

27 Views of Asheville: A Southern Mountain Town in Prose and Poetry

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It is not mandatory that a reader be familiar with (let alone a lover of) the works of the late novelist Thomas Wolfe in order to appreciate the new anthology, *27 Views of Asheville: A Southern Mountain Town in Prose & Poetry*. And it's not required that one be a current, former, or sometime resident of this storied and much-loved North Carolina hamlet. Surely a discerning, open-minded reader who has perhaps never even been to Asheville, or maybe never even heard of Asheville, will still appreciate the colorful panorama sketched by the twenty-seven writers whose work graces these pages. There is so much to recommend this spirited, diverse, and muscular collection of personal essays, narrative nonfiction, memoir shorts, prose poems, narrative poetry, and short stories, and a true reader will definitely find favorites among the panoply of offerings.

This is all good news, truly. And yet, that same curious reader will also, without doubt, find him- or herself scurrying for the library or Internet in search of that twenty-eighth view of Asheville which perhaps can only be distilled from Wolfe's original words, stories, and strictly Asheville stance. This is good news, too, because while one can enjoy *27 Views* without Wolfe, why would one want to? And when one good book leads to another—maybe especially if that next book is the one which helped inspire the first—well that's more good reading news as well.

Though no writer in these pages claims that Asheville—as past, present, spiritual, or imagined home—suits everyone, among the twenty-seven literary works, there is indisputably something for every genre-adoring persuasion. Interspersed among more highly recognizable authors such as Charles Frazier and Gail Godwin are gems from lesser lights who piercingly render purchase on a specific sliver of the local zeitgeist. Whether tracing the disappearance of a once-revered motor racing track, the city's faded race boundaries of another sort entirely, or gardens bountiful or in rotted neglect, these sharp observations bring a bevy of Ashevilles achingly alive.

While Wolfe titled a masterwork *O Lost*, none of these writers seem to be; he longed for escape, they seem to want to linger—perhaps at McCormick Field, where poet Michael McFee's fourteen-page narrative poem beautifully revivifies that oldest of unsentimental sentimental journeys, the one between father and young son, adult son and departed dad.

LISA ROMEO (Summer 2012)

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