Salomes included anorexics, voluptuaries, and vampires—all fatal to men.

Why, asks Dijkstra, did the 1890 Paris Salon ignore Ella Ferris Pell's magnificent Salome, painted in the best academic style? Apparently, he concludes, male judges could not tolerate the self-possession of the half-clad, healthy young woman, so obviously inferior to none.

LOOK HOMEWARD: A Life of Thomas Wolfe
by David Herbert Donald
Little, Brown, 1987
579 pp. $24.95

In 1938, author Thomas Wolfe died at the age of 38, having published two long novels—*Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), *Of Time and the River* (1935)—and written memoirs, a number of plays, and several hundred thousand pages in manuscript. Wolfe was a man who possessed almost inhuman energy.

Donald, a Harvard historian, describes him as an exhausting character. The unwelcome eighth child of mismatched parents, Wolfe was steadied by college years at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. In 1920, the ambitious young "genius" set off for graduate study at Harvard.

In Cambridge and during his years as a college instructor in New York, Wolfe stubbornly failed as a playwright. Failure pained him but he made use of it, cultivating the wild, lyrical misery that became both his trademark and his vice. That he retained an insatiable appetite for life surprised everyone—not the least Wolfe himself. (Invited to witness a birth, Wolfe amused the doctor by shouting excitedly, "Come on, Baby! Come on!" He spoke of nothing else for weeks.)

Yet even as Scribner's editor Maxwell Perkins brought out Wolfe's first novel to critical acclaim, Wolfe tore back and forth from Europe to America—ranting, drinking, and bedding any female who would have him. In the destructive round that was his adult life, he alternated between orgies and a monklike isolation, during which he worked furiously, standing at a high table (chairs never suited his heavy, 6′5″ frame) from dusk to dawn.

Marriage never entered his mind, but love came once—in the person of Aline Bernstein, married and 18 years his senior. "My Jew," he ambivalently called her during their years of passion, jealousy, fights, and separation, which ended only when Wolfe turned (significantly) to his mother for help.

Donald's is a remarkably full-blooded portrait, but to find out how Wolfe's prose transcends the frenzy of his chaotic life, the reader will have to go to the novels themselves.

Science & Technology

TIME'S ARROW, TIME'S CYCLE: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time
by Stephen Jay Gould
Harvard, 1987
222 pp. $17.50

Geology's contribution to the sum of human knowledge goes well beyond a taxonomy of rocks or an understanding of the processes that formed them. In studying how the Earth was made, geologists also discovered "Deep Time."

Harvard paleontologist Gould credits Thomas Burnet, whose *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1680–89) has been dismissed as "biblical idolatry" that hindered scientific advance, as the first to explain both cyclical and historical natural phenomena. Burnett observed both "scripture and nature" and found "that all things were covered by water." This was part of the Earth's sacred cycle from chaos to Christ's "bright star," but "how and when this aspect began and how long it lasted, nature says not."

Deep Time was discovered in 1795 by James Hutton, who noticed that "unconformities"—gaps between alternating vertical and horizontal rock strata—reflected cycles of deposition and uplift. Of great antiquity, Hutton's natural forces, with "no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end," were yet ageless.

Charles Lyell put numbers to Deep Time and solved the problem of the Earth's age. In the 1830s he wrote that stone was deposited and decayed at a uniform rate—a rate constant in both space (despite local catastrophes) and time. Strata anywhere in the world were datable and of equal age. Applying the same principles to biological change—which he saw as random rather than progressive—Lyell analyzed the fossil remains of the Tertiary era (geology's most recent) statistically, ranging epochs in time by how much or how little their life forms resemble our own.