

Wolfe Promises to be Good Boy; Reviewer Finds Him Redundant, Oratorical as Ever

By Bernice Kauffman.

Virginia Moore, the Nebraska born author of "Not Poppy" and "Sweet Water and Bitter," once wrote an essay, now become famous, called "Education by Desultory Reading." Those of you who have read the essay may recall that Miss Moore suggests that this type of activity, in time may lead to reading the complete works of Pascal or the "Meditations" of Marcus Aurelius. That is not the purpose of this citation. The sole reason for speaking of it is to mention the words "desultory reading," for that is to be the function of this column. But do not mistake the word "desul-

tory" as being definitive; it is used as an absolute claim to freedom.

In a flat little book of 93 pages, entitled "The Story of a Novel," Thomas Wolfe promises to tell how he wrote his enormous novel, "Of Time and the River." To explain that torrential outpouring, that maze of character and incident and description would seem work enough for any writer in so brief a space, but Mr. Wolfe, being Mr. Wolfe, does not limit himself merely to that avowed purpose. He tells also of his boyhood, of his first novel, "Look Homeward, Angel," and why it

was not an autobiographical novel, and of the four books he intends to write to finish the setology which as whole will bear the title of his second novel, "Of Time and the River."

The thread by which Mr. Wolfe holds these reminiscences and explanations together is the constantly reiterated one that his flaws in style are being corrected and eliminated. He promises to be a good boy, a very good boy. He insists that he can ruthlessly cut his own material, and that never again will there appear such an overabundance of adjectives or such a vehemence of oratory as we bewildered readers were forced to wade thru in his initial efforts.

The writing "Of Time and the River" explains Wolfe:

"With all the waste and error and confusion it led me into, it brought me closer to a concrete definition of my resources, a true estimate of my talents at this period of my life, and, most of all, toward a rudimentary, a just beginning, but a living apprehension of the articulation I am looking for, the language I have got to have if, as an artist, my life is to proceed and grow, than any other thing that has ever happened to me."

But when is Mr. Wolfe going to begin to use this language of the artist he speaks of? When is he

going to show self restraint? In the very midst of one of his most ardent recantations of wordiness we find this:

"Or again, it would be a bridge, the look of an old iron bridge across an American river, the sound the train makes as it goes across it; the spoke-and-hollow rumble of the ties below; the look of the muddy banks; the slow, thick, yellow wash of an American river; an old flat-bottomed boat half filled with water stogged in the muddy banks; or it would be, most lonely and haunting of all the sounds I know, the sound of a milk wagon as it entered an American street just as the first gray of the morning, the slow and lonely clapping of the hoof upon the street, the jink of bottles, the sudden rattle of a battered old milk can, the swift and hurried footsteps of the milkman, and again the jink of bottles, a low word spoken to his horse, and then the great, slow clapping hoof receding into silence, and then quietness and a bird song rising in the street again."

Colorful Word Pictures.

Do you remember this from "Look Homeward, Angel":

"As the flame shot roaring up from the oiled pine sticks, and he felt the fire-full chimney-throat tremble, he recovered joy. He brought back the width of the desert; the vast yellow serpent of the river, alluvial with the mined accretions of the continent; the rich vision of laden ships, masted above the sea-walls, the world-nostalgic ships, bearing about them the filtered and concentrated odors of the earth, sensual negroid rum and molasses, tar, ripening guavas, bananas, tangerines, pineapples in the warm holds of tropical boats, as cheap, as profuse, as abundant as the lazy equatorial earth and all its women, the great names of Louisiana, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, California; the blasted fiend-world of the desert, and the terrific boles of trees, tunnelled for the passage of a coach; water that fell from a mountain top in a smoking noiseless soil, internal boiling lakes flung skywards by the punctual respiration of the earth, the multitudinous torture in form of granite oceans, gauged depthlessly by canyons, and iridescent with the daily chameleon-shift beyond man, beyond nature, of terrific colors, below the un-human iridescence of the sky."

Influenced by James Joyce.

Wherein lies the difference? Wolfe claims that in the beginning he was influenced by James Joyce. If he really wishes to practice restraint we suggest that he observe these rules advocated by Ben Jonson who had the temerity to suggest that it might have been put as well as if Shakespeare had blotted a few lines. We fear that Wolfe, instead, has been following the swaggering grandiloquence of Byron, for as complete proof of the fact that he is now a writer he declaims:

"The worm has entered at my heart, the worm lay coiled and feeding at my brain, my spirit, and my memory . . . I knew that finally I had been caught in my own fire, consumed by my own hungers, impaled on the hook of that furious and insatiate desire that had absorbed my life for years. I knew in short that one bright cell in the brain or heart or memory would now blaze on forever . . . by night, by day, thru every waking, sleeping moment of my life, the worm would feed and the light be lit,—that no anodyne of food or drink, or friendship, travel, sport or women could ever quench it, and that nevermore until death put its total and conclusive darkness on my life, could I escape."

We enjoyed Wolfe's autobiographical gossip; we were not bored by his misconception that he has reformed, for whatever he says is spirited. Wolfe has a living, breathing, pulsing aliveness, even in this book of exposition, which does not fail to keep the readers alive too. His readers are wide awake as a result of his material. He does not need to shout at them to keep them so.

Interclub Council.

The Barb Interclub Council will meet Monday night in University hall, at 7:30.

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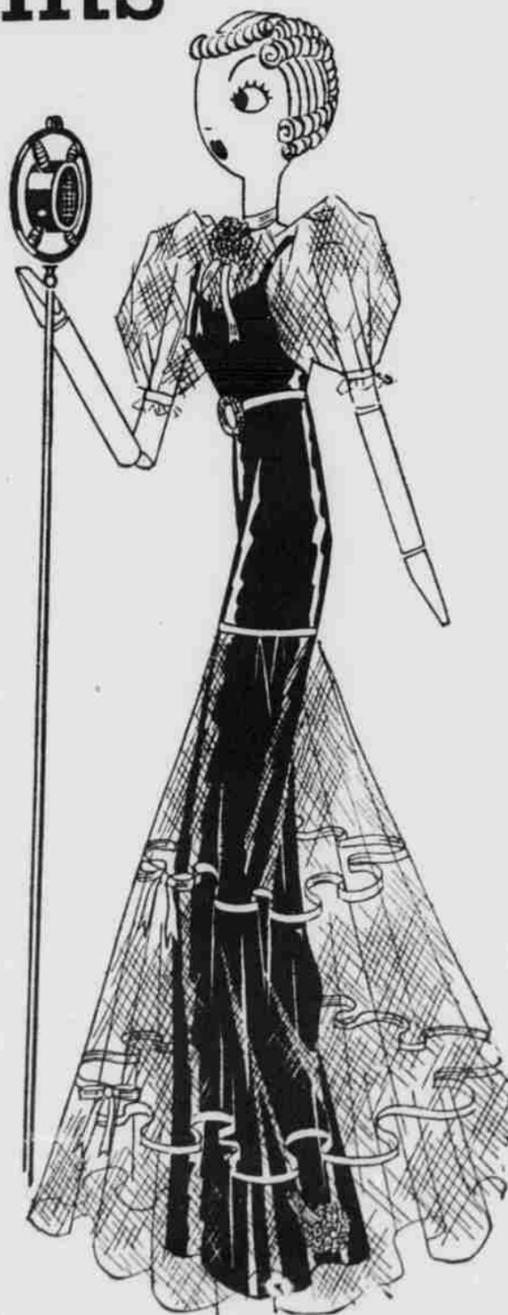
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