpolluted by human touch, broken only by the sportive antics of the mountain trout, virgin forests, where the foot of man has never trod--all conspire to give to this favored region the title of "Nature's Wonderland."[16] The climate--

JORDAN (desperately): Yes, yes, I know about the climate. It is very healthful, I am told.

BAILEY (proceeding with firmness and determination): The climate is high, dry and salubrious. The rigors of a northern winter are tempered with the exotic warmths of the tropics; there are few days so cold that the wearing of overcoats is necessary, few nights so warm but that blankets may be used with perfect comfort. A little to the south is the great isothermic belt, famous for its ruddy grapes, and its equable temperatures. The mean average temperature is 61 degrees, the mean average rainfall is-- (He hesitates.) I've forgotten for the moment, but I can find it in Sorrell's desk.

(He begins frantically to displace the papers on Sorrell's desk.)

JORDAN (softly and entreatingly under his breath): My God! My God! My God!

MISS NEELY (springing up): Mr. Bailey, what are you doing?

BAILEY: The mean average rainfall; quick, where is it: You know--the little book.

MISS NEELY: Oh, let it go, please! I'll get the blame now for disturbing these papers!

(She begins to arrange them in their proper order again.)

BAILEY: It has escaped my mind for the present, but it will return--it will return.

JORDAN (weakly): Never mind. You can tell me later.

MISS NEELY: Yes, talk to him about something else. Tell him about the town instead of the scenery. It makes less trouble.

BAILEY (pondering in vexation): Rainfall. Rainfall. I had it on the tip end of my tongue. Never mind. It will come back.

JORDAN: You have a theatre, I suppose, among your other treasures.

BAILEY: A theatre! My dear sir, we have <u>four</u> theatres!

JORDAN (surprised): That is really remarkable in a town of this size.

BAILEY (with enthusiasm): I tell you we have everything the larger cities have. You'll never want for a place to go here. You can see a new show every day, if you want to. Helen, how often do they change the pictures?

MISS NEELY: Three times a week at the Bijou, Olympic, and Orpheum; every day at the Princess.

BAILEY (triumphantly): You can see two shows a day if you want to. Think of that! And I can remember this town when there was no place to go to, nothing to do! People stayed at home at night and read.

JORDAN: A bad state of affairs.

BAILEY: I can remember this town when it was no more than a country village. Saturday was a big day because the farmers drove in and livened things up a bit. Look at us today!

JORDAN: Your growth is remarkable, surely. (He pauses.) Yet, Mr. Bailey, the thing that interests me most, I think is that old run-down house up there on the hill. To me it stands, somehow or other, for--well, for feudalism--something we call the old South.[17]

BAILEY (staring in stupefaction): The old South! But, my dear sir, you surely didn't want to find any of that kind of thing here? (Turning with a despairing gesture to Miss Neely.) You see, Helen? You see how it is? Do you remember what I told you the other day? That's the opinion they have of us. They insist on thinking we're fifty years behind the times.

JORDAN: Would that matter so much?

BAILEY: Matter: When we are stepping forward in this state faster than anywhere in the country. Do you know what this state is doing for good roads? Do you?

JORDAN: No, but--

BAILEY: Do you know that we're rapidly taking the cotton textile industry away from New England?

JORDAN: No, but I--

BAILEY (bearing down on him relentlessly): Do you know that the largest factory in the world for the manufacture of men's underwear is located within the boundaries of this state? Had you heard that, eh?

JORDAN (submissively): You have all the things we have. You will eventually be even greater than New Jersey.

BAILEY (getting into the swing of it): Facts talk! Figures don't lie! We have eight schools, one of which cost over half a million dollars, six banks, nine big hotels, over two hundred inns and boarding houses, and twenty-three churches, one of which cost half a million. Our land values are the highest in the state. Owned motor cars and over sixty-three miles of paved street within the city limits. What does all this show?

JORDAN: I have no idea.

BAILEY: Progress, Progress, Progress![18]

(SORRELL returns from the inner room.)

SORRELL (rather impatiently): Oh, haven't you gone yet, Joe? Go along now. I'll see you later.

BAILEY: I thought I'd go along with you and Mr. Jordan and show him a few of the points of interest.

SORRELL (with resignation): Oh, all right, if you don't talk us to death.

BAILEY (low voice): Writer you know--

SORRELL: If you don't talk us to death.

(MR. RUTLEDGE, a man near sixty, with remote and lonely face, comes in.)[19]

MISS NEELY: Good morning, Mr. Rutledge.

RUTLEDGE: Good morning, my dear. Sorrell, did you get the darkey?

SORRELL: At 10:30, sir. It's all arranged.

(JORDAN coughs redly into his hankerchief.)

JORDAN: The artist-type, you see. Runs to color.

RUTLEDGE: You embroider prettily, my friend.

SORRELL: Mr. Jordan; Mr. Rutledge, one of our very distinguished citizens. Mr. Rutledge, this is Mr. Reeves Jordan--

BAILEY: A very notorious writer, Mr. Rutledge.

RUTLEDGE: Good morning, Bailey. How are the pamphlets? (To Jordan.) How do you do.

JORDAN (looking keenly, pleased): How d'ye do.

(They shake hands.)

MISS NEELY (answering phone): Yes, he's here. (To Sorrell.) Mrs. Porter, Mr. Sorrell.

SORRELL: Yes--right away. My office phone, I think. Gentlemen, if you will excuse me a moment-- (To Rutledge.) At 10:30, sir.

RUTLEDGE: Yes.

SORRELL (going): Come along, Joe. (He goes into his office.)

BAILEY (to Jordan): I'll see you later, then. (He follows.)

RUTLEDGE (searching with his eyes; quietly): You have come for health. But do you think that health is in us, Jordan?[20]

JORDAN (coughing slightly into his handerchief): Is it not part of our religion as a people? Do you know that the canals of Venice stink? People have died from it. Dr. Gaunt MacGill, of Marietta, Ohio is sure of it.

RUTLEDGE: So you have put your faith in plumbing?

JORDAN: With all my heart. And damn the dullness! For it is necessary that life be long. It is not necessary that it be beautiful or interesting. I believe in bathtubs with the innocent faith of a child.

RUTLEDGE: My Fellow-Countryman! You have returned, then, from perverted kingdoms to the clean, the good Americans?

JORDAN (quickly): How did you know that, Rutledge?

RUTLEDGE (gay-grim): From death to life; from beautiful rotting tapestries to slick linoleum.

JORDAN: Yes, it is so. Two years.

RUTLEDGE: In Paris, of course.

JORDAN: In Paris, of course, with all the other Americans.

RUTLEDGE: With Beauty.

JORDAN: With Beauty and Art and Love in the city of the everlasting trite, in the company of the conventional unorthodox. Rutledge, how did you know?

RUTLEDGE: I, too, my friend have lived in banal Arcady.

JORDAN: When?

RUTLEDGE: In my hot[21] youth, when Grover Cleveland reigned. We read Mallarmé and Oscar Wilde.

JORDAN: We read Joyce and Eliot and Cocteau. My God, my God.

RUTLEDGE: Are we damned so? Eternal Platitude!

JORDAN: Perhaps Rutledge, you have heard of the stark grim brooding realism--

RUTLEDGE: Of Eugene O'Neill? Often, thank you. Or of the enormous cleverness of--

JORDAN: Aldous Huxley? Yes, thank you. Or of the lyric wonder in the poetry of--

RUTLEDGE: Edna St. Vincent Millay? Many times. She simply claps her little hands together, doesn't she? Or of the Elizabethan simplicity masking behind the semi-colons of--

JORDAN: E. E. Cummings? Or of the groping, incoherent, but starkly vital, something-or-other something--

RUTLEDGE: In the short stories of Sherwood Anderson?

JORDAN: I don't believe it! How do you know this, Rutledge?

RUTLEDGE: My dear man, is not my wife secretary of our Little Theatre here? Is she not a part of--

JORDAN: The Renaissance of the American Art Theatre!

RUTLEDGE: Exactly. Do I not know about--

JORDAN: The Jazz Age?--

RUTLEDGE: The Art of the Negro Spiritual?--

JORDAN: The pantomimic artistry in the comedy of Charles Chaplin?[22]

RUTLEDGE: Harpo Marx?

JORDAN: Bozo Snyder?

RUTLEDGE: And can you, Jordan, smile bitterly when the Rotary Club is mentioned?

JORDAN: Recognize a Babbit when you see one?

RUTLEDGE: Understand that Longfellow was not a great poet?

JORDAN: Be fierce or gay about--

RUTLEDGE: Puritanism?

JORDAN: The Ku Klux Klan?

RUTLEDGE: Go-getters?

JORDAN: The American Magazine?

RUTLEDGE: Are you a satirist--that is, are you gifted at smashing in open doors? Are you savage and gay over the utterances of--

JORDAN: Country newspapers?

RUTLEDGE: Protestant ministers?

JORDAN: Southern politicians?

RUTLEDGE: My dear Jordan, let me congratulate you on your profound insight into the operation of the National Life. We are kindred spirits.

JORDAN: Yes, Rutledge, we are both, it seems, Fearless Thinkers.

(They shake hands warmly.)

RUTLEDGE: And yet again, my friend, can you say Beauty?

JORDAN: Oh, badly, badly, Rutledge--not through the nose.

RUTLEDGE: And yet you are, I know, an artist.

JORDAN: Once, long ago, I thought I was. When I was twenty, Rutledge, I met a man who did not think I was a genius.

RUTLEDGE: Yes? And so--

JORDAN: I wept in secret pain. When I was thirty-two, another man, a critic, wrote that I was not an artist.

RUTLEDGE: And then?

JORDAN: I was enraged. But now I know that I am neither. For in our broad land, my friend, is not a genius the boy who plays first fiddle at the movie; is not an artist anyone who physically is not quite strong, and writes verse; and speaks often of the Philistines. And have we not 8,000 geniuses, and 14,200 artists?

RUTLEDGE: As many and as bad as that?

JORDAN: Poets who have never written as badly as Keats; novelists who can afford to smile at Dickens--he was, you know the word, sentimental. Playwrights who better Shaw--he never knew the rules for writing plays. Or Barrie--he's too sticky. Or Galsworthy, who wrote some fair plays long ago. My native land, home of the vital and the real, which has so many poets who are greater than the greatest, so few as good as the second-rate, where nothing is so imitative as the effort to be itself, nothing so unnatural as naturalness, nothing so artificial as simplicity, where everything is present except the authority in three acts of stale French farce; four lines of verse of the late amusing Alfred Lord Tennyson, and where Satan sits astride the arts, forever whispering: "Not quite, not quite--but there was Something Big in that one, Something Big."

RUTLEDGE (suddenly): Jordan, I have you now. The author of Harlem Wheat.

JORDAN: The same, the same. Jordan of the Harlem Wheat, three years ago, whose boom followed that of the Greek Decadent, Petronius, and preceded those of Moby Dick, Willa Cather, and Ring W. Lardner. Jordan, too, of Candleshine, the volume of verse, and author of the modern comedy of manners, The Young Intention, in which all the gents wore dinner jackets.

RUTLEDGE: I remember that one.

JORDAN: Ah, Rutledge, that was a clever play. In it, an older man said to a young one: "My dear, when a woman is eighteen and says "Yes," she means "No"; when she is twenty-eight and says "No," she means "To be sure"; but when she is forty-two and says "On the contrary," she means "By all means!"

RUTLEDGE: Subtle--subtle, Jordan.

JORDAN: So the critics agreed. One said, "Mr. Jordan comes to the theatre this time with . . ." Another spoke of the theatre of Jordan and Shaw. One spoke of Aristophanes, and one, Snobscott Pullwool, wrote, "Subtle, searching, and hushed with a kind of rueful winsomeness all its own." Rutledge, men went mad trying to decipher the meaning of that review. Finally, one said, "In the debonair, but slightly acidulous,

little comedy that came to the Elwood Theatre last night. Mr. Reeves Jordan definitely crosses his own river."

RUTLEDGE: Yes--and later, Jordan?

JORDAN: My boom prospered. I wrote an expressionist play in fourteen scenes about American Life against a background of factory chimneys, with a jazz band playing off stage.

RUTLEDGE: The real right stuff, Jordan. Business men in it?

JORDAN: A chorus of them, wearing masks, and moving to the orchestration of stock tickers. There was also an Artist, a young man with a faun's face, who ultimately, I am sorry to say, got Crushed By It All. Sinclair Lewis spoke of its stark terror, Stark Young of its Sinclairity, and the directors of the Theatre Guild kept it four mounths, rejecting it finally with assurances of its Great Promise. It was finally produced in Greenwich Village.

RUTLEDGE: And is that all?

JORDAN: I am outmoded, Rutledge, and I have a round red cough.

RUTLEDGE: A small cough, Jordan.

JORDAN: Enough to embroider all my handkerchiefs. My boom is over long ago--with Moby Dick, Petronius, A. A. Milne, Pirandello, and the German Expressionists--and, I think, I am dying.

RUTLEDGE (with a round half gesture): Come Jordan, dying! In all this health!

JORDAN: I had forgotten! I am at home! Health, Life, Vitality, Optimism! As all the world knows, Rutledge, we are a young country and a great country!

RUTLEDGE: Yes, Jordan. We have been a great country for the last century, and a young country for the last three.

JORDAN (coughing slightly into his handkerchief): Well, then, I shall get well and live, I suppose. And if I do, I shall write a biography of the late William Jennings Bryan. It will be reviewed in the American Mercury, and perhaps recommended to a place beside those on Barnum and Ingersoll. And I shall boom, boom, boom again! And you?

RUTLEDGE (quietly): I have no cough--not even a small one. Nothing, you see, to die for.

JORDAN: Not even a country?

RUTLEDGE: Not even a country.

JORDAN: Not even a mob?

RUTLEDGE: Not even a mob--for there are only two, Jordan. The greater and the lesser.

JORDAN: Yes, I've stopped reading the Mercury, too. And yet you mock well, Rutledge.

RUTLEDGE: Not well enough, my friend. To mock well needs belief.

JORDAN (suddenly grave): Yes, Rutledge. That, at least, is true. We are both, it seems, damned together.

RUTLEDGE: Not even that, I fear. We have not even a hell left that we can go to.

(SORRELL enters with BAILEY)

JORDAN: Good morning, Mr. Rutledge.

RUTLEDGE (courteously, with a slight bow): Good morning, Mr. Jordan.

(He goes out.)

SORRELL (to Jordan): I've just been talking to Mrs. Porter, the woman who owns the house we looked at yesterday.

JORDAN: Yes?

SORRELL: She has decided not to sell, I am sorry. You never know when these women will change their minds. (JORDAN coughs into his handkerchief.) Now, I have something in mind for you that I think will be just the thing you want.[23]

JORDAN: (staring into his handkerchief) Perhaps, a rented house will be the thing I want.

SORRELL: But I thought you said-- (He looks at him hard.) We will talk of that, too. This place I am showing you is in a good neighborhood, a little old-fashioned perhaps, but with nice, friendly people as neighbors. Very convenient and close in.

BAILEY: Oh, you will find that people here can't do enough for you. If you take sick, there will be someone at your bedside day and night.

JORDAN: I'm sure that is very considerate of them. (To Sorrell.) Shall we go there now? I'm a little tired.

SORRELL: Yes, certainly, I'll be right along. Joe, take Mr. Jordan down and put him in my car.

JORDAN: Then--good-bye, Miss Neely.

MISS NEELY: Good-bye. But you'll come in again, won't you?

JORDAN: It will always be a pleasure, Miss Neely.

MISS NEELY: You must.

(He shakes hands with her and goes out with BAILEY. SORRELL stays behind a moment.)

SORRELL (confidentially, lowering his voice): Helen, I have been talking with Mrs. Porter. It's too bad! She won't sell Jordan the house. The people in that neighborhood simply won't stand for it! (Glancing swiftly down the hall and then speaking sharply behind his hand.) Lunger!

MISS NEELY (with a gasp of horror): Oh!

BAILEY'S VOICE (down the hall): Hurry up, Henry.

SORRELL (In a cheerful voice): All right, gentlemen, I'm coming.

(He goes out down the hall.)

BAILEY'S VOICE: I was telling him he won't know himself in a month. This air works wonders--

(The clang of the elevator door shuts off his conversation.)

MISS NEELY (as before): Lunger! Oh!

(She wipes hard with her handkerchief the hand which the stranger had just grasped.)

CURTAIN

Notes to Scene 2:

[1] The expressionist mode of Scene 1 now disappears as Wolfe introduces almost all of the main characters and opens the thematic and plot lines.

[2] The original wording for this paragraph of the stage direction is: "During the course of the scene, the mist of the morning is lifted and disperses and the whole settlement, now mercifully hid, lies out under a bright sun." The change was made for clarity.

[3] Except for the last paragraph, this lengthy stage direction does not appear in the script for "Niggertown." As it is described here, the detailed view through the office windows would be difficult to render in an actual set. In this scene opening, as well as others, Wolfe exercises the prerogative of the novelist rather than the dramatist.

[4] Jordan is trying to hide the fact that he has tuberculosis. The disease was a veritable presence in the life of Thomas Wolfe, growing up in Asheville, North Carolina, the model for Altamont. Its clear mountain air made it attractive as a health resort for tuberculars.

[5] The "Niggertown" version of this line has "I think there's no doubt of it." The new version is definitely more sarcastic. Other small revisions to speeches by Jordan in this scene show a change in Wolfe's perception of him. Jordan of "Welcome to Our City" displays

greater bitterness and cynicism, and he frequently mocks the attitudes and enterprises of the Altamont boosters. (See Introduction for a full discussion of Jordan's character, pp. 46-47.)

[6] Instead of this discussion about Jordan's books, "Niggertown" includes the following dialogue:

> MISS NEELY: Did you ever try your hand at scenarios?
>
> JORDAN: No! Oh, no! (He mutters something under his breath that sounds like "God forbid.")
>
> MISS NEELY: I hear there's an awful lot of money in it. I'm writing one now. I'd like to show it to you when I get through and get your opinion.
>
> JORDAN: (feebly) Thank you. I'll be glad to see it, of course.

[7] Jordan's irony makes no impression on Miss Neely. His reference to Shakespeare resembles a comment Wolfe made in a letter to Margaret Roberts in 1922: "He [Sir J. M. Barrie] is not trying to 'prove' anything (thank heaven) but, like Shakespeare and other old fogies, is more interested in the story of human beings than in the labor problem" (Letters, p. 25).

[8] A Joseph Bailey appears also in Look Homeward, Angel. During Eugene's afternoon walk through town with his friend George Graves, Mr. Joseph Bailey, secretary of the Altamont Chamber of Commerce, whisks by "with a loud and cheerful word for every one . . . and a hearty gesture of the hand" (LHA, pp. 278-279).

[9] In "Niggertown" the cup belongs to Will Rutledge, an Altamont attorney who figures prominently in the play. (See Sc. 2, n. 9, below.)

[10] The words "as deep" were omitted from the typescript and were added in pen, probably by Wolfe.

[11] "Niggertown": Rutledge. According to the synopsis (see Introduction, p. 7) Wolfe first conceived of Rutledge as a ruthless materialist masquerading as a Southern gentleman. He, not Sorrell, had initiated the building projects, including Rutledge Park, and he has planned the uptown renewal which requires the Negroes' displacement. In "Niggertown" his motives are not clearly distinct from those of the town boosters. As he appears in "Welcome to Our City," however, Rutledge pursues the business venture only to achieve an idealistic purpose.

[12] "Niggertown": Rutledge.

[13] Wolfe seems to have had a particular distaste for civic clubs. He wrote to his mother in April, 1924:

> Pained at the implication in your letter that I was ashamed of North Carolina--only what is N. C. willing to do for me? I don't think there is a place there now for anyone who cares for anything besides Rotary and Lions and Booster Clubs, real-estate speculation, "heap much" money, social fawning, good roads, new mills,--what, in a word, they choose to call "Progress, Progress, Progress." The only Progress is spiritual; the only lasting thing is Beauty--created by an artist. And N. C. has forgotten such as I" (Letters to His Mother, p. 63).

[14] "Niggertown": Rutledge.

[15] A popular periodical of the 1920's, which Wolfe mentioned disparagingly several times in his letters. To Mrs. Roberts in 1922 he decried "the disgusting spectacle of thousands of industrious and accomplished liars . . . salting their editorials and sermons and advertisements with the religious and philosophic platitudes of Dr. Frank Crane, Edgar A. Guest, and The American Magazine" (Letters, p. 33); also mentioned in Letters, p. 215, p. 635.

[16] William Jennings Bryan in Chapter 24 of Look Homeward, Angel responds to a question of a newspaper reporter: "If I could have chosen the place of my birth, I could not have found a fairer spot than this wonderland of nature" (LHA, p. 282).

[17] This speech through Jordan's "You have all the things we have. You will eventually be even greater than New Jersey," does not appear until the final version.

[18] Wolfe is clearly ridiculing the extreme attitudes of both Jordan and Bailey. (See Introduction, p. 29.)

[19] In "Niggertown" Rutledge does not appear until Scene 3.

[20] The following dialogue does not appear in "Niggertown." (For a description of how it relates to Wolfe's ideas of aestheticism, see Introduction, p. 47.)

[21] The word "hot" was omitted in the typescript and was added in pen, probably by Wolfe.

[22] On the typescript a name, probably "Chrysler," has been partially marked out, and the letters aplin, completing "Chaplin," have been inserted, probably in Wolfe's hand.

[23] I have used the versions of this speech and the next one found in "Niggertown," since they seem more logical. The substitution made in "Welcome to Our City" appears to have involved an oversight, then an incorrect division of Sorrell's speech (probably the typist's error).

SCENE 3

(The office again. It is now ten o'clock.)

An old man, gaunt, stooped, palsey-shaken, and leaning on a gnarled cane, enters the office. He is on the seamy side of seventy, yet one perceives in him a certain tenacious vitality which may enable him to hang on to life for a good many years longer. He is a creaking gate which hangs by one hinge, but which hangs, nevertheless. His voice is high, quavering, irrascible; a certain impediment in the speech thickens and renders indistinct his conversation. He has long bedraggled white mustaches, heavily streaked with tobacco juice.

SORRELL enters the office from the corridor.)

SORRELL (rather irritably): Good morning, Father.

OLD SORRELL: Good mornin', Henry.

SORRELL (seating himself at his desk): Well? What can I do for you?

OLD SORRELL: I jest thought I'd come in out o' the sun fer a spell. It's hotter'n blazes out in the square.

SORRELL (showing his irritation): I'm very busy this morning, Father.

OLD SORRELL (flying into a rage at once): Oh, I kin go! I got too much pride to stay where I'm not wanted. I was good enough to go all through the Civil War and git a bullet hole in the roof o' my mouth big enough to stick yore fist through-- (Here he opens his toothless mouth and sticks his finger into the gap.)--but I ain't good enough now to be treated decent when I come to my own son's office. (Shaking his finger.) Let me tell you somethin'--

SORRELL (wearily): Yes, I know. I know, father--but the Civil War was over fifty years ago. We're living in different times today.

OLD SORRELL: You--what have you ever done, sir? Sit aroun' in an office all yore life an' you think you can talk back to a man who went all thru the Civil War. Have you got any bullet holes in you? Have you?

SORRELL (trying to pacify him): No, but--

OLD SORRELL: Then don't argue with me! You ain't been nowhere an' you ain't seen nothing! Lookee thar! (Again he stretches his mouth open to the cracking point, and sticks his finger in.) Hole's big enough to stick your fist through. All the doctors who ever seen it say it's a miracle I lived to tell the story!

(AMOS TODD, an old Negro man with a very kindly face, enters the office.)

AMOS: Mo'nin', boss.

SORRELL: All right, Amos. Just sit down. I'll see you in a minute.

OLD SORRELL: No! You've got no place fer yore ole father, but the fust dirty nigger that comes in you ask to have a seat as nice as you please.[2]

AMOS (backing away nervously): Dat's all right boss. I jest came case I got dealin's wid him.

OLD SORRELL (advancing toward him, brandishing his cane): Don't you give me none o' your sass, you dirty nigger.

SORRELL (stepping between): You leave him alone Father. He's said nothing to you.

OLD SORRELL (storming and fuming about the place): By God! I ain't goin' to take nothin' off a damn nigger. I fought all thru the Civil War, an' I got this to show for it. (He again opens his mouth and inserts his finger, speaking in almost inarticulate fashion.) Lookee thar! Big enough to stick your hull fist through.

AMOS (sliding towards the door): I'll come in again, boss.

SORRELL: Stay where you are, Amos. (He takes a bill from his pocket and slips it into his father's hand.) Come back when I'm not so rushed, Father.

OLD SORRELL (pocketing the money and grumbling): All I got to say is, this ain't no way to treat a Civil War vet'ran what's got a hole in his mouth big enough to stick yore-- (SORRELL pushes him gently out of the office, still talking angrily, as he disappears, he again turns, sticks his finger in his mouth, and mumbles:) Lookee thar.[3]

AMOS (chuckling): De ole ginlemen gits powful upsot, donn' he?

SORRELL: He's in his dotage, Amos.

AMOS: Sho! Yo don' tell me.

(SORRELL goes to his desk and busies himself with some letters there. Presently MR. RUTLEDGE enters.)[4]

RUTLEDGE: Good morning, Amos. You're looking well.

AMOS: Jes' tolable, Marse. Dis heah mis'ry in mah back's been plaguin' me again. I reckon I ain't got much mo' time on dis airth.

RUTLEDGE: Go on, Amos. They'll have to shoot you on Judgment Day.

(The old man chuckles in a slow, heaving fashion, and is very much pleased.)[5]

AMOS: Marse!

SORRELL: What are you waiting for, Amos? (Remembering.) Oh--the check! Here you are!

(SORRELL produces a check from his pocket and gives it to the Negro.)

AMOS (taking it gingerly between his fingers): What's dis heah?

SORRELL: Go easy with that, Amos; it's worth two thousand dollars.

(The old man hastily thrusts it back at Sorrell with shaking fingers.)

AMOS: Heah! I don' want dis boss, I mowt lose hit.

SORRELL: No one can get the money on it but you, Amos. That's a certified cashier's check payable to you.

AMOS: Cain't I have de money instid?

RUTLEDGE: They'll give you the money at the bank. You don't want to go walking around with two thousand dollars in your pocket, do you?

AMOS: I'se skeard to thrust myse'l wid hit.

(At this moment DAN REED returns with the mail, which he hands to Sorrell.)

SORRELL: I tell you what I'll do, Amos. I'll get Dan here to take you to the bank. He'll get it cashed for you.

(He gives the check to Dan Reed.)

AMOS (grabbing for it): Heah, niggah, you gib dat to me.

SORRELL: Why, you trust Dan, don't you?

AMOS: I don't trust no niggah, boss, let alone dese young 'uns.[6]

(DAN REED makes shuffling movements with his feet as if about to depart with the treasure.)

SORRELL: Look out Amos! There he goes!

AMOS (handling his cane and stamping forward): Come bach heah niggah dis minnit. I'll cane you ovah de haid if you don'!

RUTLEDGE: Give it to him Dan, and don't bother him any more. (DAN does so.) Now take him down to the Bankers' Trust and make a deposit for him. Amos, what are you going to do with all this money?

AMOS: I don' know, marse. Seems to be a pow'ful lot fo' an' ole niggah lak me, but vittles comes high.

SORRELL: Well, you're a good trader, Amos. We paid you the top price for that shack of yours.

AMOS: Mebbe so, boss, but I lived dere goin' on fo'ty years now. Dat place seem lak home to me.

RUTLEDGE: Amos, I think you know that I shall always be your friend.

AMOS: Why, marse, I 'member de day you was bawn. Mistah Johnny comes out ter de gahden--

SORRELL: Who's Mister Johnny?

RUTLEDGE: That was my father.

SORRELL: Go on Amos! You're not that old.

AMOS: I'se gittin' powful ole, boss.

SORRELL: How old?

AMOS: I dunno. Way ovah a hund'ed, I spec.

(SORRELL smiles, but RUTLEDGE silences him with a gesture.)

RUTLEDGE: You're as good as the best Amos, no matter what your age is. I wish there were more of your kind. (Regretfully.) There aren't many darkies left like you, Amos.

AMOS: Dey took a stick to us, marse, an' made us behave. Dat's what dese young niggahs need.[7]

RUTLEDGE: Amos, I hope you'll take part of this money and fix up your shoe shop. Put in new equipment, and get a couple of young men to help you. It will pay you in the long run.

AMOS: Mebbe, marse, mebbe, I dunno. (He mutters vaguely to himself.) Mister Johnny--

SORRELL: Take him out, Dan.

DAN: Yes, sah.

(They go out. There is a silence a moment. MR. RUTLEDGE seems lost in reverie.)

SORRELL: A good old man.

RUTLEDGE (starting): What? Yes--I was thinking, Sorrell, on the everlasting queerness of things. I was thinking that we might be taking money from the hand of Amos, instead of him from us.

SORRELL: But that's impossible.

RUTLEDGE: Ah, Sorrell, a great many things are possible. I never thought I'd see the day we bought property from one of my father's slaves. Think of that! Yes, Sorrell, things change and return again, as on a wheel. And men grow old. The claims of the past are inexorable, inexorable! They cannot be forgotten or denied.

SORRELL: Yes, Sir. Now about this matter of Johnson's house--

RUTLEDGE (stung by the word and speaking for the first time with considerable passion): My house, Sorrell! My house--mine! Do you hear?

(Displaying considerable agitation, he turns abruptly and walks to the window.)

SORRELL: I'm sorry I used that word, Mr. Rutledge.

RUTLEDGE: It's all right, Sorrell. I am not myself these days.

SORRELL (with great smoothness): What I meant to say was the house which is spiritually yours, but which, by dint of circumstances over which we had no control, has temporarily passed into other hands.

RUTLEDGE (throwing back his head and laughing gaily): My dear boy, why aren't you holding office? (He becomes serious again and a trifle grim in his manner as he looks out of the window.) Try as I may, Sorrell, try as I may--by God, it goes against the grain!

SORRELL (soothingly): I know sir, I know. I quite appreciate your feelings.

RUTLEDGE: No, you don't Sorrell. No one can appreciate my feelings. No one can understand the bitterness and despair in the heart of that boy who stood by helpless, while the house of his people was debauched before his eyes!

SORRELL (alarmed): Mr. Rutledge, you really shouldn't let yourself go like this!

RUTLEDGE: But no one can say I have any bitterness towards these people. If they say that, they lie.

SORRELL: Oh, no, indeed, Mr. Rutledge, everyone knows what a generous friend you have been to them. The best people of both races know it. Your gifts to the Industrial School, to Calvary Church, to--

RUTLEDGE (waving his hand): All right, all right, I've talked too much. This day has meant too much to me.

SORRELL: I think we all understand the importance of the occasion. The whole success of the--[8] (He checks himself.)

RUTLEDGE: The whole success of what, Sorrell?

SORRELL: Why--why--no personal interest, you know--matter of sentiment with us all. Want to see you get your house--Old Homestead, you know--history, tradition, ancestors.

RUTLEDGE: Yes, Sorrell, for we are buying back a kingdom today, my friend. We are buying back a treasure of memories and romance, so delicate, so rare, so far removed from this obscene push, that I almost hold my breath whenever I think of it. It's not dead! It's not dead! It sleeps--the one thing I yet dream of.

SORRELL (tactlessly): Will you go back there to live now?

RUTLEDGE (with a deep, wounded cry): My God, man, why did you say that? (A profound pause.) Oh, Sorrell, you must bear with me. I'm not myself today.

(LEE RUTLEDGE enters. He is a young man of twenty-five years, ruddy, blonde, with straw-colored hair, and humor and intelligence enough for anyone.)

RUTLEDGE: Good morning, Lee.

LEE: Good morning, Father.

RUTLEDGE: Where is your mother?

LEE: I drove her downtown. She's shopping at the Bon Marche. Are you coming home for lunch--she wants to know.

(SORRELL goes into the inner room.)[9]

RUTLEDGE: No. I'll stay in town today.

LEE (going): I'll tell her, then. So-long.

RUTLEDGE (calling): Lee.

LEE: She's waiting, Father.

RUTLEDGE: So am I, Lee. I have been for a long time. And women wait better.

LEE (turning directly): What do you mean? Waiting for what?

RUTLEDGE: For the time when you and I may look at each other and not be afraid to speak.

LEE: Do you think we're afraid to speak, Father? Don't let that worry you. Isn't everything in this town arranged for you--even mutual understandings? Let us attend the annual Y. M. C. A. Father and Son Banquet next week. You can slap me on the back and call me "old man"; and I promise to grin at you.

RUTLEDGE (smiling): You have a good head and no heart, Lee.

LEE: Turn it around; I have heart enough for anyone, but--

RUTLEDGE: A good head, too.

LEE: Too good for the place, perhaps. But not good enough for you.

RUTLEDGE: Do I seem that wise to you?

LEE: No. You don't seem wise at all to me. We've missed something somewhere--we've no bundles to hold to. When I finished college, I went to law school: I was coming into the office with you. It seemed the only thing at the time. But even when I thought of practicing the law, I had to grin: I had lived with you and heard you talk, and you know too much, Father. Once you told me that if I practiced here, it was not so important to know the law as to know the jury.

RUTLEDGE: And do you think that is wrong?

LEE: No, it is true. But isn't it too bad for us that things are true? Isn't it a pity that there's not something useless and wrong that we could believe in?

RUTLEDGE: Perhaps I could grow a goatee, and be a colonel. My father was.

LEE: You could, but you'd grin in your whiskers. Did you get your house?

RUTLEDGE: I think I shall today. It had white columns once. Old style. It's a beginning. Shall we try it?

LEE (looking around): Here!

(He turns to go.)

RUTLEDGE: I am getting old. I am a little lonely. Two men can live together in this world if they've a single bond--whether it be loyalty or dishonor.

LEE: I don't think you need me, Father. You know all I know and more.

RUTLEDGE: The first god was a man: the first thing he created was a son; but the kings of the earth have lost their language--we face each other, shamed and stricken like dumb mutes--and Fatherhood, the one true parent of the spirit, has no speech.

LEE (going): Do you believe in fairies? We were both at Harvard.

(SORRELL returns. During the conversation with Sorrell, LEE shows indifference, almost dislike toward the other's smug speech and manner.)

SORRELL: Oh, Lee, you must get in more often. We're always glad to see you.

LEE: Thanks.

(He starts to go out.)

SORRELL (confidentially, drawing him to one side): Lee, just a word with you. I couldn't help noticing you don't attend church as regularly as you once did. (With fat good-humor.) Now, I know how it is, my boy. I've been young too. It's very pleasant I know, and a great temptation to go out to the Country Club on Sunday morning to play tennis with a pretty girl. (Solemnly.) But I want to tell you this, Lee, you're coming back here soon to take up your father's profession and to mix in with the business men here. Lee, you'll have to attend church regularly if you want to prosper. You can't meet the right kind

of people otherwise. Church membership is a business asset these days, and you can't afford to overlook it. I want to tell you, from my own experience, you can do little or nothing until you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Saviour.

LEE (rather curtly): Thank you. But I can't afford too many clubs just now. Father, I'll tell Mother you're not coming. Goodbye.[10]

RUTLEDGE: Good-bye, son. (LEE goes out.) Now to the details of this business. Has a deed of sale been made out?

SORRELL: Helen is filling in the forms now. (He nods toward the inner office.)

RUTLEDGE (in grim set tones): If he should balk?

SORRELL: He can't! He can't. Do you think he could stand up against the public opinion in this matter?

RUTLEDGE: They say he's a smart man.

SORRELL: For a Negro, yes.

RUTLEDGE: He's a mulatto. There's a difference.

SORRELL: Yes. (Lowering his voice and speaking in a loud whisper, after looking around cautiously.) You know, they say his mother--

RUTLEDGE: Oh, don't whisper, man! Where is your secret? His mother was as black as the ace of spades and everybody's woman. Is that a world's wonder?

SORRELL: She was murdered, wasn't she?

RUTLEDGE: Yes, in a drunken row, I believe. But the man deserves all the more credit, coming as far as he has. He must have had a hard row to hoe. I wonder how he did it!

SORRELL: Some fraternal organization sent him to their orphanage and schooled him, and then North to study medicine.

(There enters, now, a tall, rather gaunt appearing man, at least fifty years old, but very erect and vigorous looking. He has the prominent high-boned features of a Scotchman, rather obstinate, but yet finely molded lines in his face, a tight mouth and aquiline nose, which gives him a scholarly appearance. He has deep hollows in his cheeks, and bright, thirsty-looking eyes.)

SORRELL: Hello! It's Mr. McIntyre.[11]

RUTLEDGE (in a cordial manner): Good morning, McIntyre.

McINTYRE (coldly): Good morning, Henry, here are the keys to my house. I hope you have occasion to use them soon.

(RUTLEDGE during this conversation half sits on the table swinging one leg under him, and turning the pages of a magazine.)

SORRELL: Is everything in order?

McINTYRE (with a wintry smile): Everything. The kettles are on the stove. A tenant can move in at any time, if you find one.

SORRELL: Good. Now don't you worry a particle. Pretty little place like that don't go begging long. We'll get you a very favorable price, Professor.

McINTYRE: I hope so, Henry. (Pause.) The truth is, that house is almost all I have, and I'm pressed for funds, so the sooner the better.

SORRELL: When do you leave for your new school?

McINTYRE: This afternoon at four-fifteen.

SORRELL: Well, Professor, I'm sorry to see you go.

McINTYRE: Yes, Henry, I think you are.

SORRELL: Of course we old students understand that you aren't the radical they said you are. But people don't understand these things. They get around and talk. You've got to be careful about people, Professor.

McINTYRE (quietly): Yes, Henry, you've got to be careful about people.

SORRELL: As far as I'm concerned, I'd like you to stay on here forever. You seemed to fit the job.

McINTYRE: I've been here many a year, Henry. My roots grew very deep.

SORRELL: I've always said, Professor, that you were the right man in the right place. Of course, I didn't take the Latin any longer than I had to, and I think you were wrong about the Greek.

McINTYRE: A classical scholar is born, not made--<u>Nascitur non fit, Henricus</u>.

SORRELL: Of course. Well, I suppose I'm doing about as well as those that took all that stuff.

McINTYRE: I'm sure you are.

SORRELL: I don't believe most of those fellows amount to much anyway. But I really think I got a great deal out of the manual training and the shorthand, and you had a good influence on all the boys. I'll say that for you, Professor.

McINTYRE: Thank you, Henry. That's very kind of you. And now I'll tell you good-bye. You have my address and know what to do in case of a trade.

SORRELL: Yes--well then I suppose the best of friends must part, mustn't they? Goodbye sir, and good luck to you.

(They shake hands and McINTYRE turns to go. SORRELL goes into the inner office.)

RUTLEDGE: Perhaps you'll let me drive you to the station?

McINTYRE (coldly): Thank you, no. I have arranged for that.

RUTLEDGE (bowing slightly): Then I can only give you my cordial wishes for your success at your new school.

McINTYRE (with quiet bitterness): And did I have the wishes at my last?

RUTLEDGE (courteously): You doubt it?

McINTYRE: Where were you, Rutledge, in my hour of travail? Where were you, whose word might stop the crowd, in the war for freedom and for truth?

RUTLEDGE: Saying a word in praise of Pontius Pilate.

McINTYRE (with growing excitement): Aiding by your silence the order of things established, blocking the path of progress, fostering ignorance in its vicious beliefs.

RUTLEDGE (coldly): Let the barbarians keep their customs. If you would live among them, you must compromise with them.

McINTYRE: You can say that! Perhaps you mean, if I had said that evolution was a fact which applied to the lower animals, but not to man--

RUTLEDGE (coldly): That would no doubt suffice. But I believe your conduct was quite different. You matched your stubbornness against their own; given a chance gracefully to retreat, or modify your former statements, you inflamed their anger.

McINTYRE: I told the truth!

RUTLEDGE: Is that important, then?

McINTYRE: There can be no compromise upon the ground of truth.

RUTLEDGE: That is the talk of a schoolmaster--and of a schoolboy. You told the truth--you told what has never been known, and what can never be told.

McINTYRE: Should I expect agreement from you, Rutledge--you, a defender of the established order?

RUTLEDGE: Might we not better call it the established disorder? No, schoolmaster, I am growing old; I am too weary for defense, and the only order I would strive for now has gone--perhaps, has never been.

McINTYRE: No matter, Rutledge. Against the mob we must make constant battle.

RUTLEDGE: Against the mob I'll wage no war. The mob is faithful only to Superstition, now and forever. I'll preach no sermons to it.

McINTYRE: Nor aid a man whose cause is lost.

RUTLEDGE: Not to a man whose cause is lost, but to a man whose cause is dull. For you, poor man, are but a smasher-in of opened doors; you are the Comic Christ who bleeds when martyrdom is dead; the bearer of the torch of truth after daylight has come; the contender for a lost cause a half century after it has been won. You, poor man, are the essential negation of the mob you pretend to despise, but for whom you live; like the young pelican you have pecked your mother's breast--but you are no less her child.

McINTYRE: And you?

RUTLEDGE: Have for you and your kind no dreams, no songs, no prophecies--not even bad ones. Perhaps I am a far and lonely man, an exile in strange lands.

McINTYRE: Too wise, then, for my prejudice; too wise for anything except your mockery. How has your life prevailed, then, Rutledge? Is it in better sort than mine? Your strength, your strength--and nothing in this world for which you care to use it.

RUTLEDGE: And have you found a place for yours?

McINTYRE: Yes, Rutledge, for revolt; for excellent and wise revolt.

RUTLEDGE (rising): Go out and join the Young Men, then; there's always a place with them for Dullness.

McINTYRE: Revolt is Dullness, then?

RUTLEDGE: Yes, Schoolmaster, the last gesture of the orthodox.

McINTYRE: You know nothing what it means, Rutledge.

RUTLEDGE (speaking with a bit of passion in his voice): Revolt! Revolt! You tell me I do not know what it means! By God, sir, I had drunk rebellion to the lees when you were still in swaddling clothes; I have seen cities wrecked, beauty pillaged and looted, and the house of ancient people given to their slaves. Revolt! What do you know of that, Schoolmaster? It is a literary fashion! I see the bottom of your well--it is not deep.

McINTYRE: Have you forgotten youth, then, Rutledge?

RUTLEDGE: I have forgotten, and I remember--for I am growing old, and now I call the lost years golden. It seems I was riding on a wind up to a star, an eagle freed in luminous bright worlds, and all my talk was liberty and love. It seems! It seems--but this I know--that I am growing old, for I belonged with all that idiot rabble that we call youth, which can do nothing alone, which calls for liberty and makes the mob, which feeds, eats, drinks, lives, dies together; and I have told the old man's lie and called it golden, for I am old, Schoolmaster, and a great horn is blowing in my heart.

McINTYRE: Rutledge, there is no ground on which we two can meet. Since it must please you, go fill the darkness with your laughter.

RUTLEDGE: And you, Schoolmaster, go to the luxury of your martyrdom. You have failed here: so, too, must you fail and be beaten wherever you go.

McINTYRE: Yet, Rutledge, men have a way of failing and being beaten, and presently it appears these things for which they strove have come to pass.[12]

(He goes out.)

RUTLEDGE: Go, happy Son of Jesus! If there are thorns, you'll find them.

(SORRELL returns.)

RUTLEDGE (indicating the door): There goes a priceless fool!

SORRELL (ever a mediator): A good fellow in many ways, but a bit extreme in his views. (He runs to the door.) Oh professor, you mustn't forget your old friends. You must come back and see us some time.

McINTYRE (his voice faint and broken down the corridor): I'll never come back and see you--never.

SORRELL (returning and shrugging his shoulders): Well, it's too bad he feels that way. He always was stubborn.

RUTLEGE: And now he can eat his heart out--but his honor is saved.

(At this moment the Negro Johnson enters. He is about forty years old, of good height, and strong physique, though somewhat paunchy. He wears good dark clothes that fit well, and a derby hat. His features are broad, heavy, but intelligent; his chin is adorned by a silky goatee. He bears himself with considerable dignity which at times verges slightly on pomposity. His language is fairly good, though idiomatic, but the tone of his voice is much the same as that of any other Negro. A mad Negro laughter lurks forever behind his voice.)

SORRELL: Good morning, Johnson. We've been expecting you. (Smoothly.) Dr. Johnson, you know Mr. Rutledge, of course?

JOHNSON: But not to talk to. Everyone knows Mistah Rutledge, I reckon.

RUTLEDGE: We've never met, I believe. How d'ye do, Dr. Johnson?

(He extends his hand; the Negro takes it.)

SORRELL (jovial ponderously): Two's a party, eh. When you talk business. Two leading citizens of both races. Too many cooks.

RUTLEDGE: Yes, if you please, Sorrell.

SORRELL: Well then, good luck. No personal interest. We stand for service to the community. Always glad to be--

(He goes into the inner office.)

RUTLEDGE (indicating chairs): We may talk for some time; let us sit down.

(A slight pause.)

JOHNSON (grinning widely): I nevah sits with a White man, Mistah Rutledge.

RUTLEDGE: Can any of us afford to be so proud, Johnson?

JOHNSON: A man's got to step high an' look proud, Mistah Rutledge, if his colah's wrong.

RUTLEDGE: Black is a very good color, I believe; it can't be seen in the dark.

JOHNSON (grinning yellowly): Black! Sho! Who said black, Mistah Rutledge? (He holds his powerful yellow hands, palms inward, up before him.) Who said black!

RUTLEDGE (peering with urbane humor): Ah--yellow! I see. Your father, perhaps, was a Chinaman.

JOHNSON (with strong high-throated laughter laden with open mirth and hidden menace): He sho' must've been a Chinaman, Mistah Rutledge. (Slapping his knee.) An' he sho' played a mean trick on my mothah--she was a big black woman. (With savage innocence.) Ole Carrie Johnson, you know. Mebbe yo' 'members her?

RUTLEDGE (unperturbed): Maybe.

JOHNSON: A big black woman.

RUTLEDGE: I seem to remember a big black woman. I seem to remember a number of big black women, but none who stepped high and looked proud.

JOHNSON: Black ain't no colah fo' a high-steppah!

RUTLEDGE: Only the yellow men can step high--and live high, then?

JOHNSON: I sho' am up deah, ain't I? (Innocently.) Highest part o' town, I reckon. On a good dark night I can look down an' see de lights in all de niggah shanties. Sho! Mistah Rutledge, I can look down f'um wheah I am, an' see all de lights ovah in de White-Town. (With malignant innocence.) Why, I reckon if I had a good strawng paiah of glasses I could look right into yo' dinin' room, Mistah Rutledge. (He laughs high in his throat again.)

RUTLEDGE (expressionless, a trifle grey-faced): A pleasant idea! Thirty thousand dollars, Johnson, for the view!

JOHNSON: The view's wo'th mo' than that, Mistah Rutledge. Yes, sah! I don' know who built that house, but he sho' done a nice job of it. He say he wan't goin' to live down wid de common fokes; he say he goin' to live way up deah wheah no one can touch him.

RUTLEDGE (tonelessly): Thirty thousand: it is four times what you paid. I did not think you'd gouge me. Name your price.

JOHNSON (with evil gravity): An', of co'se, deah's de house gettin' ole, mebbe, but it sho' was put togethah with good timbah. (As if suddenly remembering.) An' sho! I almos' fo'got! Deah's de fu'nituah. When we moved in to dat ole house we found a lot o' fu'nituah sto'd in de basement an de attic. Yes, suh; some ole chaiahs an' tables, an' two big beds dat my wife an' gals been usin' evah since.

RUTLEDGE (rising slowly): I want you to go now.

JOHNSON (the dogs of madness gnawing at his laughter): Yes, sah! When you's yellow, you sho enjoy de view. An' I clumb de hill alone to git deah: a black man don't help a yellow, an', no suh. Sho' seems lak a pile o' money, but I reckon I'll enjoy my view a while. (Laughing enormously and madly.) Gaw-w-d Almightee!

RUTLEDGE (grasping a heavy steel ruler in his hand, his voice almost silenced by passion): Get out! Get out--or I shall kill you![13]

(SORRELL rushes in.)

SORRELL (panting): You dirty nigger! You dirty nigger!

JOHNSON (rocking with mad laughter): He-he-he-he-he! Come ovah to see us sometime, Mistah Rutledge. We'll be glad to show you roun' de place.

(He holds suddenly as before his two big yellow hands up before his face and plunges blackly through the door. His great laughter fills the room.)[14]

SORRELL (breathing unsteadily): I was afraid of this! But he can't hold out against us, Mr. Rutledge. He can't! We'll put the screws on now.

RUTLEDGE (in loathing and despair): My father owned slaves, Sorrell, think of that!

(They hear the Negro's mad laughter down the corridor. Silence. Faintly the piping futile tune is whistled.)

CURTAIN

Notes to Scene 3:

[1] Wolfe used this same image to describe the aging Gant in Look Homeward, Angel (p. 484).

[2] The speech accentuates the Old South-New South polarity. As a modern pragmatist Henry Sorrell treats the Negroes with conciliation and tact. By viewing the world from the perspective of past values, Old Sorrell cannot understand or conform to the new ways. The conflict between Henry Sorrell and his father also points up the theme of domestic tension, which through the family of Will Rutledge becomes an important concern of the play. (See Introduction, pp. 38-43.)

[3] For a discussion of Wolfe's attitude toward Old Sorrell and the appearance of another Civil War veteran in Wolfe's works, see Introduction, pp. 31-32.

[4] In "Niggertown" Rutledge makes his first entrance during this scene rather than Scene 2. He is described in the following manner:

> Presently Mr. Rutledge, a fine courtly looking man, just above sixty years, comes in. Occasionally in speech and manners he betrays by some rhetoric gesture long years of practice as a court-room lawyer. Ordinarily a man of composure and restrained suavity, a certain nervousness leads one to deduce the impending presence of an important event. He greets Amos with a casual affection which the old man returns in a way that sufficiently indicates his respect and veneration.

[5] Deleted from the final play are several lines between Rutledge, Sorrell, and Amos which reveal Rutledge as a shrewd and unscrupulous lawyer and emphasize his racial prejudice:

SORRELL: Good morning, sir. I tried to get you on the phone but they told me you were at court.

RUTLEDGE: Yes, I had a case. That Porter whiskey case was tried this morning. He's a lucky man. I got him off on good behavior. Sick wife you know, and six children. The doctor testified he had a touch of lung trouble, too. With a tender-hearted jury it was irresistible. (He laughs.) I don't suppose there was a dry eye in the house when I got through--except my own.

SORRELL: What was the other case?

RUTLEDGE: Oh, a case of theft. A young nigger broke into a pressing club and stole a suit of clothes. Six years at State Prison.

SORRELL: That's pretty tough!

RUTLEDGE: No, pretty good, I think. Burglary's a capital crime in this state. He came off light. He'll be only twenty-four when he comes out, and it will take him away from that crowd he's running with. Amos, what's wrong with these young bucks nowadays?

AMOS: (Shaking his head) Oh, Lawd, marse, dey's a mean good-fer-nothin' bunch. Dey needs someone to git after dem with a stick. Dat's what. (He wags his head and mutters ominously to himself.)

[6] Amos' attitude toward the younger generation indicates the conflict of groups within the race. (For a discussion of Wolfe's view of Amos as an "Uncle Tom" figure, see Introduction, pp. 32-33.)

[7] "Niggertown" includes here a reference to Amos' grandson, later identified as Sam Tipton (Sc. 8), who is about to be released from the "gang." As in Scene 9, Amos expresses confidence that the youth will not be free long.

[8] In "Niggertown" Sorrell completes his statement: "The whole success of the Development depends upon this trade." In the final version Wolfe has eliminated monetary profit as a motive for Rutledge

by distinguishing him from the real estate developers. Sorrell's next speech, a conciliatory measure, original in the last version, clearly signifies that Sorrell himself is using Rutledge's personal dream to promote his own interests; and, therefore, he must be careful not to sully the purity of Rutledge's self-image. (See Sc. 2, n. 9.)

[9] Sorrell's exit here, called for in "Niggertown," is not in the manuscript of "Welcome to Our City"; its omission was probably a typographical mistake since it is necessary for Sorrell's reappearance later (p. 112).

[10] The version of Rutledge's meeting with his son is considerably longer in "Niggertown." Contrasted with their caustic exchange here, the tone of the original is pallid. Scene 3 of the earlier play identifies Lee as a college student who is preparing to become a lawyer and establish a practice with his father. Rutledge advises him that he should "mix around and meet more people," since his success as an attorney will depend on "knowing the jury." The Lee of the last version is evidently an older man, who has now rejected both his father's profession and his philosophy. The heightened hostility between the father and son in the final version signifies Wolfe's increasing interest in the themes of loneliness and alienation. (For a discussion of these themes in the play, see Introduction, pp. 38-43.)

[11] Melvin Groth sees McIntyre as "none other than the familiar Horace Williams," Wolfe's philosophy professor at Chapel Hill:

> How grumpily like old iconoclastic Horace Williams, sitting there in the outskirts of Chapel Hill, surrounded by his chickens, living in a house with no plumbing and no window screens. Wolfe even uses the familiar Williams' rhetoric: "no compromise upon the ground of truth," "essential negation" (Groth, p. 166).

[12] The issue being discussed by Will Rutledge and Professor McIntyre is only ostensibly the theory of evolution; actually their conversation relates to a dialectic fundamental to all of Wolfe's writing: compromise versus rebellion. The essential point in the inclusion of this "McIntyre" section and its relationship to the foregoing confrontation between Rutledge and Lee are clearer in the "Niggertown" version than in the abbreviated form of the scene in "Welcome to Our City." A section from the earlier play, quoted here, indicates more clearly Wolfe's sympathy with McIntyre:

> RUTLEDGE: Man, man, I admire your courage, but why couldn't you give in a little? You're no longer a young man McIntyre.
>
> McINTYRE: I'm younger today than I have been in many a year.
>
> RUTLEDGE: I can hardly believe that, McIntyre. You like this town and your work here.
>
> McINTYRE: Yes, as the swine liked Circe.
>
> SORRELL: You know that's a bit radical, Professor. Of course, the people here are a bit conservative.
>
> McINTRYE: There is no conservative; there is no radical. There's only barbarism and civilization.
>
> RUTLEDGE: And we're barbarians, I suppose?
>
> McINTRYE: There's not a thing in this town that would not seem a barbarian to a Greek of the Age of Pericles.

RUTLEDGE: No doubt, but we're comfortable.

McINTYRE: Yes, you have your automobiles and your hotels, and your miles of paved streets, I know the whole story of your progress.

RUTLEDGE: Sneer at these things if you will, but I've seen this town grow up from a crossroads village and I've learned to value them. For they stand for something fine and real.

McINTYRE: Perhaps you have learned to put a value on these things, but I'll never give in to them. Never.

RUTLEDGE: Think a moment, man. You're well fixed here. Even now I could make them take you back.

McINTYRE: There is no honor in staying.

RUTLEDGE: No, but there's a living, and you've a family. Have you not had honor enough? You wiped the floor with the Baptist minister in the debate.

McINTYRE: And then the howling pack rushed in.

RUTLEDGE: What of that? You had been too extreme.

McINTYRE: The truth is always extreme.

RUTLEDGE: If you had only said that evolution was a fact which applied to plants and animals--not to man. I told them I was sure that was your meaning. And then you denied it, and cut your throat. Even then you had a chance but you ran wild. You condemned everything, accused society, and used the hammer right and left. Why did you do that?

McINTYRE: Because the whole thing is rotten.

RUTLEDGE: Can you do nothing but tear down and destroy? Have you anything better to offer?

McINTYRE: Yes.

RUTLEDGE: What is it?

McINTYRE: Revolt! Red Revolt! (Rutledge now shows anger for the first time.)

RUTLEDGE: If you think that, you are a fool, and a dangerous one.

McINTYRE: Should I look to you for agreement; you who are so comfortably fixed in the established order? You know nothing what it means.

RUTLEDGE: Revolt! Revolt! You tell me I know nothing about it! By God, sir, I had drunk the dregs of rebellion before you were out of the cradle. Revolt! What do you reading and writing folks know about these things? It is you who gets the bullet through the brain, it is you who takes the sword thrust through the bowels? Have you ever seen cities destroyed, good women made coarse, beauty changed to ugliness? Have you seen your country pilled [sic] and sacked and delivered into the hands of scoundrels and rogues, your legislatures corrupted and controlled by darkies, your wealth stolen or destroyed? If you haven't, don't talk to me of revolt. The world may be as bad as you have said, but the biggest rascals of the lot are those who cry "Revolt!"

McINTYRE: Much may be said upon both sides.

RUTLEDGE: I have gone to the bottom of your well, my friend. I see what ails you now. You were right! There can be no ground between us. You have failed here. So, too, will you fail and be beaten wherever you go.

McINTYRE: Yet, somehow Rutledge, men have a way of failing and being beaten and presently it appears that those things for which they were defeated have come to pass. (He goes out.)

Since in the "Welcome" version Wolfe has dignified Rutledge's character, his lengthy speeches in the final version of this meeting, through not always intelligible, seem to carry more weight in the debate than those of McIntyre. Yet in his final character, Rutledge is himself a kind of rebel in desiring to go back to the old way when everything points to the necessity for material progress. It appears,

then, that Wolfe had not completely made the shift from Rutledge, the materialist, to Rutledge, the idealist. Perhaps the problem relates to Wolfe's own dilemma in working through his personal feelings. His resolution seems to have come in some of his last writing when he decried the meaningless existence resulting from conformity and compromise with the Great Negation. (See Introduction, pp. 52-55.)

[13] Though Johnson is the one whose behavior has savage overtones, Rutledge is the first to resort to physical violence. This act puts both on the same plane and suggests one of the play's issues--the duality of man's nature.

[14] The "Niggertown" version of the meeting between Rutledge and Johnson shows more cordiality between the two during their first speeches. Quickly the atmosphere changes and Rutledge, rather than Johnson, becomes the insolent one. The Negro demands some sympathy, in fact, in his description of his childhood. Displaying the view that light-skinned Negroes are more intelligent and industrious because of their White genes, Rutledge unjustly refuses to give Johnson credit for his educational and social accomplishments. Rutledge finally appeals to Johnson on the basis of his "civic pride"--an ironic statement, since, as he asserts, Johnson lives in "a White man's town" and "must learn to obey the White man's law."

The "Niggertown" version contains no reference to Johnson's "mad laughter," evidently an addition Wolfe made to the final form in order to increase the ambiguity of the relationship between the two men.

SCENE 4[1]

A lounge and smoking room for men at the Altamont Country Club on a night two weeks later. The room is floored with red tile; the walls are hung with various sporting prints of English gentlemen out fox-hunting--what someone has called "the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable."

The walls are paneled with oak half-way up. There are comfortable wall seats around the sides of the room, several deep, heavily cushioned chairs, and in the center, a circular divan.

On this divan, half sitting, half lolling, in correct evening dress, and somewhat conscious of it, with broad red face shining, and hair plastered smoothly down, is MR. JOSEPH BAILEY, the Board of Trade Secretary. He is smoking a good fat-looking cigar, and smacks his lips greedily around it, playing with it, pushing it hither and yon from one corner of his mouth to another, and licking it. From a distance come at intervals the strains of brisk dance music.

Presently SORRELL comes in with two guests, PROFESSOR HUTCHINGS,[2] head of the department of social welfare at the State University, and the Politician, PRESTON CARR, the incumbent governor of the state. HUTCHINGS is a small, dapper looking man in his fifties, very brisk and polished in his manner of speech, and proud of the fact that he is, as he is often told, more like a businessman than a professor. PRESTON CARR[3] is a big, rather vulgar, saxon type, blond-haired. He is somewhat young to be almost governor; he is a little over forty. Yet this is not surprising, since he began his campaign over twenty years before while a student at the University and has pushed, pushed, pushed, ever since.[4] He is a hand-shaker, a back-slapper, a true exponent of shirt-sleeve democracy, for he knows every farmer in his native county by first name. To these redoubtable gifts he adds an absolute and unscrupulous will to get what he wants most; he will pander, bargain, compromise and cheat, and never lose the smile from his face, never lose the hearty geniality of his big voice, unless, in a moment of righteous indignation, he flays a political opponent in the Republican party, and hints delicately that he has a tincture of Negro blood in his veins, a pleasant device that never fails to win results. He is what is sometimes called a man of the people, and our first reflections is that it probably serves them right.

A firm confidence in the Star of his Destiny, an unshakable belief that history is written to prove the infallibility of the Democratic party, "A large easy swallow," in all matters of party doctrine, have combined to give him all the self-assurance we can reasonably expect from the union of such qualities as he possesses. SORRELL alone is in

evening clothes. PROFESSOR HUTCHINGS is dressed well and quietly in what his tailor called a "three-button sack for businessmen." PRESTON CARR wears the uniform of his profession: a cut-away, and a white vest with a heavy gold chain and an elk's tooth charm. All the men are smoking cigars.

SORRELL (as they enter): Oh, hello, Joe, I didn't know you were here.

BAILEY: Yes, my wife is a hostess at the dance, you know. (He gets up and advances toward Preston Carr.) Sir, we've never met, but I don't feel the need of an introduction to the next governor of the state. I'm glad to know you sir. I'm a Carr man and a Carr booster.

(Both men shake hands warmly.)

CARR: I knew that when I saw you, I can pick a Carr man out of a crowd.

(PRESTON CARR has an easy informality in his tone and manner that is very re-assuring to those who stand in awe of greatness. However, this doesn't include Bailey.)

BAILEY: The State is looking forward to a great era of prosperity and progress, under your administration, Governor.

CARR: Now, that's very good of you, but I'm not elected yet, you know.

BAILEY: A mere matter of form, sir. I often wonder why the Republicans keep sending their men to the polls.

SORRELL: This is Joseph Bailey, Governor.

CARR: What! Not <u>the</u> Joseph Bailey (Pumps his warmly.) My dear sir, this is a pleasure. I want to thank you for your splendid work in the primaries.

BAILLEY (waving his hand): Oh, not at all, Governor. We know the right man when we see him. We wanted a young man and a progressive man and we have him. When I read of that first campaign speech, with your wonderful slogan--just how does it go?

CARR: "Life and life more abundant for the people of this State."[5]

BAILEY: "Life and life more abundant for the people of this State." Wonderful! When I saw that, I knew we had the man we wanted--a man with <u>vision</u>.

CARR (bowing): I thank you. Do you know I believe that slogan elected me? People cheered it to the very echo.

BAILEY: And no wonder. That's what I call a real constructive program. "Life and life more abundant." It appeals to the imagination. It shows you are alive to the higher spiritual values. It proves--

(SORRELL who has been trying to gain his attention, now interrupts.)

SORRELL: Put on the brakes a minute, Joe, and meet Professor Hutchings of the University. (To the group.) Joe's a great talker!

BAILEY: What! Is this Professor Hutchings of the department of social service?

HUTCHINGS: It is, sir, and I know you, too. I scarcely feel we require an introduction.

(They shake hands.)

BAILEY: I have long wanted to know the man who edits the University News Dispatch. Your facts and figures about the wealth of the state have been an eye-opener to us all. In fact, Sir, I believe every constructive program for the last four years can be traced back to the Dispatch.

HUTCHINGS (modestly): Oh, we have done our small part, but the success of our program was made possible only by such progressive citizens as yourself and the Governor, who have put their shoulders to the wheel.

CARR (getting the center of the group): There is a new spirit alive in this State today. We have done great things; we will do greater. We are looking forward--not backward.

HUTCHINGS: Once the people realize their wealth, there is no stopping their progress. The State is a mighty empire, self-sufficient and self-supporting. We are yet, so to speak, pioneer territory. Our potential wealth has hardly been scratched.

CARR: The interesting thing to me, Professor, is how the whole new movement has started in the University.

HUTCHINGS: Yet, don't you think that is the logical starting place for such a movement?

CARR: Beyond a doubt. The growth of the University to meet the new demands of service and leadership is the most gratifying indication of all. What a change since I was a student here!

HUTCHINGS: Yes, there has been a great change, which has marked the passing away of fossilism and old-fogyism. The University is alive to its responsibilities; it looks upon itself as an incubator for the future leadership of the state.

CARR: That's it exactly. Take the change, for instance, in the kind of men who are now teaching at the University. Take yourself, Professor. I know of no better illustration. (The Professor bows slightly.) They are men who are alive to what is going on outside. They take an interest in politics and in the party. They give public addresses. They act as if they were not living for teaching alone. Why, when I was a student, the old fellow who taught me Greek acted as if nothing else in the world mattered.

HUTCHINGS (with a laugh): Oh, you mean old Billy Bateson. We've pensioned him off. A nice old fellow, you know, but utterly behind the times. We saw he was absolutely unable to grasp the larger significance of things, so we eased him off.[6]

SORRELL: It's just as well you did, I think. I know when I was in school, they tried to get me to take all that stuff, but I couldn't see it that way. I was telling a man a week or so back that I thought the whole thing was a mistake.

BAILEY: Still, there's something to be said for this culture. When a man comes home at night, tired and worn out from his day's work, it's a great thing to be able to pick up a good book, and so to speak, rest his mind.

HUTCHINGS: Oh, undoubtedly, there's a great recreational value in the fine arts. We have recognized that in the School of Business Administration and we compel all our freshmen to take a course in the fine arts.

CARR: That strikes me as a very sensible and practical idea. A man should be rounded out, as it were.

(He makes an expansive gesture.)

HUTCHINGS: Yes, we thought so, too. So for two hours a week we give our men a course which grounds them in the fundamentals of art, comparative literature, and the modern drama. The engineering school is doing somewhat the same thing for its men in its class of engineering English.

BAILEY: Of course, a man ought not to be one-sided.

HUTCHINGS: I consider that the great advance that has been made in modern education is the relating of it to everday life. Fifty years ago we thought education was something intended exclusively for the use of gentlemen and the sons of gentlemen. That has all changed. The common man has come forward and asserted his rights. He has instilled that

education should first of all be useful.

CARR: And rightly so. What other purpose could it serve?

HUTCHINGS: The average citizen of this state is a shrewd, hard-headed, practical fellow, with a strong infusion of Scotch blood, who first of all wants the facts. "What good is all this education to me or my children?" he says. That was the problem the University had to face a few years ago, and we knew we had to meet the issue with facts, not with beautiful phrases. So it has been part of my work on the News Dispatch to point out to the good people of this state the practical value of training at the University, the dollars and cents advantage, to put it plainly.

BAILEY: I've always said you could rely on the common sense of our people.

CARR: What could better illustrate the infallible instinct of the common people for knowing the right thing, and getting it? If I understand you, this whole great educational reform originated among the masses of the people?

HUTCHINGS: Yes, sir, it amounts to that.

CARR: It is another triumph, and a notable one, for democratic institutions.

SORRELL: I never had a chance to go to college and there's not a day of my life that I don't regret it. I got my education in the University of Hard Knocks and what I've done, I've done myself.

CARR: You have no reason to apologize for that, my friend.

SORRELL: Oh, I've done well enough, but I keep thinking how much better I could've done if I'd had the chance some fellows have. I was telling my boy the other day a man simply couldn't afford to do without a college course in this day and time. The competition's getting too stiff.

HUTCHINGS: That spirit is evident now all over the state. We have made the people alive to the necessity of the educational program just as a few years ago we made them see the necessity of the good roads program. Last year our appropriations to state institutions were greater than those of any other Southern state. This year we will do still better, if I know the Governor here.

CARR: You know your man. I'm for you, tooth and nail.

BAILEY: That's the great thing about our people; when they see a thing needs doing, they do it.

SORRELL: I read somewhere the other day where some fellow lately has said the South has no literature, no art, no culture of any kind. He called it "the Sahara of the Bozart," or something of the sort.

CARR (hotly): That's a damnable libel! I read it too. I wouldn't be surprised if the man is a Republican. They never lose a chance to blacken our name. (Violently.) I tell you there's nothing to which those fellows won't stoop.

HUTCHINGS: Now that I think of it, I read the article too. It's made quite a stir. I think we can answer him by producing the facts. (He takes a folded slip of paper from a notebook.) I looked up the facts in the matter, and they are as follows: Irvin S. Nasby who has so many articles in the Saturday Evening Post, himself a Southerner and a noted humorist, is authority for the statement that the South has proportionately more literary men than any other part of the country.

CARR (triumphantly): Listen to that! I knew it!

HUTCHINGS: As for the past, let these names speak for themselves and then judge whether we have anything to be ashamed of. (Reads.) In poetry, Edgar Allan Poe and Sidney Lanier.

CARR: Names to conjure with!

BAILEY: We have their works at home.

HUTCHINGS (reading): As well as numerous other famous names, a few of which I will read you: Willard Pettigrew, whose Rhymes of the Cotton Belt are known everywhere; Henry S. Tillingsworth, who wrote the Razorback Lyrics; Ephraim Doolittle, who early gained fame as the author of Pearls of the Piedmont; Dinwiddie Stuart, who carved his way to glory with his immortal "Ode to the F.F.V.'s" and many others, whose names I will not mention here.

SORRELL (who has been counting on his fingers): That makes six in poetry.

HUTCHINGS (proceeding): In prose, it is only necessary to mention the names of Joel Chandler Harris, whose Uncle Remus stories are dear to the hearts of children of all ages, the immortal O'Henry, Edgar Allan Poe, Sidney Lanier, Augusta J. Evans, Thomas Nelson Page, John Fox, Jr., William Gilmore Simms, Charles Egbert Craddock, Sophonesbe Stevens, Jefferson Giddings, Jackson T. Busbee, and Eleazer Martin.

BAILEY: All well-known names.

CARR: How many does that make, Sorrell?

SORRELL: Thirteen in prose.

CARR: Give us another name, my dear Professor.

HUTCHINGS: Then I need only mention Philip Fuller, whose travel book, Afoot in the Everglades, is known wherever the English language is spoken.

SORRELL: That makes fourteen in prose.

CARR: A record of which every true-born Southerner may be proud.

HUTCHINGS: That makes a total of twenty authors, all of whom are dead.

BAILEY (triumphantly): Did you hear that? They are all dead!

CARR (solemnly): Their place in literature is imperishably fixed.

HUTCHINGS: Yes, sir. And it may interest you to know, Governor, that all of them voted the Democratic ticket.

CARR: A spendid record! And it shows plainly the reason for the libelous and defamatory accusations that have been made. Manifestly, it is another Republican trick.

SORRELL: Still it seems to me it's up to all of us to do all we can for culture. You've got to sell people the idea; put the whole thing on a business basis. Why can't other towns in the state show the same spirit as Altamont? We're making a yearly event now of the music festival in August.

CARR: That is splendid.

SORRELL: Yes, and it's practical, too. We had to guarantee the Philadelphia Symphony twenty thousand dollars to get them here for a week this summer, but we never lost a cent. The Rotary Club had underwritten the whole amount in fifteen minutes. We estimated that the festival brought two thousand new visitors to town that week, who spent on an average fifty dollars each. Total: One hundred thousand dollars.

BAILEY: To say nothing of the splendid advertising! Every one of those people went away and told their friends. Next summer four thousand will come instead of two thousand. The summer after, eight thousand. Wait a minute!

(He figures rapidly on a piece of paper.)

SORRELL: What are you doing?

BAILEY: I'm trying to estimate the number in 1930.

SORRELL: We've got our own music now, and we've put it on a paying basis. Why can't we do the same for our own literature?

HUTCHINGS: There's no reason in the world why we shouldn't. It's all a matter of initiative and organization, and we have that in marked degree.

CARR (in measured platform speech): We should, we ought, we must foster a native literature if only to repudiate the vicious slurs of our enemies. The soil of our glorious Southland is fairly teeming with native and original geniuses who only await the sympathetic encouragement of the state, and the Party, to produce immortal masterpieces.

HUTCHINGS: It is all a matter of energy, rightly applied. I never tire of quoting a saying of the great Thomas A. Edison: "Genius is one-tenth inspiration and nine-tenths perspiration." We excel in genius of that order. The same spirit that has expressed itself in carving roads through the rock of mountain passes, the genius that has expressed itself in statesmanship, in building up a great school system, may express itself in any given direction.

CARR: I concur in all you have said, Professor. It should be the part of all serious-minded people, of businessmen, farmers, and statesmen, to let our young writers know we are now willing to recognize the refining influence of literary endeavor. We have made ourselves a good stout pair of boots, so to speak, and we are wearing them. It is entirely fitting and proper we should now see they get polished. The Democratic Party has always been alive to the progressive issues of the moment, and it will not prove retrograde to its duty now.

SORRELL; You have hit the nail on the head, Governor. We should encourage our young writers and make it worth their while to stay at home. We have plenty of local talent, but so much of it goes north.[8]

CARR: I agree that it is most important to keep these impressionable young writers at home. The North at the present is a hotbed of dangerous radicalism, most of which has been fostered by the shilly-shallying of the Republican Party.

BAILEY: Of course, these young fellows get queer notions.

CARR: The South, under the leadership of the Democratic Party, has always shown a broad and tolerant spirit of liberality and open-mindedness.

HUTCHINGS (coughing dryly): Most of these young men evidently need a little mental discipline if I may say so, social discipline.

CARR: True! True. They are tender subjects, very tender subjects. Of course, we're all for artistic liberty.

BAILEY: Oh, of course.

CARR: But within bounds, within reasonable bounds. We mustn't inflame dangerous issues by airing them.

HUTCHINGS: Absolutely not. We must not go beyond the bounds of public decency. Personally, I feel it is our duty to uphold the established canons of decency, decorum, and good taste, I stand unalterably for nothing less than the Normal in Art!

CARR: Exactly, professor; you take the words out of my mouth. (He moves to the center of the room and gesticulates.) Shall we lend our aid and approval to anything which might affront the delicate and refined sensibilities of our wives, our mothers, and our daughters?

BAILEY: SORRELL (emphatically): No!

CARR: A thousand times no! I sincerely wish that every young man who makes the profession of writer his aim would take the same resolve that I took when I entered politics.

BAILEY: And what was that, Governor?

CARR: That the time would never come when I could not return to my mother's knee and kneel there and say: "Mother, your boy is home again. Look at his hands. (Here he open his palms.) They are clean."

BAILEY: If we only had more like you, Governor!

CARR (modestly): I'm sure you have--many of them--except, of course, Republicans. Yes, my friends, a man may keep clean hands, no matter what his business. Even a writer may do it! But, (He pauses impressively.) but, there is one subject, and only one, on which a man may write.

SORRELL: What is that, Governor?

CARR (in a portentous whisper): Life.

BAILEY (slapping his hands): You've hit the nail on the head, Governor. I've always said the same thing.

CARR: Yes, my friends, in politics, in love, or in literature, it is all the same. Life! It is the great subject, the summum bonum of our existence, the thing for which we all breathe and labor. Ah! Life! Life! Life! Life! Glorious, pulsing Life!

BAILEY: What a noble philosophy! (He quotes.) "Life, and life more abundant."

CARR: Yes, that, too, if possible, but at any rate, Life, just Life. Ah! my friends, it has taken me almost forty years to find it out, but I tell you, from the depths of my experience, that Life is the only thing that matters. Without it (He makes an expansive gesture of his hands.)--we are as nothing!

HUTCHINGS (with emotion): Ah, Governor, I see that you, too, have lived.

CARR (quietly): Yes, Professor, I know what life is, I have lived.

(Deeply stirred, they clasp hands impulsively, and are silent a moment.)

BAILEY: And youth, Governor. Don't forget youth!

CARR: Yes, Youth. Youth's the thing. We must get in touch with these young men--the voters of tomorrow--point out all the advantages of living here, and reclaim them to the fold, so to speak.

(The men, one by one, begin to toss away their cigars, preparatory to quitting the room.)

BAILEY: There's no reason why Altamont should not be the logical place for a great artistic colony: water, scenery, climate,--all point to it as an artistic center.

(They move in pairs toward the door.)

HUTCHINGS: These things we need and they will come in their proper order. We are well embarked on our road program, enormous strides are being made in the educational system; we are building up a great industrial state: soon our cotton mills will outnumber those of New England. These things are necessary and must come if we are to keep abreast of the times. After that--

SORRELL: Shall we go out now?

CARR: We might as well, I suppose. You were saying, Professor?

HUTCHINGS (in hard, precise tones): After that, I said, we will give the poets a chance.

(They pause at the door.)

CARR (gallantly): After you, Professor.

HUTCHINGS (ditto): You first, my dear Governor. Everything, you know, in its proper order.

(So they go out in this order, with Sorrell and Bailey behind.)

BAILEY (with enthusiasm): A very stimulating talk! The Governor is a fine man, isn't he? He's so plain and simple in his ways.

SORRELL: Oh, the Governor is the simplest of men. By the way, have you heard the news; the nigger Johnson has come across. He'll sign the deeds tomorrow.

BAILEY: That's great business! Now things will move! I knew he couldn't stand the pressure. The old man is tickled, I'll bet.

(As they move out, LEE RUTLEDGE, dinner-jacketed, a trifle flushed, and a little boisterous, enters the room.)

SORRELL: Good evening, Lee. Has your father heard the news?

LEE: Yes. There is rejoicing in heaven tonight. Ring out, wild bells. My father is prostrated with joy, but expects to recover. (He produces a flask from his pocket.) Gentlemen, you are both my father's friends, his dear kind friends. Will you join me in drinking his health?[9]

SORRELL (rather curtly): Thank you, no!

(He goes out.)

BAILEY (more kindly): Good luck to you, son.

(He goes out. LEE drinks, and paces restlessly around the room. Presently there enters BULL PATTON, a broad-backed, mutton-fisted, highly colored young brute of twenty-six years; he is coarsely beautiful. He has a thick mouth, with a slightly pendulous lower lip, extraordinary mobile and sensitive and humorous; and he has small ears, close to his head, and a proud straight nose.)

BULL: General, your orders--if any?

LEE: Any late dispatches from the front, Captain?

BULL: Yes, General: a young lady has been captured in the bushes near headquarters.

LEE (muttering): Strange! In the bushes, you say? Was she alone?

BULL: Absolutely alone, General. We suspect her of being Ophelia Saltonstall, the notorious Yankee spy.

LEE: Did she look disheveled? Did she have grass on the back of her back? Was there any hay or confetti on her person?

BULL: I cannot tell, General--she refuses to talk with the officers. She prefers the privates.

(DOGGIE SORRELL, whose white face ferrets away to the red peak of his nose, enters laboriously.)[10]

DOGGIE (solemnly): Say, Lee d'ye know I'm--hic--drunk?

LEE: Now it can be told!

DOGGIE: My ole man's H. D. Sorrell and Company--ask anyone. He made thirty thousand dollars yesterday. Turned it over--(He snaps his fingers feebly.) like that! (He pauses, staring inquiringly at the fingers.) Yes, sir, like that!

BULL: Why don't you get him to buy you a false face with part of it?

DOGGIE (leering): An' I'm goin' to get still drunker.

(He goes out.)

BULL: So that's where the money goes!

(Enter MISS MARY TODD WHEELER, nineteen, clad in blue and furry.)

MARY TODD: Give me a cigarette, Lee, for God's sake! (She takes one and lights it from the one Bull proffers.) Have you seen Doggie?

LEE: Yes. He has just reeled out.

MARY TODD: I've done everything tonight except carry him around on my back.

BULL: Why don't you take me on, Mary Todd? I carry my own liquor, at any rate.

MARY TODD: I'm sorry, Bull, we need the money. Lee, I'm going out to smoke. If you see Mamma, don't tell her where I am. (JORDAN enters, coughing in a handkerchief.)[11] Good evening, Mr. Jordan.

JORDAN: Good evening, my dear young lady.

(She goes out.)

LEE(to Bull): Major, this is Colonel Reeves Jordan of the Back Bay, a Yankee, sir, but by God, every inch a man.

BULL (extending his huge paw): Colonel Jordan, give me your hand. We fought under different flags but, by God, sir, it shall never be said that a Southern gentleman failed to recognize the merits of a gallant foe. I know a man when I see one.

(They shake hands.)

JORDAN: I am profoundly moved. We fought under different flags, as you so beautifully express it, but on the battlefield at night the same peaceful stars shed their benedictions over our bivouacked warriors, a common earth inherits the clay of our illustrious dead comrades now in the last long sleep before the last Great Roll Call, and the same God, I am happy to believe, looks down with equal pity and compassion upon his contending children.

LEE: Colonel, your strange and beautiful language moves me as nothing else has since I heard Governor Preston Carr introduce the late William Jennings Bryan. Let us unite now in a common cause.

(They all produce flasks from their pockets.)

BULL: I propose the health and the artistic success of Colonel Reeves Jordan, the famous author.

(They drink.)

JORDAN: Gentlemen, I thank you for your good wishes. With diligent effort, there is no reason why I should not fail. I have everything a significant American writer ought to lack--including talent. (To Lee.) And now, sir, will you join me in a health to our gallant comrade, Major Patton, soldier, gentleman and, if I do not err, scholar.

BULL: You do not, Colonel, you do not. Four colleges in five years. The record stands.

JORDAN: And now, I believe, ready to yield his bright talents in the service of the law, where, I have no doubt, the promise he has shown in the past will become a future certainty. Major, your health.

(They drink.)

BULL: And now, Colonel, will you join me in drinking the health of the bravest soldier of them all, General Lee Stuart Dinwiddie Pettigrew Rutledge.

(Loud blaring music fills the room; a girl and a boy dance by the door, pausing before the opening, locked leg to leg in jazz and ecstasy.)

LEE (solemnly arresting the lifted flasks): Stop, gentlemen, there is a lady present. (The couple move by and are gone.) Gentlemen, I thank you for the warmth of your intentions toward me, but there's another toast that we can drink with greater honor to ourselves, and to those lovely creatures, the crown jewels of our civilization. Gentlemen, I give you to the Purity of our Womanhood!

BULL and JORDAN: Amen!

LEE (imitating the tone and gesture of Preston Carr): Mr. Speaker, you may tickle your girl with a feather plucked from the tail of the eagle; you may wipe your dirty feet upon the altar cloth of Liberty; you may blow your royal nose three times upon the embroidered oriflamme of the Grand High Kleagle, but say or do anything that might insult the delicate sensibilities of our wives, our mothers, and our sisters--no, Goddam my patriotic Southern soul, no, sir, you shall not!

(The animal-with-the-two-backs returns, hovering before the opening as before.)

JORDAN: Ah, youth--golden lovely youth! Invincible boredom. How glad I am that I am not young!

LEE: Love--twiddle-and-tiddle--love, endorsed by all the best people. Ah, ah--mustn't touch--not there! She'll be a virgin yet, that girl!

BULL: She's from Atlanta--staying with Mary Todd Wheeler. I want to meet that baby.

(The young man, dancing, bites the young lady, dancing, on the shoulder, dancing.)

LEE: By heaven, gentlemen, the brute has bitten her in the neck!

(The couple moves on.)

BULL: I want to be next the next time she necks.

JORDAN: Gentlemen, gentlemen--

(RUTLEDGE enters the room.)

RUTLEDGE: Jordan, the stars are out but there is no moon. The landscape might as well be quite undeveloped and unimproved. It is a good night for talking; will you come home with me?

JORDAN: Willingly, Rutledge, is this your son?

RUTLEDGE: Yes. Then, good night, son.

LEE: Good night.

(RUTLEDGE and JORDAN go out. Music blares. MRS. WINTHROP WHEELER, fifty, with the smile that won't come off because it was carved there long ago, her small eyes button-bright and hard, swathed in black bead glitter, enters to the rhythm of her undulant cabbage breasts.)

MRS WHEELER: Have you seen my little girl, Mary Todd, tonight?

LEE: Mrs. Wheeler, we have not--both of us.

MRS. WHEELER: She was perfectly radiant--you should have seen her. The child is so like a little elf--she reminds me of my own youth. She so adores dances. And Joseph--Joseph Sorrell--have you seen him? Such a splendid boy, such a fine young man.

BULL (clucking sympathetically): Dear me, dear me--you don't say! Well, well, to be sure, nevertheless!

LEE: A quaint fellow, a rather dear person, coy but virginal, the apple of his own eye.

(DOGGIE appears, more so than ever.)

MRS. WHEELER: Why, Joseph, we were just speaking of you.

DOGGIE (leering drunkenly): Speakin'--hic--of me.

MRS. WHEELER: H'm! Yes, to be sure. (She wanders to the door.) I wonder where Mary Todd can be! (She calls throatily.) Mary To-dd!

MARY TODD (beyond): Yes, Mama!

MRS. WHEELER: Come, dear, Joseph is waiting on you.

(Music blares.)

DOGGIE: Speakin' of me, eh?

MRS. WHEELER: H'm. Yes. To be sure. (Taking him firmly by the arm.) Come, Joseph, Mary Todd is waiting on you. (Calling as they go out.) Mary To-dd!

MARY TODD (beyond, wearily): Yes, Mamma!

(LEE paces around nervously. The dancing pair return again before the opening, pausing, swaying.)

LEE (loudly, applauding with his hands): Hooray! Go it! Strut your stuff! Perfectly safe--all the best people--approved by the Board of Trade!

BULL (seizing him): Be quiet, for God's sake.

LEE: Is your car here?

BULL: Yes.

LEE (bolting for the door): Good-bye, then![12]

BULL (making after him): Where are you going?

LEE: Old homestead--always a good breeze--highest part of town!

BULL: Lee! You fool! Come back here!

(He follows him out.)

CURTAIN

Notes to Scene 4:

[1] This scene, composed mostly of vapid conversation among the Altamont Country Club set, shows the influence of H. L. Mencken, whose attitudes Wolfe adopted while he was at Harvard (Window of Memory, p. 68). Sparing no one in his satire, Wolfe lambasts the politician, the businessman, the "progressive" academician, the society matron, the coquette, the wastrel. Only one event occurs in this scene to move the action along: Lee Rutledge decides to go to the home of Annie Johnson.

[2] According to Melvin F. Groth in his dissertation "Thomas Wolfe and the Koch Idea," Professor Hutchings was modeled on Frederick Henry Koch, "Proff" Koch to Wolfe during his years at Chapel Hill. "The gospel preached" here, according to Groth, is "none other than the Koch Idea (see Introduction, p. 3); the "physical depiction" is that of "the energetic, peripatetic 'little man with the urge,' who did indeed travel around the South giving 'public addresses'" (Groth, p. 168).

[3] In a letter to his daughter, W. O. Gant mentions a Preston Carr, who is surely the same character:

> Preston Carr (who's sure to be the next governor) was talking to me about him [Eugene] the other day. He wants me to send him to the State university law school where he will make lifelong friends among the people of his own State, and then put him into politics (LHA, p. 262).

[4] This reference to Preston Carr's having begun his political career while a student at the University suggests a satiric comedy

Wolfe wrote in 1920 called "Concerning Honest Bob," a play about a student who wins an election by posing as a reluctant candidate [The Carolina Magazine (May, 1920), pp. 251-261.]

The subject of using campus politics as a stepping-stone to larger ambitions occurs also in Look Homeward, Angel:

> A youngster developed in college the political craft he was later to exert in party affairs. . . . The boy (with political ambitions) came deliberately to the university to bait and set his first traps; deliberately he made those friendships that were most likely to benefit him later. By his junior year, if he was successful, he had a political manager, who engineered his campus ambitions (LHA, p. 486).

[5] Carr's slogan relates to a speech made by Max Gardner, gubernatorial candidate to the student body of the University of North Carolina in 1918. According to Richard Walser, the speaker frequently referred to "life abundant." Wolfe expressed his objection in an editorial to The Tar Heel, "Useful Advice to Candidates," in which he called for "some real thinking" by politicians. [Richard Walser, Thomas Wolfe: Undergraduate (Durham: Duke University Press, 1977), pp. 113-114.]

[6] The "Niggertown" version includes after the name "Billy Bateson" this description:

> PROF. HUTCHINGS: Oh, no, he still putters around his house and tends his flowers. He hardly ever comes out, however.

Billy Bateson is probably a composite portrait of two of Wolfe's favorite teachers at Chapel Hill--Horace Williams, his philosophy professor, and W. S. "Bully" Bernard, who taught him Greek. While

Wolfe was enrolled at UNC, movements were afoot to remove both men from their posts. Wolfe took part in the factions to maintain them. (Walser, T.W.: Undergrad., pp. 26-30; Kennedy, Window of Memory, pp. 49-54.)

[7] "The Sahara of the Bozart," an essay by H. L. Mencken, ridiculing the South for its lack of a healthy cultural environment, appeared originally in the New York Evening Mail for November 13, 1917; it has been reprinted in Prejudices: Second Series (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1920), pp. 136-154.

[8] Included in the "Niggertown" version of this scene is a discussion about "that Powell boy," which is obviously a self-portrait:

> BAILEY: Yes, there is that Powell boy, for example.
>
> SORRELL: Which one?
>
> BAILEY: The youngest, the long-legged fellow, you know. The point I'm making is you can get a young fellow like that and train him up.
>
> CARR: Is he old enough to vote yet?
>
> BAILEY: Yes, I think we can fix that part all right.
>
> CARR: I agree that it is most important to keep these impressionable young writers at home. The North at the present is a hot bed of dangerous radicalism, most of which has been fostered by the shilly-shallying of the Republican party. (To Bailey.) Did you sound the young man out?
>
> BAILEY: Yes. He's a little impressionable and has a few queer ideas, but we could steady him up in a short time, I have no doubt. I remember he said to me the writer ought to be allowed the same freedom in dealing with facts as the historian.

CARR: Absolutely. The South, under the leadership of the Democratic party, has always shown a broad and tolerant spirit of liberality and open-mindedness.

BAILEY: There is one thing he said that bothers me: He said he didn't think the South could have a serious literature at the present time that didn't deal in some way with the Negro question.

SORRELL: Oh, oh.

HUTCHINGS: (coughing dryly) The young man evidently needs a little mental discipline.

CARR: That's a tender subject, a very tender subject. Of course we're all for artistic liberty.

BAILEY: Oh, of course.

CARR: But within bounds, within reasonable bounds. We mustn't inflame dangerous issues by airing them.

[9] Lee's meeting with Bailey and Sorrell in this scene of "Niggertown" includes no reference to the sale of Johnson's house:

BAILEY: Hello, Lee!

LEE: Hello!

BAILEY: You'll be going back soon, won't you?

LEE: Yes, tomorrow.

SORRELL: I hope you'll come in and see us before you go, Lee.

LEE: Thanks. I will if I have time.

BAILEY: I'll say good-bye now. We're expecting big things of you, Lee. Your father's record gives you something to shoot at. Good luck to you, son.

LEE: Thank you, Mr. Bailey. The same to you. Good-bye! (He shakes hands with Bailey, and the two men go out.)

Notable in the revision is Lee's increased animosity, directed against the older generation, especially his father.

[10] In the early versions of the play, "Doggie" Sorrell is given no last name and thus has no kinship with Henry Sorrell, the realtor.

[11] Jordan's entry to this scene is an addition to the final version. It serves no purpose except to prepare for his visit with Rutledge in Scene 6.

[12] The decision Lee makes in the next few lines reflects the altered character Wolfe gives him in this final version. (See Sc. 3, n. 10.) Lee's motive, which is clear from his choice of words ("Old homestead--always a good breeze--highest part of town"), is to enrage his father and shock the town boosters. During the same scene in "Niggertown," Lee never mentions going to the Johnson house. Instead, his visit to Annie in Scene 5 seems the result of boredom and restlessness, as indicated in the following lines from the earlier version:

> LEE: (getting up suddenly) Oh, damn it, let's go somewhere.
>
> BULL: Go where?
>
> Lee: I don't know; anywhere. I want to do something; I don't know what it is. I get wild like this every year before I go back.

SCENE 5

A room in the home of the Negro, Johnson.[1] The room is a spacious high-walled chamber, which yet retains more than a trace of its ancient nobility.

There is a door to the left which opens on a hall, and high French windows at the back which give on a broad porch, flanked by square, heavy, wooden columns of a weather-beaten brown.

A fine old marble mantel at the right, opposite the door, now supports various bits of bric-a-brac; a naked doll, tied with a sash of stained red ribbon, two vases covered with gilt flowers, a china bulldog, and a small cheap clock.

The occupants have indulged artistic tastes with these pictures, which are suspended from the walls: the doctor at the bed-side of the sick child; the two lovers fleeing before the storm; the horse-fair; Leonardo's "Last Supper"; a Remington cowboy picture; and an engraving of black and white cherubim sailing around the knees of an impartial Saviour, bearing this legend in illuminated scroll-work--"God Loves Them Both."[2]

There is a small table in the center of the room, on which there is a lighted lamp, elsewhere a couch, and several stiff varnished horsehair chairs, and a large framed photograph of the Negro himself on an ornate easel in the upper left corner.

It is night. Below on the slopes of the hill the lights from many a Negro shack burn a dull, smoky yellow.

In the distance, and at an elevation but slightly lower than that of the house, the lights in the town gleam sharp and clear.

From below there is the hum of a powerful motor climbing laboriously up the unpaved, lumpy street.

A mulatto girl, nineteen years old, enters the room, and goes to the window. She is the daughter of the Negro Johnson. She is dressed cleanly and neatly, and her coarse, black hair, which is straight, is combed flatly down on either side, and bound in a knot behind. She is well developed, and has thin, but not sharp features.

The automobile stops outside; the motor is throttled to a low hum. In a moment LEE RUTLEDGE crosses the porch and enters the room. She is somewhat startled by his sudden appearance, but composes herself quickly, although she shows pleasure by a sudden, swift gleam of her eyes and a momentary glimpse of white teeth.

LEE: Hello, Annie

ANNIE: Hello, Mistah Lee.

(A pause.)

LEE: I thought I saw you at the window, so I took a chance, and came in. (There is a certain unconscious insolence in his manner. A pause.) How've you been?

ANNIE: Oh, pretty well. (A pause.) Where've you been keepin' yo'self? I haven't seen yo' in a long time.

LEE: Oh, busy mostly.

(An awkward pause. He looks around.)

ANNIE: What yo' lookin' at?[3]

LEE (grinning): I'm looking at my house, Annie. How do you like it? (A pause.) What've you been doing?

ANNIE: Oh--nothin'. (A pause.) What's there fo' me to do, anyway? I might as well be in jail as heah.

LEE: Your old man keeps you pinned down pretty close, doesn't he? (Dance music, jazz with a very primitive, a very compelling rhythm, is heard, somewhere off in the settlement. It is a little franker, a little more vulgar than the dance music played at dances of White people.) What's that?

ANNIE: Oh, the niggahs are givin' a dance, I reckon.

LEE: Don't you ever go?

ANNIE (scornfully): What do yo' think I am? You don't catch me mixin' up with that Black trash. (A pause.) You must've been to a dance yo'self.

LEE: Yes, I have been.

(The automobile Klaxon honks impatiently outside.)

ANNIE: Who's with yo?

LEE: Oh, a friend of mine.

ANNIE: Who is he? Do I know him?

LEE (irritably): No. He's a friend of mine.[4] I told you. You've never seen him.

ANNIE (angered): How do you know? You don't think you're the only White boy I know, do you?

LEE (annoyed): Ah, you can't fool me. Where'd you ever get to know any White boys?

ANNIE: Maybe where I got to know you.[5]

LEE: Ah, cut it out! (A pause. Quietly.) Where is everyone?

ANNIE: Papa's in town. He won't be back till late.

LEE: Where's your mother?

ANNIE: She went to meetin'.

LEE: (banteringly): You haven't gone and got religion, too, have you?

ANNIE: No, an' I'm not goin' to. You don't catch me foolin' with those crazy niggahs, singin' and shoutin', and prayin' till two o'clock in the mawnin', sometimes.

LEE: You don't go with any of these--people, do you?

ANNIE (as if stung by the implication): I'm no niggah!

LEE (with rather brutal mockery): No? What are you, then? The Queen of Sheba?

ANNIE (sullenly): Niggahs don't have straight hair like that, do they? (She pats her own. A pause.) I saw you on the street the other day!

LEE: Did you? (A pause.) I didn't see you.

ANNIE: Yes you didn't! You turned yo' head when you saw me comin'--I saw you!

LEE (sternly): What d'ye take me for? (A pause.) Yes, I saw you. Don't you ever speak to me on the street again, Annie. You ought to have sense enough to know better.

ANNIE (passionately): You're speakin' to me now, ain't yo'?

LEE: Don't be a damn fool!

(The automobile Klaxon honks impatiently again.)

ANNIE (with smouldering bitterness): Yo' friend mus' be in a hurry. Go on, if you want to. Some one you know might see you.

LEE: Don't you want to go with me?

ANNIE: Go wheah?

LEE: Oh--for a little ride--up the mountain.

ANNIE: If I'm not good enough to speak to, I'm not good enough to ride with, I reckon.

LEE (angrily): Then go to the nigger dance, if you like; I won't fool with you any longer.

ANNIE (with the cry of a wounded animal): I don't have to go with niggahs! I can go with White boys!

LEE: Ah--you're crazy!

(He turns to go out. The savage rhythm of the dance music is heard again. The girl's face darkens with pain and disgust. In a moment she controls herself and speaks quietly, but with a sullen note in her voice.)

ANNIE: Is yo' friend goin', too?

LEE: Yes.

(A pause.)

ANNIE: I'll get my hat and coat. You'd bettah wait outside.

LEE: That's more like it. We'll be waiting in the car. Make it snappy, won't you?

(He turns to leave the room, but as he nears the open window, he is blocked suddenly by the bulky body of the Negro JOHNSON who has crossed the porch quickly and now enters the room, carefully planting himself before the windows. The Negro's manner betrays a high degree of emotion and anger. He breathes heavily and it is some moments before he controls himself sufficiently to speak.)

JOHNSON (sternly): What're yo' doin' heah, Mistah Lee?

(The boy is white-faced, but at the Negro's tone, his back stiffens and his head springs up like a lash. He makes no answer. The Negro is angry; he grasps the young man roughly by the arm. They come to grips; the boy is fastened in the man's powerful arms, and in the struggle, his soft, felt hat is knocked off.)

LEE (furiously): Take your hands off me, you damn nigger!

(He strikes the Negro a heavy blow in the face, which staggers him, and causes him to reel back against the wall. The boy rushes out through the window. The Negro recovers himself quickly and follows. The girl runs to her father and clings desperately to his arm, saying nothing. Outside the car leaps off and rushes away down the hill. JOHNSON turns to the girl, and removes her grasp forcibly. She retreats under his glare and he advances slowly upon her to the end of the scene.

JOHNSON (his yellow eyes are staring with rage):[6] So this is the way you do when my back's tu'ned! I keeps you away from the othah niggahs. I tell my folks to hold theah heads up--and the minutes I get away, yo' make a whore out of yo'self with a White boy!

CURTAIN

Notes to Scene 5:

[1] This entire scene takes place inside the disputed house, now the home of Jim Johnson, his wife, and daughter Annie. Claude LaSalle maintains that this house is the central symbol of the play. It figures prominently in the self-image of both opposing characters, Johnson and Rutledge:

> For the Negro physician, Dr. Johnson, it symbolizes his superiority to the other Negroes, and his right to be accepted as something of an equal by white men. . . . For Rutledge, the house represents the dead tradition of the Southern Aristocrat - the man who supposedly acted from noble rather than commercial motives. His desire to recapture a dead past, and thereby "stop" time, is symbolized by his desire to return to the house (LaSalle, pp. 154-155).

[2] The description of these pictures does not appear in "Niggertown." The motif of the "black and white cherubim" shows up elsewhere in Wolfe's writing: a similar picture hangs in the home of a character in his play, The Mountains. [Thomas Wolfe, The Mountains, ed. Patrick M. Ryan (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970).] In Look Homeward, Angel the inscription "God Loves Them Both" appears as a framed piece of scrollwork over the mantel of Essie Corpening, the Negro woman who dances for Eugene Gant (LHA, p. 253).

[3] This question and Lee's answer, referring to his possession of the Johnson house, do not appear in "Niggertown."

[4] In "Niggertown" this word has no underlining.

[5] "Niggertown" includes here the phrase "in the dark."

[6] This stage direction does not appear in the original version. Like Johnson's mad laughter, added to his character description in Scene 3, this reference emphasizes the man-beast association developed elsewhere in the play. (See Sc. 3, n. 14; Sc. 10, n. 7; and Introduction, p. 25, p. 53.)

SCENE 6[1]

The library of the attorney, Mr. Rutledge. The room is a high, massive chamber, with beams of quartered oak, and wainscoting. The furniture is likewise dark and cushioned with leather. Here Mr. Rutledge has accumulated a large law library. The books are racked on both sides of the room in thick, yellow rows. High French windows at the back open on a broad veranda bordered by a low, heavy white rail; beyond there is a dark vision of clumped flower bushes, shrubbery and a spacious lawn. A door between the cases of books at the left opens to other parts of the house.[2]

It is the same night. A clock in town strikes eleven times;[3] the attorney Rutledge is discovered seated at a table in the rear, with his back to the windows, which are open.

JORDAN, a half-consumed cigar in his fingers, sits on the table, facing the window and manifold starlight.[4]

JORDAN: Rutledge, this excellent cigar, and this incredible corn whiskey, just like my story, and I may add, my life, are getting short. I believe I must be going.

RUTLEDGE: Then I must resort to bribery: there are other cigars, Jordan, and, as for the whiskey, it comes from a keg of charred oak, kept three years in a very secret place. Will you stay now?

JORDAN: Thank you, but I'm much too great a sensualist. Besides, it would not be loyal to good drink.

RUTLEDGE: Then you have not forgotten loyalty?

JORDAN: No, Rutledge, I have not forgotten loyalty. But not the loyalty of my youth to victory, to prosperity, to success.

RUTLEDGE: To what, then? To lost causes?

JORDAN: Yes, and to one above all others: to everlasting Defeat.

RUTLEDGE: In spite of everything, Jordan, you will believe in the Devil.

JORDAN: I used to think that was his name; now I say "God."

RUTLEDGE: A strange god, Jordan, that no respectable clergyman would speak to on the street. Don't you know that successful people must have a successful god? What kind of a god, my friend, gets beaten?

JORDAN: The only one I care to serve. Are we not always beaten, Rutledge? Does a victorious general lead defeated troops? No, for to be driven into the wilderness with a hunted and defeated God, with all the malign and destructive forces triumphantly in pursuit, to make a final and ruinous stand with backs to the face of the celestial cliffs, and to know before that the cause was doomed--how fine a thing that would be, Rutledge!

RUTLEDGE: I agree. Men do not remember Austerlitz, but Waterloo.

JORDAN: And, in later days, to meet some veteran comrade, doomed as well to the eternal exiles, to say to him: "I, too, was with him at the Battle of the Cliffs. The pity of it! What leadership he showed that day! In spite of all--hunger, wounds, number--we should have won, if only--

RUTLEDGE: If only Beelzebub had not arrived with the reserves.

JORDAN: Yes! And we should speak again of our banished leader, caged, but vigilant, on his lonely isle, and, growing old, we should wait with confidence, his return. Rutledge, how fine a thing that would be!

RUTLEDGE: Have a drink.

(JORDAN pours whiskey in a glass and drinks.)

JORDAN: What a piece of work is a God! How valiant in despair! How mighty in defeat! In all his pained and thwarted beauty, how like a man! The ruin of the sun, the broken shard of overthrown light, on tiger feet he carries his fierce flame through the victorious dark![5]

RUTLEDGE: Have a drink, Jordan.

(JORDAN drinks again.)

JORDAN: And yet He dies eternally--lost music under sea.

(MRS. RUTLEDGE enters the room bearing in her hand some sheets of paper on which there is writing. She is a woman in the late fifties; with a great show of energy and enthusiasm she has exhausted rapidly and earnestly whatever has held the stage of her fancy from the days of the Montessoni method to the more recent developments in the drama league. Below all this her life lies sunken dead; but she has too much humor and intelligence not to take the moment seriously.)

JORDAN (taking his hat, ceremoniously): Madam, nothing, I hope, has been lacking to your delight. You alone have been lacking to ours. I must be going.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Why must you go now? I have something here that I have written. I had hoped to have your opinion on it--as a critic.

JORDAN: Not tonight, dear lady. My powers of critic have been drowned in rum and starlight. Another time.

MRS. RUTLEDGE (rather eagerly): Then before you go, do tell me of what you have been talking, Mr. Jordan.

JORDAN: Of ruin and loss, and the defeated Gods. And now I must go to bed, as the doctor ordered. I don't like it. My cough keeps me awake, and I find I fear the dark as I did when I was a child.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Are you afraid that you will see something in the dark?

JORDAN: No. I think I am afraid that I shall not. Rutledge, for this good cheer, thanks. Good night.

RUTLEDGE: Good night, my friend.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Good night, Mr. Jordan.

(JORDAN goes out under the windows. RUTLEDGE seats himself at the table and busies himself over some papers.)

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Oh dear! I feel a wreck.[6]

RUTLEDGE(Proceeding with his work): So!

MRS. RUTLEDGE: I'll be glad when this week's over.

RUTLEDGE: Busy?

(He works on.)

MRS. RUTLEDGE: I'm coaching one of the drama league plays and I must read a paper to the Quill Club, Friday, and I've hardly begun it yet.

RUTLEDGE (working on): What's--the--subject?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: "The Drama As a Social Force."

RUTLEDGE (while he works): Interesting?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Very. There's an awfully good article in the encyclopedia. Can you give me some help?

RUTLEDGE: Afraid not, I don't know enough on the subject.

MRS. RUTLEDGE (sighing): Oh dear! I wish the Riders wasn't taking up so much time.

RUTLEDGE: The what?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: The play I'm coaching: Riders To The Sea.

RUTLEDGE: Oh!

(He goes on working.)

MRS. RUTLEDGE: We're putting on two others, too. (She waits expectantly but he does not answer.) Lady Gregory's Rising of the Moon, and Lord Dunsany's Night at an Inn.

RUTLEDGE: Good.

(He works on.)

MRS. RUTLEDGE: After that we're going to produce Booth Tarkington's Clarence and O'Neill's Beyond the Horizon.

RUTLEDGE: Splendid.

(He works on.)

MRS. RUTLEDGE: You don't seem a bit interested, Will.

RUTLEDGE (looking up): Of course, I am.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: At the end of the year we're going to produce three one-act plays written by members of the club. They are to represent the development of the play and the dance in different countries--Ireland, Burma, Spain. I'm writing one of them now.

RUTLEDGE: Ireland, Burma, Spain--isn't that a little--frantic?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Let me read you the opening scene of mine.

(He lays down his pen and looks up with considerable resignation.)

RUTLEDGE: All right, dear, let's have it.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: It's an Irish play.

RUTLEDGE: Oh, an Irish play? It ought to be amusing.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Oh no, it's not a comedy. It's a terrible tragedy. The scene's in Ireland.

RUTLEDGE (protesting mildly): But, my dear, you don't know very much about Ireland, do you?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: That doesn't matter. It's a positive advantage, if anything. The play's supposed to take us out of ourselves.

RUTLEDGE: Oh, I see.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: To create a new and wonderful land of heart's desire.

RUTLEDGE: Oh!

MRS. RUTLEDGE (reads): "The scene is the interior of a small fisherman's hut--"

RUTLEDGE: Hadn't you better say, "a fisherman's small hut?"

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Perhaps you're right. "The scene is the interior of a fisherman's small hut on the little island of Mulligatwney, off the west coast of Ireland."

RUTLEDGE: By the way, what's the name of the play?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: I haven't named it yet. Do be quiet, dear.

MRS. RUTLEDGE (reads on): "The walls of the room are draped with fishing nets of light gray, gathered in at intervals, and embroidered with small festoons of marine-blue fish hooks, hanging here and there. Giant harpoons are in each corner of the room."

RUTLEDGE: Are they whale hunters, too?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: No, that adds a touch of color. (Reads.) "At the rise of the curtain, the room is nearly dark, save for the delicate red tints thrown out by a small peat fire on the hearth."

RUTLEDGE: What's a peat fire?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: It's Irish coal. Now, listen. (Reads.) "Tim, a young Irish fisherman, sits by the fire mending his nets, and presently Maurya, a peasant girl, comes in, bent beneath a load of faggots which she throws at his feet."

RUTLEDGE: Are they married?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: No, of course not. That all comes out later.

RUTLEDGE: Oh!

MRS RUTLEDGE (reads):

"Tim: 'Tis pinin' I've been for ye lass.
Maurya: Oh, 'tis pinin' ye've been for me, is it?
Tim: Yes, 'tis lass.
Maurya: Ah, tis many a weary day an' night I been waiting, Tim, waiting there with the white pig by the brown boards on the green hillside.
Tim: Ochone! Is it they were new boards, lass?
Maurya: Yes, brown and new cut is it they were, Tim.
Tim: Then, lass, I'm thinkin' they'll do fer me coffin when the sea brings me home, an' the green tides have combed me red hair on the black rocks.
Maurya: Ochone! It makes me keen to hear ye say that Tim, and me heart is full sore and weary, (she begins to keen softly to herself, after which she runs swiftly around the room like a caged animal, beating her breasts and moaning, until at length she collapses on the floor.)"

RUTLEDGE: Perhaps you can finish it tomorrow night, honey, when I have more time to enjoy it.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: How do you like it so far?

RUTLEDGE: Splendid! Lots of color in it.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Ah! You got that, did you?

RUTLEDGE: Yes, it was very evident. You say there are to be three plays in all?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Yes, Mrs. Bailey is writing one of them, you know. The Burmese thing.

RUTLEDGE: Mrs. Board-of-Trade Bailey?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Yes, and Mrs. Parsons is writing a perfectly beautiful play about Spain.

RUTLEDGE: Who is Mrs. Parsons?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Oh, you know her, the dentist's wife.

RUTLEDGE: Dentist's wife? Oh! about Spain, you say?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Well, the scenes are in Spain, but the characters are from different places. An Italian tenor falls in love with a Russian dancer and marries her; this rouses the jealousy of a Spanish Toreador, who loves her also. There's a thrilling scene at the end where the toreador opens the gate and lets the mad bulls rush over the lovers.

RUTLEDGE: Is any one hurt?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Hurt? They're both killed. Anyway, it's going to be perfectly thrilling.

RUTLEDGE: I should think you'd have trouble making the bulls behave.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Yes, that is the only difficulty. But the rest of the play goes beautifully. I do hope you'll take more time for these things hereafter, Will. You really ought, you know. Your position in the community demands you show an interest in the finer things of--[8] you're laughing at me![9]

RUTLEDGE: Indeed I'm not!

MRS. RUTLEDGE: I don't mind, Will. I have seen you laugh before. And it is better to do a foolish thing than just to breathe. (A pause.) You are getting the house back, I understand?

RUTLEDGE: Yes, I believe so. The Negro is coming in to sign the papers tomorrow. I believe he reconsidered under the weight of--ah--public opinion.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Yes--everyone was righteously indignant--as if they cared. I had never known the papers were so moral. (A pause.) Well, my dear, since you have wanted it, I am glad you have it. You have wanted so little--so little. (A pause.) A house--I am glad.

RUTLEDGE: Do houses matter? I wonder now. Now that I almost have it, I wonder that I ever wanted it.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: What will you do with it?

(A pause.)

RUTLEDGE: God knows. It's a high place--an odd place. Perhaps Lee will marry some day. I'll give it to him.[10]

MRS. RUTLEDGE (wincing slightly): Ah, no--not now. (A pause.) Is Lee home yet?

RUTLEDGE: I think not. He has not come in to see me.

(A pause.)

MRS. RUTLEDGE: He will come in to see you, I suppose.

RUTLEDGE: No doubt. He often does.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Do you think it is quite fair, Will?

RUTLEDGE: That what is?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: To take my son away from me?[11]

RUTLEDGE: Have you not the resources of your art--Ireland, Burma, Spain?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: I did not ask for your mockery, but for an answer.

RUTLEDGE: And did I not give it to you? Why is it, when women lose something, they say it has been taken from them?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: What does it matter what we say--if we always lose?

RUTLEDGE: What do you think you have lost?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: I will name the thing, though you may smile. It is love.

(A pause.)

RUTLEDGE: I do not smile, you see.

MRS. RUTLEDGE (quietly): I loved you once, my dear.

RUTLEDGE: But now--you have lost that love?

MRS. RUTLEDGE (slowly): No. That is not true. I have not lost my love, Will, I have lost you. For love is something that a woman has forever; she only finds someone or something to attach it to. What she loves she may lose, but love she cannot lose. It is born with her, and in her; it is the thing she knows best, the only thing she knows perfectly; it is her only wisdom.

RUTLEDGE: And do you think it is wisdom enough?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: No. I know it is not enough. Does the confession please you, Will? I know that it is not even a very great thing.

RUTLEDGE: Even though the books and plays end upon it?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Yes--and say that it is a very great thing. But neither are we women very great people, Will. And we don't grow clever as the years pass on. And we lose you.

RUTLEDGE: Are possession and love the only things you understand--that matter to you?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: What if they are, my dear? They are important things--and we understand them very well. Those things we hold, we hold so tightly; those things we know, we know so well. Men know so much; they know so much so badly. If we were only made a little closer heaven, dear; if you were but a little nearer to the clay we're made of! But you're not! You're not! All of the angels who fell were men, but they didn't fall far enough.

RUTLEDGE: Or much too far.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: And so, you see, you are unsuccessful gods.[12]

RUTLEDGE: And you, successful humans?

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Except we lose--we lose what we possess.

RUTLEDGE: Except we lose--we lose what we have never had. And that, wife, is the greatest loss. For it is better to have loved and lost, than never to have lost at all.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Sometimes I think I shall put out my hand, and touch you--but I couldn't; it's too far. (A wind stirs the curtain.) I never feel the wind now, but somehow I could cry.

RUTLEDGE: I have grown old, but sometimes I think that I remember heaven, and dawn, and a sea breaking.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: When I was just a little girl, all the little girls were prim, and wore pigtails, but all the little boys, even the rough, loud ones, were lost gods. When spring came, the little girls were glad because it was warmer, and they raised their voices; but the boys had lonely eyes.

RUTLEDGE: I have sown my life on barren land--I had strength once, but I have ploughed no furrow. God sent me out into a desert.

MRS. RUTLEDGE: Then, the poor gods, the lost lonely gods, who cannot find the way.

RUTLEDGE: I have not asked to be taught, but to remember.

MRS. RUTLEDGE (rising, moving toward the door): My arms are empty--and old. An old woman's flesh is good for holding nothing. Once I had a god--and a poet--and I lost both. (At the door.) Mrs. King has written us from China; she is returning in the fall. She has been studying the Chinese theatre. Perhaps we shall do something like that next season. The Chinese have no grammar, she says. When you say a thing in Chinese, you simply string the words together . . .[13]

(She goes out. RUTLEDGE settles down to his work again, but has hardly started before the door opens and LEE enters, in a manifest and uncontrollable state of excitement. RUTLEDGE puts down his pen and rises hastily.)

RUTLEDGE (sharply): What is the matter! Why don't you answer, Lee? What is the matter with you?

(LEE drops into a chair and covers his face with a gesture of blind horror. RUTLEDGE goes quickly to the door, closes and fastens it, and returns to where his son is sitting.)

RUTLEDGE (quietly): What is the matter, son? You must tell me.

(LEE finally raises his head, and slowly gets control over himself.)

LEE: Suppose-just suppose--mind--

RUTLEDGE: Yes, go on!

LEE: Suppose a nigger, a dirty nigger, put his hand on you--

RUTLEDGE (sternly): Who has done this to you, Lee? What has happened? Come now, I must know.

(The Negro JOHNSON, disheveled, and with a swollen and discolored eye, enters the room through the window. He is holding in his hand Lee's soft grey hat, which was knocked off in the struggle. The man stands just inside the room, breathing heavily, and glaring uncertainly about him like a wild animal, brought suddenly into the light. LEE leaps to his feet with an exclamation of anger and surprise. RUTLEDGE steps in front of him and shields him with his body.)

RUTLEDGE (to the Negro): Who told you to come here at this time of night? What do you want, Johnson?

JOHNSON: Ask yo' boy. He knows.

RUTLEDGE: I'm in the habit of sending darkies to my back door, Johnson, and I make no exceptions for you.

JOHNSON: That didn't keep yo' boy from comin' right into my front do' tonight, without askin' no one's leave.

(RUTLEDGE turns and looks searchingly at his son. LEE turns his head away.)

JOHNSON: I brought his hat to him. Heah it is! (He tosses it on the table.) I found him with my girl tonight an' I want to tell you he's lucky to be standing where he is.

RUTLEDGE (white faced): Get out, Johnson.

JOHNSON: All right, I'm goin', but, White man, I want to tell you there ain't never going to be any dealin's between you and me. I'm through with you.

(The Negro goes out. RUTLEDGE turns to his son.)

RUTLEDGE: Is this true?

(There is a pause.)

LEE: Yes, I'll go away.

RUTLEDGE: Go where?

LEE (turning away): Oh God, I don't know! Anywhere!

RUTLEDGE (quietly and firmly): You'll do nothing of the sort, Lee.

(He puts his hand upon Lee's shoulder.)

LEE (writhing desperately): Don't talk about it, please.

RUTLEDGE: I shall not talk about it. But there is no language greater than silence.

LEE (rising): Then let me go, if it means that to you.

RUTLEDGE: Wait. I do not blame you. You have given me something to guard between us. I wish it were a better thing; but men should enter somewhere together--hell or heaven. Now, since there can be no speech between us, promise me that you will keep this silence.

LEE (desperately): Father!

RUTLEDGE: Promise!

LEE: I promise.

RUTLEDGE: That no matter what happens to either of us, we will act and live as if this day had never happened.

LEE: Yes. I promise.

RUTLEDGE: Except for silence. Except for silence.[14]

(The high piping tune, far off.)

CURTAIN

Notes to Scene 6:

[1] Coming after the rapid movement of events in Scene 5, the trite conversation about fallen gods and amateur theatre groups, which consumes nearly all of Scene 6, appears unnecessarily drawn out. Though the dialogue here contributes nothing to the plot, it does allow a lull in the action, which helps to emphasize the explosive confrontations between the Johnson and Rutledge families. Also, it provides a period for Johnson's movement to Rutledge's house.

[2] Here Wolfe shows the interior of another house, that of the attorney Rutledge. There are interesting similarities and differences between this set description and that of Scene 5, the interior of Johnson's house. The structures of both rooms are nearly identical: large, high-walled, dignified, with French windows at the back opening onto a broad porch. The furnishings and general atmosphere are quite different, however. Rutledge's comfortable leather furniture and his library of law books convey an air of culture and tradition that is more prominent as it contrasts with the inharmonious assortment of cheap bric-a-brac in the Negro's home. The slight variations of the two sets intensifies the parallel Wolfe has drawn for Rutledge and Johnson. [Claude LaSalle has noted the parallel construction of other scenes in the play; for example, scenes in the Negro settlement, portraying the world of the Negroes, and comparable scenes in the Altamont Real Estate office, showing the environment of the Whites (p. 199), but he has not noted the relationship between Scenes 5 and 6.]

[3] To build suspense in this scene, Wolfe uses the melodramatic "eleventh-hour" motif. Henry Sorrell has revealed that Johnson Will sign the deed of his house to Rutledge the next day (Sc. 4). The action of Scene 6 reverses Rutledge's expectations just before their fulfillment.

[4] The meeting between Rutledge and Jordan is not in "Niggertown." Wolfe may have added it to intensify the relationship of Rutledge and Jordan--two different kinds of effetes. The dialogue consists mainly of effusive rhetoric, spoken chiefly by Jordan, and containing bountiful allusions to lost battles. Jordan's articulation of his sense of defeat (against disease and death) has the effect of pointing up the futility of Rutledge's desire to recapture the past. With time as their common enemy, both men have subscribed to lost causes.

[5] Jordan alludes to Hamlet's fourth soliloquy ("What is a man?" IV, v, 33-35). The Shakespearean passage underlies the central question of the play: What does being "human" mean? Jordan's speech relates specifically to the similarity of man and God. (For a discussion of Wolfe's view of duality in man's nature, see Introduction, pp. 52-55.)

[6] The following conversation between the Rutledges has two functions: (1) to make concrete the impoverishment of the arts by their subordination to materialism and (2) to point up the problem of isolation and the sense of loss created by a society in which there is no real culture. (See Introduction, p. 40.)

[7] Mrs. Rutledge's description of the efforts of her drama league to write and produce their own plays was intended as satire of Frederick Koch's advocacy of the folk play. This section of "Welcome to Our City" is related to the caricature of Koch in a passage deleted from the published version of Look Homeward, Angel. The "Professor Hutch" segment, as this passage is known, parodies the teacher's attempts to wrench folk plays from his students--plays about mountaineers, farmers, fishermen, Negroes--which Wolfe viewed as insincere and immature representations. According to Melvin Groth (p. 41) Koch, like the character Hutch, had once inspired a group of farmers to write a pageant. In this scene of his play Wolfe disparages similar attempts to produce folk plays. (See Introduction for a discussion of Melvin Groth's dissertation, "Thomas Wolfe and the Koch Idea." p. 3.)

[8] A long passage of conversation between the Rutledges which appeared in "Niggertown" was deleted in the final version. The following is a summary:

Mrs. Rutledge criticizes her husband for being insensitive to "art," using as an example his attitude toward her membership in the Quill Club. "We're so awfully Main-Streetish here in the South," she says. He answers that with "The South has never been Main Street . . . even if the Drama League and the Quill Clubs are trying to make her so now." Mrs. Rutledge charges that he is "so professional . . . so old fashioned . . . narrow and provincial" in his belief that "the South can do no wrong." Rutledge responds with an oration on the South (consuming twenty-four lines), in which he expresses in symbolic

terms both his love and loathing for the region of his birth. Mrs. Rutledge berates him for not "keeping abreast," but he replies that he is not ashamed of being "fifty years," even "a hundred years behind the times." Then follows a debate between them about the most desirable kind of power--over body or over mind. Rutledge understands only the former. As a district attorney, he has assisted in sending "hundreds of men to the jail and penitentiary." To counter, Mrs. Rutledge reads from a paper she has written, "Drama as a Social Force":

> Once you have had control over the heads and hearts of people for two hours and a half, once you have moved them to tears or laughter, once you have made their emotions your own, and have struck upon the taut cords of their being; I care not who they be, they will never be quite the same thereafter.

The Rutledges then part on amicable terms, Will giving his wife the clear impression that he regards her as a "delightful amateur."

[9] The references to Rutledge's laughter here and in Mrs. Rutledge's next speech are not in "Niggertown." Wolfe may have added them to intensify the tension between the husband and wife. (See Introduction, p. 40.)

[10] The version of this speech in "Niggertown" reveals a more selfish motive: "Well, we'll give it to Lee, and someday the Rutledge family will be established there again. There's something in tradition, I suppose." The pronoun has been changed from "we" to "I," the singular placing greater emphasis on the alienation of the partners.

[11] The rivalry between the Rutledges for the affection of the son does not appear in "Niggertown." Instead there is an harmonious

discussion about Lee's restless nature. The ensuing dialogue through page 161, Mrs. Rutledge's reference to the syntax of the Chinese language, was added after the play was performed at Harvard.

[12] Mrs. Rutledge's definition of man as an "unsuccessful god" recalls Jordan's phrasing earlier in this scene: "What a piece of work is a God. . . . how like a man!" Wolfe seems to be groping for the concept of pre-existence which he developed in Look Homeward, Angel. The ideas suggested in the speeches which follow are strikingly similar to those of the poetic passages in the novels. Rutledge, pre-occupied with his efforts to remember the spiritual world he knew before this one, does not even hear his wife's lament for the loss of love. These lines may be Wolfe's first expression of the themes of loneliness and loss. (See Introduction, pp. 41-43.)

[13] The Chinese language works as an analogy to the problem of communication, which is suggested by the fragmentary dialogue exchanged by the Rutledges.

[14] The following lines close Scene 2 of "Niggertown":

> LEE: (Writing desperately) Oh, don't talk about it, please!
>
> RUTLEDGE: I'm not going to talk about it. I want you to promise me never to talk about it. Will you promise?
>
> LEE: Yes.
>
> RUTLEDGE: (With steady persuasiveness) No matter what happens to either of us--if we are alone together--if we are with other people; no matter what worries, troubles, or cares. we may have; no matter what grief, pain, joy, suffering, or happiness we know, I want you to act and live as if this day, out of all the other days in our lives had never happened. Promise!

LEE: I promise.

(The shadow of a great African head is projected against the wall for a moment.)

Two changes seem important. First, Wolfe emphasizes the element of silence in the bond between Rutledge and Lee. Second, the stage direction for the "shadow of a great African head" is omitted. The result is that the compact itself becomes more significant, not the consequences or the attendant guilt. (For a discussion of the new relationship between father and son, see Introduction, pp. 39-40.)

SCENE 7[1]

(A bedroom suite in the Altamont Inn. The Inn, which is built of gray uncut stone, and roofed in billowing red tile, is in the English style, and is a most fashionable hostelry. All of its apartments are appropriately named. This one bears the title of "YE SNUGGERIE," stenciled in old English letters across the door.

There is a living room and a bedroom, furnished tastefully in black walnut. We see both rooms and the partition between.

It is midnight of the same day. A babble of voices is heard before the rise of the curtain. PRESTON CARR is discovered in the living room of his apartment, engaged in conversation with three guests--BAILEY, SORRELL, and PROFESSOR HUTCHINGS. He has been renewing his campaign pledges, engaging in intimate anecdote, and enumerating the qualifications of leadership.)

CARR: My friends, you can't fool the people. They know their man. The common judgment of mankind is infallible. Then, what is it that the people demand first of all in one of their servants?

BAILEY: Personality: snap, ginger, pep! He must be a live wire.

CARR: That's part of it; that's another way of saying he must have imagination. Yes, my friends, imagination's the thing.

BAILEY: Vision!

CARR: Yes. That's the same thing, too. When my opponent came out in favor of evolution in his speech at the University, he made the greatest mistake of his political career. He showed no imagination. I took him up like a flash. "Which shall it be?" I said to my constituents, "which shall it be? God or Monkey?" And when election day came, you know the result: they rallied to my standard. That night the eagles of victory were perched aloft on the banner of Preston Carr, while that of J. Vance Lewis dragged in the dust of ignominious defeat.

BAILEY (aside to Sorrell): He stirs my blood when he talks like this!

SORRELL (aside to Bailey): He's at his best.

HUTCHINGS (coughing dryly and nervously): Strictly speaking, of course, in regard to evolution, the facts--

CARR: The facts! What do we care for the facts? This is politics, not a census report. It is my duty to appeal to the imagination. I know the facts as well as you do, my dear Professor. But I choose to touch the imagination--and I sweep the state.

BAILEY (quoting): "Life and life more abundant for all the people of this great state."

CARR: Exactly. There you have it! That's imagination. "God or Monkey! Which?" There you have it again. That's imagination. The thing sticks; their minds take fire at an idea poetically expressed. Gentlemen, in my opinion, God and good weather are the two greatest campaign issues the Democratic party has ever had. As you know, in my campaign I came out in favor of both. I made the point that our great party had always obeyed and feared the one, and controlled the other. And you know the results--

BAILEY, SORRELL: You swept the state.

CARR: Exactly.

HUTCHINGS (rather timidly): Of course the facts in the case--

CARR (scornfully): The facts! Why, man alive, I had the facts! I used 'em. I proved conclusively that the only time the Republican party has ever been in power in this state since the Civil War, we had a falling off in church attendance and the coldest winter known to history. If those aren't facts, what are they?

HUTCHINGS (tapping his finger tips): You strive for the illusion of a higher reality, as it were--the truth lies behind reality. Why Governor, you are a philosopher--an Aristotelian!

BAILEY (to Sorrell): You heard that, didn't you?

CARR: Of course now that I am in office I intend to recognize the facts. My name shall be linked to that of Progress. We shall go forward together. You know my views on the roads program, the education appropriations bill, the fisheries endowment, and other progressive measures. When I go out of office four years from now I want it to be said that Preston Carr never betrayed a trust he made to the masses of the people, that he has carried out in full his campaign promises to his constituents, and that he has done more for the cause of progress than any governor this state has ever had.

SORRELL: We know you'll do it too, Governor.

BAILEY: Yours will be a notable administration, Governor.

CARR: My friends, I thank you for these expressions of your confidence.

(He gets up and makes a quick little bow.)

HUTCHINGS (looking at his watch): Much as I hate to disturb so pleasant and informative a discussion, I think we had better disperse now. It is past twelve, and the Governor has a hard day mapped out tomorrow.

BAILEY: Can it be so late? When the Governor speaks, the hours become minutes.

(All rise to depart.)

CARR (becoming confidential): I don't like to send you boys away--ahem--empty handed. I am reminded of what the Governor of North Carolina said to the Governor of South Carolina. So, if the Professor here doesn't think it will disagree with his academic dignity--(All laugh heartily.) we might take a little nip before you go.

HUTCHINGS (with rare good humor): Ah, Governor, professors may have changed more than you suspect, since you were a student.

CARR: Then, if you'll wait, just a minute, boys.

(He goes into his bedroom.)

BAILEY: He's a regular fellow in every way, isn't he?

HUTCHINGS: All great men are simple and unaffected in their ways. It's a sure test of their quality.

SORRELL: What a fine figure of a man the Governor is! He carries himself as straight as a rod.

BAILEY: What shoulders he has! He could carry an ox on them! Think of it! The destinies of this great state are on that man's shoulders for four years. And he sat here talking to us tonight like any plain citizen.

HUTCHINGS: I am disposed to admire the Governor's head more than any other physical attraction he has. What a way he has of tossing it like an angry bull when denouncing an opponent or when exposing some vicious and corrupt practice. What a forehead! And what a splendid mane of hair!

(During this time GOVERNOR PRESTON CARR has been preparing the beverage in his bedroom. We see him enter, glance quickly back to see if he is watched, and open his traveling bag, from which he takes a quart bottle, which bears in high letters the word "Alcohol" surmounted by a skull and crossbones. He washes this label off at the basin, and fills the bottle which is already half full, with water, shaking the mixture well, and stirring it around with a pencil. Glancing furtively toward the door, he takes a small flask from his hip pocket, drinks deeply, and returns it. This done, he sets the bottle and several glasses on a tray and returns to the living room. The men make the customary exclamations of joyful surprise.)[2]

BAILEY: Am I seeing straight?

SORRELL: Right from the old well,[3] eh, Governor?

(The Governor eyes him sharply.)

CARR: I hope you'll like this. A constituent sent it to me, and said it was really good corn whiskey. (PRESTON CARR gives each of his guests a glass and pours for Bailey first.) Say when!

BAILEY: When!

SORRELL: When!

HUTCHINGS: When!

BAILEY (lifting his glass): Well, here's looking at you, Governor!

SORRELL: Wait! I propose a toast! (They pause. He is silent a moment phrasing his toast, then proceeds.) "May our Governor's reign be as successful as his intentions are honest; May he have faithful followers, industrious assistants, and devoted friends. Finally, may he achieve for himself what he has so gloriously promised his constituents: "'Life and Life more abundant!'"

(The three men touch glasses and drink. The Governor bows his acknowledgment. BAILEY and SORRELL gulp their brinks down; the Professor coughs and gasps a little.)

CARR: How is it, boys?

SORRELL (doggedly): Splendid!

BAILEY (weakly): The best I ever tasted!

HUTCHINGS (wiping his mouth): Yes, a strong but not unpleasant beverage.

BAILEY: Aren't you drinking with us, Governor?

SORRELL (a trifle bitterly): Just one, to be sociable, Governor.

(He takes the bottle and makes ready to pour.)

CARR (hastily): No thank you, I don't think I'd better tonight.

BAILEY: Just one, to make it a party, Governor.

CARR (feebly): I don't think I'd better, really. Another time. Business tomorrow.

SORRELL (boisterously, rather stimulated): Ah, come on, Governor. Say when!

(He pours recklessly and spills some of the beverage on the blotting paper on the table, which immediately bursts into flame. BAILEY extinguishes it with his hand.)

BAILEY: Look out, Hen. You're spilling it, man. That's precious stuff.

SORRELL: Is that enough, Governor?

CARR (rather mournfully): Yes, plenty, thank you. Well, here's to you gentlemen.

(He drains the glass rapidly, giving one or two shuddering gasps at the end.)

BAILEY: A little strong, but splendid stuff. Thanks for the entertainment, Governor.

CARR: The debt is mine. You must all come again.

SORRELL: Thank you. Good night, Governor.

HUTCHINGS: Good night and pleasant dreams, Governor. We'll meet soon again, I hope, at the University.

CARR: Yes, boys, I trust we shall. Good night. (They all go out. The Governor closes the door carefully when they are gone. He replaces the tray and glasses, and puts the bottle in his traveling bag. Returning to the living room, he takes a small, blue volume from his desk, thumbs the pages until he finds what he is looking for, reads intently, puts the book down, and repeats:) "Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be what thou art promised."[4] He ponders deeply on this for a moment, then replaces the book in the desk. He goes to the mirror of his

dresser and considers himself carefully, in all his aspects--now sternly frowning, now playfully smiling; now with hands folded before him; now behind; now profile; now front view. He even takes a small mirror and revolves slowly in order to see himself from all angles. This done, the Governor prepares to go to bed; he goes first to the door, opens it quickly and peers out. He then closes it, locks it, and pulls on it hard several times to make sure it is secure. He wads up a small piece of paper and rams it into the keyhole with his penknife. Next he draws up a small rug and arranges it in such a manner as to hide the crack at the bottom of the door. He cuts several long strips from newspapers, which he wets in water, and pastes along the edges of the door. He goes to the 'phone and says to the hotel clerk below:) This is the Honorable Preston Carr. I am not to be called or disturbed by anyone until nine o'clock tomorrow morning. (He goes to the closet, explores it thoroughly, then closes the door and locks it. He goes to the window, looks out, down, and to either side, then pulls the shade completely down and tacks it at the bottom. He looks behind the dresser, in each of the drawers, under the rug, and beneath the bed. He comes back quickly and takes a second look under the bed. Then, he begins to disrobe, or, we should say, to dismantle his various parts. First he removes his toupee, folds it with tender care, and puts it lovingly under his pillow. Then he takes out a gleaming set of false teeth, which he washes at the basin, and puts on his dresser. Then he pulls off his shoes and takes out carefully three sets of false soles, and a pair of leather arches. He then pulls off his coat and takes from under the shoulders a thick pair of shoulder pads; then he removes the shoulder braces which give him his erect appearance. He pulls off his shirt and unlaces next his abdomen-supporter; an immediate fleshy landslide to his middle regions is visible. He goes behind a chair--here art must supplant photography--and removes his underwear, three suits in all, disclosing a flabby, mottled, and wart-pitted torso, which flows down to the budging mountain of his belly. Shivering, and displaying evidences of the utmost trepidation, he takes his pajamas from the chair, and dons them, after which he tiptoes softly to the door and listens intently for a moment. Apparently satisfied, he returns and is about to turn off the lights, when the image in the mirror again arrests his attention. He pauses, looks, and mutters toothlessly and incoherently. Failing to understand himself, he picks up his teeth from the dresser, claps them into his mouth, and repeats again:) Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be what thou art promised. (He removes the teeth, puts them on the dresser, takes a frightened survey of the room, and a fugitive look under the bed, switches the light off, and leaps beneath the cover, which he pulls securely up as far as his eyes. There is silence and absolute stillness for a moment. Then in the dim light, the bedclothes move, the white wedge of his face comes slowly in view, and as slowly uplifts itself. Slowly, shudderingly, he climbs from his bed and goes down on his knees until his face is tilted in prayer and his hands folded in supplication. The prayer is silent. A bright moonbeam intrudes through the crack in the curtain

and gilds his bald head, in poetic phrase, "an unearthly white." For the benefit of those who have never seen a governor at his prayer, it is well to explain that in engulfing darkness, which blots out line, form and perspective and which gives a vast and empty look to things, he often seems no more than a small, pudgy, and rather terrified boy. And here, as the story writers say, let us leave him to his orisons.)[5]

CURTAIN

Notes to Scene 7:

[1] This scene, even more than the previous one, strays from the central action of the play. The opening dialogue continues the Board of Trade jargon and political rhetoric of several earlier scenes. The only new information provided by the speakers is that Carr's expected election to the governship has taken place.

By timing the election during the period of the play, Wolfe has helped to enlarge the scope of his social comment. Previous scenes have demonstrated the emptiness of life in Altamont, the microcosmic society. With shysters and fools controlling the economy and culture, families drifting apart from misunderstandings and private endeavors, and the races squabbling among themselves and with one another, the people lack both direction and purpose. As their leader, Carr is in a position to effect improvements in the spiritual quality of their lives. With the exposure in this scene of his physical and moral infirmities, however, Wolfe makes quite clear that the individual cannot look to the mechanisms of society to render his life meaningful. Since he is deeply earnest on this matter, Scene 7 should be viewed as a serious comment on the condition of mankind rather than a humorous aside.

[2] Wolfe may be suggesting a symbolic relationship between Carr's serving his guests poison and his tenure in office. Instead of helping to improve their lives, he will promote causes that may ultimately destroy the society.

[3] An allusion to the Old Well, a landmark on the campus of the University of North Carolina, where Wolfe earned his bachelor's degree.

[4] This quotation from Macbeth adds a sinister quality to Carr's character. Though it is easy to laugh at him during the following pantomime, Carr is really a man to be feared and hated. No buffoon at all, he is crafty and relentless, and he plans to achieve even greater power. His control over the lives and fortunes of others is execrable.

[5] In preparing this scene, Wolfe may have been encouraged by by George Pierce Baker, who, according to Baker's biographer Kinne, urged his students to make considerable use of non-verbal techniques (Kinne, pp. 107-108). In Dramatic Technique, the textbook Baker wrote for his Harvard drama courses, he says:

> Without question, then, speech in the drama may often give way in part or wholly to pantomime. The inexperienced dramatist should be constantly alert to see to what extent he can substitute it for dialogue. [George Pierce Baker, Dramatic Technique (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1919), pp. 380-381.]

SCENE 8[1]

(It is the next morning, and the scene is again the street in Niggertown brought closer to view until we see only one side of the vacant lot and the building which contains the dirty-looking restaurant and the greasy fried foods, and on the other side, separated only by a flimsy board partition, the dark and smoke-filled pool-room.

At first, only two young Negro men are present on the street. One is a large black Negro called SLEW-FOOT, a stupid, sullen-appearing, and thoroughly vicious member of his race. The other is a small mulatto, a little man with a sharp, furtive face, and with no gift for silence, as his rapid, chattering conversation discloses. There is something decidedly ape-like in his appearance, in his voluble, high-pitched chattering, in the momentary glimpses he affords us of gleaming white teeth, and in the unbaffled pertinacity of his attempts to promote conversation with his sullen, monosyllabic neighbor. This Negro's name is PICKENS GAFFNEY.

This pair will presently be joined by other Negro men, some members of the crowd, some important enough to be named.

There comes, from time to time, from another part of the lot, the sound of hammers and the rattling of a cement mixer, indicating that workers are engaged on construction nearby. There is also visible a small pile of sand, used by the mixers of lime and cement.[2]

Affixed to the brick wall is a large, brilliantly colored poster, announcing the arrival in Altamont, on its fortieth annual tour, of the Al G. Fields Minstrel Troupe. The central part of the poster contains a picture of the assembled company, in its wonted semi-circle, with the black-face comedians and dancers in suits of red silk at either end, and the singers, in eighteenth century periwigs and silks, in the center. On either corner of the posters are small pictures of the company's chief comedians: BERT SWOR, JOHN HEALEY, BILLY BEARD--White men, and, as the poster says, "Famous for their inimitable portrayal of Negro character."

PICKENS: I heahs dat Jones woman's in de lock-up again.

SLEW-FOOT (in surly tones): Whut Jones woman?

PICKENS: Lawd, boy, you ought to know her; you laid up wid her enough: Carrie Jones.

SLEW-FOOT: How do I know who you's talkin' 'bout? Dey's mo'n one Jones woman, dey's a million. Speak so's I heah yo', niggah.

(After this, conversation languishes somewhat, but not for long.)

PICKENS: Is you gwine to de dance tonight?

SLEW-FOOT: Whut dance? I don't know nothin' 'bout no dance.

PICKENS: De dance at de Y.M.I.

SLEW-FOOT: How'd I know which dance you'se talkin' 'bout?

(Again there is a lull.)

PICKENS: Is yo' seen dat bright-skinned niggah dat's been goin' roun' wid his papahs?

SLEW-FOOT: What bright-skinned niggah? Dey's million bright-skinned niggahs.

PICKENS (showing some signs of irritation): Look heah, big boy, don't you evah <u>see</u> nothin' so you undahstan's it?

SLEW-FOOT: You got to talk so's I heah you, niggah. I ain't no mind-readah!

PICKENS: I mean dat bright-skinned fellah fum de Nawth. He belongs to one o' dem suhsietys what's gwine to make us as good as de white men.

SLEW-FOOT: How dey gwine to do dat?

PICKENS: Dey goin' to fix hit so's we kin ride on de same seats in de street kyars wid de white folks, and sit nex' to dem in de shows, and eat in de same eatin' places wid dem.

SLEW-FOOT: Go on, boy! Yo' kin do dat right now in Bawston.

PICKENS: Sho'! Ain't dey no Jim Crow[3] up dere?

SLEW-FOOT (pausing impressively): Boy, dey don't know whut it is?

(SAM TIPTON, a broad-faced, grinning young Negro, makes his appearance, and joins the group.)

PICKENS: Heah's ole Sam Tipton! When' yo' git out, boy?

SAM: Yestiddy.

SLEW-FOOT (surlily): You been on de gang, ain't yo'?

SAM (rather insolently): Mus' is, niggah.

SLEW-FOOT (belligerently): Who tol' you to call me niggah, niggah?

SAM (also in a hostile manner): Don' call me no niggah, niggah!

SLEW-FOOT: Who de yo' think yo' is, boy? Don't go gittin' biggity 'roun me!

SAM: Shut up, niggah, or I'll call you whut you is!

SLEW-FOOT: Don' you cuss me, niggah!

PICKENS (the mediator): I heah yo' ole grandaddy's jes' got paid a pow'ful lot o' money by de white folks fo' his place.

SAM (proud in the consciousness of newly acquired wealth): Dho'! De ole man's lousy wid money. He don' know whut to do wid it.

PICKENS (laughing loudly): I reckon you know! Don't you, boy?

SAM: I reckon I does. I'm goin' to hab me some of dat money.

PICKENS: I wish I had some money right now. I'd pack up an' take a trip Nawth.

SAM: Uh, uh, boy! Dat don' go fo' me!

PICKENS: Sho, you ought to heah de ole Slew-Foot tell 'bout Bawston.

SAM: Whut 'bout Bawston, boy?

PICKENS: Dat place mus' be niggah heaven. Dey ain't no Jim Crow up dere.

SAM: Whut good dat do?

PICKENS: Ole Slew-Foot say you can sit on de same seats an' eat offen de same tables wid 'em.

SAM: Whut good dat do, boy?

SLEW-FOOT: Dey treats you like a ginleman up dere, dat's whut. You'se jes' as good as a white man.

SAM: Yes, yo' is! Don' tell me, niggah, Ef all dat eatin' an sittin' wid dem at de tables made you's good as de white folks, why't yo' stay up dere wid 'em?

SLEW-FOOT (sullenly): Aw, I don' like de damn col' weathah dey has.

SAM (scornfully): Eatin' at de tables wid 'em, was you? Yes you was! Big boy, when you got back home, you didn' look like you'd been doin' much eatin' wid anyone. Yo' ribs was stickin' out, an' ef dey hadn't sent you on de gang fo' dat cuttin' scrape, you'd a stahved to death.

(Other Negro men come up from time to time to join the party. They listen in, and occasionally add a remark of their own.)

FIRST NEGRO MAN: Well, h'it'll be movin' day fo' us niggahs soon.

SECOND NEGRO MAN: We got ouah awduhs to git out on de fust.

FIRST NEGRO MAN: Dat only give us two weeks.

PICKENS GAFFNEY: Wheah is yo' movin' to?

THIRD NEGRO MAN: I'm goin' to wuk fo' de tann'ry an' git one of dere houses down by de tracks. It's clossah fo' me dere, anyway.

SECOND NEGRO MAN: You tan'ry folks is all right. But whut 'bout dese othah niggahs? Dey's shuntin' us 'way ovah to de hollow on de othah side o' town.

FOURTH NEGRO MAN: Don' know how it's goin' to seem bein' so fah off. Dis seems home to me now. I nevah lived nowhere else.

SLEW-FOOT: Well, if I didn't want to go, I wouldn't go, an' dey wouldn' budge me.

SAM : Dat's strong talk, big boy! I'se seen niggahs like yo' befo'; dey's a whole gang of 'em out dere wher' I come from, makin' little 'uns out'a big uns.

PICKENS (showing his teeth): Dat doctah man didn't take none o' dere sass. He tol' 'em he wan't g'wine to sell 'less he wanted to.

SAM: Whut's dat got te do wid dese niggahs heah? He owns de house he's livin' in, don' he?

PICKENS (unwillingly): Yeah, I s'pec' he do.

SAM: Well, den, whut you talkin' 'bout?

SECOND NEGRO MAN: He comes cross, dough. He tol' 'em de othah day he'd sell h'it.

THIRD NEGRO MAN: Uh, uh, boy! He ain't gwine to now. I seen him dis mawnin'. He say he change his min'.

(A sensation in the crowd, and startled exclamations of "No," "Go on, Boy," and "Sho.")

PICKENS (grinning excitedly): De ole doc ain't lettin' no one boss him roun'.

FIRST NEGRO MAN: He's holdin' out fo' mo' money, dat's whut he's doin'.

FIFTH NEGRO MAN (older than the others): He's a damn fool, den. Dey's awffuhed him twice as much as de place is wuth already.

PICKENS: Ef I was him I'd hol' out till day awffuhed him three times as much.

FIFTH NEGRO MAN: Yeah, an' you'd tu'n up missin', too. Dose white men ain't gwine to fool wid him.

PICKENS: Dey got to have dat house, ain't dey?

FIFTH NEGRO MAN: Yeah, but dey ain't goin' to lissen to no hold-up.

SLEW-FOOT (getting on center of the stage): Dat's de way dey does us, now. We was good enough to go to France an' fight fo' 'em; now we ain't good enough to tromp on.

SAM: Uh, uh. Lissen to Gen'l Puhshing!

(The other men laugh and nudge each other.)

SLEW-FOOT (belligerently): Whut you shovin' in fo', boy?

SAM: You went to France and fought fo' 'em, didn' you?

SLEW-FOOT: Who says I didn'? I kin show you my ticket. De man give me my cahd an' says: "You is 963,437."

SAM: Big boy, you sho' was considdubble. But when'd you do any fightin' in France?

SLEW-FOOT: Whut'd you do, niggah?

SAM: Me? Who said anything 'bout me? You don' heah me goin' roun' braggin' and blowin' 'bout whut I done, does you? No. I didn' do no mo' den you. We was bofe back dere loadin' de boats an' haulin' de truck aroun'; dat's de only fightin' you done, niggah, 'cause I was right dere wid you. You ain't nevah seen none o' dose Gumnans, boy; you ain't even seen a pictuah av 'em.

SLEW-FOOT (sullenly): I reckon I'd a gawn ef dey's sent fo' me.

SAM: Den I reckon dey'd have to a-carried you, boy, 'cause you sho-Gawd would'n have been able to wawk.

(There is a roar of laughter at this sally, and SLEW-FOOT rewards his persecutor with most evil looks. At this moment UNCLE AMOS TODD comes by. As he nears the crowd, his face sets in a heavy scowl; he mutters ominously to himself, and he grips his cane a little more tightly. The Negroes, who are in a gay humor now, seize the opportunity to banter the old man a bit.)

FIRST NEGRO MAN (calling loudly): Hello, Uncle Amos.

(AMOS makes no answer, but moves on.)

SECOND NEGRO MAN: He ain't speakin' to us sence he got his money.

THIRD NEGRO MAN: Dat ain't Uncle Amos. Dat's Mistah Jay Pierpont.

(There is another roar of laughter at this thrust; still AMOS moves on. Then the young Negro SAM beings to whistle softly a little tune to which the old man appears to keep step. He recognizes immediately the notes of his grandson's voice, and turns angrily, brandishing his cane.)

AMOS: You nasty, good-fo' nothin' thing, mixin' up wid dat black trash dere. Dey'll git you on de gang agin, dat's whut dey'll do. Ain't you got no shame, boy? You won't wuk, you won't do nothin' but set aroun' wid dat black truck dere. You is jes' plain no 'count an' shif'less--dat's whut you is. Why ain't you out findin' a job like you would ef you was any good?

SAM (innocently): Whut fo'? I don't hab to wuk now.

(There is another burst of laughter from the Negroes.)

AMOS (brandishing his cane): You don't git nothin' fum me, boy, not a penny. (He turns away suddenly, but returns again.) Somebody aught to take a stick to you--dat's whut you needs.

(He goes on, followed by the laughter of the crowd. A tough-looking young White man, wearing leather leggins, a flat cap, and a Norfolk jacket, stops in the street a few feet away and beckons to Sam. The White man is evidently a public chauffeur. SAM, wearing his ever-ready grin, shuffles over good-naturedly to him. The Negroes talk among themselves in lowered voices, glancing over at the new arrival from time to time, and grinning. The man and SAM talk to each other in low tones.)

THE MAN: Can you git me a quart fer tonight, Sam?[4]

SAM (after an appreciable pause, in which he appears to ponder): Why I reckon so, boss. 'Cose, it ain't gwine to be easy to git.

THE MAN: Ah, tie a can to that, an' don't try to hold me up. I can depend on you, can't I? (With a wink.) I'm gittin' this fer a guy that wants it awful bad.

SAM : Yes, suh, boss, I'll be heah; at whut time?

THE MAN: I'll come by at eight o'clock.

SAM : All right, boss, I'll have it fo' you, sho.

THE MAN: So long.

(He goes out. SAM returns to the crowd.)

FOURTH NEGRO MAN: Uh, uh, Sam! You sho' is stahtin' in agin, soon. You mus' like dat rock pile.

SAM (grinning): Well, dey feeds you out dere, boy, and dat's mo'n I gits in heah sometime.

SLEW-FOOT: Dey owes us a livin', dat's what. Dey feed us long's we fight fo' 'em; den dey kicks us when it's all ovah an' we's down.

SAM (scornfully): Go on, boy! Why don' you git out an' git you a job an' quit yo' growlin'.

SLEW-FOOT (surlily): Dey ain't no jobs.

SAM: I'll git you a job ef you wants one. De tan'ry wants men right now. Why don' you go down dere ef yo' wants to wuk? (SLEW-FOOT makes no reply.) Go on, boy. I knows you. You wouldn' take no job ef dey come beggin' you. You wants to sit 'roun' an' growl.

PICKENS: I got one o' dese papahs heah dat dis bright-skinned niggah fum de Nawth has been passin' roun'.

(He produces a newspaper from his pocket.)

SAM: Boy, you'll come up missin', sho, ef you reads dat truck.

PICKENS: Look at dis heah pictuah, will yo'? (They all crowd around.) You see dis heah niggah in unifawm wid a gun in bofe han's. He's cuttin' loose on dose white folks ovah dere, an' it say: "An eye fo' an eye; a toof fo' a toof."

SLEW-FOOT: Heah! Lemme see dat, boy.

(He takes the paper and studies the picture with signs of evident satisfaction.)

SLEW-FOOT: Dat's de way to do 'em!

SAM: You'll wake up an' fin' yo'sef graveyahd dead some mawnin', niggah. You'se gittin' too big to be healthy.

ONE OF THE NEGROES (sings): "Oh, I tell you de graveyahd's a mean ole place, Dey puts you in de groun' an' throwd d'ut in yo' face."

SEVERAL (Joining in the chorus):

"Oh tell me how long
Will I have to wait,
Can I git you now,
Or must I hes-o-tate?"

SAM: De man in de minst'el show sung dat las' yeah: Does you remembah dat little dance he done wid it?

(He produces a pair of wooden bones from his pocket, rattles them deftly between his fingers, and dances a shuffling clog dance accompanied by strokes of the hand, and rooster-like cranings of the head. The Negroes are delighted.)

ONE OF THE MEN: Sho! You ought to be in a minst'el show yo'se'f, Sam. De cuhcus dat was through heah las' yeah had a show all of niggahs.

SAM: Dat wan't no good. I seen h'it; h'it takes de White folks to put on a good minste'l show.

PICKENS: Field's Minst'els is in town today. (He points to the poster.)

SAM: You know who's goin' to be dere, too, don't you? When's de peerade?

PICKENS: Dey comes up on de Squah at twelve o'clock, de papah say.

SAM: Boy, I'll be dere "when dat brass ban' stahts playin'".

(A small mulatto Negro, very well dressed, and wearing spectacles to which a cord is attached, appears in the street bearing a sheaf of newspapers under his arm. The Negroes regard him curiously.)

PICKENS (in a whisper to the group): Dere's dat bright-skinned niggah fum de Nawth.

SAM: Uh, uh! Ain't he somp'n, dough! Look at dat strut!

(The Negro surveys the scene for a moment, espies the minstrel poster on the side of this brick wall, goes up to it, and tears it off. This action manifestly pains SAM deeply, for he loves the bright colors.)

SAM (protesting): Look out, dare, big boy! Whut yo' doin'?

THE MAN (SYKES) (using very good English with a New England accent): I'm asking you to stand up for your rights, my friends. We'll put an end to the White man's conspiracy for once and for all. This is all part of their propaganda to make a race of buffoons out of us.

SAM: Sho'! Is dey tryin' to do dat?

(The Negroes gather around their Northern brother, staring at him curiously.)

THE MAN (SYKES): A minstrel show, my friends, think of it--a minstrel show made up of White men who poke fun at our race. I'm surprised that you have stood for it so long. Where I come from we wouldn't tolerate it five minutes.

SAM: Where is you f'um, big boy?

THE MAN (SYKES) (coldly): My name is Sykes.

SAM (unruffled): Where is you f'um, Sykes?

SYKES: I'm from Boston.

(He pauses for this to take effect. They press in close, gazing on him with open-mouthed wonder.)

SAM: Don't dey have no minst'el shows up dere?

SYKES: Not until a committee of citizens of our race have decided that it contains no matter that would insult or injure our feelings.

SAM: An' whut ef hit does, big boy?

SYKES: Why, we protest to the mayor.[5]

PICKENS (triumphantly): Uh, uh! Yo' heah's dat, don't you? Dat's de place fo' me. I'se goin' soon's I git de kyar fayah.

SAM: Hush yo' mouf' boy. Don't you want to see no mo' minst'el shows?

SYKES: Now, my friends, I have a few copies of a newspaper which should be in the home of every person of color in America--the Clarion Call. I'm going to give a copy to each of you today and I hope you read it carefully and manage to take out a year's subscription as well.

(He begins to pass copies of the paper around.)

PICKENS: Dis heah's de same as de one I showed you.

(A White man, evidently a foreman of laborers or a mason comes by, putting the lid on his dinner pail.)

SAM: Is yo' through eatin', Mistah Jim?

THE MAN: Yes. You can finish out the can, Sam; there are some sandwiches left. Put the pail back when you get through.

(He goes on. SAM puts the dinner pail down by the side of the building.)

SYKES (who has finished distributing the papers): Now, my friends, I hope you will all come to hear me when I speak tonight at your local Y.M.I.

SAM: Yo' picked a bad night, big boy. De minst'el show's in town.

SYKES: Surely, my friends, you wouldn't go to a minstrel show, which will only insult and make fun of you, when you can come and hear me explain the purpose of that wonderful organization in the North which is doing so much to promote and alleviate your condition?

PICKENS: Does you belong to dis heah sahsiety I heahs so much about?

SYKES: I am one of its traveling secretaries.

SAM: Whut's de name of dis heah sahsiety?

SYKES: It's full title is the Society for the Promotion of Brotherly Love, Racial Equality, and Humanitarian Principles Between the Colored and White People. If any of you are ever in trouble of any kind, my friends, just write us and we will respond with friendly and sympathetic advice.[6]

PICKENS: Ain't dey no shawt way of sayin' dat name?

SYKES: I'll write it out for you.

SAM: Dat's sho' a considdable sahsiety.

SYKES: My friends, I come to you with tidings of a better day--a day when strife and bitterness will have died from the earth, when hatred, and prejudice will have passed away, when the color line is a thing of the past, and when Black men and White men will live together as the brothers they are and should be.

A VOICE: You tell 'em, big boy!

SAM: Whut ef de White men don't want to be brothers?

SYKES (fiercely): Then we'll force them; our dream of brotherhood must be realized and realized it will be, if we have to shoot down the first White man that gets in our way.

SLEW-FOOT: Now you's talkin'!

SAM: Yeah, he's talkin', niggah, but he'll be pushin' daisies 'fo' long, ef he keeps dat up!

SYKES: Tonight I am going to talk to you of the infamous plot of the White men of your town who want to rob you of your homes in order to fill their own pockets with the wealth you have created for them. (SAM observes at this moment that a crafty black hand has crept over to where the dinner pail sits and has removed the lid. A well-directed kick sends the hand flying away.)[7] There is one thing and only one which is needed to raise you from your present condition to your proper place as the equals of the Whites. (He pauses.) That thing is education. (SAM rescues the pail and spits upon the food, covering it with his own saliva, in order to protect it from further depredations. He then puts the pail back with an insolent smile of triumph and is rewarded, by the would-be thief, with a savage look of anger. SYKES has

busied himself by tacking up a printed bill announcing his lecture, on the space formerly occupied by the minstrel poster. He now prepares to depart.) Remember, the time is tonight at eight o'clock, my friends. I hope you will all manage to come. There is no admission charge.

(JOHNSON appears in the street, a grim and unsmiling figure. His manner forbids and repels the Negroes, who become suddenly quiet and make a path for him, as he comes by. Finally the curiosity of PICKENS GAFFNEY emboldens him to speak.)

PICKENS: I heah you ain't sellin' de house aftah all, doctah.

JOHNSON (curtly): You hear a lot, don't you? (He turns abruptly and faces the silent, abashed group.) No. I ain't sellin'! They can't make me get off. I'm not like some folks who let themselves be kicked aroun' from pillar to post.

A MAN: I reckon we got to go when they tells us, doc. We ain't like you--we don't own nothin', so whut can we do?

JOHNSON (contemptuously): Yes, you have to go! Of co'se you do; you'll go wherever they tell you whenever they crack the whip. But if you stood up like men you wouldn't have to go anywhere. They couldn't budge you.

SYKES (applauding with his hands): Hear! Hear!

(There are exclamations in the crowd and a general gathering in. Someone says, "Git up dere and tell us 'bout it, Doc," and others say, "Dat's right, git up dere, doc." The Negro appears to hesitate a moment, but finally he gets up on the little mound of sand which the masons nearby have been using.)[8]

JOHNSON (from the mound): Yes, the White man owns the place, but you've paid him rents enough to have bought it four times over. Now, when he sees a chance to make more money, he'll kick you off without carin' whether you freeze or starve.

SYKES: It's all part of the capitalist conspiracy to crush our race, just as I . . .

(Cries of, "Shut up," "Hush," "Be quiet, man.")

JOHNSON: If you were White men living down here, do you suppose these people in town would kick you off like this? (There are cries of "NO!" from the crowd.) No! The White man knows too much for that. He knows that his own kind are men, and expect to be treated like men, and fight back like men. He thinks that you are dogs and will whine like a dog when he kicks you, and he does with you just as he likes.

A VOICE: Dat's right, doc. We's as good as de White men. De bright-skin man say so.

JOHNSON: No, niggah, you ain't as good as he is. You're a long way from it. You ain't even as good as I am.

SYKES (glibly): Education will change all that.

JOHNSON: No, it won't; it's mo' than that. You can't give a man a few books, you can't teach him to read or write, an' make him ovah. I've known White men that couldn't read, but they held their heads up and lived in their own homes, and took care of their women-folks and fought for 'em. The White man makes laws for himself and makes you live up to 'em. He builds jails an' puts you in 'em. His wife bears children an' your wife nurses 'em. The White man believes in a thing an' sticks to it an' fights for it. What do you do--you niggahs! All of you have worked for the White man; you have run his errands an' done his chores all yo' life. An' what's he done fo' you? I'll tell you what he's done--niggahs. He's given you all them yellow skins I see down there. He's crep' up behind yo' houses in the dark an' gone to bed with your wife an' daughter; an' if she spoke to him in the street the next day he'd mown her down with his fist. That's the White man fo' you! (He laughs with light-throated madness--his yellow eyes dilating. Angry cries in the crowd.) If you serve the White man he will pay you, if you bow and scrape to him, he will have a good word for you, if you act like a monkey befo' him, he will laugh at you an' give you money. As long as you act like a dog, the White man will treat you like a dog, and be a good master; he'll feed you, he'll pat you on the head, he'll be good ehough to you, maybe. But act like a man and he'll hate you, and he'll want to kill yo'.

(Excited murmurs and shouts, and a general pressing in.)

JOHNSON: What yo' goin' to do? Why, yo'll do like you always done, niggahs. Yo'll take it lyin' down. (With sudden fierce exhortation.) Why don't yo' do like I do? Stand on yo' feet an' act like a man, an' take yo' chances. When they come to put you off the place, tell 'em you ain't going' to move, an' they can't do anything to you. How can they? Tell 'em you've paid their rents, an' if they give you time you'll buy their houses, but that this is your town an' they can't take it from you an' kick you out to build up anothah.

(There is a roar of approval from the men, and shouts of "You tell 'em, doc," "That's the way to do it," and so on.)

VOICE IN CROWD: Who's gwine to stay wid us, doc, an' tell us whut to do?

JOHNSON: Me. I'll stick to you as long as you stick to me.

(Another roar from the crowd.)

SLEW-FOOT: We's wid you doc! We'll stick to you, doc!

SAM (pleasantly scornful): Don' lissen to de Black bastahds, doc. Dey can't stick to nothin'.

(Cries of anger and disapproval in the crowd.)

SLEW-FOOT (menacingly): Who's you callin' a Black bastahd, niggah?

SAM: I'se callin' you all, but I'se lookin' at you, big boy.

SLEW-FOOT: Wait till I git my knife, niggah!

(He reaches for it.)

JOHNSON: Come on, niggahs! None o' that, now. If you stick to me, I'll . . .

(SLEW-FOOT and SAM engage in a fist fight, and roll over on the ground, clawing, punching, kicking, and cursing, both making hasty but fruitless attempts to draw their knives. In a moment all is turmoil and confusion. The Negroes divert their attention from Johnson and follow the squirming contestants slowly down the lot, shouting advice and encouragement to them as they roll and jostle each other along. Presently the crowd has moved to a point some distance away, leaving JOHNSON alone on his pile of sand. He has been trying to attract their attention by shouts, by gestures of the arm, and in various other ways, but they pay no attention to him.

The man SYKES, who has been left behind, presently goes over and joins the crowd. And now, above the confusion, there is the sound of music, of a blaring, brass band, and of the beatings of big drums. At first it is barely audible, then it comes closer and closer until it predominates above the shouts and curses of the men.

A flurry in the crowd is noticeable; the Negroes look at each other and cry joyfully, "Minst'el Show! Minst'el Show!" The two fighting men are pulled apart and placed on their feet, and in a moment the whole, howling, jostling pack, SYKES included, rush out and up the street to the direction of the music, leaving JOHNSON standing alone and staring glassily before him. One of the Negroes returns, hastily, and beckoning to JOHNSON to follow, cries "Minst'el Show, Doc," and disappears.

Presently he comes down from the sand pile and, as if unconscious of his act, bends and scrapes up a handful of the sand.

The poster that Sykes has nailed to the wall attracts his attention, his big fist tightens convulsively, and the sand spurts out through his fingers. He reads the poster and with a savage gesture tears it from the wall.

The heavy blaring music, and the heavy booming drums, now swoop down upon the stage in great rhythmic beats of sound. It seems as if it is advancing steadily to this point; it seems as if, in a great crash of noise, it will presently converge on the scene before us. The music is the same foolish recurrent tune that has been previously whistled.[12]

The Negro turns with stolid and unyielding features, and walks rapidly down the street in a direction opposite to that taken by the crowd.)

CURTAIN

Notes to Scene 8:

[1] Returning to the racial conflict, Scene 8 reveals the dissension among the Negroes which makes inevitable their defeat by the more organized Whites. Wolfe depicts the average Southern Negro as irresponsible and ignorant--an easy victim for ridicule and exploitation by Whites and an unsuspecting target for abuse from the more clever ones of their own race. Resisting all urging by Johnson and Sykes to unite in opposition to insult and injury by Whites, the Negroes begin to fight among themselves. Finally, all becomes chaotic until a minstrel band summons them, and they fall into place like joyful and obedient children.

[2] These sounds are made by the same workers who in Scene 1 are marching homeward. Since they never appear doing their work, the noise of the machines rather than the men appropriately signifies the inexorable movement of material progress.

[3] The "Jim Crow" laws were regulations passed in Southern states after Reconstruction to prevent the intrusion of Negroes upon White Supremacy. Some of that legislation called for absolute segregation of the races in public buildings and facilities. [C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913, Vol. IX of A History of the South, ed. Wendell Holmes Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), pp. 211-212.]

[4] A relationship may exist between Preston Carr's use of illegal whiskey in Scene 7 and this incident showing a Negro as "supplier" to

a White man. As willing participants in the corrupt system perpetuated by Whites, the Black characters, such as Sam Tipton in this scene and Annie Johnson in Scene 5, share guilt with the Whites who exploit them.

[5] Sykes' exaggerated claims of fair treatment for Negroes in the North are meant to destroy his credibility for the audience. The Altamont Negroes are obviously being duped with a false vision of better conditions.

[6] In the name of brotherly love, Sykes utters inane jargon which is similar in tone to that of the Altamont boosters.

[7] Occurring at the same time that Sykes charges the Whites with robbery, this slight incident shows that greed is not a trait peculiar to the White race.

[8] Johnson's movement is ironic because this same sand pile will be used in the buildings that will supplant the Negroes' houses.

[9] See quotation from Wolfe's "Prefatory Statement," Introduction, p. 16.

[10] This stage direction, like similar references in Scene 3, is not in the original play.

[11] This speech implies the man-beast theme that appears elsewhere in references to evolution and in occasional eruptions of primitive behavior in the Negroes. Johnson's words prepare for the conclusion of the play, when a perplexed Rutledge, standing over Johnson's body, asks, "Why did you choose to become a man?"

[12] This reference to music does not appear in "Niggertown."

SCENE 9[1]

The offices of the Altamont Development Company one week later.

It is late afternoon of a gray foggy day, and the stenographer, MISS NEELY, wearing coat and hat, is closing and locking her desk, preparatory to departure for home.

MISS NEELY goes to the window nervously and peers out. Everything is unnaturally still outside, but, from time to time, there comes a low hum of voices. SORRELL, rather haggard and drawn about the face, enters the office. He speaks quietly, but it is evident that he is in a subdued state of excitement.

SORRELL: Leaving, Helen?

MISS NEELEY: Yes, sir.

(She continues to peer out.)

SORRELL: Nervous?

MISS NEELY: I wish those men would go away. The way they stand around in little groups and talk, and are quiet when you pass by, is enough to make your flesh crawl.

SORRELL: Go home and get a good night's rest. You're tired and nervous after these last few days. When you come in tomorrow morning everything will be settled.

MISS NEELY: Oh, Mr. Sorrell, I do hope--

SORRELL (soothingly): Nothing's going to happen. We'll work the whole thing out around the table before another hour.

MISS NEELY: I'm so glad. You don't know what a relief it will be.

SORRELL: Yes; it will be for us all.

MISS NEELY: Good night, Mr. Sorrell.

SORRELL: Good night, Helen.

(She goes out. RUTLEDGE, an old man with a grey face, enters from the inner office.)

RUTLEDGE: Has no one come yet?

SORRELL: They are coming right away, I think. You look tired, Mr. Rutledge. Sit down.

(SORRELL goes into the inner office closing the door. JORDAN enters.)

JORDAN (entering): Rutledge, I have come to say good-bye to you.

RUTLEDGE: I am sorry to hear that you are going, my friend.

JORDAN: I am dying more rapidly than I had expected--(A sound in the street.) in all this health.

RUTLEDGE: So it is Paris, of course? Well, Jordan, artists have died very prettily there before.

JORDAN: I shall perform nicely, Rutledge, never fear. I have just enough money for Beaujolais and the Left Bank. To have more would spoil it. And the little hotel where dear old Oscar finally exploded still does business at twelve francs a day. Thank God--I am in for a gaudy finish, a bit trite, perhaps, but does that matter in Paris? Oh, there will be color enough, my friend, as long as I can cough hackneyed red blotches upon a handkerchief.

RUTLEDGE: If you write bitterly about us, end always upon the well-known note of hope--a sky scraper against the morning sky, the span of the bridge in the dying sun, or--

JORDAN: Some similar bilge. I shall not fail, Rutledge. I have found new monarchs for the dying kings, new treasons for the old. The greatest still life in the world--a hardware window; the greatest music, riveters on steel. And I have found as well a low comedian who is better than Chaplin and Euripides; a Negro jazz player who surpasses Gershwin and Beethoven; a newspaper columnist with greater genius than Ring Lardner or Goethe; a cartoonist who surpasses Rembrandt or Voltaire; a dandy poet with more satire than Homer; at least two super Blakes and Donnes, and a whole host of super Crashaws.

RUTLEDGE: Enough to start a new world with.

JORDAN: Enough at least to gather in the parading Yanks--for a year, perhaps. A year! Why loyalty will become a chronic state!

RUTLEDGE: When all else fails, when everything is lacking, the vulgar posture wins, if we say "beauty" long enough. Goats are sheep and sheep are goats. But it is easier to die, Jordan. The eternal trifler wins eternally. Ignorance and snobbery are invincible. Do you need money now?

JORDAN: No. I have done well in local real estate.

RUTLEDGE (surprised): I did not know that.

JORDAN: My profits are small, but sufficient for my passage. I bought when I came two lots in your leading cemetery, intending one for personal occupancy. They doubled in value overnight. What could I do, Rutledge? Manifestly, death here is out of the question for a man with my income. I sold and took my profit. A friend of mine once told me cremation was not at all unpleasant. And now, goodbye my friend. I shall send you my book when it appears. The title is "Eleven Frantic Arts."

RUTLEDGE: Goodbye, Jordan. We are weary for an ancient earth.

JORDAN (advancing a step): Before I go: Why are your eyes high, high, sorrowful and sad? Rutledge, beware the Ides. Local color runs to red. I watched the flight of the birds last night. Goodbye.

RUTLEDGE: Goodbye, Jordan. We shall meet, I trust, in Limbo.

(JORDAN goes out. RUTLEDGE goes into the inner office. In a moment SORRELL returns.)

(Presently there is a babble of voices in the hall, and SORRELL looks at his watch. PROFESSOR HUTCHINGS, the REVEREND MR. SMALLWOOD, the Baptist minister, the HONORABLE PRESTON CARR, and MR. TYSON, the President of the Center-Union Bank and Trust Company come in.

(The REVEREND MR. SMALLWOOD, who is the idol of his flock, is a big, red-faced, well-fed man, in the mid-forties, wearing a white vest. He is hearty in speech and manner; his robust pronunciation of the word "Brother" warms the cockles of the heart.[2]

(TYSON, the banker, like PRESTON CARR, is a man of the people, and they know it and make him banker for it. He is a small, provincial, Southerner with all the flamboyance, all the floridity of the clan; to this he combines a hard, peasant hostility toward any idea he cannot understand, so that he holds half the world in constant suspicion. He is small, brisk and plump, in a pasty, white manner; he has all the hard, self-congratulatory assurance of the very common man who has "got there," who won his spurs and proved his honesty and worth by fifteen years of steadiness, punctuality, and abstention from tobacco, alcohol, and anything attractive in silk hosiery.)[3]

CARR (as he enters, in angry, querulous tones): Johnson hasn't done all of this. It's that educated nigger from the North who's been stirring them up with his speeches and papers. (More composedly.) But a flare-up, gentlemen, only a flare-up. The good people of both races.

TYSON: The man should be driven out of town. He's a menace to law and order.

(BAILEY rushes in, in a very excited state, brandishing a newspaper in his hand.)

BAILEY: It's all up! They've let the cat out of the bag. The New York Times has a story of the thing on the front page--all about the troops being sent here and everything.

CARR (angrily): Who let the thing out?

TYSON: Oh, the newspapers get hold of everything.

BAILEY (fervently): Thank God the tourist season's over; It would've knocked an awful hole in our business. I only hope it doesn't hurt us next year.

SMALLWOOD (who despises friction): I'm sure it'll all be blown over by that time.

BAILEY: It's that Yankee nigger who's behind all this--mark my words! (In an aggrieved tone.) He's quoting books and papers to 'em--psychology and all--some of it by niggers, too, saying there's no difference between darkies and White people.

CARR: I'll bet you anything the Black scoundrel is in Republican employ. I see the whole thing. They plan to undermine the foundations of White supremacy in the South again, reestablish Black legislatures and free lunch counters in every state capitol, and turn the country over to martial law, corrupt politics, and Northern carpet-baggers. The whole trick is as plain as the nose is on your face.

SMALLWOOD (butter-lipped): It is plain, we must do something to refute these infamous assertions.

CARR: We must do something--but what? (Helplessly.) The man is quoting books. It isn't fair! Calling science to his aid like that.

HUTCHINGS: We can meet his facts with facts of our own, Mr. Governor. He has only been able so far to quote as authorities three books by sociologists, four by psychologists, and six by economists and historians, a total of thirteen in all, including a total mass of evidence of six thousand, seven hundred, and forty-two pages. Offhand I am able to produce the works of five sociologists, six psychologists, and eight economists and historians, a total of nineteen, composing in all over ninety-five hundred pages of solidly-documented scientific, historic, and economic evidence, all tending to show that the Negro is racially, morally, intellectually, and physically an inferior. One, indeed,

asserts he is a higher species of ape and produces eight hundred closely-filled pages to support his contention.

CARR: Truth will prevail! You have done an invaluable service for science, Professor.

HUTCHINGS: I have failed to cite one authority, and the most important of all! Professor Stiggins of the University.

CARR (rather doubtfully): Oh yes.

HUTCHINGS: Surely you have heard of Professor Stiggins, the noted psychologist. He is known all over the world for his experiments on guinea pigs.

CARR: Oh, Professor Stiggins, to be sure. An invaluable man. Guinea pigs, you say?

HUTCHINGS: Yes, white and black guinea pigs.

CARR: Ah! White and black guinea pigs. I think I catch your drift now.

HUTCHINGS: Yes, sir. White and black guinea pigs. In fact, I think I may state without fear of contradiction that Professor Stiggins has the largest private collection of guinea pigs in existence.

BAILEY: A man must be a specialist if he gets anywhere today. If you'll pardon the comparison, I think I may say I own the largest private collection of railroad time-tables, Board of Trade bulletins, and advertising pamphlets in the country. At any rate, one of the largest.

HUTCHINGS: Exactly. It is necessary for a man to be a specialist, as you say. Professor Stiggins, in his researches has come to know the guinea pigs as no other human knows the species. And he has been able, in the course of a lifetime of research, to show beyond the shadow of a doubt that certain deep-seated and fundamental differences separate the white guinea pig from the black guinea pig; he has demonstrated the superiority of the white species in a way that precludes further opposition.

BAILEY: Science is surely a wonderful thing.[4]

CARR: Tell us more about this, Professor.

HUTCHINGS: You are doubtless familiar with the famous Bunsen burner experiment of Stiggins?

CARR: I have forgotten the details for the moment. Will you refresh my memory?

HUTCHINGS: In this experiment, a Bunsen burner is ignited and adjusted to a steady white flame which burns at a constant heat. The white guinea pig is then brought forward and the Bunsen burner is placed in close proximity to the animal's left rump. (The BAPTIST MINISTER coughs.) A purely scientific use of the word, sir.

SMALLWOOD (relieved): Oh, I beg your pardon, Professor.

HUTCHINGS: Not at all. The leap of the white guinea pig in response to the heat stimulus, is now measured. Then the black guinea pig is brought forward, the Bunsen burner is placed in juxtaposition to his--hem--posterior, and his leap measured. Now here is the interesting and decisive thing, gentlemen: during the course of thousands of these experiments, ranging over a period of eight years, Professor Stiggins found that the response of the white guinea pig resulted in an average leap of fourteen and three-quarters inches, that of the black species in only twelve and one-eighth inches.

BAILEY: Barely a foot!

HUTCHINGS: Exactly! You will find the whole story of this famous experiment set forth in Professor Stiggins' doctoral thesis, published by the University.

CARR (writing in a small book): I must get that down. What is the title?

HUTCHINGS "The Locomotive Response of Black and White Guinea Pigs to Heat Sensation."

BAILEY (in open-mouthed wonder): Well, what do you know about that?

HUTCHINGS: The whole history of modern progress is bound up in the history of modern science. And what an advance that has been, my friends! Consider the Middle Ages, when the people were solely dependent on bigoted and superstitious priests. (The REVEREND MR. SMALLWOOD coughs twice, nervously.)--of the Roman Catholic Church, of course.

SMALLWOOD (relieved): Ah yes, I quite agree with you. There has been a tremendous advance.

HUTCHINGS: Nowadays they go to the scientist instead of to the priest.

BAILEY: There's progress for you.

TYSON (looking at his watch): See here. When are they going to start this thing off?

SORRELL: We're ready to start, gentlemen, as soon as Mr. Rutledge and Colonel Grimes arrive.

(At this moment, the rest of the party comes in. It includes WEBSTER, the publisher of the morning paper, a small wizened, sour-faced man; KENDALL, his editor, a professional newspaper man--tall, thin, rather dissipated and sleepy-looking, and wearing eye-glasses; MRS. WHEELER, as the representative of the Federated Women's Clubs; and MR. RUTLEDGE, who enters from the inner office, who seats himself at the foot of the table.)

CARR (with mildly servile friendliness): Ah, there, Mr. Rutledge. I have just seen your son in his officer's uniform. A fine figure of a soldier! Like old times, eh? Carrying on the tradition of a noble old family!

SORRELL (Hastily): If you please, Governor.

TYSON (surlily): A mistake calling the local guard out. Should have been sent!

CARR (genially): Pshaw, man! A flare up! No more than that.

(COLONEL GRIMES comes in unattended. He is a man of some fifty years, with grizzled grey hair, blunt forceful features, with a sphinx-like fixity of expression, and an erect, sturdy figure. SORRELL beckons him to a seat at the head of the table. He seats himself. Everyone is trying to talk at once, there is a confused, excited, and angry babble of voices. The Army man waits impatiently for the noise to die down, his manner indicating a certain contempt for the lack of order and discipline.)[5]

GRIMES (In a harsh, even curiously inflexible voice): You sent for me. I am here. What do you want.

SORRELL (very smoothly): Yes, Colonel. We want the benefit of your advice and suggestion. (Pause.) Now I suppose you all know the purpose of this meeting. We are all here to talk over this, this little disturbance and to discuss ways and means of settling the matter.

BAILEY: It's a splendid idea! Nothing's really the matter. I've said that all along. A good get-together will iron the whole thing out.

SORRELL: I feel there is no essential difference between us and the ah, colored citizens of this community. The whole matter may be settled by the use of a little tact.

SMALLWOOD (beaming): Ah yes, tact, Brother Sorrell. Tact. And faith! Oh, my friends, we must have faith--faith in ourselves, faith in mankind, and, above all, faith in the blood of the lamb. (A noise in the street.) Won't someone close the window? I think we can talk better then.[6] (BAILEY gets up and shuts the window.) The church must rise to its new duties, brethren. We must take life as it comes to us. We must reclaim our poor, strayed sheep; we must--

SORRELL (leading him off): Yes. Exactly! Now, Colonel Grimes, we'd like to get your opinion. What do you think?

GRIMES (in his harsh, even, subdued voice): Think! Why, sir, I think it's all a very good idea. (They pause, waiting to hear more. He closes his gray mouth firmly, and looks at them with stony eyes.)

SORRELL: Now, if anyone has any helpful suggestions--any little thing that you think might help!

MRS. WHEELER: I'd like to say that the Associated Women's Clubs are ready to do all they can to help at any time. We will be glad to make sandwiches and coffee--that is, if anyone needs them.

(There is a pause while everyone considers this.)

SORRELL: All right. Has anyone else any suggestions?

TYSON (exploding with a suddenness which makes them jump): I didn't come here to talk faith, hope and charity! My good money's tied up in this thing. I want some protection. My property is endangered. I'd like to ask the Colonel what he intends to do.

GRIMES (in the same inflexible tone): I will wait.

WEBSTER: Wait! (Several, in particular TYSON, the banker, SINCLAIR, the mayor, and WEBSTER, the publisher, speak at once. Again there is the tumult, but from the confusion our ears pick out these phrases.)

. . . rights of property
. . . must have protection
. . . sin and shame
. . . disgrace to the community
. . . no respect for law
. . . laughing-stock of state

(An so on. The COLONEL, as before, waits inflexibly until the hubbub dies down.)

WEBSTER: What of the burning of those two shacks?

GRIMES: White men, perhaps.

WEBSTER (excitedly): Can you prove that? Can you?

GRIMES: Ask the editor of your paper.

(They turn to Kendall, the editor. He wets his lips nervously and turns questioningly to his employer, Webster.)

KENDALL (quickly): An unidentified mob!

TYSON (bluntly): Who?

GRIMES (with a frozen smile): Ah!

SMALLWOOD (deprecatingly, rubbing his hands): I am sure only the riff-raff and scum of creation take part in these affairs. The better class citizens--

SORRELL: Now, is there anyone else? Mr. Rutledge, have you any suggestions?

(MR RUTLEDGE raises his head slowly and with effort, and we see now that his face is old and gray.)

RUTLEDGE (after a pause): None.

(There is silence. Then they begin to whisper among themselves. A pause again.)

SORRELL: Anyone else?

MRS. WHEELER: I was telling my husband this morning that I couldn't understand what has come into these people. Everything has so changed since I was a girl. (She sighs.) We used to have the dearest old Black mammy, who nursed all of the children in our family in turn. And when my father told his slaves, after the war, that they were free and could go where they pleased, they came to him with tears in their eyes, and said, "Marse Jim"--they always called him "Marse Jim"--"Marse Jim, we's gwine to stay right hyeah wid you. We don't want to be free niggers."

BAILEY (comfortably): I've always said it took the native Southerner to understand the darkey.

RUTLEDGE (with weary irony): The evidence is surely all around us.

BAILEY: Yes. There's no one else who knows them like we do.

RUTLEDGE (slowly and thoughtfully): Such has been our boast. I wonder if we really do!

(WEBSTER, TYSON AND BAILEY have begun to stare at Rutledge now--coldly, suspiciously, angrily.)

HUTCHINGS (briskly and glibly): The problem, of course, demands, above all else, a knowledge of social economics and of the underlying psychological conditions.

RUTLEDGE (quietly as before): Colonel Grimes, I thought I wanted a house. I am no longer sure.

WEBSTER (hotly): What are you talking about, Rutledge? You're not the only one interested in this business.

SORRELL (tactfully): Of course, Mr. Rutledge, none of us want violence.

SMALLWOOD: Oh, no indeed.

BAILEY: By no means.

SORRELL: It's merely the principle of the thing we're standing up for.

RUTLEDGE: The principle of the thing?

SORRELL: Well, the principle of law and order.

RUTLEDGE: My friend, that is nonsense. We don't fight for principles.[8]

SMALLWOOD: Oh, Mr. Rutledge! I don't think you mean quite that. You forget the Great War.

RUTLEDGE: Nevertheless, I do mean it.

WEBSTER (hotly): I think you're crazy to talk like this.

RUTLEDGE: Very well, now that you know I'm crazy, you can be prepared for me, and I can do you no harm. So many people are crazy and it never gets out. That causes the trouble, you see.

WEBSTER (angrily): This is a fine time you've taken to turn against us! But my money and other people's money is in this business as well as yours. And we're not going to see our property destroyed without an effort.

RUTLEDGE (with a passionate cry): What does it matter if we can't have it fairly!

(They start to their feet and face one another. There is again confusion around the table.)

SORRELL (pacifically): Gentlemen, gentlemen!

SMALLWOOD (hastily pulling out his watch and consulting it): Oh dear me! I really must be going. I'm already late for an engagement at the parsonage.

(He rises. So, too, do PROFESSOR HUTCHINGS AND MRS. WHEELER.)

HUTCHINGS: Then I'll accompany you, sir. Everything is getting along so nicely. (Waves his hand.) Anyway, I just dropped in for a few minutes.

MRS. WHEELER: Now, remember, we are always ready to help with sandwiches and coffee.

(SMALLWOOD moves out of the room, murmuring, "Faith, faith, my brothers. Yes, and tact." He goes out, followed by PROFESSOR HUTCHINGS and MRS. WHEELER, he gallantly giving the lady precedence.)

MRS. WHEELER (at the door): Oh, Professor, I've been wanting to ask you again to give us that wonderful definition of art you gave in your talk last week.

HUTCHINGS: Art, my dear lady, according to Croce, is the transcendental intuition objectified.[9]

(They go out and the door is closed behind them. TYSON, who has also gotten to his feet, now speaks across the table to Rutledge, and his voice betrays a cold, unreasoning antagonism.)

TYSON: Rutledge, what I've got, I've got by main strength, not by sentiment. I've pulled myself up by my own bootstraps. No one ever pampered me. Your father was a rich slaveholder. Mine was a poor farmer. All right. That was well and good fifty years ago. But, but God! We've come far since then, and you haven't kept up with us. And we intend to hold on to what we have.

WEBSTER: Stop living in the past, Rutledge. That day is gone.

RUTLEDGE (slowly and quietly): No. A day I have never seen. Money changers, I am no part of your scheme. I wanted a house--I wanted a house, but now I want nothing!

(Again there is the confusion of voices, during which the door opens and LIEUTENANT LEE RUTLEDGE comes in. He goes directly to Colonel Grimes, saluting, and whispers to him. The COLONEL speaks to him but we do not hear what he says. LEE turns, meets for a moment his father's grey face, and goes. A hush falls over the group, and they turn questioningly to the officer.)

GRIMES: I declare this town under martial law. I request all you people to go at once to your homes and wait there until you receive further instructions.

(He goes out immediately. There is stunned silence for a moment; then the quiet is broken by the heavy reverberations of the fire bell beating out the number of the alarm. A moment later the trucks thunder by outside, with a rapid clanging of bells. SORRELL leaps to his feat and rushes to the window, looking away toward the settlement.)

SORRELL: By God! They've fired the place.

(All the men, except Rutledge, rush to the window, and there is again a great deal of voices, mingled with oaths and curses. RUTLEDGE sits at the table as if unmindful, with his back toward the window.)

WEBSTER (savagely): Niggers this time! There's no doubt of it.

(They become quiet again and then turn and gaze questioningly at one another and at the bent figure of Mr. Rutledge at the table.[10] Then all except Sorrell file slowly and softly out. A red glare lights the windows. MR. RUTLEDGE sits stolidly at the table.)

SORRELL (after a moment): Mr. Rutledge!

RUTLEDGE (very quietly, almost inaudibly): My house, Sorrell!

SORRELL (after a pause): Yes. I'm sorry! (Then he falls to cursing softly and monotonously, under his breath while he rummages in one of the drawers of his desk. His mouth is drawn in tight and savage lines. Presently he finds what he is looking for--an automatic revolver. He drops it into the pocket of his coat, jams on his hat, and prepares to quit the room. He again stops to notice the man at the table and again he speaks to him very quietly.) Are you coming, too? (MR. RUTLEDGE makes no answer, but sits staring before him as if carved from stone. Presently SORRELL goes out quietly and closes the door behind him.

(It has begun to grow dark. The glow of the burning house brightens the scene, and its glare paints the windows the red color of blood. MR. RUTLEDGE doesn't move in his chair.)[11]

CURTAIN

Notes to Scene 9:

[1] (Only one page of the typescript for Scene 9 exists in the Wisdom materials.) After focusing on the Blacks' unrest in Scene 8, Wolfe turns here to the confusion among the Whites. A meeting of the town leaders takes place in the offices of the Altamont Development Company, a suitable location since the conflict is chiefly the result of the Whites' greed for economic profit.

[2] Resembling this character in appearance and behavior, the Reverend John Smallwood walks past Eugene Gant and George Graves in Look Homeward, Angel:

> White-vested, a trifle paunchy, with large broad feet, a shaven moon of a red face, and abundant taffy-colored hair, the Rev. John Smallwood, pastor of the First Baptist Church, walked heavily up the street, greeting his parishioners warmly, and hoping to see his Pilot face to face (p. 281).

[3] This sketch of Tyson may be a prefiguration of Jarvis Riggs, the president of the Citizens Trust Company, who is prominent in the financial catastrophe described in You Can't Go Home Again. Jarvis is greatly admired for having "learned business and banking in 'the hard school of experience'" (YCGHA, p. 362). Smallwood (n. 2, above) and Tyson, as well as other minor characters who people the streets of Altamont in "Welcome to Our City," show that by 1923 Wolfe had already conceived the background characters for much of his prose fiction.

[4] This entire section of dialogue is a digression on a so-called "scientific conclusion." Science is here being irresponsibly used to justify human behavior. As the modern faith, however, it fails to satisfy man's longing for spiritual consolation.

[5] Grimes' personal appearance and behavior are clues to his function as a symbol for Fate.

[6] Smallwood's reference to the objectionable noise and confusion of the riot outside the window suggests that the Church does not serve the real needs of the people. Since science, the only other "faith," cannot fill the spiritual vacuum, modern man is essentially lost.

[7] This is probably an oblique reference to Thomas Nelson Page (1853-1922), a defender of the Old South, whose stories depict an idealistic relationship between freed slaves and their former masters. During his Harvard period, Wolfe began to think about his relationship with other writers from his region. In some random jottings, preserved in his Notebooks, he noted the tendency of most Southern writers to sentimentalize the Old South and listed Page as an example (Notebooks, I, 4). Wolfe generally regarded himself as distinct from other writers who treat the South. He wrote in a letter to his mother, "The play [Welcome] . . . may or may not win success but its [sic] the only honest, sincere play that has ever been written about the South, I know for I've read all the rest" (Letters to His Mother, p. 46).

[8] At this point Rutledge has become an embittered and defeated man. Several subsequent speeches suggest that he may be nearly mad.

[9] Groth, who identifies Hutchings as Wolfe's first characterization of Frederick Koch, reports that this speech is an accurate rendering of Koch's patronizing manner (Groth, p. 169).

[10] Grimes has already blamed Whites for some of the burning, Though the others have not agreed with him, they are evidently overwhelmed by the events of the last few moments and are perhaps beginning to doubt the clarity of the issues.

[11] Momentum has mounted steadily throughout this scene until during these closing moments, the hysteria of the characters is nearly palpable. This scene contains some of the best drama of the play. Against a background of fire, noise, and disruption, Sorrell and Rutledge appear in an important pairing. Though having sprung from different motives, the ambitions of both men have resulted in the same thing--violence. Powerless to stop what he has helped to set in motion, Will Rutledge, a vestige of the old order, can do no more than mourn, while the proponent of the new order marches forward to take what he wants by force. The change is merely one of form, however. In Rutledge's idealism the house of his ancestors represents abstractions like loyalty and honor; he has evidently forgotten the human exploitation that made possible the house and the way of life it symbolizes. By pointing up the limitations in the visions of both men, Wolfe shows that no real spiritual progress has been made.

SCENE 10[1]

The scene is in the basement of a brick building and represents the interior of the shoe-repair shop, conducted by the aged Negro, Amos Todd.[2] At the rear a narrow flight of steps descends from the sidewalk; a little to the left there is a window which looks out on the level of the pavement and which admits through its dirty panes a dim, unsatisfactory light.

The machinery of the room is of the simplest and most primitive kind; there is to the right a stitching machine; in the center of the place is a long bench which supports trays of nails, tacks, and repair tools, as well as pieces of leather, and so on.

AMOS TODD sits by his bench on a chair which has lost its back and whose legs have been sawed off to a convenient shortness. For comfort he has provided himself with a worn leather cushion such as are used in automobile roadsters. The old man is engaged in putting half soles on a pair of shoes. Presently he puts aside his hammer and gripping the shoe between his knees, cuts off the projecting edges of leather with a short knife. Shoes, ready for delivery, patched in a rude but serviceable fashion, are piled on the bench, and on shelves along the left wall. Once the old man leaves his stool and goes to the window where he stands quietly a moment and listens. The street outside is bare of traffic; there are no pedestrians and very little sound, though from a distance may be heard the low hum of many voices. Presently the Negro returns to his stool and resumes his work, muttering to himself and shaking his head. Suddenly, shattering the unnatural stillness, the fire bell begins to ring an alarm; the old man gets to his feet and goes to the entrance; the street outside begins to swarm with activity; running feet pass the window; there are cries, exultant, angry or excited. Afar off rises the sound of the approach of many men--a crescent hum like the sound of angry bees.[3]

The entrance is darkened by a shadow, and the young Negro, SAM TIPTON, bounds down into the room.

SAM TIPTON: Close up yo' shop an' get along home.

AMOS: Whaffo', Boy?

SAM TIPTON: De niggahs fired de hill. De White folks is aimin' dis way.

AMOS (stubbornly): I ain't gwine to budge. De White folks ain't got no grudge agin me.

SAM TIPTON: Dey's gwine to be trouble an' dey ain't no use you gittin' mixed up in it. Go on home now, lak I tells you.

AMOS: Lak you tells me! Boy, who is you to tell me? I was in dis shop befo' you was bawn, boy, an' I been in it, day in, day out evah since.

SAM TIPTON (impatiently): Go on home, now.

AMOS: I goes when it's closin' time, boy. I goes at half past five lak I allus is done.

SAM TIPTON (looking at the old man's clock): Den you only got ten minutes.[4] Go on home.

AMOS: Den I goes in ten minutes, lak I allus has gone. (A pause.) What's you gwine to do, boy?

SAM TIPTON: Ne' min' 'bout me. I reckon I kin look out fo' myse'f.

AMOS (pulling his arm): Heah! You stay right wheah you is, boy. I ain't goin' to lit you git mixed up wid dem no 'count niggahs.

SAM TIPTON (wrenching free): Le' go of me. I knows whut I'm doin'.

AMOS: Don' you go fightin' dem White men. You ain't goin' to git de best of 'em.

SAM TIPTON: Aw, you ole niggahs ain't got no guts. We's as good as dey is in a fight.

(He turns to go.)

AMOS: Don' you go out dere, boy. Ef you does, don' you evah come back to me fo' nothin'. I'se thoo wid yo'.

(There are great cries from the other end of the street where the mobs have assembled.)

SAM TIPTON: You stay heah an' lay low. You cain't go home now.

AMOS (tugging at his arm): Come back heah, boy. You stay wheah you is.

SAM TIPTON (exultantly): Aw, le' go o' me. I got to see de show, ain't I?

(He wrenches free from the old man's grasp and runs out into the street.

There is the sound of breaking glass and of stones skipping along the pavement and a stray shot or two. Then with any angry roar the mobs meet in the street outside. There are oaths, wild screams of rage or pain, the thud of fist on flesh, and all the mingled noises of physical combat. A stone shatters one pane of Amos Todd's window. He goes to the window and looks with a drugged fascination on the scene outside.

Suddenly, above the noise, there is the rapid beat of the guardsmen approaching at a double-quick march. One hears the hard staccato of military commands, the snapping back of rifle bolts, and a volley of shot fired over the heads of the combatants. There are savage shouts and cries and the running of many feet along the pavements as the crowds disperse. The Negro JOHNSON, disheveled, exhausted, and breathing heavily, his mad eyes staring down the steps, runs into the room. He is armed with a revolver.)

AMOS: Git out of heah! Git out of heah, niggah. I ain't got no place heah fo' de like of you.

JOHNSON: Come away from that window, you old fool. (He attempts to pull him away, but the old man fights him off. There is another volley of gunfire which shatters sill and glass, and the old man is shot down. JOHNSON catches him as he falls and drags him to the back of his room and puts him on the floor. Bending over the body.) I tol' you to come away from there. How bad are you hurt? (There is no answer. JOHNSON examines the body briefly. The old man is dead. The Negro rises slowly and looks down at the inert figure which, with the dirty leather apron and soiled clothes, looks like a greasy bundle of rags and patches.) You pore ole fool! Whut good's all your bowin' and scrapin' done you?

(Outside the noise, the shouting, and the confusion have died away in the distance. The guardsmen come by, ordering frightened Negroes out of their hiding places, deploying slowly in files on either side of the street. LIEUTENANT LEE RUTLEDGE discovers the Negro Johnson.)

LEE (from the top of the steps): All right, you! Come out of there! We've got you!

(The Negro wheels slowly and stands quite still for a moment, his powerful head swinging rhythmically from side to side. Then like a bull he charges at his captor straight across the room, leveling his revolver as he goes.

LIEUTENANT LEE RUTLEDGE shoots him; he is stopped by sudden impact; he slides forward carefully to his knees and hands, sprawling slowly on the floor.)[5]

LEE: Touched me! (A SERGEANT, a tough, sure, hard-faced young man, enters the room.) I think he's done for sergeant.

(The SERGEANT bends and examines the body briefly.)

SERGEANT (making a face): God! He's bleedin' like a stuck pig!

LEE (bending): Here, lend a hand.

(They lift the body carefully and carry it to a corner of the room. COLONEL GRIMES enters the room.)

SERGEANT (in low tone): The man's dying, sir.

GRIMES: Send for an ambulance and a doctor.

SERGEANT: Yes, sir.

(He goes out. SORRELL comes quickly into the room.)

SORRELL: The house is gone; it burned like tinder.

(The body on the floor stirs feebly, and the Negro speaks in faint tones.)

JOHNSON: What's that?

(GRIMES motions Sorrell to silence. RUTLEDGE enters the room.)

SORRELL: I'm sorry, sir. The house--

RUTLEDGE (briefly): Yes, I know. (He goes to where the body of Amos Todd is lying and pulls the leather apron away from the old man's face. Then he pulls himself erect with visible effort and stands looking down for a moment.) That good old man! But why--why?

GRIMES: Oh! Mr. Rutledge, that is the great pity of these matters.

RUTLEDGE (as if he has not heard): Is this, then, the end of loyalty?

(There is a pause. The room is almost dark. GRIMES breaks the silence abruptly.)

GRIMES: What is the time?

(A brief pause.)

RUTLEDGE: My watch has stopped.

SORRELL (peering): The old man's clock is just on half past five.

RUTLEDGE: I'll set my watch by that.

GRIMES: I think it is later; that is slow.

(RUTLEDGE winds his watch. The dying Negro in the corner stirs slightly. RUTLEDGE goes to where he is and stands silently a moment, meeting him glance for glance.

SORRELL (In grim, set tones): "Those who live by the sword shall perish by the sword."

(The Negro hears and laughs feebly but mockingly.)

JOHNSON: He's talkin' to you, I reckon, Colonel.

(SORRELL has been staring with a fixed and awful fascination at something which crawls along the warped flooring. Now he plucks nervously at the coat-sleeve of Mr. Rutledge.)[6]

SORRELL (In a queer, desperate voice): Mr. Rutledge! Come away! Please, sir, come away!

(MR. RUTLEDGE does not move.)

CARR: (breathing stertorously as he enters): A flare up! A flare up! The work of agitators from the North! Must be left to work out our own destiny. Best people of both races living side by side, together. Peace and righteousness, St. John. (Suddenly astare, he halts and steps widely and carefully across the dark rill on the floor. He sees the body of the Negro, and removes his hat, speaking solemnly.) Gentlemen, we are in the presence--

(A young man, brisk, breathless, derby-hatted, runs down the steps into the room.)

YOUNG MAN: Have you any statement for the papers, Colonel Grimes?

GRIMES (with a touch of weary irony in his voice): Yes, you may say the usual thing: "We have the situation well in hand and expect no further trouble."

YOUNG MAN: Thank you, Colonel. (He starts to depart but glances toward the corner.) Say, what's this?

GRIMES (gruffly): Something which doesn't concern you--yet. On your way, son.

(The YOUNG MAN goes out unwillingly.)

RUTLEDGE: Will you leave me alone with this man for a moment?

SORRELL (moistening dry lips, in a whisper, still gazing at the floor): Mr. Rutledge!

CARR (thoughtfully): It will be in the papers, I suppose.

SORRELL (as before): Mr. Rutledge!

(RUTLEDGE dismisses him with a gesture of the hand. He goes out with COLONEL GRIMES and PRESTON CARR.)

LEE (emerging from the shadow, quietly): It is getting dark here, Father. Shall I light the lamp?

RUTLEDGE: No. We are cast out in darkness--this barren and most weary earth has given us no light. But there is yet a better thing than light, though we go damned for it.

LEE (almost inaudibly) I do not understand you, Father. (A pause.) You want me to go?

RUTLEDGE: No, boy. We are partners in secret and unspeakable woe. I have no language for a curse. We are joined in this blasted and deserted place--but we are joined.

LEE: Is that all?

RUTLEDGE: That is all. There is only the distance and all the pain.

LEE: I will remember. Good night. (He goes out.)

(There is a pause when nothing is heard but the faint and labored breathing of the Negro. Finally, MR. RUTLEDGE seats himself before the man.)

RUTLEDGE: You mad, rash fool. Where is your army now?

JOHNSON: They quit on me. They quit on me.

RUTLEDGE: So do they on all of us. My father owned slaves--body and soul. (He mutters beneath his breath.) And now they forget--forget.

JOHNSON: So we're even then.

RUTLEDGE: It is hard to forget at sixty. What man is not in bondage to his youth? What man who does not see the world go by him at the end? (There is a profound pause.) I am growing old. And I can't understand. (Leaning forward.) Where have you come from--you and your kind?

(JOHNSON laughs feebly but mockingly. MR. RUTLEDGE half-starts from his seat with a strangled cry.)

RUTLEDGE: Mad-dog!

JOHNSON: Keep back! Keep back, white man!

(RUTLEDGE sinks back onto his seat and stares at the floor.)

RUTLEDGE: My life is creeping home on broken feet. All of which I thought myself a part, drifts by like painted smoke. (A pause, then he mutters to himself.) Gone--gone.

JOHNSON (with a feeble grin): The house?

RUTLEDGE: Gone! But it doesn't seem to matter.

JOHNSON: No. It's funny: It's funny. I was livin' high an' steppin' wide, an' they smacked me down. (He laughs convulsively.) It don't do no good. It's funny. Fool niggahs! Can't stick to nothin'. (There is a pause--very faintly) Mad-dog. Mad-dog. Yes. . . It's funny. (He is seized by an awful, an uncontrollable fit of laughter, and his whole frame is shaken, though the sound is very feeble, almost inaudible. He tries to speak two or three times, but splutters and is set off again in the terrible, almost silent chuckling. Finally, he controls himself sufficiently to speak.) Mad-dog? Listen, Mistah Rutledge! It's funny! (He bays twice in this throat, like some giant mastiff, and baying in his throat, he dies. There is a long pause while RUTLEDGE stares down at the man with graven intentness.)

RUTLEDGE: Poor fool! So still! So still! Why did you choose to become a man?[8]

(In the street there are again signs of activity. Again there is traffic, the sounds of noises, voices, even of laughter; again the whistles blow, the siren shrieks its blast, the courthouse bell booms out its solid six strokes.

MR. RUTLEDGE rises slowly, walks to the place on the wall where the clock is fastened, and moves the hands up to the mark of six. The clock strikes quickly with a harsh, vibrant, metallic clang. MR. RUTLEDGE resumes his seat.

And again--but this time by the window the workmen come by, marching solidly and heavily in their mortar-stiffened shoes, moving as one, feeling as one, compact, a unity, in their implacable animal strength. And so, they pass and are gone. It grows darker. The lamps in the street go on. There is a fog in Altamont and it drifts across the street before the windows like crimson smoke. Occasionally there are soft padding footfalls along the pavements, and presently out of the mist, black faces appear, which press and flatten their broad features against the dirty window panes, peering cautiously and stupidly down on the scene within. Faint and far is heard the high piping notes of the foolish, futile little tune which was played in the beginning. It grows louder and louder and deeper and deeper, becoming slow and more slow, until suddenly it ends close at hand in ponderous bass and gutteral notes. Mr. Rutledge continues to stare down with the same graven intentness, winding his watch slowly between his fingers all the while.

CURTAIN

Notes to Scene 10:

[1] In this final scene Wolfe focuses attention on the victims of the changes brought by the new social and economic order and through one of his characters articulates the central issue of the play--the nature of man.

[2] The occupation of Amos Todd and the location of his shop are symbolic of his relationship with the White world he serves.

[3] Originally this paragraph of the stage direction was divided into seven separate paragraphs. Since all sentences refer to actions of Amos Todd, they have been consolidated.

[4] The reference here to time and others similar to it in this scene do not appear in "Niggertown." Sam's speech becomes important after Amos' death when another character notes that the clock in the shop is ten minutes slow. Symbolically, Amos has incorrectly measured the passage of time, and without realizing it, he has failed to keep pace with the flow of change. His old definitions of loyalty, industry, and punctuality are no longer relevant.

[5] In the original play, Johnson is killed by an anonymous guardsman: "A thin, somewhat peaked youth, dressed in a uniform some sizes too large for him, and pressing his weapon close to his body, in order to disguise his trembling; he presents anything but a soldierly appearance."

For the final version Wolfe made Lee Rutledge the guardsman, and he added the important line, "Touched me," which reveals Lee's personal grudge as the motive.

[6] Wolfe uses the stream of Johnson's blood to symbolize the guilt of all those present in bringing about his death. A similar image occurs in You Can't Go Home Again as the narrator describes the death of C. Green:

> Well, where's the blood, then, Drake? You're used to blood; you'd like to know. Well, you've heard of casting bread upon the waters, Drake, and having it return--but never yet, I'll vow, of casting blood upon the streets--and having it run away--and then come back to you! But here it comes now, down the street--down Apple Street, round the corner into Hay, across the street now toward C. Green, the lamp post, and the crowd! (YCGHA, p. 472).

(For a discussion of other ways the play "Welcome to Our City" relates to the "C. Green" section of You Can't Go Home Again, see Introduction, p. 54.)

[7] The dialogue between Lee and Rutledge during the next few lines was added in the final version of the play.

[8] For his final version Wolfe made substantive revisions in the dialogue between Johnson and Rutledge during Johnson's dying moments. The following excerpt from that scene suggests the origin of the mad-dog motif which has appeared elsewhere (Sc. 3, Sc. 9):

(There is a pause when nothing is heard but the faint and labored breathing of the Negro. Finally:

RUTLEDGE: How are you now?

JOHNSON: (grinning feebly) I'm a mad dog, Mistah Rutledge. If you come close I'll bite yo'.

(There is again a moment's silence.)

RUTLEDGE: I think we never knew each other, Johnson. There is no meeting place upon this earth for you and I. We have seen without recognition; we have spoken without understanding. There is babble and confusion of voices between us. (There is a pause.) I am sixty years old, Johnson. Soon I will be an old man. (In a fretful, troubled voice.) And I don't understand. I can't. You and your kind: where have you come from? (A pause.) My father owned slaves. Owned them, body and soul. They've almost forgotten that today, but I remember (Muttering.) I remember. And now it's as if a dog who had come running to my call should turn and reply in the language of a man. (A pause.) We remember day-break longest when our day is almost spent and I belong to a day like that.

JOHNSON: (in a puzzled, querulous tone) An' wheah do I belong?

RUTLEDGE: God knows! I'd like to know myself.

JOHNSON: So would I. (He laughs softly and mirthlessly.) It's even on both sides, I reckon.

RUTLEDGE: (in a voice which is drenched with weariness and despair) My life is creeping home on broken feet, a glass whose sands run always back-ward. My heart is sealed up in forgotten ruins, and never, never, will I find my way back to them. My fields are cut and mown, my grain is sacked and harvested, my meadows all are bare. My destiny is on its iron rails, and all of which I thought myself a part drifts by like painted smoke above the factory wheels. Oh, youth! What man is not in bondage to you? What man who doesn't see the world go by him at the end? And now it's gone, gone, like last year's snows and departed months of May!

JOHNSON: The house?

RUTLEDGE: That, too, is gone, but it doesn't seem to matter! Smoke! Smoke! The hooves of phantom horses in the darkness, the sounds of elfin eagles unheard to all save me, the gleam of ghostly swords which cut not even air, the tossings of invisible plumes within a plumeless world!

JOHNSON: (laughing softly and feebly, but with a note of wonder in his voice) All my life I've been fightin' somethin', outside o' me, tryin' to keep somethin' out, an' then you see it ain't outside at all. It's funny! Fool niggahs! Buying oil to make their hair straight! An' street cahs! (He laughs convulsively.) Like that'd help. It's mo'n that. It's somethin' heah. You see. (He taps his chest.) It's got to come from there. (With a note of anger.) They quit on me, they quit on me. I might'v known. It didn't do no good. (With a note of triumph in his voice.) But if I'd been alone. I'd rather I had been.

RUTLEDGE: That's what we all learn too late!

(There is a pause.)

JOHNSON: (Very faintly) A dog, a dog, you said?

(He is seized by an awful, an uncontrollable fit of laughter and his whole frame is shaken, though the sound is very feeble, almost inaudible. He tries to speak two or three times, but sputters, and sets off again in the terrible almost silent chuckling. Finally he controls himself sufficiently to speak.)

JOHNSON: A dog, you said. Did you know I could bark like one. Listen, Mistah Rutledge! (He bays twice in his throat, like some giant mastiff, and, baying in his throat, he dies. There is a long pause while Mr. Rutledge stares down at the man with graven intentness.)

RUTLEDGE: Poor fool! So still! So still! Dogs have been happy before this and their masters have stroked them. Why did you choose to become a man?

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