LawArt
Rivista di Diritto, Arte, Storia
Journal of Law, Art and History
www.lawart.it

doi: 10.17473/LawArt-2021-2-4

2 (2021) 81-128

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Thomas Wolfe's *I Have a Thing to Tell You*: Narrative Discourse, Metaphoric Transference and German National Socialism

I Have a Thing to Tell You di Thomas Wolfe: discorso narrativo, transfert metaforico e nazionalsocialismo tedesco

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ABSTRACT. The paper argues that Thomas Wolfe's novella *I Have a Thing to Tell You* was written to enable his readers to construct the reality of discrimination against Jews in Nazi Germany in the period surrounding the Berlin Olympic Games of 1936. Wolfe's intention was to record faithfully an episode that took place on a train in Germany in early September 1936, which brought home to him more forcibly than any other personal experience the reality of Nazi oppression. Through this story, Wolfe wanted to engage his readers in a narrative discourse, to reveal the truth as he saw it, and to ask his readers to make a metaphoric transference from this one example of Nazi oppression to whatever land or ruler tried to imprison people physically or spiritually. The "thing to tell" was both a protest against abridged or denied civil rights and a testimony of his commitment to expose man's inhumanity to man.

ABSTRACT. L'articolo evidenzia come la novella di Thomas Wolfe *I Have a Thing to Tell You* sia stata scritta per consentire ai lettori di rappresentarsi la realtà della discriminazione contro gli ebrei nella Germania nazista durante i Giochi olimpici di Berlino del 1936. L'intenzione di Wolfe era di registrare fedelmente un episodio accaduto su un treno in Germania all'inizio del settembre 1936, che lo aveva portato a prendere coscienza, più forzosamente di qualsiasi altra esperienza personale, della realtà dell'oppressione nazista. Attraverso questa storia Wolfe ha voluto coinvolgere i suoi lettori in un discorso narrativo, per rivelare la verità come la vedeva lui e sollecitarli ad un transfert metaforico, da questo esempio specifico di oppressione nazista a qualsiasi Paese o governante cercasse di imprigionare le persone fisicamente o spiritualmente. La "cosa da dire" era insieme una protesta contro la negazione dei diritti e una testimonianza del suo impegno a mettere a nudo la disumanità dell'uomo verso l'uomo.

KEYWORDS / PAROLE CHIAVE: Wolfe, Nazism, Hitler, Antisemitism, Olympics / Wolfw, Nazismo, Hitler, Antisemitismo, Giochi olimpici

Thomas Wolfe's *I Have a Thing to Tell You*: Narrative Discourse, Metaphoric Transference and German National Socialism

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1. *Preface*

When *I Have a Thing to Tell You* was published in serialized form by *The New Republic* in March 1937, Heinz Ledig-Rowohlt, Thomas Wolfe's friend and editor with the German publisher Rowohlt Verlag «feared the worst»[1]. The title of the story was the exact phrase with which he had

[1] Thomas Wolfe (1900-1938) was one of the most important American authors of the twentieth century, a writer who enjoyed during his lifetime a literary reputation that was equal to that of Faulkner, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald. However, since his death of tubercular meningitis on 15 September 1938, Wolfe's artistic reputation has been in serious decline, and today it remains so damaged that very few people read him, and even fewer serious literary scholars refer to him unless it is to dismiss his contribution as that of a prolific amateur. Of course, Wolfe did much to undermine his own reputation. A self-obsessed Romantic, Wolfe permitted unchecked raw feelings and intense emotions to invade the creative process and to condition his writing with a highly inflated rhetorical style that appeared at times to know no bounds. Then there was the author's life, certainly no more dramatic than that of his contemporary Hemingway, but somehow tainted in the public eye by his gargantuan love for alcohol, food and sex, as well as books and art, and by his tendency toward manic depressive behaviour, all personal issues that worked their way into his fiction to generate the «autobiographical controversy» that would haunt Wolfe until his death, as well as the myth of the raw, unpolished and uncontrollable genius who, in the words of his most serious contemporary critic, Bernard DeVoto, «had mastered neither the psychic material out of which a novel is made nor the technique for writing fiction». See: DeVoto (25 April 1936), p. 3, and more recently Bloom (8 February 1987), pp. 13-14. Whether Wolfe was a gifted genius or prolific amateur, there can be no question that he had a command of words that few if any

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begun all his «atrocity stories», all of his private conversations with Wolfe on the «political situation» in Nazi Germany. In this story, which would be included word for word in Wolfe's last novel, *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940), Wolfe had worked over all their more intimate dialogues and discourses with «photographic exactness, and with a few deviations from reality». He had brought together his visits to Berlin in the summers of 1935 and 1936, and had set them in the Olympic summer, so that the furious ill humour of 1936 was dampened or even neutralized by the easy cheerful mood of 1935. For all that, concluded Ledig-Rowohlt, any careful observer must have been able «to construct the reality of it» down to the last detail [2].

The principal task of this paper is to argue that Thomas Wolfe's novella, *I Have a Thing to Tell You*, was written purposely and precisely to enable his readers «to construct the reality of it». Wolfe's intention was to record faithfully an episode that took place on a train in early September 1936 when he was leaving Germany, an event that brought home to him more forcibly than any other personal experience the reality of Nazi oppression: a Jewish man who was traveling in the same compartment with him on a train bound for Paris was arrested at the border for trying to expatriate illegally and for attempting to smuggle out more currency than the Nazi law allowed. Through this story, it will be argued, Wolfe wanted to engage his readers in a narrative discourse, to reveal the truth as he saw it, and to ask his readers to make a metaphoric transference from this one example of Nazi oppression to whatever land or ruler tried to imprison people physically or spiritually. The «thing to tell», in sum, was both a protest against abridged or denied civil rights and a tes-

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other modern American novelists have achieved. Indeed, one of Wolfe's greatest attributes was his extraordinary ability in the use of the English language. Like a brilliant painter uses colour, Wolfe used words to blend syllables and phrases into a composite whole more beautiful than any of its parts. In preparing this paper for publication it was decided that many quotations taken from Wolfe's works would be culled and reproduced in paraphrased form so as to permit readers – particularly those who may be unfamiliar with the author's writings – to experience more fully the power, brilliance and significance of the Wolfean epic poetic style.

[2] Ledig-Rowohlt (1953), p. 199.

timony of his commitment to expose man's inhumanity to man. What Wolfe had witnessed in Hitler's Germany in the summer of 1936 deeply concerned him, it had revealed to him that the country he most revered next to his own was headed toward unspeakable atrocities, and the task he set for himself with the writing of *I Have a Thing to Tell You* was to communicate this to his readers.

2. *Wolfe Arrives in Berlin*

When Thomas Wolfe arrived in Berlin during the summer of 1936, he had every expectation of reliving the glorious moments he had experienced in Germany the previous year when he was perhaps more completely happy than at any other time in his life. In April of that year Rowohlt Verlag had published Hans Schiebelhuth's sensitive translation of Wolfe's novel *Of Time and the River* (1935), under the title *Von Zeit und Strom*, and German reviewers had praised it even more enthusiastically than Wolfe's first book, *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), which had been published as *Schau Heimwärts, Engel!* [3]. To be sure, there were some dissenters. Hermann Hesse, who had admired Wolfe's first novel, found the second book so lacking in artistic structure that he laid it aside without finishing it, and a Nazi critic in *Die Neue Literatur* declared that

[3] There can be no question that much of Wolfe's success in Germany was due to the fine translations made by Hans Schiebelhuth, who proved himself a master at capturing in German what was in effect typically Wolfean English phraseology. Straight English can be translated rather readily, but Wolfe's regional terms like *backwoods school*, his idiomatic expressions like *flying high*, his slang wording like *give'er the gas*, and his Wolfeanisms like *nose-winged* present serious linguistic and cultural challenges to any translator. E.D. Johnson has suggested that Wolfe translated best into German, «possibly because of the many English-German cognates, but more probably because Wolfe's long, rambling, word-heavy sentences are almost German in structure to begin with». Johnson's very fine, but very brief comparative work on translating Wolfe, an approach that sadly has been pursued by few scholars, concludes that Wolfe's writings «easily rendered into German because he himself was basically Teutonic in his philosophy, phraseology, and in his literary leanings». In addition to German, Johnson's study used French, Spanish, Norwegian, and Italian translations to develop his arguments. Johnson (1957), pp. 96, 100 and 101.

Wolfe was inferior to Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, and Sinclair Lewis. However, the overwhelming majority of the reviews had been entirely positive and, in some instances, unabashedly laudatory: the *Berliner Tageblatt* called Wolfe an epic poet; the *Kölnische Zeitung* commented that his «realistic-romantic epic» presented both a «photographically true environment» and a «dreamland of the souls»; and the *Magdeburgsche Zeitung* ranked Wolfe above Whitman, Dostoyevsky, Goethe, Dickens, Cervantes, and Homer because of the «original poetic breath of fire which issues … from the volcano of this spirit like a pure flame» [4].

Famous and admired in Germany, Wolfe set out immediately upon his arrival to immerse himself completely into the experience of the moment: he renewed his friendships with his German editor Ernst Rowohlt and his son, Heinz Ledig-Rowohlt, who were absolutely delighted to have one of their major authors and friends to entertain and promote; he also sought out the family of the American Ambassador William E. Dodd, especially the Ambassador's daughter, Martha, who was still at the American embassy in Berlin; he began musing about stories he could write for the North German Lloyd magazine, *The Seven Seas,* which had given him $ 150 worth of free passage on the liner *Europa* in return for a short article or two about Germany; and, as he did in 1935, Wolfe launched almost immediately upon his arrival upon the enjoyable occupation of spending his considerable German royalties as fast as possible, for they had been blocked by Nazi legislation and could not be taken out of the country.

Wolfe's first few days were a round of dinners, parties and interviews, interrupted only by visits to the Olympic stadium, where he had a standing invitation to use Ambassador Dodd's box, which was very close to that of Chancellor Hitler himself. Wolfe had no direct contact with Hitler during his visit, although he once came perilously close to it at the Olympic Games, in what might have been an embarrassing diplomatic incident. When the American track star Jesse Owens won a particularly conspicuous victory, Wolfe cheered so enthusiastically that Hitler looked

[4] For an overview of the critical reception, see the Pulitzer Prize winning biography by Donald (1987), p. 385.

up angrily at the American Ambassador's box to see who was making such a commotion. Throughout the first two weeks of August, Wolfe attended the Games religiously: he wanted most certainly to enjoy the sport competitions, but he also wanted to exam the Games within the context German National Socialism, and «getting it all right» from firsthand observation. As he said later in *You Can't Go Home Again,* «I could never learn anything except the hard way. I must experience it for myself before I knew», that is, through personal experience and emotion and meditation, instead of accepting at face value the arguments advanced by others. Implicit in this comment was Wolfe's steadfast refusal to accept what he called the «slot-machine» condemnation of Nazi Germany that was urged upon him by the left-wing intellectuals of New York. For, again, as he wrote in *You Can't Go Home Again,* «about Hitler's Germany he felt that one must be very true». And the reason one needed to be very true was that «the thing in it which every decent person must be against was false. You could not turn the other cheek to wrong», but also, it seemed to him, «you could not be wrong about wrong. You had to be right about it. You could not meet lies and trickery with lies and trickery, although there were some people who argued that you should». And so, every day, Wolfe sat at the Olympic stadium or prowled the Berlin streets, with his powers of perception keyed up to their highest pitch. His impressions, as recorded in his Purdue speech of 19 May 1938[5] and in *You Can't Go Home Again,* seemed somewhat inconclusive at that crucial time, when Hitler was holding Europe and America upon the brink of World War II, but they are very much a living representation of Nazi Germany during that Olympic summer of 1936.

> Almost every day – wrote Wolfe – [he] … went to the stadium in Berlin. [He] observed that the organizing genius of the German people, which has been used so often to such noble purpose, was now more thrillingly displayed than he had ever seen it before. The sheer pageantry of the occasion was overwhelming, so much so that he began to feel oppressed by it. There seemed to be something ominous in it. One sensed a stupendous

[5] Braswell/Field (1964).

> concentration of effort, a tremendous drawing together and ordering in the vast collective power of the whole land. And the thing that made it seem ominous was that it so evidently went beyond what the Games themselves demanded. The Games were overshadowed, and were no longer merely sporting competitions to which other nations had sent their chosen teams. They became, day after day, an orderly and overwhelming demonstration in which the whole of Germany had been schooled and disciplined. It was as if the Games had been chosen as a symbol of the new collective might, a means of showing to the world in concrete terms what this new power had come to be.

Wolfe was amazed that

> [w]ith no past experience in such affairs, the Germans had constructed a mighty stadium which was the most beautiful and most perfect in its design that had ever been built. And all the accessories of this monstrous plant – the swimming pools, the enormous balls, the lesser stadia – had been laid out and designed with this same cohesion of beauty and of use.

Most impressive to Wolfe was that

> [t]he organization was superb. Not only were the events themselves, down to the minutest detail of each competition, staged and run off like clockwork, but the crowds – such crowds as no other great city has ever bad to cope with, and the like of which would certainly have snarled and maddened the traffic of New York beyond hope of untangling – were handled with a quietness, order, and speed that was astounding.

3. *National Socialist Rhetoric and Spectacle at Face Value*

Wolfe appeared to accept at face value the Nazi's use of architecture, design and dramatic public displays to systematically manipulate public sentiment. At one point he conceded that

> [t]he daily spectacle was breath-taking in its beauty and magnificence. The stadium was a tournament of color that caught the throat; the massed splendor of the banners made the gaudy decorations of America's

> great parades, presidential inaugurations, and World's Fairs seem like shoddy carnivals in comparison.

He also appreciated almost instantly that

> for the duration of the Olympics, Berlin itself was transformed into a kind of annex to the stadium. From one end of the city to the other, from the Lustgarten to the Brandenburger Tor, along the whole broad sweep of Unter den Linden, through the vast avenues of the faery Tiergarten, and out though the western part of Berlin to the very portals of the stadium, the whole town was a thrilling pageantry – Wolfe commented enthusiastically – a pageantry of royal banners – not merely endless miles of looped-up bunting, but banners fifty feet in height, such as might have graced the battle tent of some great emperor.

Berlin itself had been gloriously transformed by the Games, and Wolfe sensationalized the transformation. Already considered one of the world's greatest cities by the early 1930s, known for its leadership roles in science, the humanities, music, film, higher education, government, diplomacy, industries and military affairs, Wolfe identified a reawakened Berlin, a Berlin in full metamorphosis, suggesting an abrupt or startling change induced by or as if by magic or a supernatural power.

> And all through the day – wrote Wolfe – from morning on, Berlin became a mighty Ear, attuned, attentive, focused on the stadium. Everywhere the air was filled with a single voice. The green trees along the Kurfürstendamm began to talk: from loud-speakers concealed in their branches an announcer in the stadium spoke to the whole city – and for George Webber it was a strange experience to hear the familiar terms of track and field translated into the tongue that Goethe used. He would be informed now that the *Vorlauf* was about to be run – and then the *Zwischenlauf* – and at length the *Endlauf* – and the winner: 'Owens – Oo Ess Ah!' Meanwhile, through those tremendous banner-laden ways – Wolfe reported – the crowds thronged ceaselessly all day long. The wide promenade of Unter den Linden was solid with patient, tramping German feet. Fathers, mothers, children, young folks, old – the whole material of the nation was there, from every corner of the land. From morn to night they trudged, wide-eyed, full of wonder, past the marvel of those banner-laden ways. And among them one saw the bright stabs of color of Olym-

> pic jackets and the glint of foreign faces: the dark features of Frenchmen and Italians, the ivory grimace of the Japanese, the straw hair and blue eyes of the Swedes, and the big Americans, natty in straw hats, white flannels, and blue coats crested with the Olympic seal.

What appeared to impress Wolfe most sensationally was that Berlin and its people appeared to be marshaled and disciplined and in complete rhythmic harmony with a new political essence that seemed divinely inspired, or at the very least otherworldly:

> And there were great displays – continued Wolfe – of marching men, sometimes ungunned, but rhythmic as regiments of brown shirts went swinging through the streets. By noon each day all the main approaches to the Games, the embannered streets and avenues of the route which the Leader would take to the stadium, miles away, were walled in by the troops. They stood at ease, young men, laughing and talking with each other – the Leader's bodyguards, the Schutz Staffel units, the Storm Troopers, all the ranks and divisions in their different uniforms-and they stretched in two unbroken lines from the Wilhelm-strasse up to the arches of the Brandenburger Tor. Then, suddenly, the sharp command, and instantly there would be the solid smack of ten thousand leather boots as they came together with the sound of war.

It seemed to Wolfe,

> as if everything bad been planned for this moment, shaped to this triumphant purpose. But the people – they had not been planned. Day after day, behind the unbroken wall of soldiers, they stood and waited in a dense and patient throng. These were the masses of the nation, the poor ones of the earth, the humble ones of life, the workers and the wives, the mothers and the children – and day after day they came and stood and waited. They were there because they did not have money enough to buy the little cardboard squares that would have given them places within the magic ring. From noon till night they waited for just two brief and golden moments of the day: the moment when the Leader went out to the stadium, and the moment when he returned.

And finally,

> [a]t last he came – and something like a wind across a field of grass was shaken through that crowd, and from afar the tide rolled up with him, and in it was the voice, the hope, the prayer of the land. The Leader came by slowly in a shining car, a little dark man with a comic-opera mustache, erect and standing, moveless and unsmiling, with his hand upraised, palm outward, not in Nazi-wise salute, but straight up, in a gesture of blessing such as the Buddha or Messiahs use [6].

Curiously enough, Wolfe's Olympic musings on Germany's «new collective will and spirit», his references to Germany's «newly found modernism», and his powerful description of Germany's «messianic leader» and its «militaristic culture», indicate that his political education about Nazi Germany had made little, if any, progress since his previous visit in 1935, when he chose conveniently to discount the stories he heard about Nazi oppression. It must be borne in mind that during his previous visit to Germany in 1935, and despite his long political discussions and conversations with the Rowohlts, the Dodds, and others, Wolfe appeared quite unwilling or unable to recognize the political realities of National Socialism beyond the outward signs of Nazi pageantry, its orderliness, its discipline, and its staged rituals of popular consensus. In her book *Through Embassy Eyes* Martha Dodd described Wolfe's attitude from firsthand observation and offered the following insightful explanation of the author's state of mind:

> Wolfe came, strangely enough, with high enthusiasm about Germany ... He had studied and loved the great German writers and artists and felt more closely akin to the Germanic spirit than to any other. It took him some time to learn what was happening, as it does most people who have not been passionately interested in the political and economic developments in Europe ... The Germans, even the Nazis, loved Thomas Wolfe. He had long articles written about him, comparing him to a much-loved Bavarian poet of the people. His book, *Look Homeward, Angel,* had been acclaimed by pre-Hitler Germany, and his personality and later works by post-Hitler critics … The fanatic Hitler-followers accepted and praised him, the enemies of Hitler were devoted to his personality, respected the

[6] As reproduced in Nowell (1960), pp. 326-328.

> power and lyricism of his prose. In fact, there actually seemed to be something Germanic about him which they all could claim … In his short month or two there the first time, he became a legend around Berlin. For the first time since Hitler's coming to power, the famous Romamisches Café, formerly the center of literary lights, artists and intellectuals, took on life. He seemed to give a sort of animation to the streets and café. People began shyly to enter the almost deserted café. Tom, a huge man of six feet six, with the face of a great poet, strode the streets, oblivious of the sensation be created, with his long powerful strides, his head high, his posture free and full of a lumbering rhythm.

To the desolateness of the intellectual life of Germany, wrote Dodd,

> Thomas Wolfe was like a symbol of the past, when great writers were great men … He gave back to the intellectual and creative people of Berlin a sense of their past, of the dignity and power and freedom of a mind not under stress. Certainly he was the most vital experience literary Berlin had had in the Hitler years, and for months after, people would gather to talk of him. But when he had left, the famous café, no longer animated by his booming voice and reckless gestures, with his circle of friends and admirers around him, again was deserted and silent. I have heard that he attracted men to the café who had not been in such public places since Hitler; and that the Secret Police, aware of this, planted spies for weeks after in the café, to try to ferret out some free opinion that might have been less cautiously expressed after the sense of security and oblivion of terror that Wolfe's presence had given them.

Part of Wolfe's uncritical attitude toward Nazism, concluded Dodd,

> can be explained by his own state of delirium. He had just published his book, *Of Time and the River* (1935), after five years of writing, during which time most of the critics said he was through, that he had written himself out in his first book and would never be able to repeat his success … His book had been an overwhelming success immediately and was on the bestseller list in a few days, with the critics proclaiming him one of the greatest writers of his time. He was in a state of high nervous tension, wherein everything took on the proportions of a gigantic and infinitely beautiful dream. He loved everything and everyone, his high spirits flooded everything he did, thought, saw, or felt. And his moods of despair were equally terrifying in their intensity. He was mad with the music of his own personality and power, almost beside himself, and no one could

> come near him without feeling the charged atmosphere of his tremendous excitement. Several of us took a trip with him to Weimar, the home of Goethe in his adult and later years, and to the Wartburg. We tried futilely to slow him that all was not unconditionally superb in Germany. He was to learn for himself; in the meantime, he was in a ferment, taking all of it in and waiting for the passion of the moment to become quieter [7].

The trip to Weimar in 1935 had marked the climax of Wolfe's triumphant joy and of his gratitude to and love for Germany. It is no wonder, therefore, that the efforts of his friends to educate him on the political realities of Hitlerism were futile: he was not really living in Nazi Germany at all, but in a vivid emotional re-creation of the great cultural Germany of a hundred years before [8]. Wolfe himself confirmed much of this in a letter he wrote to his American editor Maxwell Perkins from the Wartburg on the second evening of the trip:

> All through a wonderful sunlit day we drove down southwest through this magnificent, beautiful and enchanted country. We spent the night in the old town of Weimar and today we went about the town and saw, first, Goethe's Gartenhaus in a wonderful green park and the rooms where he lived and worked and the saddle he sat on when he wrote, and his high old writing desk and many other things that he used and lived with, that made his life and work seem real and near to us. Then we went to the fine old house in Weimar where he lived later on and where all the evidences

[7] Dodd (1939), pp. 87-96.

[8] In his published reminiscences, Heinz Ledig-Rowohlt repeats much of Dodd's assessment of Wolfe. When in the company of Wolfe, writes Ledig-Rowohlt, «[o]ur conversations at the time knew no political restrictions: he was already then that 'citizen of humanity' that he called himself in a letter shortly before his death. For everyone who came into contact with him in Berlin, he was the embodiment of that free world that we in Hitler's prison were longing for more and more. He was aware of this, and our response was for him the confirmation of this enormous power. However, [o]nly occasionally did our conversation touch on the murky political situation and on the 'Dark Messiah', as Wolfe was later to call Hitler. His political scepticism was still glossed over by joy at his literary success; and besides, he loved Berlin more than any other European capital. He felt how genuine the response was which his mighty figure and his childish lack of affection awakened everywhere, whether among cab drivers, trolleymen, salesgirls or waiters, or even among German writers, who treated him with respect». Ledig-Rowohlt (1953), pp. 280-281.

of his great and illimitably curious intelligence – his laboratories, his workshops, his great library, his rooms for his experiments in physics, chemistry, electricity and optics – have been exactly and truly preserved. Then we went about the town some more and visited the crypt where Goethe and Schiller are buried side by side, and finally with regret we left that wonderful and lovely old town that seems to me at least to hold in it so much of the spirit of the great Germany and the great and noble spirit of freedom, reverence and the high things of the spirit which all of us have loved. Then we came here through one of the most indescribably lovely and magical landscapes I have ever seen. And tonight we are staying here in the Wartburg, a great legendary kind of hill from which came the legend that inspired Richard Wagner to write *Tannhäuser*. We are going back to Berlin tomorrow through the wonderful Harz Mountains, and I have not space or power enough here to tell you how beautiful and fine and magical this trip has been.

Still, wrote Wolfe,

I am telling you all this … because you and I have often talked about Germany and the German people whom you do not like as much as I do and about what has happened here in recent years. But I want to tell you that I do not see how anyone who comes here as I have come could possibly fail to love the country, its noble Gothic beauty and its lyrical loveliness, or to like the German people who are, I think, the cleanest, the kindest, the warmest-hearted, and the most honorable people I have met in Europe. I tell you this because I think a full and generous recognition must be made of all these facts and because I have been told and felt things here which you and I can never live or stand for and which, if they are true, as by every reason of intuition and faith and belief in the people with whom I have talked I must believe, are damnable … [but now] I so much want to see you and tell you what I have seen and heard, all that has been wonderful and beautiful and exciting, and about those things that are so hard to explain because one feels they are so evil and yet cannot say so justly in so many words as a hostile press and propaganda would, because this evil is so curiously and inextricably woven into a kind of wonderful hope which flourishes and inspires millions of people who are themselves, as I have told you, certainly not evil, but one of the most child-like, kindly and susceptible people in the world … More and more I feel that we are all of us bound up and tainted by whatever guilt and evil there may be in this whole world, and that we cannot accuse and condemn others without in the end coming back to an accusal of ourselves».

> Further along Wolfe concludes, [we] are all damned together, we are all tarred by the same stick, and for what has happened here we are all in some degree responsible. This nation to-day is beyond the shadow of a vestige of a doubt full of uniforms and a stamp of marching men – I saw it with my own eyes yesterday in one hundred towns and villages across two hundred miles of the most peaceful, lovely and friendly-looking country I have ever seen. A thousand groups, uncountable divisions of the people from children eight years old to men of fifty, all filled beyond a doubt with hope, enthusiasm and inspired belief in a fatal and destructive thing – and the sun was shining all day long and the fields the greenest, the woods the loveliest, the little towns the cleanest, and the faces and the voices of the people the most friendly of any I have ever seen or heard, so what is there to say [9]?

4. *Antisemitism and the Racial Laws*

In all fairness to Wolfe, it is to be remembered that, although eliminationism and racial antisemitism had always been central to Hitler's political views [10], many of the anti-Jewish laws that had been promulgated in Germany since the ascension to power of the Nazis in January 1933, including most notably the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, were not fully enforced, or would not become fully operative, until after the summer

[9] Nowell (1960), pp. 275-277.

[10] Hannah Arendt advanced one of the earliest works on the importance of eliminationism to German National Socialism's ideological core and to both its national and international political objectives soon after the collapse of the regime. Arendt's classic treatise on totalitarianism, which offered insights and comparative references to the institutional dynamics, the organizational structures, and the functional mechanics of Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, cites that the most important tasks of totalitarian regimes is to transform classes into masses, to exploit political propaganda and myths to fashion a political consciousness that subtends the governing elite, to use terror to enforce conformism, and to strategically employ eliminationist policies, both at home and abroad, to excise cancers on the body politic – either by separation from the public at large, through censorship or by outright extermination – in order to protect the purity of the nation. Totalitarian movements are fundamentally different from autocratic regimes, writes Arendt, insofar as autocratic regimes seek only to gain absolute political power and to outlaw opposition, while totalitarian regimes seek to dominate every aspect of everyone's life as a prelude to world domination. Arendt (1951).

Olympic Games had been held. However, Wolfe's friends in Berlin, especially those that met socially at Ambassador Dodd's residence, knew through their personal experiences that discrimination against Jews had intensified in Germany immediately after the Nazis had seized power. Throughout the early months of 1933 there were daily reports of vicious attacks by members of the *Sturmabteilung*, the SA paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party, on Jewish businesses, synagogues, and members of the legal profession, and on 1 April 1933 Hitler declared a national boycott of Jewish businesses [11]. There were also widely circulated reports that many ordinary German citizens who were not Nazi Party members advocated segregating Jews from the rest of German society [12]. The Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, passed on 7 April 1933, forced all non-Aryans to retire from the legal profession and civil service. Similar legislation soon deprived Jewish members of other professions of their right to practice [13]. In 1934, the Nazi Party published a pamphlet entitled *Warum Arierparagraph?* (*Why the Aryan Law?*), which summarized the perceived need for the law [14]. As part of the drive to remove Jewish influence from cultural life, members of the National Socialist Student League removed from public libraries any books considered un-German, and a nationwide book burning was held on 10 May [15]. Violence and economic pressure were used by the regime to encourage Jews to voluntarily leave the country [16]. Legislation passed in July 1933 stripped naturalized German Jews of their citizenship, creating a legal basis for recent immigrants, particularly Eastern European Jews, to be deported. Many towns posted signs forbidding entry to Jews [17]. Throughout 1933 and 1934, Jewish businesses were denied access to markets, forbidden to

[11] Shirer (1960), p. 203.

[12] Evans (2005), p. 539.

[13] Longerich (2010), p. 40.

[14] Schulz/Frercks (1934).

[15] Longerich (2010), p. 39.

[16] Longerich (2010), pp. 67-69.

[17] Shirer (1960), p. 233.

advertise in newspapers, and deprived of access to government contracts. Citizens were harassed and subjected to violent attacks[18]. Other highly publicized laws promulgated in this period also gave evidence of National Socialism's intention to fulfill its pseudoscientific biological racism that fueled its ideological core beliefs on "Aryan purity". The Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring, for example, enacted on 14 July 1933, called for the compulsory sterilization of people with a range of hereditary, physical, and mental illnesses[19]. Under the Law against Dangerous Habitual Criminals, enacted 24 November 1933, habitual criminals and recidivists were forced to undergo sterilization as well[20]. This law was also used to force the incarceration in prison or Nazi concentration camps of "social misfits" such as the chronically unemployed, prostitutes, beggars, alcoholics, homeless vagrants, black people, and Romani, referred to specifically in the law as "Gypsies"[21].

Many observers also witnessed with great alarm the intense struggles that existed between Hitler and the more intransigent elements of the National Socialist Party during the first year of Nazi power. While Hitler preferred a piecemeal legislative approach to the "Jewish problem", SA members grew contemptuous of the Nazi leadership, openly accusing it of applying half-measures that painfully slowed the process of eliminating Jews from German society. SA members often ignored direct orders from above for restraint and lashed out with violent punitive expeditions against the Jewish minority as a way of expressing their frustrations. While it is true that the *Nacht der langen Messer* (Night of the Long Knives) between June 30 and July 2 1934 served to consolidate Hitler's power and alleviate the concerns of the National Socialist Party leadership, as well as the German military, about the role of Ernst Röhm and the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), violence against the Jews continued unabated in this historical period. A Gestapo report from early 1935 stated that the

[18] Longerich (2010), p. 41.

[19] Evans (2005), p. 507.

[20] Evans (2005), p. 511.

[21] Longerich (2010), p. 49, and Morrison (2006), p. 80.

rank and file of the Nazi Party would set in motion a solution to the «Jewish problem … from below that the government would then have to follow»[22]. Assaults, vandalism, and boycotts against Jews, which the Nazi government had temporarily curbed in 1934, increased again in 1935 amidst a propaganda campaign authorized at the highest levels of government. Most non-party members ignored the boycotts and objected to the violence out of concern for their own safety[23]. The Israeli historian Otto Dov Kulka argues that there was a disparity between the views of the *Alte Kämpfer* (longtime party members) and the general public, but that even those Germans who were not politically active favored bringing in tougher new antisemitic laws in 1935[24]. The matter was raised to the forefront of the state agenda as a result of this antisemitic agitation[25]. On 25 July 1935, the German Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick, as a way of appeasing the intransigents, also announced that a law forbidding marriages between Jews and non-Jews would shortly be promulgated, and he recommended that registrars should avoid issuing licenses for such marriages for the time being. The draft law also called for a ban on marriage for persons with hereditary illnesses[26]. Others within the Nazi leadership took a much harsher stand against the unchecked violence and freebooting activities of the extremists. Hjalmar Schacht, for example, the Minister of the Economy and President of the Reichsbank, criticized the violent behavior of the *Alte Kämpfer* and SA because of its negative impact on the economy[27]. The violence also had a negative impact on Germany's reputation in the international community[28] and appeared at the time to seriously jeopardize Germany's chances of staging the summer Games in 1936. Although Berlin was awarded the 1936 Olympic

[22] Kershaw (2008), p. 340.

[23] Kershaw (2008), p. 341.

[24] Marrus (2000), pp. 92-93.

[25] Kershaw (2008), p. 342.

[26] Longerich (2010), pp. 57-58.

[27] Gordon (1984), p. 122.

[28] Marrus (2000), pp. 92-93.

Games by the International Olympic Committee in 1932, Hitler's antisemitic programs caused many officials to doubt their decision. World reaction to Hitler's program resulted in a movement to boycott Nazi goods and services, which included a movement to take away the 1936 Olympics from Berlin in an attempt to force the German government to cease its discriminatory practices against the Jews. This movement failed when on 7 June 1933 the International Olympic Committee (IOC), based on pledges from the German government, reaffirmed its decision to stage the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. However, in spite of the pledges made by the Germans, conflicts arose that made many of the member countries of the IOC consider the boycott of the Games, and at the forefront of this campaign was the United States [29].

Faced with a major diplomatic crisis that threatened both the German economy and the Berlin Olympic Games, Hitler ordered a stop to "individual actions" against German Jews on 8 August 1935, and the Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick threatened to take legal action against Nazi Party members who ignored the order. From Hitler's perspective, it was imperative to quickly bring in new antisemitic laws to appease the radical elements in the party who persisted in attempting to remove the Jews from German society by violent means, but it was also important to delay their application and enforcement until after the Games had taken place. Hitler's ultimate objective in organizing the Berlin Games was to showcase the "new" Germany, its industrial and military might, its technological prowess, its universal appeal amongst Germans, and the natural superiority of the Aryan race, and if this meant an easing or softening of the enforcement of Germany's anti-Jewish laws until after the Games, it was a price he was willing to pay in the short term. A conference of ministers was held on 20 August 1935 to discuss the question [30]. Hitler argued against violent methods because of the damage being done to the econo-

[29] Two very useful studies on the pressures exerted upon Nazi Germany by the International Olympic Committee and individual foreign countries can be found in Kass (1976), and Krüger (1999).

[30] Kershaw (2008), p. 341.

my, and he also stressed that extremist violence against the Jews only served to embolden those countries within the IOC, like the United States, that intended to boycott the Games on humanitarian grounds. Hitler insisted the matter must be settled through legislation. The focus of the new laws would be marriage laws to prevent racial defilement, stripping Jews of their German citizenship, and laws to prevent Jews from participating freely in the economy [31], but he took care to emphasize yet again in no uncertain terms that these new legislative initiatives would not be enforced until the Games were over.

The seventh annual Nazi Party Rally, held in Nuremberg from 10 to 16 September 1935, featured the only Reichstag session held outside Berlin during the Nazi regime [32]. Hitler decided that the rally would be a good opportunity to introduce the long-awaited anti-Jewish laws [33]. In a speech on 12 September, leading Nazi physician Gerhard Wagner announced that the government would soon introduce a law for the protection of "German blood" [34]. The next day, Hitler summoned the Reichstag to meet in session at Nuremberg on 15 September, the last day of the rally [35]. Franz Albrecht Medicus and Bernhard Lösener of the Interior Ministry were summoned to Nuremberg and directed to start preparing a draft of a law forbidding sexual relations or marriages between Jews and non-Jews. The two men arrived on 14 September [36]. That evening, Hitler ordered them to also have ready by morning a draft of the Reich citizenship law [37]. Hitler found the initial drafts of the *Blood Law* to be too lenient, so at around midnight Interior Minister Frick brought him four new drafts that differed mainly in the severity of the penalties they imposed. Hitler chose the most lenient version, but left vague the definition of who

[31] Kershaw (2008), p. 342, and Longerich (2010), pp. 57-58.

[32] Gordon (1984), p. 122.

[33] Kershaw (2008), p. 343.

[34] Longerich (2010), p. 59.

[35] Friedländer (2009), p. 45.

[36] Evans (2005), p. 543.

[37] Kershaw (2008), p. 344.

was a Jew [38]. Hitler stated at the rally that the laws were an attempt at the legal settlement of a problem, which, if this proved a failure, would have to be entrusted by law to the National Socialist Party for a definitive solution [39]. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels had the radio broadcast of the passing of the laws cut short, and ordered the German media to not mention them until a decision was made as to how they would be implemented [40].

The two Nuremberg Laws were unanimously passed by the Reichstag on 15 September 1935 [41]. The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour prohibited marriages and extramarital intercourse between Jews and Germans, and forbade the employment of German females under 45 in Jewish households. The Reich Citizenship Law declared that only those of German or related blood were eligible to be Reich citizens; the remainder were classed as state subjects, without citizenship rights [42]. The wording in the Citizenship Law that a person must prove «by his conduct that he is willing and fit to faithfully serve the German people and Reich» meant that political opponents could also be stripped of their German citizenship [43]. This law was effectively a means of stripping Jews, Roma, and other "undesirables" of their legal rights, and their citizenship [44].

During the summer of 1936, at the height of Hitler's deceitful political actions in regard to the "Jewish question", Wolfe's ideas about Nazi Germany were in constant ferment with his experiences of 1935 and the writings they had inspired and spawned, and every first-hand encounter with National Socialism, every personal eye-witness account he could verify and record for himself about Hitler's Germany, worked like a yeast

[38] Kershaw (2008), pp. 344-345.

[39] Kershaw (2008), pp. 345-346.

[40] Longerich (2010), p. 60.

[41] Mommsen (1989), p. 225.

[42] Evans (2005), p. 544.

[43] Kershaw (2008), p. 345.

[44] Wolfe (2014), p. 94.

against his deep, unthinking love for the country, which was both "his father's land" and the place where he himself had been the happiest and the most admired. Throughout his Olympic summer, Wolfe made a number of entries in a notebook that he kept during his trip that are of considerable interest in this regard [45]. However, while many of the notes are tellingly political, and others still give tremendous insight into Wolfe's creative process as an artist at the height of his creative powers, the entries do not indicate that Wolfe's views on German totalitarianism had undergone any substantial change. Indeed, while the notebook is full of arguments about Hitlerism, most of them seem inclined toward its defense. «Horses are happy in Germany», he wrote triumphantly on the flyleaf of the little book, and later, as a kind of a poetical refrain, «Horses are happy in a land I know». This idea undoubtedly came from Ambassador Dodd, who loved horses and often remarked on their sleek, well-fed condition, saying that, «only horses seemed happy in Germany» [46]. In his eagerness to defend the country, Wolfe evidently seized upon this, but conveniently omitted the word «only» [47]. At another point in his notebook Wolfe tried to rationalize his defensive reflex in a fragment that he called *The Slot Machine*:

> Nothing good can be said about the Italian or German Dictatorships. If one suggests that benefits from these dictatorships have been considerable, the slot-machine answer is: 'Oh yes, we know – the streets are clean and the trains run on time. But do you think these blessings compensate for the loss of human liberties, freedom of speech, etc. etc.?' It is useless to tell the Slot-machiners that the benefits of the Fascist Dictatorships have resulted in far more considerable benefits than 'clean streets and trains on time,' and if we are really going to combat the evil of Fascism we must first begin by understanding its good [48].

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[45] Wolfe's notebook entries for *I Have a Thing to Tell You* have been collected in: Kennedy/Reeves (1970).

[46] Dodd (1939), pp. 89-91.

[47] As reproduced in Nowell (1960), p. 332.

[48] Kennedy/Reeves (1970), p. 830.

On yet another page of his notebook Wolfe tried to list these benefits, as against the evils of the system:

Fascism

For	Against
• Physical Cleanness	• Repression of free speech
• Healthy People	• A Cult of Insular Superiority
• Effective Relief	• With This a Need for Insular Domination
• A Concentration of National Energy	

Then, a few pages later, Wolfe's sardonic sense of humor begins to get the upper hand: «Benefits. Let us consider some of the probable benefits of such a system. I should be suppressed, which would be a natural loss and a loss to art, but the Malcolm Cowleys, the Mike Golds, the V. F. Calvertons, the Bunny Wilsons, etc. etc. would also be suppressed, which would be a gain to everyone and everything». Several notebook entries are of considerable interest because they betray Wolfe's antisemitism [49]. On the topic of freedom of speech and thought, for example, Wolfe scribbled, «[i]n Germany you are free to speak and write that you do not like Jews and that you think Jews are bad, corrupt and unpleasant people. In America you are not free to say this» [50]. Musing further on a potential problem forced upon him by the inclusion in his stories of characters who are Jewish, Wolfe confessed: «I don't like Jews, and if most of the people that I know would tell the truth about their feelings, I wonder how many

[49] One of the unfortunate characteristics of Wolfe's early work, notably the more autobiographical work associated with the character Eugene Grant, is that it is tainted by racial stereotype, and, on occasion, by outright racial prejudice and antisemitism. This element has precipitated several important essays and one significant monograph, Reeves (1968). Those commentators who have read Wolfe more carefully, however, agree that his attitude toward his African-American and Jewish characters shifted considerably during the 1930s. It can be argued authoritatively, in fact, that as Wolfe became less interested in his own history during the 1930s and more interested in the history of others, he naturally became more sympathetic to the social and cultural plight of others. As his writing became less autobiographical, and so less self-centred, so did his social and cultural point of view. The most remarkable evidence of this change is *I Have a Thing to Tell You*.

[50] Kennedy/Reeves (1970), p. 829.

of them would be able to say that they liked Jews»[51].

Judged solely on the basis of this notebook, Wolfe would seem to have been inclined to defend Hitlerism, or, at the very least, to offer no effective criticism of National Socialism, through sheer emotionalism, ignorance, and wrong-headedness[52]. Wolfe failed to admit that anything untoward was happening in Germany and continued naively to embrace a romantic sentimentalism about the country and its people that confounded his critical senses and confused his rational judgment. However, it must be remembered that most of these entries were made after heated arguments with his friends, almost all of whom were strongly anti-Nazi. Wolfe never could accept a thing on anybody's word, and attempts to make him do so always drove him to the opposite extreme. Again, he had to form his own conviction through experience, emotion, and trial and error, and even while he was making these entries in his notebook, he was doing exactly that.

5. *The Sacralization of Politics in Nazi Germany*

Ironically enough, if Wolfe's published writings and notebook entries of the period indicate a continuing attitude of passive acquiescence in regard to Nazi politics, it is also clear that his work represents an indispensable chronicle of first-hand observations of National Socialism's totalitarian essence, and specifically the power of Nazi propaganda to systematically manipulate symbolic imagery in order to accommodate both its ideology and agenda. Indeed, Wolfe's descriptions of the cult of personality in Nazi Germany – the ubiquity of Hitler's images, along with the heroicization of his person and the myth of his power – were rather extraordinary revelations about the main constituent elements of National Socialism and its attempt deify the Führer through the use of political propaganda. Moreover, Wolfe was able to identify in the main constitu-

[51] Kennedy/Reeves (1970), p. 835.

[52] Nowell (1960), p. 333.

ent elements themselves the principal narrative device of the Nazi regime's discourse about its leader, an observation that even some of the most important historians and social scientists of period – August Thalheimer[53], Ortega y Gasset[54], Wilhelm Reich[55], Otto Bauer[56], Emil Le-

[53] Thalheimer (1930). Thalheimer was a Marxist-Leninist and a member of the German Communist party who insisted as early as the late 1920s that fascism could be most coherently construed as an autonomous mass-mobilizing political movement that arose in social and economic circumstances where the bourgeoisie was incapable of ruling effectively. The fascist movement protected the economic and social position of the bourgeoisie, initially acting as an anti-proletarian reaction and agent of bourgeois capitalism, but it eventually outgrew this role and arrogated political power onto to itself.

[54] Ortega y Gasset (1932). Ortega was among the first authors to explain the rise of fascism by employing some of the end-of-century ideas of Gustav Le Bon on «amorphous masses». According to Ortega, fascism, like an amorphous mass, was essentially an aggregate of individuals unified by sentiments of rage and irrationality. Ortega saw fascism rise to power as the result of the intrusion of the amorphous masses into history, a palatable manifestation of a new mass mentality that was innately ignorant, volatile, intolerant, totalitarian, violent, immoral, barbaric and primitive due to their having decided to rule society without having the capacity for doing so.

[55] Reich (1933). Reich's work, which was much read in the years between the two World Wars and then rediscovered by academics in the period immediately subsequent to the collapse of both the Italian and German dictatorships, offered an interpretation of fascism that synthesized Freudianism with insights from Marxism. For Reich, fascism was the consequence of the patriarchal authoritarian family and its sexual suppression. As a consequence of thousands of years of social and educational warping, the masses became biologically rigid, languishing in a state of unsatisfied orgiastic longing, and incapable of freedom and of organizing a peaceful living together. Fascism was not the consequence of imperialist interests, as classical Marxist theorists believed, but rather the outcome of the suppression of infantile and adolescent sexuality.

[56] Bauer (1936). Bauer insisted that fascism constituted a force too strong to be contained by the established elites. It could not, in effect, be employed and controlled as the «simple anti-proletarian tool of the bourgeoisie». Fascism, he argued, outgrew its initial role as a violent arm of the propertied elite to assume a position of net political superiority over the heads of the capitalist class and their liberal-democratic political allies. The bourgeoisie imagined that they could domesticate fascism, but fascism extended its power over all classes. Bauer did insist that, ultimately, fascism came to terms with the capitalist elites, but he also indicated that the confluence of interests between fascism and its non-fascist allies was at best temporary and partial. The foreign policy of fascism, for example, exposed clearly for Bauer that fascist totalitarianism pursued political objectives that worked against the vested interests of broad segments of the capitalist class.

derer [57], Peter Drucker [58], Eric Fromm [59], Hans Kohn [60], Peter Nathan [61], and Benedetto Croce [62] – failed to accomplish in their attempts to inter-

[57] Lederer (1940). Lederer maintained that the various efforts of his contemporaries to explain fascism – «he last ditch effort of capitalism to postpone the day of its doom», «the rule of a single man by violence», or «the revolt of the middle class against its decline» – did little to explain fascism's «sociological nature», which housed its true essence as a new political force in the immediate post Wold War I period. According to Lederer, at the heart of fascism was a genuine attempt to construct a modern political system inspired by the irrationality of amorphous masses. The putative psychological traits of the amorphous masses not only explain the overt features of fascism, but these traits, when institutionalized, maintain the dictator in power. Since mass psychology provides at least the necessary condition for fascist rule, fascism must destroy the complex of relatively autonomous groups that make up society, and institutionalize atomized crowns. Only with the destruction of society can men be reduced to the masses necessary for fascist survival.

[58] Drucker (1939). Drucker maintained that fascism could only be explained by coming to grips with the critical problem that subtended what was in effect a fundamental change in man's social organization: a revolution of man's concept of his own nature, of the nature of society, and of his own function and place in that society. For Drucker, fascism was the consequence of a moral malaise brought on by Europe's inability to produce the freedom and quality that had characterized European history since the commencement of the Christian era. Fascism promised to exorcise the demons of the modern world and to provide security, and for that order and security the masses chose to surrender their freedom and equality to fascism.

[59] Fromm (1941). Fromm's work was in the Freudian-Marxian tradition. He maintained that there were certain factors in man's nature that were fixed and unchangeable: the necessity to satisfy the psychologically conditioned drives and the necessity to avoid isolation and moral aloneness. According to Fromm, the striving for justice and truth was an inherent trend of human nature, as is the tendency to grow, which, in turn, marks the desire for freedom and the hatred against oppression natural to man. Fascism was a middle class phenomenon that arose when the middle class felt itself trapped between the successes of the capitalist class and the developing power of the proletariat: the middle class found itself helpless and insignificant, its status threatened, its sense of community hopelessly impaired, and its values desperately and disparately dysfunctional. As a consequence, the middle class both admired and feared the great capitalists, it doubted its own significance, it suffered envy and resentment, and it was at this point that the members of this class sought recourse in an «escape from freedom», becoming submissive to authority in order to find security. The individuals of the middle class sought power to relieve their pervasive sense of isolation, and it was their sado-masochist authoritarian character that provided the psychological foundation for the recruitment successes of fascism.

[60] Kohn (1943). For Kohn, fascism represented power politics and *Realpolitik* in their most naked form. It was facilitated by the growth and overwhelming complexity of life

pret the European fascist phenomenon of the inter war years. In Wolfe's writings, Hitler occupied all the visible realms of political life and monopolized all public spaces in Germany. It was a recognition, in sum, that through the *Führerprinzip* National Socialism was able to present Germany with a model of centralized power that rotated around the mythical and spectacular authority of one person, and that image of Hitler as omnipotent, valiant, and heroic invested the Führer himself with a magical, mystical aura that placed him above common people, above the collectivity, or, better yet, above mortals. Hitler's constant presence in peo-

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in the age of masses and machines, and by a feeling of disillusionment and cynicism in the generation that had survived the global conflagration of 1914-18. It opposed itself to democracy because of democracy's emphasis upon individual responsibility and individual choice, which require human maturity and rationality, neither of which was present in fundamental characteristics of man in this historical period. Fascism provided an escape from such responsibilities by promising the masses social security, economic progress, and political leadership.

[61] Nathan (1943). Nathan provided a psychoanalytical approach that borrowed heavily from Freud. The work was less an account about fascism than it was an account of why men are governable. Still, at the heart of Nathan's thesis was the notion that men do not make reasoned choices, but simply act out the consequences of the family drama. Since all men suffer the same Oedipal drama, all men are afflicted with the same psychodynamic disabilities. Fascism, according to Nathan, like any other form of governance, was the result of essentially individual psychodynamic individual problems suffered by large groups of political actors. Fascism was understood to be the consequence of problems generated in the psychosexual development of the individual. Many individuals suffering the same process produce the human mass required to support fascism. Fascism was the product of a «sick society» that was afflicted with the working out of problems of psychodynamically impaired individuals.

[62] Croce (1945). Croce advised that fascism was a consequence of a moral crisis ushered in by the Great War. According to Croce, the principal factor that made populations susceptible to fascist mobilization was the corruption among them of the consciousness of liberty brought about by materialistic influences, particularly Marxist materialism. Marxist ideas work their influence best where there is a lack of faith in the principle of liberty and where there is no effective liberal-democratic tradition. Amongst some European populations of the immediate post war, the lack of liberal-democratic tradition, and the absence of any kind of liberal-democratic consciousness, proved to be fertile ground for Nationalist myths, the cult of heroes and heroic deeds, of governments conducted by men of will, determination, and violence. This corruption of consciousness, conjoined with the erosion of the concept of liberty, produced a disposition toward a return to absolutism, and fascism, both in its internal dynamic form and its external manifestations, represented a neo-absolutism.

ple's everyday life, his supervising gaze that looked over pupils in schools, workers in factories, families at home, even passersby in the street, exercised a continuous authority over Germany. Like God, Hitler «the messiah» was an omnipresent essence that followed ordinary German citizens in the fulfillment of their daily tasks and controlled them from above. At the symbolic level Wolfe's writings indicate that Hitler had proposed himself as the supreme leader, the invincible 'Man', and they indicate as well that the myth of the Führer, as it unfolded before his eyes at the Berlin summer Olympics of 1936, was an emotional charged national celebration of a political fantasy about one man's power. In his masterful descriptions Wolfe was unveiling a totalitarian state that was advancing a new understanding of life and an elitist conception of politics that embodied what fascist writers of the period referred to as the coming of the Nietzschean superman who would dominate over the common people. Implicit here is the vision of Hitler as politician-artist-creator that placed the superman in a near-divine condition. From this core collection of beliefs, Hitler, who was a superb propagandist, if not an original thinker, did not have to journey far to interpret himself as a «God-like figure». Hitler's efforts to construct a modern totalitarian state for Germany, his personalistic approach to politics, and his centralization of authority testify to his desire of being the one and only leader of Nazi Germany. Moreover, this desire to achieve an absolute position within the regime gave way to Hitler's fantasy of God-like power, and Wolfe, forever concerned as a mature artist with mediating and transmitting the real world to his readers, identified immediately that the task of constructing and perpetuating the myth of the 'messiah' through the rituals and spectacles of the regime found in the Nazi leader its perfect embodiment. If there is not yet in Wolfe's writings a political indictment of Nazism, if there is not yet an attempt in his work to construct and advance a moral judgment on Hitlerism, there is nonetheless a narrative discourse that eloquently and exhaustively chronicles for his readers what few other writers and commentators of the period were able to iden-

tify and describe: the birth of a secular religion and the sacralization of politics in National Socialist Germany [63].

[63] To understand the importance of Wolfe's observations on Hitler and National Socialism, it is to be noted that, in addition to extending the interpretive boundaries of those working within the professional social sciences and humanities of the period, his views on the sacralization of politics in Nazi Germany anticipate by more than a half century the writings of George L. Mosse and Emilio Gentile, the two most distinguished scholars writing on "fascism as a secular religion". Mosse argues in his most important work on the subject that since the time of the French Revolution people have come to worship themselves, that is, the nation, and that in the nineteenth century a new politics sought to express and enhance national feeling and unity through the creation of a political style that became, in reality, a 'secularized religion'. The new style consisted of the use of national myths and symbols and the creation of a liturgy that permitted the people to participate directly in national worship. The mass movements of the twentieth century adopted this style with little change and thus became the heirs of a tradition that had long presented an alternative to parliamentary democracy. Mosse discusses the new style as it developed in Germany in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, making detailed reference to Hitler's Nazi regime. Underlying the festive ceremonies and the mythmaking in Germany was the idea of beauty as the unifying element in society, as the absolute that could bring together opposites and ennoble national life. The new politics, the effort to nationalize the emerging masses, relied heavily on the appeal of the beautiful in Mosse's view. Specifically, he describes the symbolism and mythical significance of national monuments, public festivals, the theater, and the ceremonial role of organizations including the gymnastic associations, choral societies, sharpshooting clubs, and labor groups. He discusses Hitler's taste, showing both his idiosyncrasies and his continuity with the established patterns of mythmaking and national worship. The new politics, Mosse concludes, was not the conscious application of a political theory but the encouragement of esthetic, objective expression of the basic longing for wholeness or totality, which the masses felt as they emerged in a partisan, pluralistic, and confusing world. Monuments symbolized and festivals and ceremonies personalized this expression. Mosse's work has made an important and unique contribution to the literature on nationalism and totalitarianism. Moreover, by demonstrating the power and prevalence of various nationalistically oriented mythical and ritualistic practices in the nineteenth century and their influence on the twentieth century, Mosse underlines the importance of keeping in mind the principle of continuity in history. Emilio Gentile is one of Italy's most prolific and influential students of Italian Fascism. Gentile treats Fascism's "internal symbolic universe" of rituals, symbols, myths, monuments, and commemorations, showing how these served the Fascists' totalitarian aspiration to remake Italian society. Scholars familiar with the work of Mosse, to whom Gentile expresses a particular debt, will find some familiar accents, but there is special value in Gentile's work in that he provides a systematic treatment of this dimension in Fascist Italy, which, the author makes clear, pioneered much of the modern political use of symbol and ritual. With the accent on political sacralization, both Mosse and Gentile have invited some fresh thinking about the origins of totalitarianism. Moreover, in high-

6. *The Little Man and the Coins*

It was the final episode of Wolfe's stay in Germany that brought home to him most powerfully the realties of Nazi oppression, and it would be this episode that would become the central focus of *I Have a Thing to Tell You*[64]. A man who was traveling in the same compartment with Wolfe on a train bound for Paris was arrested at the German-Belgian border for trying to smuggle out more currency than the Nazi law allowed. It was whispered among the other passengers that the man was Jewish and that he was trying to expatriate from Germany in order to escape persecution. Trembling «with a murderous and incomprehensible anger», for the first time Wolfe understood, in personal terms, what the Nazi dictatorship was. The impact of this incident upon Wolfe was immediate and he began at once to plan a story based on the train ride and the incident. In what was one of the final entries in his travel notebook for the summer of

lighting the innovative totalitarian thrust of both German National Socialism and Italian Fascism, they have corrected the widespread tendency, traceable to many of the scholars referenced earlier who wrote in the years between the two World Wars, to view German National Socialism and Italian Fascism as merely totalitarian impulses that revolved exclusively around terror or mere power for its own sake. Significantly enough, in bringing fascism, political sacralization, and totalitarianism together as they have, Mosse and Gentile have made a major contribution not only to German and Italian history, but to our ongoing effort to grasp the contours of the modern political experiment, which Wolfe appeared to appreciate with such energy and enthusiasm several decades earlier. See: Mosse (1975), and Gentile (1996).

[64] Wolfe's departure from Germany came at a moment when a series of personal and professional matters had come to a head, leaving him deeply frustrated and emotionally depressed. To begin with, his torrid love affair with Thea Voelcker, whom he had met that summer, had ended very badly. It was also the case that his business relationship with his German publishers had soured to the point where Wolfe spoke of betrayal and fraud and decided to hire a Berlin law firm to protect his interests. Despite the extraordinary reviews, very few people in Germany bought his books. In the first year after publication, only 7,707 copies of *Von Zeit und Strom* were sold, and only 604 copies of *Schau Heimwärts, Engel!* Angry and disillusioned, Wolfe began to question the sales reports given him by Rowohlt Verlag, especially since the company had persuaded him to accept a reduced rate of royalty on *Von Zeit und Strom* because it was such a long and expensive book. He also took great offence at the German system of basing royalty payments on the price of a paperback edition of a book, even when, as in the case of *Von Zeit und Strom*, no paperback was actually published. Donald (1987), pp. 387-389.

1936, Wolfe wrote: «I am going to tell you a little story and it is a little story that may hurt me too»[65]. Although Wolfe understood that he would be taking a chance when he told it, for he realized that his works would be banned by the Nazis and he would never be able to return to Germany[66], his perception of what lay ahead for humanity if Hitler and his followers were left unchecked led him to proclaim clearly, unequivocally and forcibly: «I have a thing to tell you … brothers, we must brothers be – or die»[67].

Having experienced his epiphany, Wolfe made the decision to use the story to take a firm stance against Hitler and German National Socialism. The sight of that one anguished little man had turned him against Hitlerism as no amount of facts or arguments could do: from this day forth he not only was a fervent anti-fascist, but also made considerable sacrifice of his personal happiness and his general reputation for the sake of his belief. Three days after he arrived in Paris he wrote his agent, the tireless and dedicated Elizabeth Nowell: «I've written a good piece over here – I'm afraid it may mean that I can't come back to the place where I'm liked best and have the most friends, but I've decided to publish it».

Wolfe returned to the United States with the French liner *Paris*, and was settled in his First Avenue apartment in New York by the first week of October. One of the first things he did was to write to *The Seven Seas* to ask them to release him from his promise to write articles on Germany and to accept his check for the $ 150 that they had credited against the cost of his passage in July. «May I tell you», wrote Wolfe, «that I have the deepest and most genuine affection for Germany, where I have spent some of the happiest and most fruitful months of my life, and for the German people, among whom I have some of the best and truest friends I know». It was for «that very reason, above all others,» he continued, «that I want to be scrupulous now not to abuse your own generosity or to make any commitments that would not be in full accordance with certain

[65] Kennedy/Reeves (1970), p. 835.

[66] Donald (1987), p. 390.

[67] Kennedy/Reeves (1970), p. 835.

deep and earnest convictions of my own or with anything I might write or say hereafter. I cannot go into detailed explanation here, but I leave it to your intuition to understand what is in my mind» [68].

Having got this off his chest, Wolfe plunged into the writing of *I Have a Thing to Tell You*. The task proved at times to be difficult and arduous, and Wolfe did express that there were moments when he felt haunted by visions of the «little man». Just before he was arrested at the German-Belgian border, the man had persuaded Wolfe to take a little of his extra money in order to get it past the inspectors for him. However, because of the man's arrest, Wolfe had been unable to return it, although, in a moment of intense excitement, he had wanted to do so and had only been prevented by his fellow passengers. He still had the little handful of two-mark pieces when he reached New York. In fact, one of his earliest titles for *I Have a Thing to Tell You* was *I Have Them Yet*. He didn't like to touch the coins: he thought that they were «blood money» and that they felt greasy with their owner's agony and sweat: but they lay for a long time upon his table. As he wrote his story, Wolfe would look at them and his mouth would pucker up with pity, and he would shake his head quickly, repeatedly, too moved for words [69].

Once Wolfe committed himself to writing a fictionalized account of the incident, he realized immediately that the narrative discourse generated by the story would give him the opportunity to publicly proclaim his steadfast opposition to the political oppression that had come to dominate German society under Hitler's dictatorship. His story would permit him to expose Nazism as he had come to know it and to dramatize how the chain of humanity might be severed if mankind refused to acknowledge and defend what he came to call "the brotherhood".

The plot of the story, which would be eventually published first in serial form in *The New Republic* in the spring of 1937 [70], is introduced in its

[68] As reproduced in Nowell (1960), p. 337.

[69] Field (1983), pp. 249-250.

[70] The periodical version of the story appeared in 1937 in three instalments of *The New Republic*, 10 March, pp. 132-36; 17 March, pp. 159-64; and 24 March, pp. 202-207.

opening scene through the character of Paul Spangler, who, in conversation with Franz Heilig, establishes the fact that Hitler's Germany has created suspicion, mistrust and hatred. In heavy irony, and with an English grossly overburdened by a German accent, Franz, confiding his fear that he will be punished for having his girl share his one-room place with him, says, «I will now tell you something. Under ze Dritte Reich ve are all so happy, eve sing is so fine and healsv zat it is perfectly God damn dretful». Through Franz, Wolfe reveals how the Nazis have treated Jews: «All ze Chews have been taken from zeir work, zey have nozzing to do any more. Zese people come around – some stupid people in zeir uniforms» he says contemptuously. «And zey say zat everyone must be an Aryan man – zis wonderful plue-eyed person eight feet tall who has been

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As a section of *You Can't Go Home Again* (1940), it runs from pp. 634-704. Unless stated otherwise, the version of the story employed in this work is the one held by the Williams B. Wisdom Collection of Thomas Wolfe Manuscripts, Haughton Library, Harvard University, catalogued specifically as: bMS Am 1983: Compositions by Thomas Wolfe (734), a second draft changed slightly and added to by Wolfe and used by Edward Aswell as Book VI of *You Can't Go Home Again* Wolfe divided the typescript into three uneven sections, marked *The Hotel*, *The Station*, and *The Train*. This version was chosen because it represents the story as Wolfe shaped it for publication before he and Elizabeth Nowell trimmed it for its appearance in *The New Republic* in three instalments in March 1937. This second typescript version is told from the first-person point of view and narrates the experiences of the character Paul Spangler, who later was to be called George Webber. It must be indicated here that the analysis of the Wisdom Thomas Wolfe Manuscripts is indebted deeply to the seminal piece produced by John L. Idol, Professor Emeritus of Clemson University, entitled, *The Narrative Discourse of Thomas Wolfe's 'I Have a Thing to Tell You'* (Idol, 1993). It is to be noted that the Wisdom Collection of Thomas Wolfe Manuscripts consists of manuscripts, letters, and other papers of Thomas Wolfe purchased by William B. Wisdom from the Wolfe estate and donated to Harvard University where it joined the earlier donations of Gabriel Wells and James Buell Munn. The collection includes manuscripts, drafts, and notes for Wolfe's novels, as well as his plays, poems, and other creative writings; correspondence, chiefly from the 1930's, including long runs of letters to and from Aline Bernstein, Elizabeth Nowell, Maxwell E. Perkins, and family members; pocket notebooks; academic notebooks, exercises, essays, and examinations; legal and business papers, including royalty reports; and manuscripts and correspondence concerning Wolfe. Supplementary contributions, both by William B. Wisdom and others, were subsequently added to the main collection. The Thomas Wolfe manuscripts may not be consulted without the permission of Eugene Winick c/o McIntosh & Otis, Inc. 353 Lexington Avenue, Suite 1500 New York, N.Y. 10016.

Aryan in his family since 1820. If zere is a little Chew back zere – zen it is a pit» [71].

All of the passages in this section of the story prepare readers for actions taken later at Aachen against the «little man», a Jewish lawyer trying to flee the country with more marks than permissible. Franz's statement about Paul's current fame and notoriety in Germany, and the risk he would run if he wrote a story criticizing Hitler's regime, carry Wolfe further into the narrative discourse now being opened with his readers. German repression of anything unfavourable to the Nazi line touches not only living arrangements and harassment of Jews, but the freedom of artistic expression as well [72]. Wolfe here reminds readers that writers in America suffer repression, too, not as victims of official government action, but as targets of leftist or rightist groups more concerned with political correctness than with artistic merit. Spewing acid for Wolfe on both aesthetic and political groups, Franz spits out his loathing for Expressionists, Surrealists, Communists and anyone dedicated to spreading or promoting propaganda: «I hate them – zese bloody awful little men» [73]. Franz tears into them because he considers these special interest groups enemies of free expression: «You must say ze sings zey want you to say or zey kill you» [74].

The opening scene of Paul with Franz thus opens the questions that Wolfe wishes to pursue, it offers firsthand evidence of the troubling dis-

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[71] bMs Am 1883 (734), pp. 7, 14.

[72] Wolfe in this instance appears to anticipate similar views expressed by Arendt in her classic work. According to Arendt, «[i]ntellectual, spiritual, and artistic initiative is as dangerous to totalitarianism as the gangster initiative of the mob, and both are more dangerous than mere political opposition. The consistent persecution of every higher form of intellectual activity by the new mass leaders springs from more than their natural resentment against everything they cannot understand. Total domination does not allow for free initiative in any field of life, for any activity that is not entirely predictable. Totalitarianism in power invariably replaces all first-rate talents, regardless of their sympathies, with those crackpots and fools whose lack of intelligence and creativity is still the best guarantee of their loyalty». Arendt (1951), p. 416.

[73] bMs Am 1883 (734), p. 23.

[74] bMs Am 1883 (734), p. 25.

coveries he had made about Nazi Germany, and it prepares the reader to accept a developing thesis that Germany's crushing of political and artistic rights and freedoms could be setting a pattern for much of Europe and the liberal-democratic west, including the United States.

The subsequent scene, set on the platform of the Bahnhof Am Zoo, forces the reader to respond to the hints about suspicion and mistrust offered in the first scene. When Paul introduces Else von Kohler to Franz, the two Germans stare at each other coldly, with innate hostility, a reaction that leads Paul to observe: «It had in it a quality that was different from anything I had ever seen at home, a quality that was at once shockingly cold and naked and disturbingly subtle. It was as hard as steel and flashing as a rapier» [75]. The issue here seems to be less aesthetic than sexual, though the former does arise in Else's critique of the drawing of Paul by Franz's friend. Franz appears to move in Berlin's homosexual circle, whereas Else seems to embody the essence of heterosexuality.

The second scene permits Wolfe to continue painting a portrait of the German character when Paul's friend Lewald joins the farewell party on the platform. When Lewald speaks to Else, his manner seems bluff, boyish, and exuberant, indeed full of high spirits and «jolly good will» [76]. Paul finally sees that Lewald's «boyish ingenuousness was just a mask» and that his «soul and character were sly, shrewd, subtle, devious, crafty, cunning, dexterous as hell» [77]. This episode eventually underscores the feelings of hostility, alienation and marginalization existing among Paul's German friends. Hoping that Paul won't be caught up in bitter rivalries for his allegiance or by some group's hope that his pen will be used in their behalf, Else says to him in reference to Franz: «You must not listen to zis bitter man! You are religious man. You are artist. And ze artist is religious man» [78].

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[75] bMs Am 1883 (734), p. 31.

[76] bMs Am 1883 (734), p. 38.

[77] bMs Am 1883 (734), p. 38.

[78] bMs Am 1883 (734), p. 30.

The unfolding of the novella in the third scene proves that statement to be true, for it is there that Paul and the people he encounters in his compartment on the train to Paris come to realize the need to become their brother's keeper if civilized society is to survive. The narrative thread holding this third section together is more tightly woven than the thread running through the first two parts. Whereas there has been a degree of acquaintance among the Germans of the first two parts, all but the Rubenesque mannequin manufacturer and her employee, a young sculptor, are utter strangers. At first glance it is difficult for Paul to understand why the German woman and the young man should be travelling together, so different seem their mien and breeding, she appearing theatrical, he, countrified. Puzzling as this unlikely couple is, Paul has trouble getting a fix on an elegantly dressed young man sitting by the window. «Certainly he did not look English or American. There was a kind of foppish, almost sugared elegance about this costume that one felt somehow was continental, even though one did not know from what place on the continent he came» [79]. But what strikes Paul with a «sense of shock» is the fact that the young man is reading an American book, a popular work entitled *The Saga of Democracy*. For the time being, this passenger will remain, like all the others in the story, another «isolated individual» in a community of «isolated people».

The scene is now set for the last person to enter the compartment, Wolfe's «little man», described as «a drab, stuffy, irascible-looking little fellow of the type that one sees a thousand times a day ... the kind of fellow ... who is always fidgeting and fuming about ... always, in short, trying by every crusty, crotchety, sour, ill-tempered method in his equipment to make himself as unpleasant, and his travelling companions as uncomfortable, as possible». His mannerisms will eventually lead Paul to call him «old Fuss-and-Fidget». His nervousness, looks of suspicion, and his pointing at the «Nicht Raucher» sign when Paul and the elegant young man take out cigarettes present serious obstacles if «a Siamese connexion» is ever to be formed with him. He will be, in short, the most

[79] bMs Am 1883 (734), pp. 48-49.

isolated of the isolated as the train rushes across the German countryside from Berlin to Hanover. In his isolation, Paul tries to pass a wearisome time by dozing. «Time after time I started out of this doze to find old Fuss-and-Fidget's eyes fixed on me in a look of such suspicion and ill-tempered sourness that the expression barely escaped malevolence. I woke up one time to find his gaze fixed on me in a stare that was so protracted, so unfriendly, that I felt anger boiling up in me» [80].

However, it is not until Hanover that the heavy air engulfing the characters in the group finally dissipates. The first connection to be formed is between Paul and the elegantly dressed young man with a continental look, the naturalized American now identified as Johnnie Adamowski, symbolically much more appropriate than the surname Stefanowski used in *The New Republic* version of the story. This naturalized American, this new Adam, enables Wolfe to give voice, even if it is a bit on the enthusiastic side, to American ideas. Unhappy about conditions in Europe during his return to Poland to visit relatives, Adamowski asserts, «I am sick of Europe. Every time I come I am fed up. I am tired of all this foolish business, these politics, this hate, these armies and this talk of war … It will be good after all this to back [to America] where all is Peace … where all is Friendship … where all is Love» [81]. In his role as narrator, Paul confides that he had «reservations on this score but did not utter them» [82]. Despite Paul's reluctance to argue, Wolfe effectively highlights America's most cherished values by having Adamowski state his preference for the New World, where New Adam is free to attempt to achieve his highest dreams.

Once the heavy air dissipates, Paul and Johnnie rapidly establish bonds: they have mutual friends in New York, enjoy eating and drinking together, and share the goal of spending all their German marks before the train reaches the border. When they return to their compartment, their eager and easy dialogue begins to draw the others into conversation

[80] bMs Am 1883 (734), pp. 51-52.

[81] bMs Am 1883 (734), pp. 54-55.

[82] bMs Am 1883 (734), p. 55.

as well. It becomes obvious that their companions have discussed them during their absence. Now curiosity begins to bind them. The mannequin maker and her youthful companion begin to open up, and even Fuss-and-Fidget relaxes somewhat and finally identifies himself as a lawyer on his way to a Parisian conference. Helping to break down any remaining reserve is Johnnie's sharing of the food his family had packed for him. The group is becoming a community, or as Chapter 42 of *You Can't Go Home Again* would have it, *The Family of Earth*.

Another connection cementing them, one that leads to a test of its strength and one that leads to the arrest of Fuss-and-Fidget, is money. Their grievance about German policy restricting the amount of money a person can take out of Germany prompts them to acts of friendship, acts of brother-keeping, that mere fellow companions on a train trip would never perform. Evidence of this appears in Johnnie's eagerness to befriend the German woman by taking into his keeping some of her excessive marks and Paul's acceptance of Fuss-and-Fidget's proffered ten marks. Through these actions, Wolfe involves his readers even more deeply in the narrative discourse he has been conducting as the action of his plot further unfolds itself. These passengers have discovered their common humanity and are acting to protect one another from oppressive political policy.

Instantly, however, the discourse has a darker, terrifying, and fearful symbolic element added. That comes with the appearance of the customs official, «a burly-looking fellow … a Germanic type with high blunt cheekbones, a florid face and tawny moustaches, combed out sprouting, in the Kaiser Wilhelm way. His head was shaven, and there were thick creases at the base of his skull and across his fleshy neck»[83]. He will symbolize all that is «loathsome, sinister and repellent» in Hitler's government[84]. Paul's trembling with a murderous and incomprehensible anger and desire «to smash that fat neck» and «pound that inflamed and blunt-

[83] bMs Am 1883 (734), p. 80.

[84] bMs Am 1883 (734), p. 80.

ed face into a jelly» catch us up in his revulsion [85]. We feel that he indeed does have something vitally important to tell us about man's inhumanity and the need to stand together against it.

Paul now swells with emotion and humane feelings for Fuss-and-Fidget, identified here for the first time as a Jew. Paul's informant is the Rubenesque mannequin maker, who now rejects part of the bond she had formed because she shares many of her countrymen's biases against Jews: «These Jews!» she cries, «These things would never happen if it were not for them! They make all the trouble. Germany has had to protect herself. The Jews were taking all the money from the country» [86].

With the revelation of her feelings Wolfe asks us to make still another metaphoric transference, this one demanding that we acknowledge that seemingly decent German citizens, whom this culturally rich fading beauty symbolizes, share heavily in Germany's mistrust and mistreatment of Jews. That becomes part of what Paul feels he must tell us, too. Still, Wolfe leaves her some humanity, despite her energetic attempt at justifying Fuss-and-Fidget's arrest. As the re-united companions reflect on his fate, she finally «gravely, quietly» says, «He must have wanted very badly to escape» [87].

Wolfe's description of the actual arrest and taking away of the «little man» as the train moves out of the station creates the story's most complete bond between discursive narrative and metaphoric transference:

> The three officials came through the door of the compartment with the little man between them – Wolfe wrote – They stepped down to the platform and marched him along, white as a sheet, grease standing out in beads all over his face, protesting volubly in a voice that had a kind of anguished lilt in it ...
>
> They had him. Far down the platform the passengers heard the shrill, sudden fife of the Belgian engine whistle. The guard cried warning. All up and down the train the doors were slammed. Slowly the train began to move. At a creeping pace it rolled right past the little man. They had him,

[85] bMs Am 1883 (734), pp. 80-81.

[86] bMs Am 1883 (734), p. 89.

[87] bMs Am 1883 (734), p. 89.

> all right. The officers surrounded him. He stood among them, still protesting, talking with his hands now. And the men in uniform said nothing. They had no need to speak. They had him. They just stood and watched him, each with a faint suggestion of that intolerable slow smile upon his face. They raised their eyes and looked at the passengers as the train rolled past, and the line of travelers standing in the corridors looked back at them and caught the obscene and insolent communication in their glance and in that intolerable slow smile.
>
> And the little man – he, too, paused once from his feverish effort to explain. As the car in which he had been riding slid by, he lifted his pasty face and terror-stricken eyes, and for a moment his lips were stilled of their anxious pleading. He looked once, directly and steadfastly, at his former companions, and they at him. And in that gaze there was all the unmeasured weight of man's mortal anguish. George and the others felt somehow naked and ashamed, and somehow guilty. They all felt that they were saying farewell, not to a man, but to humanity; not to some pathetic stranger, some chance acquaintance of the voyage, but to mankind; not to some nameless cipher out of life, but to the fading image of a brother's face.
>
> The train swept out and gathered speed – and so they lost him [88].

Before his discourse could end, however, Wolfe had one more metaphoric transfer to request of his readers. This drive was how now to deal with his love of Germany, a land that seemed more than a mere second home to him. No doubt speaking through Paul, he wrote, «I was the other half of my heart's home, a haunted part of dark desire … It was the dark lost Helen I had found, it was the dark found Helen I had lost – and now I knew, as I had never known before, the priceless measure of my loss, – the priceless measure of my gain» [89]. He came to realize that he had to give up Germany, to suffer the consequences of his desire to tell the truth. And he came, more profoundly still, to realize that he must one day give up the earth, for something has spoken in the night; and told me I shall die, I know not where. Saying, «To lose the earth you know for greater knowing, losing the life you have, for greater life; leaving friends you loved, for greater loving; to find a land more kind than home, more

[88] As reproduced in Nowell (1960), p. 334.

[89] bMs Am 1883 (734), p. 92.

large than earth»[90]. Thus the final words of the narrative discourse conducted through this simple and much tested travel plot invite us to join Wolfe in his concluding metaphoric transfer. The sustaining metonymy of the train trip is that humanity rides together to eternity. The best hope that each passenger will arrive unscarred by atrocities is to travel together as brothers and sisters, to keep linked together the chain of humanity.

At the conclusion of the longer version of the story in *You Can't Go Home Again,* Wolfe bids farewell to Germany:

> He … was 'out' of that great country whose image had been engraved upon his spirit in childhood and youth before he had ever seen it. He … was 'out' of that land which had been so much more to him than land, so much more than place. It had been a geography of heart's desire, an unfathomed domain of unknown inheritance. The haunting beauty of that magic land had been his soul's dark wonder. He had known the language of its spirit before he ever came to it, had understood the language of its tongue the moment he had heard it spoken. He had framed the accents of its speech most brokenly from that first hour, yet never with a moment's trouble, strangeness, or lack of comprehension. He had been at home in it, and it in him. It seemed that he had been born with this knowledge.
>
> He had known wonder in this land, truth and magic in it, sorrow, loneliness, and pain in it. He had known love in it, and for the first time in his life he had tasted there the bright, delusive sacraments of fame. Therefore it was no foreign land to him. It was the other part of his heart's home, a haunted part of dark desire, a magic domain of fulfillment. It was the dark, lost Helen that had been forever burning in his blood – the dark, lost Helen he had found.
>
> And now it was the dark, found Helen he had lost. And he knew now, as he had never known before, the priceless measure of his loss. He knew also the priceless measure of his gain. For this was the way that henceforth would be forever closed to him – the way of no return. He was 'out.' And being 'out,' he began to see another way, the way that lay before him. He saw now that you can't go home again – not ever. There was no road back. Ended now for him, with the sharp and clean finality of the closing of a door, was the time when his dark roots, like those of a pot-bound plant, could be left to feed upon their own substance and nour-

[90] bMs Am 1883 (734), p. 93.

> ish their own little self-absorbed designs. Henceforth they must spread outward – away from the hidden, secret, and unfathomed past that holds man's spirit prisoner – outward, outward toward the rich and life-giving soil of a new freedom in the wide world of all humanity. And there came to him a vision of man's true home, beyond the ominous and cloud-engulfed horizon of the here and now, in the green and hopeful and still-virgin meadows of the future.
>
> 'Therefore,' he thought, 'old master, wizard Faust, old father of the ancient and swarm-haunted mind of man, old earth, old German land with all the measure of your truth, your glory, beauty, magic, and your ruin; and dark Helen burning in our blood, great queen and mistress, sorceress – dark land, dark land, old ancient earth I love – farewell!' [91].

7. *Conclusion: If Men Could Somehow Cease to be Afraid of Truth*

Thomas Wolfe's *I Have a Thing To Tell You* was more than a story about the author's experiences in Berlin during the Olympic summer of 1936. It was a personal diary and record of a precise moment in his creative odyssey as an artist when his experiences with the world changed his views and brought him «nearer the common heart of man». Wolfe was not a systematic political thinker, and there is no evidence in his work that he was ever exposed in any way to the first major theoretical attempts to interpret fascism that were beginning to make their appearance in the academic world in the 1930s, precisely at the time that he was writing, but there can be no question that the serial he produced for *The New Republic* was one of the most eloquent indictments of German National Socialism written in the period immediately prior to the global conflagration of 1939-45. Most contemporary historians and social scientists who study the fascist phenomenon of the inter war years will admit that the cognitively least satisfying accounts of fascism are those that conceive it to have been the simple consequence of «evil», «brutality», and «inhumanity», for they provide no persuasive theory or empirical evidence to explain the internal institutional dynamics and the ideological

[91] As reproduced in Nowell (1960), pp. 335-336.

rationale that subtended and sustained them over the course of their histories. Indeed, they would argue with measurable authority that studies of fascism that have been produced with the conviction that «understanding» fascism means to appreciate the «pathology that lies behind the hatred and destructiveness [it] unleashes» have fallen into disuse and disfavor within the humanities and social sciences [92]. And yet it is precisely Wolfe's acute ability to respond emotionally and aesthetically to the complex personality and spirit of the fascist experience that enriches and ennobles his work, permitting him to engage his readers in a narrative discourse that effectively translates and communicates the hatred and violence that fascism was able to unleash on western civilization. Wolfe's task was not that of the historian or the social scientist, but that of artist with a commanding worldly presence and prestige who sought to use his pen in the service of justice and humanity in order to arouse the emotions and social consciousness of a generation. Wolfe did not, in fact, consider *I Have a Thing to Tell You* a political statement. In a letter he wrote to Nowell he commented that «its greatest value … lies in the fact that I wrote it as I write all my other stories about a human situation and living characters». Had Wolfe's statement been political, some of the social-

[92] Gregor (2000), pp. 239-262. Gregor, a prolific scholar who has dedicated a half-century of profound study to fascist intellectual history, posits in the new introduction to one of his earlier classic contributions, that for most of the twentieth century, analysts of world events have habitually dealt with modern revolutionary systems in terms of a left-right dichotomy in which the 'left' somehow remains in the Enlightenment tradition, and the 'right' is associated with primordial bestiality. Very often fascism is seen as uniquely 'irrational' and 'psychopathological'. Thus, fascist systems are typically described as 'narcissistic' and 'megalomaniac', or 'sadistic, necrophiliac, or psychopathological', in any case remarkable for their sheer scale of inhumanity. Such characterizations are rarely employed in the analysis of Marxist-Leninist systems, no matter how bestial they may be or have been. One does not seek to 'explain' or 'understand' such systems by identifying them as megalomaniacal, narcissistic, or necrophiliac. Such properties are treated as if they are uniquely fascist. If one wished to study political horrors, mass murder, and the pathological administration of violence, one would study Nazi Germany; but one would have to study the Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and Democratic Kampuchea as well. It is not immediately obvious why one would restrict one's scrutiny to generic fascism. Identifying fascism with bestiality and the rejection of all standards of ethical conduct provides remarkably little cognitive leverage on any serious question.

ist and communist ideas with which he was flirting in this period would have surely appeared in some guise in the story [93]. Instead, nowhere in the novella is there an attempt to interpret Nazism as the consequence of a class struggle, nowhere is there a reference to Nazism as an anti-proletarian reaction and agent of bourgeois capitalism, and nowhere is there a critical offering that Hitler was purely and simply the executor of the directives of German capitalists. If there is a fundamental statement made in the novella it is one related specifically to Wolfe's growing sensitivity to the emotional and spiritual lives of others, which in itself heralded a decisive moment in the symbiotic evolution of his sensibility as a man and his craft as an artist [94].

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[93] During the fall of 1937 Wolfe began to talk with left-leaning writers and intellectuals in Sherwood Andersons circle, but despite his initial enthusiasms he did allow himself to be recruited ideologically or politically by American Communists. To be sure, this was due in part to the Communists themselves, many of who considered Wolfe a philosophical lightweight incapable of identifying and articulating the complex doctrinal points that separated many Marxist-Leninists of the period, but it was due primarily to the fact that Wolfe remained unconvinced, unmoved and indifferent to Communist ideology. On Wolfe's flirtations with American Communists, Donald (1987), p. 434 et seq.

[94] The view that Wolfe's later works, particularly the short novels, reflected a greater concern for others and a more passionate commitment to voice concerns of «man's suffering soul» is a constant theme in several important works: Holman (1961) pp. vii-xx, maintains that the intrinsic qualities of the short novel [15,000 to 40,000 words] were remarkably well adapted to Wolfe's special talents, his creative methods, and his growing preoccupation to place his life within the context of the interconnected lives of others. Holman also admits that one of the reasons the short novels are not known is that Wolfe's continued until his premature death to attempt large autobiographical works that in the end served only to solidify among many critics his reputation for artistic excess; Stegner (1965), pp. 1071-1081, writes that Wolfe was more powerful and more passionate when he did adopt sensibilities not is own, or at least more successful in creating a similar passion amongst his readers; Stutman (1987), pp. 95-101, writes that beyond the blindness or short-sightedness, Wolfe possessed a determination to grapple with his own shortcomings, and to depict his characters as complex, believable human beings, and in doing so he was able, if only haltingly, to transcend his limitations and to become as a writer both translator and mediator for a generation; Tattoni (1992), advances the view in post-modernist terms that in Wolfe was a type of metafiction: a literature that examines its own power and structure as the story unfolds; Idol (1993), whose work served in part as the inspiration and model of the current effort, submits that Wolfe's later writings were meant to protest against abridged or denied civil rights, wherever these occurred, and give living testimony to his commitment to expose man's inhumani-

Wolfe's fullest and final explanation of this personal odyssey – an explanation that was meant to serve as much as a clarion call to awaken the spirit of America as it was to announce mournfully the death and extinction of the German soul at the hands of fascism – received its most cogent and eloquent rendering in the final pages of *You Can't Go Home Again*:

> Up to that time I had been merely the sensitive young fellow in conflict with his town, his family, the life around him – then the sensitive young fellow in love, and so concerned with his little Universe of Love that he thought it the whole universe. But gradually I began to observe things in life which shocked me out of this complete absorption with the independent entities of self. I caught glimpses of the great, the rich, the fortunate ones of all the earth living supinely upon the very best of everything and taking the very best for granted as their right … At the same time I began to be conscious of the submerged and forgotten Helots down below, who with their toil and sweat and blood and suffering unutterable supported and nourished the mighty princelings at the top.
>
> Then came the cataclysm of 1929 and the terrible days that followed. The picture became clearer now - clear enough for all with eyes to sec. Through those years I was living in the jungle depths of Brooklyn, and I saw as I had never seen before the true and terrifying visage of the disinherited of life. There came to me a vision of man's inhumanity to man, and as time went on it began to blot out the more personal and self-centered vision of the world which a young man always has. Then it was, I think, that I began to learn humility. My intense and passionate concern for the interests and designs of my own little life were coming to seem petty, trifling, and unworthy, and I was coming more and more to feel an intense and passionate concern for the interests and designs of my fellow men and of all humanity.
>
> Of course I have vastly oversimplified the process in my telling of it. While it was at work in me I was but dimly aware of it … Those were the years of the greatest doubt and desperation I had ever known. I was wres-

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ty to man; Zahlan (1999), pp. 4-12, advances the view that Wolfe's craft outgrew the autobiographical and, as it infused itself with democratic implications, it came to express a fascination not only with the other voices, but also with multiple, even choral points of view; and Roberts (2000), pp. 27-41, persuasively argues that Wolfe's short novels reflect Wolfe's maturity and development as an artist, particularly his move away from autobiography, and they should be studied and appreciated separate from his much larger and more famous literary works.

tling with the problems of my second book, and I could take in what my eyes beheld only in brief glimpses, flashes, snatches, fragments. As I was later to discover, the vision etched itself upon some sensitive film within, but it was not until that later time, when the second book was finished and out of the way, that I saw it whole and knew what the total experience had done to me …

By then life's weather bad soaked in, although I was not fully conscious yet what seepings had begun, or where, in what directions, the channel of my life was flowing … I had gone back for rest, for recreation, for oblivion, to that land which, of all the foreign lands I had visited, I loved the best … And now it seemed to me, who had so often gone a stranger and unknown to the great cities of the world, that Berlin was mine … The weeks passed … and then it happened. Little by little the world came in. At first it sifted in almost unnoticed, like dark down dropped in passing from some avenging angel's wing. Sometimes it came to me in the desperate pleading of an eye, the naked terror of a startled look, the swift concealment of a sudden fear. Sometimes it just came and went as light comes, just soaked in-in fleeting words and speech and actions…

But even as I saw it and knew it … there came to me, most strangely, another thing as well. For while I sat the night through in the darkened rooms of German friends, behind the bolted doors and shuttered windows-while their whispered voices spoke to me of the anguish in their hearts … while I heard and saw these things, my heart was torn asunder, and from its opened depths came forth into my consciousness a knowledge that I had not fully known was there. For then it was, most curiously, that all the grey weather of unrecorded days in Brooklyn, which had soaked through into my soul, came flooding back to me. Came back, too, the memory of my exploration of the jungle trails of night. I saw again the haggard faces of the homeless men, the wanderers, the disinherited of America, the aged workers who had worked and now could work no more, the callow boys who had never worked and now could find no work to do, and who, both together, had been cast loose by a society that had no need of them and left to shift in any way they could to find their food in garbage cans, to seek for warmth and fellowship in foul latrines like the one near New York's City Hall, to sleep wrapped up in old newspapers on the concrete floors of subway corridors…

So it was … that I realized fully, for the first time, how sick America was, and saw, too, that the ailment was akin to Germany's a dread world-sickness of the soul … In Germany it was hopeless: it had already gone too far to be checked now by any measures short of death, destruction, and total ruin. But in America, it seemed to me, it was not mortal,

> not incurable – not yet … America was young, America was still the New World of mankind's hope, America was not like this old and worn-out Europe which seethed and festered with a thousand deep and uncorrected ancient maladies. America was still resilient, still responsive to a cure – if only – if only – men could somehow cease to be afraid of truth. For the plain and searching light of truth, which had, in Germany, been darkened to extinction, was the remedy, the only one, that could cleanse and heal the suffering soul of man [95].

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[95] Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again*, as reproduced in Nowell (1960), pp. 339-341. It is quite difficult to read these last passages by Wolfe without recalling some of the conclusions that Arendt would make in her seminal work on totalitarianism. Toward the end of her study she writes in a phrase, what could surely have been written by Wolfe himself, that totalitarianism preys upon the politically and ideologically marginalized, the faithless, the disenfranchised, the disheartened, the economically impoverished, those overwhelmed by a sense of homelessness, those afraid of the truth, and those who believe they are alone in the world, «as loneliness is a precondition for totalitarian domination, with people who are socially isolated more likely to be attracted to totalitarian ideology and movements». Arendt (1976), p. 416.

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