

## **Multitudes: A Celebration of the Yale Collection of American Literature, 1911–2011**

*On view at Beinecke Library, Yale University, July 8 through October 1, 2011*

Checklist and Descriptions: American Dramatists: Thornton Wilder (1897-1975)

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### American Dramatists: Thornton Wilder (1897-1975)

Theater in the Yale Collection of American Literature is well documented through company-based archives such as those of The Theatre Guild, The Living Theatre, The Phoenix Theatre, The Civic Repertory Theatre, and New Dramatists, Inc. These archives include working scripts with lighting plots and blocking notes, readers' reports, financial papers, casting books, cast and production photographs, playbills, and reviews.

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### Thornton Wilder: Early Days

Journal, Oberlin, commencing April 25, 1917 (April– May 1917). Photograph, Wilder and friends at Yale, ca. 1920. Yale graduation portrait, 1920. Portrait of Wilder and his sister Isabel Wilder,

December 1933.

*From the Thornton Wilder Papers.*

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### Yale Writing

As a Yale undergraduate, Thornton Wilder was already an avid theatergoer and a serious writer. In 1918 he won the John Hubbard Curtis Prize for his short story "Spiritus Valet." In 1920 he

won the Bradford Brinton Award for his play *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, published in three consecutive issues of the *Yale Literary Magazine* (October–December 1919).

“*The Trumpet Shall Sound*,” manuscript notebook, n.d.

*Yale Literary Magazine*, October 1919; December 1919.

*From the Thornton Wilder Papers.*

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### Correspondence

Wilder maintained a rich body of correspondence over the years, and he received considerable amounts of fan mail, which he responded to with his sister Isabel’s assistance. Substantive correspondence from fellow writers, actors, composers, and other luminaries can be found in Wilder’s papers, including letters from Mia Farrow, Ruth Gordon, Ernest Hemingway, Vivien Leigh, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Laurence Olivier, Louise Talma, Gore Vidal, Orson Welles, Donald Windham, and Glenway Wescott, among many others.

F. Scott Fitzgerald to Wilder, March 23, 1928 (page 1 of 3).

Albert Einstein to Wilder, August 12, 1928. (Einstein compares *Our Town* to the *Odyssey* and *Hamlet* and adds “mathematical physicist” after his signature by way of identifying himself.)

Sigmund Freud to Wilder, October 10, 1938.

*From the Thornton Wilder Papers.*

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### *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*

Wilder started work, in 1926, on his second novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* at the MacDowell Colony for writers and artists in New Hampshire while on leave from his post as a French teacher at the Lawrenceville School in Princeton, New Jersey. The novel was published the following year to immediate critical acclaim, and Wilder went on to win his first Pulitzer Prize in 1928.

Thornton Wilder, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, with an introduction by Granville Hicks, illustrated and lithographs in color by Jean Charlot (New York: Heritage Press, ca. 1962).

Thornton Wilder, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, illustrated by Amy Drevenstedt (New York: Albert & Charles Boni, 1927). Presentation inscription to Professor Chauncey Brewster Tinker, November 1928.

Thornton Wilder, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, illustrated by Rockwell Kent (New York: A. & C. Boni, 1929). Signed by the author and the artist.

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### Gertrude Stein

Wilder met Gertrude Stein in November 1934 while he was teaching at the University of Chicago and she was on a visit to lecture there. Coincidentally, Carl Van Vechten was in Chicago at the same time, as was Zora Neale Hurston—a convergence that resulted in Van Vechten’s signature photographs of Hurston. Wilder became an immediate champion of Stein’s inimitable work, often explaining and contextualizing her creative output for a broader audience. Importantly, Wilder, along with Van Vechten, encouraged Stein to donate her papers to Yale, and most of her pre-1946 gifts were given either through Wilder or Van Vechten. The earliest gift in June of 1937 was presented by Thornton Wilder on behalf of Gertrude Stein—typescripts of “Four in America,” “An American and France,” and “What Are Masterpieces.”

Gertrude Stein, *Four in America*, introduction by Thornton Wilder (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947). Extensive manuscript notes by Thornton Wilder.

“Miss Gertrude Stein’s “Four in America: Introduction,” typescript, corrected, n.d.

Thornton Wilder, “Gertrude Stein Makes Sense” in ’47: *The Magazine of the Year* (1947).

*From the Thornton Wilder Papers.*

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## *Our Town*

Wilder's journal notes for 1935 include ideas for ten plays, among them "M Marries N" (an early working title for *Our Town*). He began to work in earnest on the play in 1936 after resigning from his post as a part-time visiting lecturer in Classics and Writing at the University of Chicago. After short try-outs in Princeton and Boston, the play opened on Broadway on February 4, 1938 to mostly favorable reviews, with Wilder playing the role of the Stage Manager for two weeks of the play's run in September. *Our Town* garnered Wilder a second Pulitzer Prize and the play became a classic not only in American theatre, but in classrooms across the country.

"Our Town" holograph manuscript example, "Stage Manager's Part," n.d.

Thornton Wilder, *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts*, acting edition (New York, Coward-McCann, Inc., in cooperation with S. French, Inc., ca. 1939). Manuscript corrections by Thornton Wilder.

*From the Thornton Wilder Papers.*

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*Our Town*, three piano excerpts from the film score by Aaron Copland (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., 1945).

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*Our Town*, recording for the television version starring Frank Sinatra, n.d.

*From the Thornton Wilder Papers.*

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## James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*

Wilder enjoyed a deep-seated fascination with Joyce's highly complex novel *Finnegans Wake*, and he brought great energy as a scholar and writer to deciphering and making sense of an otherwise impenetrable modern text. Wilder produced essays and extensive notes on Joyce and

engaged in a long correspondence with the Joyce scholar Adaline Glasheen, collected in *A Tour of the Darkling Plain: The Finnegans Wake Letters of Thornton Wilder and Adaline Glasheen*, edited by Edward M. Burns and Joshua A. Gaylord (2001).

James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939). Copy 211 of 425 copies, signed by Joyce, and inscribed "To Thornton, Michael 26.1.48." Annotated.

James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking, 1939). Heavily annotated.

Manuscript example, *Finnegans Wake*: alphabetical "theme key," n.d.

*From the Thornton Wilder Papers.*

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### *The Matchmaker*

Following the success of *Our Town*, *The Merchant of Yonkers* opened on Broadway in December 1938 to disappointing reviews. Wilder later revised the play and a new version, *The Matchmaker*, starring Ruth Gordon, opened successfully at the Edinburgh Festival in June 1954. *The Matchmaker* then became the basis for the hugely successful and long-running musical comedy *Hello, Dolly!* The actress Carol Channing, of whom Wilder was especially fond, originated the role on Broadway. She received a Tony Award for her performance.

Holograph manuscript chart of actresses Wilder considered for the role of Dolly Levi, n.d.

Paramount showmanship manual containing promotional and advertising material for the Don Hartman film production of *The Matchmaker*, based on the play by Thornton Wilder, ca. 1958.

*The Matchmaker: A Farce in Four Acts* (New York: S. French, ca. 1957). Based on a comedy by Johann Nestroy, *Einen Jux will es sich machen* (Vienna, 1842), which was, in turn, based on an English original, *A Day Well Spent* by John Oxenford (London, 1835). Earlier version published under the title *The Merchant of Yonkers*.

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*Hello, Dolly!*

*Hello, Dolly!* Book by Michael Stewart, music and lyrics by Jerry Herman (New York: DBS Publications, 1968). Based on *The Matchmaker* by Thornton Wilder.

Playbill, Carol Channing in *Hello, Dolly!* Houston Grand Opera, n.d.

Playbill, Pearl Bailey in *Hello, Dolly!* Co-starring Cab Calloway. St. James Theater, New York, November 1967.

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Playbill / commemorative brochure, Carol Channing in *Hello, Dolly!* Houston Grand Opera, n.d.

Irving Penn portrait of Thornton Wilder, Vogue Studios, New York, August 1947.

*From the Thornton Wilder Papers.*

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*The Merchant of Yonkers*

Thornton Wilder, *The Merchant of Yonkers: A Farce in Four Acts* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1939). Wilder's annotated copy.

Thornton Wilder, *The Merchant of Yonkers: A Farce in Four Acts* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1939). Wilder's presentation inscription dated September 1939 to Margaret and Carl [Rollins].

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*The Skin of Our Teeth*

As World War II gets under way, Wilder began work on a play titled "The Ends of the Worlds." He completed the play as *The Skin of Our Teeth* in 1942 before joining the Army Air Intelligence. The play previewed in New Haven, Baltimore, and Philadelphia and then

transferred to Broadway in November. Wilder received his third Pulitzer Prize before being shipped overseas for intelligence work in Algeria.

Life mask of Thornton Wilder by William Lawrence, n.d.

Manuscript example, Act 2 of “The Skin of Our Teeth,” typescript corrected, n.d.

*From the Thornton Wilder Papers.*

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Thornton Wilder, *The Skin of Our Teeth: A Play in Three Acts* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1942).

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Carl Van Vechten photograph of Wilder as Mr. Antrobus, August 18, 1948.

Playbill, Minnesota Theatre Company, Tyrone Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis, Season '66 [1966]. Features *The Skin of Our Teeth*.

*From the Thornton Wilder Papers.*

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For Thornton Wilder’s collected works, see the Library of America editions, two volumes, edited by J.D. McClatchy with detailed chronology and notes (2007; 2009).

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