
Thomas Wolfe in October

James W. Clark, Jr.

October had come again, and that year it was sharp and soon: frost was early, burning the thick green on the mountain sides to massed brilliant hues of blazing color, painting the air with sharpness, sorrow and delight—and with October. Sometimes, and often, there was warmth by day, an ancient drowsy light, a golden warmth and pollinated haze in afternoon, but over all the earth there was the premonitory breath of frost, an exultancy for all the men who were returning, a haunting sorrow for the buried men, and for all those who were gone and would not come again...

With this sublimity Thomas Wolfe opens Book III of his second novel *Of Time and the River*, whose early working title had been "The October Fair." Decades ago, John Hall Wheelock, as well as Louis Untermeyer and John S. Barnes, emphasized the poetry of Wolfe's lengthy prose treatment of "the riches of the seasons..." By mining this same account, Jonathan Daniels celebrated his friend's life and work in an address at the biennial conference of the Southeastern Library Association in Asheville on October 14, 1960. Wolfe's month has come back again.

October 1983, has, in fact, few equals in Thomas Wolfe annals. On the third day, when he would have been eighty-three, a bronze angel, stylized and larger than life, was unveiled in fabled Pack Square. Friends and family members joined the Thomas Wolfe Society and the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in dedicating the statue, which is the work of Daniel W. Millsbaugh. The day before this ceremony in Asheville, Pulitzer historian David Herbert Donald's essay entitled "The Troubled Career of Thomas Wolfe" dominated the "Book Review" of the *New York Times*. At work himself on a biography of North Carolina's most famous literary son, Professor Donald evaluates four new Wolfe books: *My Other Loneliness: Letters of Thomas Wolfe and Aline Bernstein*, edited for the UNC Press by Suzanne Stutman; *Welcome to Our City*, Wolfe's 1923 play in ten scenes, edited by Richard S. Kennedy; *The Autobiography of an American*

Novelist, which is Leslie Field's edition of Wolfe's two excursions into personal literary theory; and *Beyond Love and Loyalty: The Letters of Thomas Wolfe and Elizabeth Nowell*. Editor Kennedy has bound together with this correspondence of the author and his indefatigable agent a previously unpublished story entitled "No More Rivers." As a piece that obviously satirized identifiable members of the Scribner firm, the story was cut in half by Nowell and Wolfe, but the result still found no place in print during Wolfe's lifetime. A different fate explains Wolfe's "Last Poem," which appears for all to see in the October issue of *Vanity Fair*. Earlier this year, Charles Scribner III dislodged this 1934 manuscript from inside the drawer chamber of Maxwell Perkin's oak desk on Fifth Avenue. The poem is an October piece in its pleading for the return of the writer's "wild first force," for the music of "pain and joy and exultancy strong..."

These three sensations affirm that October has always been, will always be, the festival of Thomas Wolfe. He and his work are painted with October and live in its "ancient drowsy light." His first book — still his foremost today — was published on October 18 — two weeks after his twenty-ninth birthday and ten days before the crash of the stock market in 1929. It was typical that his literary fortunes climbed as universal bust whispered in the wind. Almost exactly a year before, Wolfe had been raging and ranging across Europe; recovering from a serious Oktoberfest fight, he received word that a man at Scribners was interested in his manuscript. That man turned out to be Maxwell Perkins, the fatherly blue pencil of October Wolfe who a decade later became the famous writer's literary executor. In *Look Homeward, Angel* itself, W. O. Gant, the fictional father, makes his way into the hills around Altamont on a "gray-golden day" in late October that is "bright and windy." Eugene Gant tells us of his own early identification of the "wood-smoke and burnt leaves" odor of October. His favorite brother Ben dies and is buried in October. In this particular instance, the novel is strictly autobio-

James W. Clark, Jr., is Associate Professor in the Department of English at North Carolina State University. His talk was sponsored by the Junior College Section. We thank Andrea Brown for providing us with the text of his talk.

graphical. Ben Wolfe died October 19, 1918. In response to Ben's death, Wolfe in time wrote and later included in *Look Homeward, Angel* the medley of "It was October" reflections that is the fore-runner of the celebrated passage in *Of Time and the River*. Yet more importantly, the first novel ends with Eugene, after encountering Ben's ghost in the town square, preparing to escape into life as October is arriving in the marvelous hills. The young man heads north in the same time of year that his father had climbed into the mountains.

Wolfe's fascination with abundance and multiplicity in style and substance is an October trait, one, incidentally, that made the dedicated craftsman dependent upon an editor; it is hard to believe the totality of his studious creativity in the lifelong month of his birth. In school, young Wolfe would have discovered writing, Eugene's "line of life," in October. October 23, 1908, is the actual date on the future author's first letter, a note to his sister Effie. He is pleased to say: "I am getting off to school in time every morning, and I am never late." The teacher who is the original for the Margaret Leonard of *Look Homeward, Angel* would have discovered the sensitive boy, in life as in fiction, in the fall, another October song. As a student at Chapel Hill, Wolfe began to edit *The Tar Heel*, the campus newspaper, on October 11, 1919. He was a senior. This is an excerpt of his first editorial:

The enrollment of the University far exceeds that of any past registration. Rooming accommodations in town have been completely exhausted. There are four, and in many cases five, boys living in the same room. This is very undesirable for the boy who likes to study in a quiet room . . . It matters not what he is studying, you should remember that you are infringing upon his rights as a roommate when you allow . . . friends to come in . . .

Our October Wolfe could be a librarian or at least someone to stand at the door of the reading room and set the stage for study. He was, in fact, an avid and voracious reader, and it would have been his first October at Harvard that he set upon the books in the great Widener Library with intentions to devour every one. In October of his second year of graduate study, 1921, his one-act play "The Mountains" was performed in the Agassiz Theatre at nearby Radcliffe.

Since the fall of his arrival in Cambridge, Wolfe had kept an informal notebook, but not until his first departure for Europe did he make a resolve to be more formal about it. October 26, 1924, his first day at sea, he wrote:

Today, for the first time in my life, I am beginning a more or less methodical record of the events which impinge on my own experience. I do this, I believe, because for the first time in my

life I feel an utter isolation from such reality as I have known; because I know that I must live a good week longer with the people on this ship and that try as we may, we cannot get away from one another. The opportunities for observation are humorously unique.

Traveling and at home he kept his October resolve, filling over thirty pocket notebooks during the remainder of his life.

It was on the voyage home the following August that Wolfe met Aline Bernstein, the older woman who became his mistress and supporter for a brief period of years beginning in October 1925. In New York they were "inseparable." His plans to write an autobiographical novel were shaped under her influence, and in the summer of 1926 they went together to Europe, first to Paris, where Wolfe outlined or made lists for the projected fiction, and then to England. There in London, after Mrs. Bernstein sailed for New York, he began the first version of what ultimately, with her indulgence and the skill of Perkins, appeared as *Look Homeward, Angel*. When Wolfe later wrote down the story of how this novel came into being, he put it this way, however:

I would get a great, hollow utterly futile feeling inside me, and then I would get up and switch on the light and read the words I had written that day, and then I would wonder: why am I here now? why have I come?

By day there would be the great, dull roar of London, the gold, yellow, foggy light you have there in October.

This forceful experience of a creative North Carolinian in England caused him to view October as a benchmark in each remaining October of his life.

Certain October letters of 1926 and 1928 bare the "pain and joy and exultancy strong" of the protracted evolution of *Look Homeward, Angel*. These selections (notes deleted) from Stutman's Wolfe/Bernstein correspondence show all. The first excerpts are from his long letter to her as he turned twenty-six alone in London:

My dear, your letters are the only thing that hold me to the least reality in this world. I have determined to write more often — I don't know how well I shall succeed. You are the only person who seems to me to have flesh and blood substance: — I want you to understand that I am living in a kind of mighty dream, where I wander about extensively, examine everything, and find everything unreal[.] In this way my days pass, I enter and leave my room, write, fall heavily upon my bed for an hour, write again, go out on a bus, wander, rove, eat. Thus I think of you all the time, begin a letter, sleep, write, add to the letter, and finally, wondering in horror how it shall ever get to you, I remember suddenly that there are postage stamps, and strange things called ships, in which I don't believe . . .

Do you know, my dear, that in writing this book, the last thing I shall ever write, I feel for the first time as if I'm throwing my strength not at the empty air but at some object. I am deliberately writing the book for two or three people, — first and chiefest, for you. There is not the remote shadow of a chance

that it will ever get published — if I cared to write salable stuff I would: I know most of the tricks, but something takes possession of me when I write, and I wear my entrails upon the page. I can't help it: I am writing, like any sensible person, for some audience — but unhappily my audience has never existed[.]

But, somehow, I am rather happy about the book. I am fashioning it somewhat as one of the men of Platin's time might have fashioned his, or as Burton the Anatomy. I know that, at the most, it's one for two or three people. But it is evolving as a huge rich pageant, with a blending shift and interweave in the pattern. It ought to make good reading for those two or three...

If my book breaks down, and I can't finish it I don't know what I'll do. I shan't stay in England, and I don't think I'll come home. Find out more definitely from your lady friend what "piece work" is, and how much it pays. Let me know about it.

I have about \$600 left. I'm not in need of anything...

London/October 14, 1926

My Dear: —

I had two letters from you to-day — one was a one page note, I got a cable from you the other day.

I moved to Bloomsbury from Chelsea 10 days ago: I am living at 57 Gower Street; I have a huge room; much furniture; red curtains on my bed; plaster statues under glass, engravings of the Crimean War — but there's room to move. I have worked well.

I will tell you how I feel. I live in my pyjamas until about one o'clock, when I go to the Express[.] I write in the mornings — I am heavy after lunch and beer; I wander about the book shops in the Charing Cross Road until 4 or 5. I go home, have tea[.] from six to eight or nine I work. Then I eat and drink. After this I work from 11 or 12 until 1.

Your letters describe your desire for me, and then you add, as if you wanted me to deny it "but perhaps you are better there[.]" I am sunken; I am about incapable of action; I am the super-Hamlet pinned beneath the weight of his own spinning; I live under the sea, I think of you continually, I do not know how I shall emerge[.] I intended to go to Oxford last week; I think I shall go at the end of this one... I got your cable this morning — you said you were hopeless and tired. My dear Jew, my life is yours. I am held from submission because I believe sometimes that during the ten days between the writing and delivering of this, trickery has crept in. But I believe in you at bottom. I am terribly depressed to-day. The rainy weather has set in; a leaden drizzle falls constantly — London reels with mist and fog[.]

Since you left I have written over 60000 words of a book that may be almost 200000[.] I cabled you a long message this morning in which I said I would come back without complaint whenever you want me. I think now I shall go to Oxford tomorrow, if possible stay a month, and do all I can. Then I should like to go to Germany for a few days. I don't know — all I do know is that I want to get on with the book. Your letters about New York have depressed me — I found that even the easy promises of work in the movies went the way of most easy promises — faded... When I finish the book I want to earn my living in some way[.]

The thing we have got to find, I suppose, is whether we can be together and work, too. I am so low today I hardly know where to turn. Your letters are the only things I have left — I have lopped off everything; and your letters have almost taken the heart out of me[.] I do not mind being in anyone's employ as long as I can render faithful service; I can hold my head up as long as I write honestly and hard for four or five hours a day...

October/Wednesday/October 20

My dear:

I came up to Oxford Sunday afternoon; I have stayed ever since — on this High Street at the Mitre Tavern, a famous old and chilly place[.] The term has just commenced; all up and

down the High Street and in and out of the colleges swarm apple cheeked boys. I feel very old — I can never be a part of this again. I went out looking for rooms. Those I found were far out, miserable, cold, dispirited — there's very little coal. Yesterday I found this place — it's called Hilltop Farm; it's 20 minutes walk from the center of Oxford but like the country, up a noble avenue of trees, flanked by green playing fields. The house is a fine residence; I have a sitting room and bedroom — both magnificent places — I get breakfast and dinner at night as well for 3:10 a week[.]

I am settled here now in my sitting room, with a cheerful fire in my grate[.] The weather here has been raw & cold, several heavy frosts. Last night there was a blazing moon, but today rain is falling, there's a mist low over everything. I am going into town presently to the Post Office to see if I have any mail from you. Did you get a cable from me saying that my address until further notice was Poste Restante, Oxford. I got one from you, telling me to finish the book before I came back. I'm afraid my dear, it will be several months before the book is finished[.] I want to stay here a month, and work like Hell. By that time I hope to have on paper roughly three parts of it — There are four parts — but one is an introduction that will be comparatively short. I have almost finished the third part; I am well on with the first. I am fairly sure I have done more work since you left than most of the Oxford boys will get done during the entire year... I have watched some of the American students here — they submit reverently to all the constraint of the life, hush their voices, and try to be as unlike themselves as possible[.] No one seems to have thought yet of the possibility of becoming a civilized person at home, yet we have, it seems to me, the materials from which civilization ought to be made — abundance, plumbing, warmth, light, comfort — the nasty little people sneer at these, but fine people, like fine horses, need them — even plumbing[.] Also, when any of our people have ideas, it seems to me they are likely to be quicker, truer, and less worn[.] I have been away four months, I wonder how much longer I shall stay[.] Have you been able, in the midst of your woes, to perform the single little errand I asked of you — namely to get from Miss Lewisohn without talk my plays? Have you been able to realize that I get sick every time I think of them in conjunction with the rather interesting reptilian face, and that I no longer want them to pollute the air near this very extraordinary, sensitive, although somewhat inarticulate-because-what-she-has-to-say-is-so-unusual person? You have not, but please, please do.

[Oxford]Thursday/October 28, 1926

My Dear: —

Unfortunately, I'm going to write you a nice letter, which will explain its brevity. I'm writing you this in my sitting room at ten o'clock in the morning after breakfast. I got your letter yesterday in which you speak of your relief over my cablegrams. I am relieved to get the letter.

I have been thinking of getting home in time for Christmas or New Year's. The book stands thus: I work five or six hours every day on it now — I see my way through the first three books as straight as a string. I brood constantly over the fourth and last — the book lifts into a soaring fantasy of a Voyage, and I want to put my utmost, my most passionate in it. The prefatory action to these four books I can write down in ten days.

I am confident now I can get the central body on paper by Christmas — that is, the first three books. But I am also confident I can not get the last book in by that time. But if then three books are done, I know that the whole will get done wherever I am. Listen, my dear: last night I worked till past midnight, a late hour for me now, and did over 2000 words. The book is swarming with life, peopled by communities, and governed by a developing and inexorable unity.

I think I shall stay here until late November: it is a fine house, out in the country, a quarter mile off the road that goes

from Oxford to the village of Cowley. "There was a roaring in the wind" last night ...

Sailing to New York aboard the *Majestic* two months later, Wolfe asked his notebook: "What rut of life with the Jew now?" He was soon to have the answer. Aline Bernstein settled him in a studio on Eighth Avenue, one he had occupied before. And rather than have him return to the teaching job he had had last spring and summer at New York University, they agreed that she would support him while he continued writing. Following several months of feverish composition, Wolfe spent the middle of the summer of 1927 out of the swelter of New York City. He wrote instead at the Rhinebeck estate of his friend (another patron) Olin Dows. Suzanne Stutman writes that by "the winter of 1928, Wolfe was working himself to exhaustion, teaching, writing, and dictating his finished manuscript. The arguments and recriminations became unbearable, until finally Wolfe refused to see Mrs. Bernstein at all. Each went to Europe alone. Wolfe later referred to his European trip as 'The Grand Tour of Renunciation.' Mrs. Bernstein yearned to meet with him in Europe, but he consistently avoided her, although he maintained a steady stream of letters." The manuscript of his first book had been left in New York; work on the material that *Of Time and the River* would eventually be made of was already underway.

Munich/Thursday/October 4 [1928]

Dear Aline:

I got your cable today — I was very pleased and glad to know that you had remembered me on my birthday which I had about forgotten. But I am sorry I did not find a letter from you as well — it has been six weeks or more since you got home, and during that time I think I have had only three letters from you. This would be often enough if your letters were of any length, but they have been scarcely more than note — little dashes that you wrote down and sent off in five minutes. This is one reason why I have not written you since coming to Munich — my own letters were not so numerous but they were ten or twenty times as long as yours — it may be childish, but it seemed only right to me that you should catch up.

Today is the first time that I have been for mail since Saturday. I went to the hospital Monday and got out this afternoon. I had a mild concussion of the brain, four scalp wounds, and a broken nose. My head has healed beautifully, and my nose is mending rapidly, although I may lose the little loop in it that you were the first — and the last! — to admire. I am shaven as bald as a priest — in fact with my scarred head, and the little stubble of black hair that has already begun to come up I look like a dissolute priest.

What happened I am too giddy to tell you about tonight. I shall begin the story, and try to finish it tomorrow. I had been in Munich three weeks — during that time I had led a sober and industrious life — as I have since coming abroad. It is now the season here of Oktoberfest. What the Oktoberfest is I did not know until a week or two ago when it began. I had heard of it from everyone — I thought of it as a place where all Bavarian peasant people come and dance old ritualistic dances, and sell

their wares, and so on. But when I went for the first time I found to my disappointment only a kind of Coney Island — merry go rounds, gimcracks of all sorts, innumerable sausage shops, places where whole oxen were roasting on the spit, and enormous beer halls. But why in Munich — where there are a thousand beer drinking palaces — should there be a special fair for beer. I soon found out. The Oktober beer is twice as strong as the ordinary beer — it is thirteen percent ...

I'm glad I'm alive. I've meant to lead a good life, and I've led a bad and wasteful one. But out of all this waste and sin I believe — in spite of all logic — that some beauty will come. I love you, and as long as I love you beyond myself — as long as I could think of you then while I wallowed a beast in the mud, and believed myself to be near death — as long as you came to me then — then all is not lost, all good in me is not dead ...

It is apparent that the Oktoberfest brawl had the effect of smoothing the edge that had turned up between Wolfe and Mrs. Bernstein, who had returned to New York in late August. From there her indulgent and persistent correspondence directly affected Wolfe's first book as never before.

New York/October 18, 1928

SCRIBNER INTERESTED BOOK WRITING DEAREST LOVE = ALINE

[New York]October 18, 1928

My Dear Tom:

I sent you a cable concerning your book two days ago, but unfortunately it was returned to me, I enclose notice from Western Union. I have not heard from you since you arrived in Munich. I presume all my letters were too wearisome for you. I hardly know what to do, as the Scribner people are anxious to talk to you and it seems too good a chance to miss. I write you still to Munich, as I know of no other address and apparently you do not care to keep me informed. I hope you are alright in health ... My dear, I always want to write how much I love you, but what use is it? Aline

New York/October 20, 1928

SCRIBNER INTERESTED BOOK DEAREST LOVE = ALINE

Vienna/October 23, 1928

Dear Aline:

I have been here four or five days — sent my long letter in two sections a day or so after I got here. I hope both parts arrive at the same time and that you are able to read them — I know it will be a job (to read it) as the writing is a wild scrawl, and very soiled and crumpled. But it is a good description of myself at the time I wrote it ... I have lost all capacity and desire for work — the kind of work I thought I wanted to do. I circle and twist about all day in the labyrinthine streets — so strange and narrow and crooked — of the old City here, taking down the names of the books on display in the bookshop windows — scrawling, scribbling insanely the names of the books other people have written, and unable to continue with one I had begun for myself. I have no confidence and no hope. The huge vomit of print that inundated that world has sickened me and killed — for the time at least — all my creative energy. Only my mind seems to stay alive — my heart is leaden and hopeless — but my mind keeps working like some animal trying to find its way out of a maze ...

[New York, Late October 1928]

My Dear Tom:

I was in a great state of worry over not hearing from you for so long and today received an alarming post card saying you

have been in a hospital in Munich with a broken nose etc. The lower half of the writing I could not make out well, as the pencil was somewhat rubbed out. I cabled you twice this week, both cable returned saying you were not in Munich. So the moment your card came I wired you. You must write one telegraph immediately to Madeleine Boyd, I will enclose her Paris address. Scribner's want to see you about your book. I am so excited, and wonder how the new one is coming on... I do not know whether Olin is sending you money or not, and wonder whether your finances have anything to do with your coming back to America. I do not flatter myself that I have anything to do with it, you told me before you left that Olin promised to help out. I was paid yesterday by the theatre, and have \$750. I will send you some if you need it to come home, \$500... I thought surely you would stay a long time in Munich and write, but I might have known you would not do what I expected. Anyway, you have had a long vacation and should feel strong and rested. I envy you the extraordinary quality you have of detachment from responsibility. I know it is an attribute of genius. Maybe it is the genius I envy you, for I know I have it not. But I think you hardly take the proper responsibility toward yourself. I am here preaching tonight and better stop. My whole career or profession, or what ever you call it, has resolved into two aching legs and a bad head. But I look well, some of my Carlsbad cure is still with me. I'd like to go there and do look after yourself,

Love, Aline

Mdeleine Boyd
c/o W. A. Bradley
5 Rue St. Louis en L'Ile
Paris

Vienna/Thursday Night/October 25, 1928

Dear Aline:

I'm going to try a *short* letter to you to see how it goes. I sent off my last huge scrawl in two installments a day or so after I got here, and I hope you got both parts together, and were able to read the contents — as ugly and sordid as they were. It has been a matter of 3½ months since I landed this time upon this land of Europe — and what have I to show for it? Some 30000 or 40000 words actually written, some three or four books full of notes — which I may use, a half fair-to-middling reading knowledge of the German language although I still speak very badly, a heart full of hopelessness, a broken nose that is taking a crooked twist across my face, a criminal stubble of hair upon my head, and a large white scar on which no hair will grow — and a great, grand, unfading love for you, my darling, which seems to be the only beautiful and redeeming thing in my life, and which is so much better than the rest of me that I cannot believe it belongs to me, or is a part of me...

I circle the maze of the Old Town here like a maniac, taking down the names of hundreds of books in the windows — trying to dig out of all the nightmare horror of dust and forgetfulness and junk with which Europe is weighted down, something that may have a little beauty, a little wisdom for me. This terrible vomit of print that covers the earth has paralyzed me with its stench of hopelessness — I can not lift my head above the waves of futility and dullness — I have no hope, no confidence, no belief in my ability to rise above the level or even the worst of it. Impulse is killed in me, life is dead — for I am sure so much of this — most of it! — was begun hopefully, was thought good by its perpetrators, found praisers. And to think that this world is full of people who say this and that confidently, who write criticisms, and talk confidently of literature and art, who peck around in the huge mess with a feeling of complacency and pleasure — I can not follow them, understand them... This life, the glorious city is in its yellow leaf. I am going to Budapest, then back here, then to Florence, Rome and Naples, and then home. I am going to work and try to make some money. God bless you, my dear. I hope your write [to] me. Tom

Vienna/Sunday Night/October 27 [1928]

My dear Aline:

In several of your letters you have begged me to make use of "this precious time" — not to waste it — to make something of my life here while I have the chance. Every one of these words stabs me — I know how right you are, and how little I have made of my chances — how I have wasted everything most precious — paramously yourself — and made a wreck of everything I wanted to make beautiful. I do not know the reason for it. It seems to me that the people who lose all reason in this world are the people who try most desperately to find it. I know I have always been after the reason of things — I am now more than ever — and my brain is weary and wants rest, and can not get it. It is like something that hunts round and round inside an iron cylinder trying to find some way out when there is none.

My dear — if only I had a little of your calm certitude, your wisdom, your beautiful vision; or if only I had some of the false certitude of other people — of men who believe only in the bank business, or furniture, or automobiles; or of others who believe that no painting is good that is not like the Picasso's, or no writing that is not like Gertrude Stein's or Dickens or Pirandello's. I am going through a horrible struggle of the spirit, and unless I find some way out I am done for. It is not new — it has gone now for several years. You have seen it, and I do not think you have ever understood it very well, for in your own work you have been so certain: you have so fine a talent and you have found the thing you like best and for a while you are best fitted. Dear happy Aline — you were right about me. I'm a Bum — but I've always wanted to be something better. I am not lost yet, there is still hope and life in me, and with God's help, and my own, and above all, almost, I hope with *yours*, I'm going to pull out of it. My dear, will you save these letters that I have written



North Carolina State University professor Elliot Engel, entertaining those at the conference banquet with a discussion of the life and times of Charles Dickens.

you. They have been poor jumbled letters, but outside of my notes, they give the only fairly consecutive account of my life for the last four months. Please save the last one about the Okto berfest — it is a broken mumbling sort of nightmare, but I put down without any literary varnish some of the things that were happening at the time. I have not yet been able to see the whole thing clearly — I don't know what it means — but I believe there may be a strange and moving story in it ...

[Vienna]Monday Night [29 October 1928]

Dear Aline —

I got two more of your blessed letters tonight and a cable about Scribners. In my present state Scribners does not make even a dull echo in me — I have seen so much print that I feel it is criminal to add to it. Perhaps you can help me get back a little vanity, a little self-belief, a little boastfulness. God knows we all ought to have some, and all my egoism has plunged downwards and left me stuck in the mud. But every word in your letters I love and cherish — My dear, I am coming back to America, and get some kind of paying work, and then perhaps, if you want it, we can have some kind of life together again. Everything I write you runs on into words — I am going to be definite for once now: I love you dearly, I have acted badly while wanting to act well, I want to redeem myself, I want to see you again, I want to try to act fairly and humanly towards you from now on, I want to go to work. I am coming back to America next month — one week in Budapest, two weeks in Italy, and home if possible from Naples ...

Vienna/Tuesday Night/October 30 [1928]

My Dear —

Thank God I have recovered my paper out of the depths of my travelling book-case — paper in Vienna seems to be a kind of precious gold leaf, and is doled out at high prices a sheet at a time. Also, I have found a pencil I can write with — the fountain pen which I started so nobly lies buried somewhere in the mud or dust of the Oktoberfest. Today I got a letter from Mrs. Boyd — on her way to Paris — saying a Mr. So-and-So was interested in my book. She gave me her Paris address, and I answered her at once from Cook's. She said she hoped I would not do anything with it except through her — a very gratifying apprehension — and I told her in my letter that she could depend on me to stick closer than glue if anything came of it in any way through her efforts. She also said she hoped my new book was almost finished — and my heart began to throb up and down like a sore tooth. I have made thousands of notes, and written scenes here and there, and gone and investigated and explored all over ...

Circumstances were to be such, however, that Wolfe and his indulgent mistress were not to make another book together, and Mrs. Boyd was to be superseded by agent Elizabeth Nowell.

This letter from Mrs. Bernstein to Wolfe places the great book they did make together in its most intimate October light.

New York/The Gotham[October 1934]

Dear Tom. —

Some years ago, when you went abroad on your Guggen-

heim fellowship, you gave me the manuscript of "Look Home-ward, Angel."

I think it no more than just to tell you that I am sending it to Mr. Perkins, for him alone, with the stipulation that it will under no circumstances be given to you or any member of your family. He has stood by you as a loyal friend, as I have always had it in my heart to do; and although on your part, the relation between us has come to an end, on my part it never has, and never will so long as I breathe.

I loved you and always will, in spite of your unjust repudiation of me. For many years I have clung to simple faith in the old fashioned words of loyalty and truthfulness, and now realize how foolish I have been.

I am sick, returned from hospital a week ago, and I am obliged to give up all of my work for at least a year, and doubt if I will be able to return to it. I am also dead broke, and going to California for part of the winter. My good friend Aline MacMahon is treating me to every thing, even such clothing as I need. It is not easy for me to accept but I have to. We do not know what is becoming of the house, trying to sell it or rent it. So I thought it best to send your book to Mr. Perkins not knowing what might happen to it. I do not in the least mind the loss of my comfortable living, but the turnabout of my faith in you has really done me more harm than any physical or objective thing.

I still have faith in you as a writer, but you will achieve the beautiful thing only if you look deep into your heart for the truth. You just can't go wandering on putting musical words to paper. Too many people are doing that. — I leave about Nov. 15 and wish you luck, but I know luck means nothing. I am old and wise enough to have found that out.—

As always, devotedly yours
Aline

Whenever sensational October comes back again, it will be the season of the massive ghost of Thomas Wolfe. Halloween as a notion for library cases and boards can give way in college and university facilities to displays of Wolfe's October books, letters, notebooks, and biographical materials. Jonathan Daniels called his friend "warm and good, tumultuous, angry and comic, too." While the prose poetry of October is one very memorable item, Wolfe's account of himself for Aline Bernstein, October 25, 1926, deserves to be well known too:

I am invincible in defeat, supreme in my victory over all lost faith: you have given me that, it cannot be taken from me. O great lost demon of my youth, wild boy that beat across mysterious seas, strange seeker of enchanted coasts, I haunt around the grey walls of my house to find you. Where is the apple tree, the singing and the gold? Where are the moonbright feet of the running girls — the Arcadian Meadows — the goat hooves and the glimmering thicket faces? I will sing of him and celebrate my sorrow; I will invoke him, over all loud laughter, for he was godlike, deathless faith, unending beauty hung like lanterns in his eyes, and he is gone.

All men must lose a god to gain a castle[.]