



Thornton Wilder: Collected Plays and Writings on Theater (Library of America)

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Thornton Wilder: Collected Plays and Writings on Theater (Library of America) Thornton Wilder Tender, beguiling, suffused with feeling and wit, the remarkable plays of Thornton Wilder occupy a unique place in American culture. His most celebrated play, *Our Town*, has achieved iconic status as an expression of the spirit and pathos of small-town American life; adapted for the movies and the operatic stage, it continues to resonate with audiences responding to its formal elegance, plainspoken poetry, and moving evocation of the inevitability of loss.

Collected Plays & Writings on Theater, the most comprehensive one-volume edition of Wilder's work ever published, takes the measure of his extraordinary career as a dramatist by presenting the complete span of his achievement, beginning with his early expressionist experiments and daring one-act plays such as "The Long Christmas Dinner" and "The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden" (one of Wilder's personal favorites), ranging through the full flowering of *Our Town*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, and *The Matchmaker*, and encompassing the intriguing dramatic projects of his later years, such as his adaptation of the ancient story of Alcestis (*The Alcestiad*) and plays written for dramatic cycles based on the Seven Deadly Sins and the varied ages of an individual's life. Complementing the selection of plays is an illuminating group of essays that captures Wilder's reflections on his plays and contains a revealing epistolary account of the film adaptation of *Our Town*, as well as evaluations of dramatists such as Sophocles, George Bernard Shaw, and the Austrian satirist Johann Nestroy (whose farce *Einen Jux will er sich machen* Wilder brilliantly transformed into *The Matchmaker*).

Collected Plays & Writings on Theater also includes material never before published: scenes from *The Emporium*, an ambitious unfinished play that, emerging out of Wilder's intense engagement with existentialist philosophy in the postwar years, imagines a Kafkaesque department store whose enigmatic activities are as inscrutable as the mysteries of life itself; and the complete screenplay Wilder wrote for Alfred Hitchcock's film *Shadow of a Doubt* just before reporting for military service in 1942. Although faithful to the spirit of the film, the screenplay presented here restores Wilder's original dialogue, some of which (to Wilder's dismay) was altered for the movie. A study of family life, youthful illusions, and the desperation of a criminal on the run, the *Shadow of a Doubt* screenplay is a masterful exhibition of the art of suspense and taut dramatic storytelling, and is an essential part of Wilder's oeuvre.

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