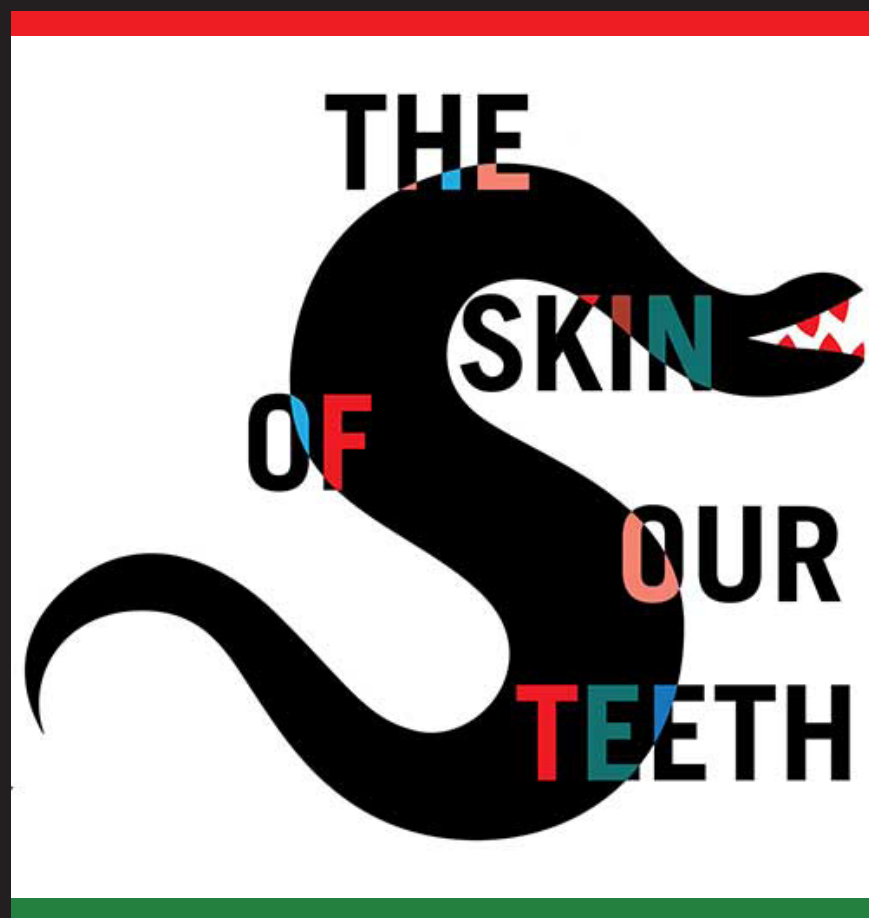


THEATRE FOR A NEW AUDIENCE

P O L O N S K Y   S H A K E S P E A R E   C E N T E R

## 360° SERIES

VIEWFINDER: FACTS AND PERSPECTIVES  
ON THE PLAY, PLAYWRIGHT, AND PRODUCTION



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### Notes

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"Biography" of Thornton Wilder provided by A. Tappan Wilder.

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"A Most Important Broadcast" excerpts a pamphlet, "Prominent Writers' Statements of Why They Are For Franklin D. Roosevelt." Thanks to A. Tappan Wilder for passing along this gem from his collection.

Eleanor Roosevelt "My Day" columns ([3/2/1938](#) and [11/30/1942](#)) courtesy of The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Digital Edition (2008), accessed 2/27/2017.

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# 360° VIEWFINDER *THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH*



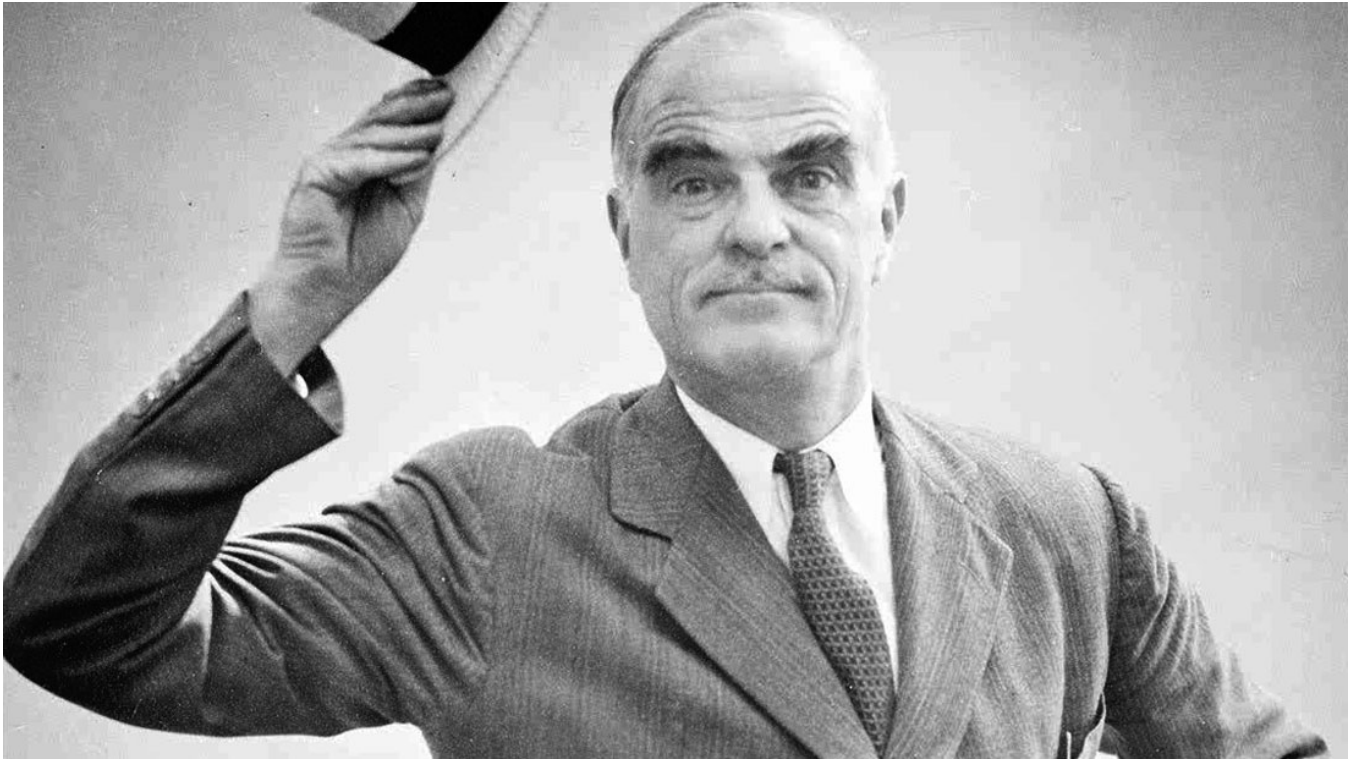
Kecia Lewis, Kimber Monme and David Rasche in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Henry Grossman.



The company of Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.



# THE PLAY PERSPECTIVES



Thornton Wilder as Mr. Antrobus in a production of *The Skin of Our Teeth* in summer stock, 1947  
Courtesy of the Wilder Family LLC and the Yale Collection of American Literature, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

*The following quotes are selected perspectives on the plays from notable scholars and artists.*

“‘What’s it all about?’ a man complained to his wife. ‘Why, George,’ she said. ‘It’s about love and hate and passion and everything—ever since the world began.’ ‘Well,’ the man said, ‘There must be more to it than that.’”

Elia Kazan, director, Broadway premiere of *The Skin of Our Teeth*, overhearing a couple on opening night (*A Life*, 1988)

“The novel is pre-eminently the vehicle of the unique occasion, the theater of the generalized one. It is through the theater’s power to raise the exhibited individual action into the realm of idea and type and universal that it is able to evoke our belief. But power is precisely what those nineteenth-century audiences did not — dared not — confront. They tamed it and drew its teeth; squeezed it into that removed showcase. They loaded the stage with specific objects, because every concrete object on the stage fixes and narrows the action to one moment in time and place.... When you emphasize *place* in the theater, you drag down and limit and harness time to it. You thrust the action back into past time, whereas it is precisely the glory of the stage that it is always ‘now’ there.... No great age in the theater ever attempted to capture the audience’s belief through this kind of specification and localization.... I began writing one-act plays that tried to capture not verisimilitude but reality.”

Thornton Wilder, "Preface to Three Plays" (1957)

“We should see [Wilder] clearly, in all his complexity. His is no more a caustic pessimistic perspective than it is a sentimental optimistic one. Ironically, staunchly anti-realistic in his method, he is probably more realistic in his attitude towards the human condition than many a more traditionally realistic playwright.”

Jackson R. Bryer, “Thornton Wilder at 100: His Achievement and His Legacy” (1999)



## THE PLAY PERSPECTIVES

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“I am searching for a new form in which there will be a perpetual counterpoint between the detailed episode of daily life—the meal, the chat, the courtship and the funeral—and the ever-present references to geological time and a distant future for the millions of people who have repeated these moments.”

Thornton Wilder, from a 1939 *New York Times* interview with John Franchey

“In America the family is the nexus of an unusually powerful ambivalence.”

Thornton Wilder, Norton Lectures (1951-52)

“Thornton Wilder was an entrepreneur of the ordinary and the extraordinary . . . who considered himself the poet laureate of the family. Where the other major playwrights turned psychology into behavior, Wilder turned philosophy into playfulness. Wilder’s themes were optimism, not pessimism; exhilaration, not alienation; compassion, not corruption; the spirit, not cynicism. The scope of Wilder’s acquaintances was as great as the breadth of his knowledge. He took tea with Sigmund Freud, roller-skated with Walt Disney; hiked the alps with the world heavy-weight-boxing champion Gene Tunney; worked on a Hollywood thriller with Alfred Hitchcock; and befriended and collaborated with Gertrude Stein.”

John Lahr, Introduction to the forthcoming Penguin Classics *Collected Works of Thornton Wilder*

“Two of Thornton Wilder’s plays have in them moments which always bring me to tears (I am not an easy one to cry, by the way) and not only in performance but in reading and even just in thinking about them.

There is the moment in *The Skin of Our Teeth* when Mrs. Antrobus, during the cataclysmic storm calls out to her son, for the first time using his real name: ‘Cain! Cain!’

And there is the moment in *Our Town* when Emily, returning from the dead, stands in the family kitchen as a teenage girl—invisible, unheard—on the day of her birthday, and hears her father coming down the stairs, saying, joyfully: ‘Where’s my girl!? Where’s my birthday girl!?’

There: I did it again; I started to choke up as I wrote that sentence.”

Edward Albee, letter to Jackson R. Bryer (1997)

“Wilder occupies a unique position, between the Great Books and Parisian sophistication one way, and the entertainment industry the other way, and in our culture this region, though central, is a dark and almost uninhabited no man’s land.”

Francis Fergusson, “Three Allegorists: Brecht, Wilder, and Eliot” (1956)

“The as yet unwritten fourth act of my tragicomedy *The Skin of Our Teeth* would deal with the painful lessons man still has to learn in the process of adapting scientific and technological advances to the demands of freedom, dignity and the ultimate destiny of mankind. Despite everything, I am still an optimist, even though in that work I put a damper on the straightforward belief in technical and material progress just as much as on the pessimism of the prophets of ultimate doom.”

Wilder, from a 1953 interview

## THE PLAYS PERSPECTIVES

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“In Wilder’s nervy negotiation with life, humor was essential, a form of non-friction that banished gravity, an attack on what weighed him down. ‘All that ignoble passion to be didactic that I have to fight with. All that bewilderment as to where Moral Attitude begins and where it shades off into mere Puritan Bossiness,’ he wrote to Chauncey Tinker, Yale’s distinguished Sterling Professor of English. On stage and off, humor was a strategy that kept the world both at attention and at arm’s length. Wilder preached the tactic of detachment that he practiced in his great plays. ‘The chief thing I want you to learn to do is laugh, to understand these things with laughter,’ he wrote.”

John Lahr, Penguin Introduction

“We know too much nowadays. Our imagination is oppressed by memory, by the knowledge of a hundred thousand details of history, by a tangle of private stories which rose to the surface with the help of psychoanalysis. It will take decades, maybe centuries, before the artistic creator and his audience, which really should also participate in the creative process, can free themselves from the avalanche of figures and happenings, which keeps on growing through the mass of daily news. Sometimes I am close to despair when I think about my characters as being surrounded by the shadows of other similar figures from political and literary history so that I as well as my public more often make comparisons instead of having a new experience.”

Thornton Wilder, Interview with Robert Jungk (1956)

“The point of the play is that mankind somehow scrounges his way through disasters by the skin of his teeth. Everything seems lost, then something turns up.

That is what the play is commonly said to be about, though it is not so simple-minded as that, and has more interesting things to say than those. It says, along the way, that evil is part of life, closely related to virtue, and it says rigid over-righteousness is bad, and it says that times change, and it says laughter is quite valuable to all of us, actually, and that life is a great mystery we keep outlining and channeling but which we do not very much control. It is a way of looking at the world, not a series of gripping events, that the play offers.”

Henry Mitchell, “Life Viewed as a Totality Versus Gobblydegarble,” *Washington Post*, July 6, 1975

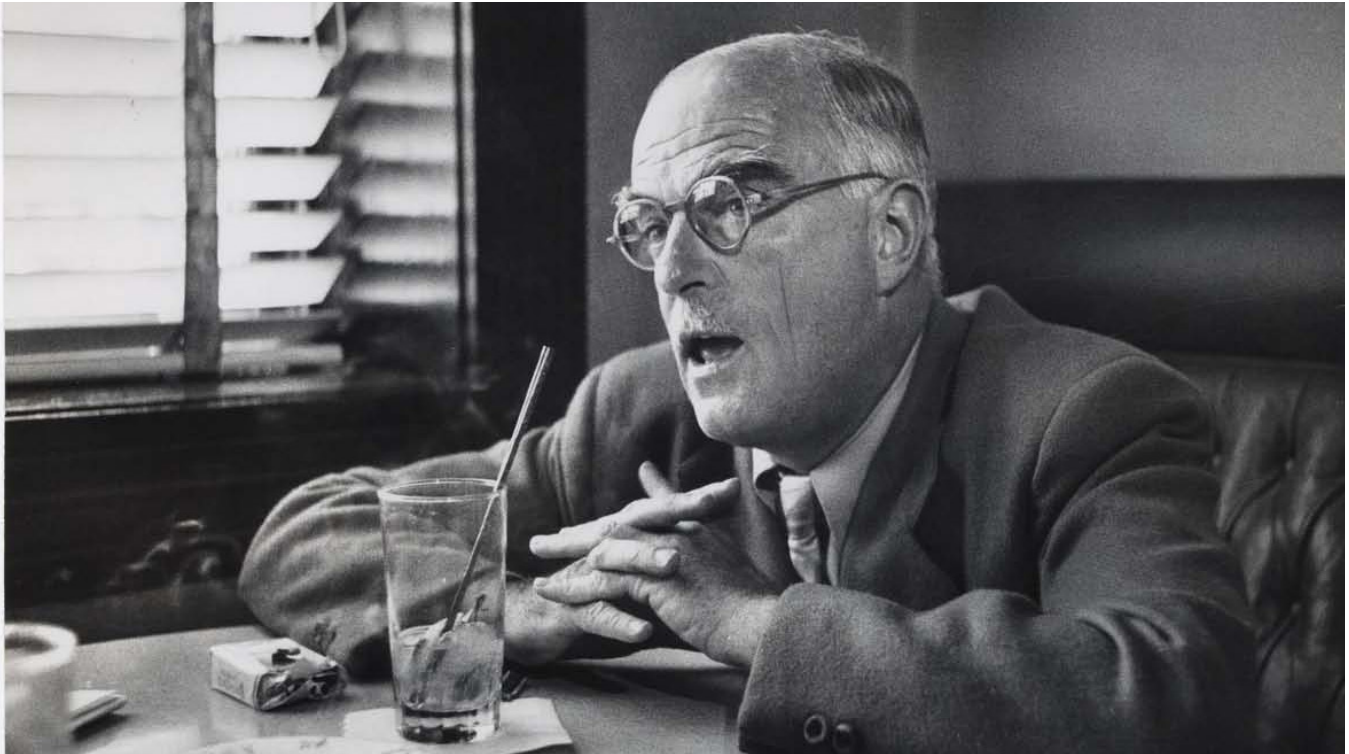


The company of Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Henry Grossman.



# DIALOGUES FOREWARD TO *THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH*

PAULA VOGEL



Photograph of Thornton Wilder Seated At a Table With a Drink and Cigarettes, 1949. Courtesy of the Yale Collection of American Literature, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Call Number YCAL MSS 108, [Object ID #2037302](#).

*This essay was originally published as a foreward to the 2003 Harper Perennial Classics edition of The Skin of Our Teeth. It is re-published here with the permission of the author.*

I took my second trip to the MacDowell Colony for artists in 1989.

Two hours, and a world away, outside of Boston, nestled in time-locked rural roads, stands Peterborough, New Hampshire. Those of us who are invited to MacDowell remember the hills and deep forests with gratitude, but we remember the small clustered cottages that house writing desks facing the unpeopled woods with love.

My second invitation to write among the painters and composers and the poets and fiction writers meant two months of solitude and solicitude from the colonists and administrators. On the drive to the colony on the back roads of New Hampshire, I envisioned unpacking my boxes in my cottage, spreading out my computer and my books, and sitting down to write the play on domestic

violence, *Hot 'n' Throbbing*, upon which I had spent months of research and preparation.

— Until I actually went to my cottage, that is. The first thing colonists do, when they are alone in their cottage, is read the "tombstones" on the wall: wooden tablets that bear the signatures of all the artists who have spent time pacing the cottage floor. As I traced the names back in time, I saw his signature: Thornton Wilder.

In a fever of excitement, I sat down on my cot and gave myself a pep talk: Vogel, you'd better dig a little deeper this time: you're in his cottage. In a night, I scrapped the plans for the play I'd been working on and started page one of another play, *The Baltimore Waltz*. Three weeks later, I emerged, blinking in the sunlight, with a first draft.

For an American dramatist, all roads lead back to Thornton Wilder. Time and again, I return to his scripts and grapple with the problems he tackled — so, it seems, effortlessly — in the unwieldy theatrical apparatus. How do we, when we enter the theater, arrest time and make this art, made of actors and audience, the weight of scenery, flesh and face paint, melt into something fragile?

## FOREWARD TO *THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH* PAULA VOGEL

How can we make the material mess of it all — rehearsals, tech, and opening night — disappear into spirit?

The remarkable thing is how we forget, again and again. We forget Wilder's vision and voice; in our memory we assign his works to a nostalgic theater of our youth, encountered first in high school, in community theater, in assigned work judged to be inoffensive enough to constitute the canon for young readers. It's as if he were the theatrical equivalent of castor oil and the honey used to coat the medicinal taste: literature that is good for our moral constitution dredged in sentiment. And then we encounter him on stage as he is and will remain through the ages: tough-minded, exacting, facing the darkness in human existence without apology.

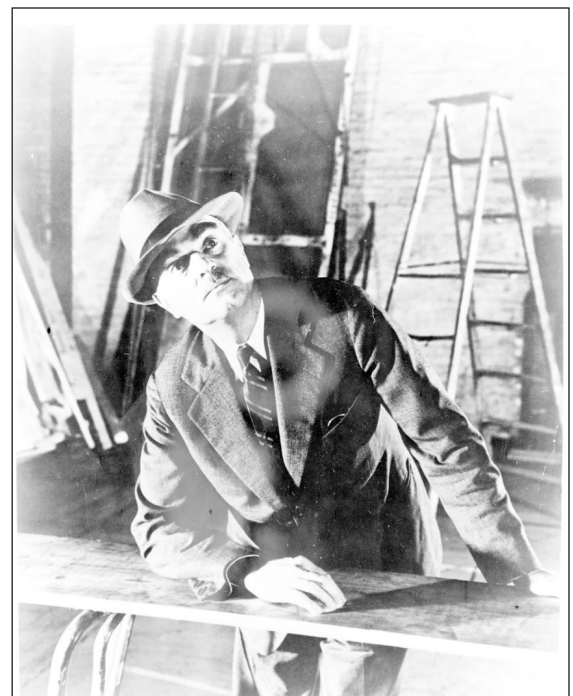
The question I want to face... is why we relegate one of our most remarkable and enduring dramatists to such a place in memory. Because to read him again, whether it be *Our Town*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, or his short plays — *The Long Christmas Dinner*, *Pullman Car Hiawatha*, or *The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden* — is to be astonished. I am astonished each time I read him, at

the force of his work, at the subtle blend of humor and pathos, and his masterful balancing act of abstraction and empathy. I remember anew how much I owe to him, and see in his work the roots or parallels of so many theatrical forebears and influences on my own work: Friedrich Durrenmatt, Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, Lanford Wilson, and John Guare.

At one level, the forgetting of Wilder's impact is almost Oedipal — a rejection of the playwright who has given us our American vocabulary, who forged a synthesis of theatrical traditions from the past, from Europe, from Asia — with an American theater taken over by a viral infection of "realism" (an infection from which we've never recovered). By tearing down the walls of the box set, he concentrated our focus on the essential with an almost ruthless insistence that we pay attention to the story of the drama unfolding, rather than the props and decoration, the fussy business of stage machinery inflicted on an audience by the boulevard theater of Broadway.

There is an irony in forgetting the influence of Thornton Wilder. The man who generously paid tribute to James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* wrote: "I should be very happy if, in the future, some author should feel similarly indebted to any work of mine. Literature has always more resembled a

Left: Decor for four three-minute plays by Thornton Wilder, by Raymond Myerscough-Walker, 1938.  
Right: Wilder as the Stage Manager in a production of *Our Town*, undated.  
Images courtesy of the Yale Collection of American Literature, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.  
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## FOREWARD TO *THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH* PAULA VOGEL

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torch race than a furious dispute among heirs." He suffered the charge of plagiarism leveled against *The Skin of Our Teeth*, written in the spirit of tribute to Joyce's work. This spurious charge, brought by Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson in the two articles they published in late 1942 and early 1943, may well have cost him the Nobel Prize. Of all his contributions to us, Wilder's belief that every new work is in fact a response to the writers who came before, a dialogue between two writers separated in space and time, and not the narcissistic "rip-off" of the imitative, may well be his most important generosity. Wilder may have cast himself in the raiment of others, freely taking from a vast theatrical hope chest, but he always stitched together the old cloth with a new vision and a sense of gratitude.

I have found, in the last three years as I have revisited him on the page, a realization that he was the writer I have borrowed from, not second hand, but third hand — because his work has so imbued the works of writers who have followed him. Wilder has indeed led the torch race, and we remember the recent runner but forget the lead athlete who started the race. There, in *Our Town*, is the bold audience address that I attributed to Tennessee

Williams. There, in *The Skin of Our Teeth*, is the collapsing fragile box set exposing the family to the world that I remember in *Death of a Salesman*. There, also in *Skin*, is the nuclear family leaping across centuries and eras that I remember vividly in Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine*.

We may also forget Thornton Wilder because he is the last private writer of the twentieth century. After him, any writer of such stature has suffered the glare of celebrity in a culture that consumes us, rather than us consuming culture. Do we remember *Glass Menagerie* more perhaps, because it belongs to the obsessive cult of personality in which the work itself becomes digested by a pop-psych analysis of the writer, Williams? Wilder wrote elegantly about Emily Dickinson, who, while in seclusion, nonetheless embraced the world in her poetry. He managed to draw a parallel veil himself around his own life and was the last writer not subjected to the analytic couch of theater critics. How fascinating that his two towering works, *Our Town* and *The Skin of Our Teeth*, take place in the two locations in American life where there is neither privacy nor acceptance of deviance from the norm — the small town or the suburban tract — places where "almost everybody in the world gets married—you know what I mean? In our town there aren't hardly any exceptions." As a persona in the theater, Wilder successfully evaded the glare of cultural

Thornton Wilder, from left to right:

As a Young Boy, 1907; Yale Graduation, 1920; Leaning on a car, photo credit Jill Kremenz.  
Images courtesy of the Yale Collection of American Literature, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.  
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## FOREWARD TO *THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH* PAULA VOGEL

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consumption by creating the role of Stage Manager, the character apart from the play-world, the outsider who manipulates the stage, but is not himself captured by the frame of the play-world itself.

Of all his innovations, we are most indebted to the way Wilder transformed the passage of time on stage — an innovation most often attributed to Samuel Beckett a decade later. Wilder wrested theater out of the apocalyptic sense of catastrophe, the ticking of the bomb due to explode in an Aristotelian plot-driven play-world, that had driven all Western drama since the Elizabethans. Instead, in *Our Town* he managed to freeze time, to stop plot, in ways familiar to the Japanese theater and the medieval cycle plays: by staging all moments of time simultaneously so that our awareness of the fragility of time is captured with a delicacy unknown to the American stage of the time. Take, for example, the Stage Manager's introduction of Joe Crowell, the eleven-year-old paperboy in *Our Town*: "Want to tell you something about that boy Joe Crowell there. Joe was awful bright — graduated from high school here, head of his class. So he got a scholarship to Massachusetts Tech.... Goin' to be

a great engineer, Joe was. But the war broke out and he died in France. — All that education for nothing."

*The Skin of Our Teeth* was written in the midst of apocalypse, about apocalypse, and here Wilder once again renovates our sense of theatrical time by borrowing a trick from the Viennese playwright Arthur Schnitzler. In order to stop the explosion of the world, he uses a plot structure similar to Schnitzler's *La Ronde*: a pattern plot that creates a cycle. A pattern plot is simply the same act occurring again and again — so that the more furiously our characters run in place, the deeper the rut of stasis. He creates, in *The Skin of Our Teeth*, a theatrical treadmill of entrapment for the Antrobus family, facing the end of time again and again and again, until we realize that the human race is perpetually caught in crises, but also perpetually surviving. The effect of stasis is created by running furiously in the same place, until we end up where we began (the plot form of *The Skin of Our Teeth* would become favored by the French Absurdist, in plays such as *Waiting for Godot* and *Rhinoceros*).

*The Skin of Our Teeth* was a remarkable gift to an America



Mary Lou Rosato, Sam Morales, Austin Reed Alleman, Andrew R. Butler, Storm Thomas, Fred Epstein, and Eric Farber in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Henry Grossman.



## FOREWARD TO *THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH* PAULA VOGEL

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entrenched in catastrophe, a tribute to the trait of human endurance. But Wilder does not give us a sentimental or easy bromide of a play: the gift for destruction and violence is as innate as our spirit to survive. Remarkably, he suggests that violence begins at home, not abroad in the breasts of our enemies, nor outside the family circle. At the time of the greatest threat, our most American dramatist does not shy away from suggesting we cast out the mote in our own eyes....

Why, if *The Skin of Our Teeth* and *Our Town* remain as topical as our daily papers, do we relegate Wilder to a slot for community theater? There is one theatrical element that ages quickly, and is the weakest element among the tricks of our trade: the language. Wilder's use of plot structure remains extraordinary, as do the characters in the Antrobus family and his remarkable use of the stage. But the way people talk on stage has changed under the influence of David Mamet and Quentin Tarantino (themselves influenced by a German writer, Franz Kroetz). The fashionable notion of the "real" in

speech right now promotes a view that the way we speak is wounded, incapable of eloquence, or of speaking an original thought. American stage speech right now sounds programmed, reflecting an urban poetry of profanity.

Against the scripts of *American Buffalo* or *Pulp Fiction*, *Fargo* or *The Sopranos*, Wilder's characters speak an American English that sounds quaint to our urban ears: "This is his home ... conveniently situated near a public school, a Methodist church, and a firehouse; it is right handy to an A. and P.," the announcer says in the first act of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. It sounds quaint, that is, until one drives the back roads of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, or Maine. And probably, the speech sounds "real" when one talks to one's neighbors in any small town, where men still wait until ladies leave the room before spitting out any regionalism not fit for mixed company. Perhaps the reason Wilder is relegated, then, to our community stages is that his characters do not offend the ears of the community.

Regardless of how his characters speak, it is what his characters say that remains timeless. He believed that the most pertinent of voices to listen to in times of crisis are the voices passed down through the ages. If, at this point in time, we may not share Thornton Wilder's confidence in the strength of canonic literature and great minds to pull us through, we can enjoy, in the words of critic Francis Ferguson, Wilder's "marriage of Plato and Groucho Marx."

And now, more than ever, we can appreciate his legacy, his questioning mind and his belief that hope is the most necessary of civic virtues.●

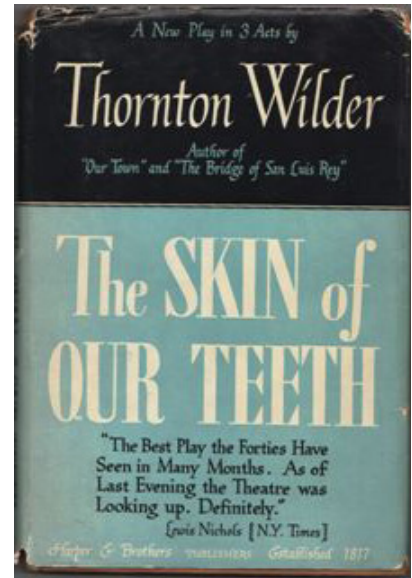
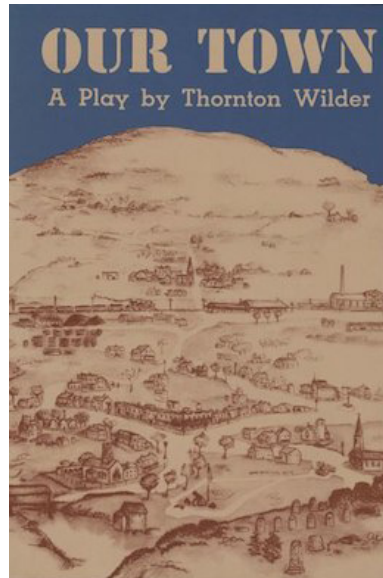
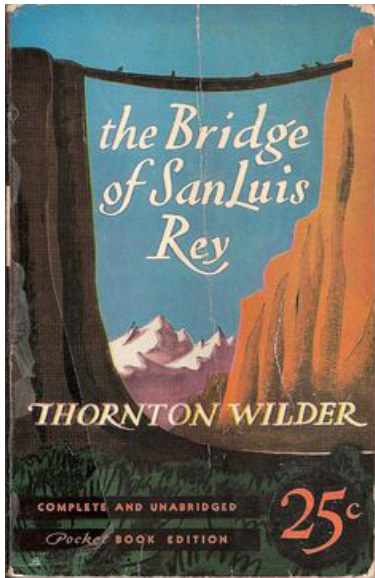
PAULA VOGEL's play, *How I Learned to Drive*, received the Pulitzer Prize, Lortel Prize, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle and New York Drama Critics Awards for Best Play, and her second OBIE. Other plays include *The Long Christmas Ride Home*, *The Mineola Twins*, *The Baltimore Waltz*, *Hot 'N' Throbbing*, *Desdemona*, *And Baby Makes Seven*, *The Oldest Profession*, *A Civil War Christmas* and *Don Juan Comes Home From Iraq*. Co-created with Rebecca Taichman, her play *INDECENT*, will open at The Cort Theatre in NYC in April 2017. TCG has published four books of her work. She teaches playwriting workshops throughout the United States and abroad.

Thornton Wilder as Mr. Antrobus, with the Antrobus family and Sabina, in Westport Country Playhouse's 1948 production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Courtesy of the Wilder Family LLC and the Yale Collection of American Literature, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.



# THE PLAY THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH JOURNALS

THORNTON WILDER



Three Pulitzer Prize winners. From left to right, paperback edition of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, published by Pocket Books (1939); first edition of *Our Town*, published by Coward McCann (1938); first edition of *The Skin of our Teeth*, published by Harper & Brothers (1942).

By 1940, Thornton Wilder had already been awarded two Pulitzer Prizes: for his 1927 novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, and his 1938 play *Our Town*. These excerpts from *The Journals of Thornton Wilder: 1939-1961* (Yale University Press, 1985) offer insight into Wilder's thinking as he wrote *The Skin of Our Teeth*, over the period of 1940-'42. *The Skin of Our Teeth* was completed by January 1, 1942, went into rehearsal September 23, 1942, and after tryouts in New Haven and Baltimore, opened in New York at the Plymouth Theater on November 18, 1942.

**THE MACDOWELL COLONY  
PETERBOROUGH, NH  
JULY 6, 1940**

"The Ends of the Worlds."

Began my play on "The Ends of the Worlds," Monday, June 24, in the Veltin Studio.

The difficulty of finding a subject. During the last year subject after subject has presented itself and crumbled away in my hand.

Can this one hold out?

The difficulty of finding the right tone.

**QUEBEC**

**OCTOBER 26, 1940**

On My Play [*The Skin of Our Teeth*].

Here this week I've been writing the Second Act of my play, all wrong, and knowing that I was writing it all wrong. It presents problems so vast and a need of inspiration so constant that all I can do is to continue daily to write it *anyhow* in order to keep unobstructed the channels from the subconscious and to maintain that subconscious in a state of ferment, of brewing it. The wrongness of the present text lies in the fact that the scenes of the triangle situation and the family conversation are homely and realistic. It may well be that before I "bring them up" I will be obliged to bring down the portentous size and the furious energy of the present opening and perhaps of some of First Act; but that I shall not touch until I've found ways of recasting these intermediary scenes into moment-by-moment myth and a thing that one could call gigantism if it weren't also human generalization.

This attempt to do a play in which the protagonist is twenty-thousand-year-old man and whose heroine is twenty-thousand-year-old woman and eight thousand years a wife makes me see all the more clearly how necessary for Joyce it was, with a similar self-assignment, to invent a grotesque tortuous style of his own. Happier ages than our own could do it — or some aspects of it — in the purity of the lyric, the morality play, or in the relative simplicity of



## THE SKIN JOURNALS THORNTON WILDER

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the *Prometheus Bound* and the *Oedipus*; but in this century and, above all, in these times, there has been added to the difficulty that of avoiding the pathetic, the declamatory, and the grand style. The only remaining possibility is the comic, the grotesque, and the myth as mock-heroic.

I have one advantage: the dramatic vehicle as surprise. Again by shattering the ossified conventions of the well-made play the characters emerge *ipso facto* as generalized beings. This advantage would no longer be mine twenty years from now when the theatre will be offering a great many plays against freer decors; the audiences will be accustomed to such liberties and the impact of the method will no longer be so great an aid to its myth-intention. (My play will be just as valid then, but what it has lost in surprise will be replaced by its prestige, by the audiences' knowing "what it's all about.")

The challenge that has been issued, then, by the accumulated weight from the previous act of the play's proposal to represent Man and Woman, and by the columnar moments already established in Act Two — the President's acceptance of his nomination; Mrs. Hobson's reminiscences on the history of marriage; Miss Atlantic City's outburst to the audience and, particularly, her closing consolation to her partner that men and women are "of straw"; the radio address to the other convening Orders; and the final storm and the cries down the theatre aisle (I have not yet been able to "realize" the scene of the Fortune-teller) — must be met throughout. The intervening material need not be as freighted with emphasis as thought, and should not be, but the theatric invention must tirelessly transform every fragment of dialogue into a stylization surprising, comic, violent, or picturesque. Here lies the increased difficulty over the writing of *Our Town*, where the essence of the play lay in the contrast between the passages of generalization and those of relaxed and homely tone.

Had I not all my writing life been convinced of the fact that the subconscious writes our work for us, digests during the night or in *its* night the demands we make upon it, ceaselessly groping about for the subject's outlets, tapping at all the possibilities, finding relationship between all the parts to the whole and to one another—had I not long been convinced of this I would have been the other night.

Turning over the play in feverish insomnia, I suddenly saw that there, waiting for me in the structure of the Act, was a felicity, integral, completely implicit and yet hitherto unforeseen: since the Orders of the Birds and the Fishes were simultaneously holding their conventions probably nearby, how ready they were to have their representatives present, two-by-two, for the entrance into the Ark, which for months has been established as the closing moment of the Act.

A few more such revelations and I shall be building a mysticism of the writing process, like Flaubert's: that the work is not a thing that we make, but an already-made thing which we discover.

And yet how difficult it is — returning to the paragraph before the preceding — to restate those intermediary scenes. Even granted that my theatric invention could furnish an unbroken chain of strikingly novel devices, revitalizing representations of the material of our daily yet saecular [*sic* -ed.] life, how great is the risk that, placed side by side, these passages over-fatigue the spectator and



Mary Lou Rosato in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Henry Grossman.

## THE SKIN JOURNALS THORNTON WILDER

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finally stupify [*sic* -ed.] the attention, which through them is supposed to be gazing at the condition of life itself.

One's hand falls to one's side in discouragement; all one can do is to trust that the subconscious has foreseen that peril too; that the already written has circumvented it, and that I shall be permitted within the next months to read the solution of this problem.

[QUEBEC]

OCTOBER 29, 1940

On the Stage and Women.

All evening from under my window rises the sound of laughter, touched with hysteria. The men in uniform are parading up and down Dufferin Terrace and have found themselves companions in such girls as the mothers have allowed out. The girls walk up and down pretending to be very self-absorbed, and from the benches come the overtures: "Commong dally foo ser soi?" Soon the couples are formed and the laughter rises.

It reminds to be inserted into my play near the beginning and at regular intervals, jokes about sex. Such jokes awaken the nervous system, unlock a host of contracted centers, set a diffused humming preparation along the receptive attention: prepare for the comic spirit.

Laughter is not in itself sexual; but how closely it is allied to that same censor that holds guard over all the confusions, the humiliations, and (to state the more positive side) the unspoken, unspeakable gratifications of life. Most of laughter is the retaliation against the inflexible Other of life, the adamant circumstance, texture, or accident, which neither our wishes nor our vainglorious will can alter. (Here Bergson, as well as Freud.) Sex is a vast phenomenon, a maw seldom pacified, never circumvented, and perpetually identified by the subconscious mind with the refractory exasperating, not to say inappeasable, character of external circumstance itself.

A laugh at sex is a laugh at destiny.

And the stage is peculiarly fitted to be its home. There *a*



Mary Lou Rosato and Mary Wiseman in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.



## THE SKIN JOURNALS THORNTON WILDER

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woman is so quickly All Woman.

What more telling ratification could be found of my favorite principle that the characters on the stage tend to figure as generalization, that the stage burns and longs to express a timeless individualized Symbol. The accumulation of fictions—fiction as time, as place, as character—is forever tending to reveal its true truth: man, woman, time, place.

And the operation of such an activity must be recognized: when man and woman are regarded in their absolute character that character is pejorative: man is absurd; woman is sex.

It is no accident that since the beginning of theatre the actress has been regarded as the courtesan. The usual explanations for this are but secondary: the actress's private life as being incompatible with that of the bourgeoisie; the professional deformation of the career that *aims to please*; the factor (imperceptible probably to the subconscious of the audience) that the succession of roles induces an

emotional instability in the performer's character. There is an element more significant than these: a woman appearing on the stage, pretending to be someone else in a world all pretense, is revealing herself as Womankind, and under conditions—however noble, dignified, or even sanctified the role—which all too easily imply the more facile aspects of that condition.

Woman lives in our minds under two aspects: as the untouchable, the revered, surrounded by taboos (and a taboo is a provocation-plus-veto); and as the accessible, even—in spite of the mask of decorum and dignity-indignity — *inviting*. To maintain the first of these two roles all the buttresses of society and custom are necessary: the marriage institution, the prestige of virtue, the law, and custom. A woman on the stage is bereft of these safeguards. The exhibition of her bare face in mixed society, for money, under repetition. Speaking words not her own, is sufficient. But far more powerfully is she delivered into the hands, into the thought-impulse life, of the audience by the fact that she is on the stage—that realm of accumulated fictions



Kecia Lewis in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Henry Grossman.

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— as Woman, as prey, victim, partner, and connivance — that is, as bird-of-prey, hence attacker — and as willing victim, that is, *piège*. Under those bright lights, on that timeless platform, all the modesty of demeanor in the world cannot convince us that this is not our hereditary ghost, the haunter of our nervous system, the fiend-enemy of our dreams and appetites.

(The above written while mildly drunk on a quart of Bordeaux.)

### QUEBEC

NOVEMBER 1, 1940

Difficulties with My Play [*The Skin of Our Teeth*].

The play seems — as it is being said of the Italian army in North Africa these days — to have bogged down again, halted in irresolution and a sense of lacking any vitality.

Undoubtedly, there is a real subject for a play there.

I seem to have lost it among misjudgments in manner, in whimsical digressions, and among a number of stated positions which are not *real* to me, which are insincere. For the present leaving out of consideration the Second Act, all of which may not be real to me, how about the First?

Yesterday and today I have been rewriting the opening of the First — not only as to manner, which is relatively unimportant, as that will come right when I have grasped with conviction the central intention of the Act.

This being the most ambitious subject I have ever approached (*sic!*) I am faced as never consciously before with the question: do I mean it? In this case, in what part or level of myself am I actually interested in such a problem (problem for literature, that is; hence, burning problem for the self) as the struggles of the race and its survival? Have I been "making up" emotion, and contriving an earnestness? Is that why my play has bogged down? (Only now as I write this note can I see that that is a misstatement of the question: it is like saying "if you could save a thousand Chinese by cutting off your right hand and leg, would you do it?" *i.e.*, indubitable and unrealizable; a concept graspable by the human mind

only in the specific occasions that vitalize it.) No, it is a subject as real as any other, as dramatizable as any other. It is not so much that one might charge it with an emotion one hasn't got, as that one might charge it with a false pumped-up emotion—or an anemic emotion which ekes out itself in whimsical fancies. In fact, it's not so much a matter of emotion at all, as it is of seeing, knowing, and telling.

In so far as I see, know, and tell that the human race has gone through a long struggle (Act One) it is legitimate that I cast the consideration in the form of a modern man and his home; and precisely to avoid false heroics — in this time, of all others — that I cast it in comic vein.

My difficulties thereafter are three:

(1) *Simplicity*. To state this is sufficient. With what dismay I see some of the passages I wrote this afternoon, passages which, under the guise of theatric liveliness, uprooted the play from its forward drive and introduced digression and inexpedient "color." My old dread of being "boring," my reluctance to trust to strong subject matter.

(I wish I could reread *Candide* — where the problem was not unlike — but though there are many French bookstores in this town, *Candide*, by reason of the Catholic censors is unprocurable here. *N.B.* I think I should read Rolland's *Liluli*, too; I gather on the wind that that belongs to the same category.)

(2) *Working perseverance*. These two years of taking up subjects and dropping them, of desultory reading as an evasion from writing, of mixed activities have undermined what little collection-to-work I used to have. I particularly find great difficulty in fixing my mind on the play as a whole; that exercise sine qua non of composition. I seem only able to "flag the reluctant and tired horses of my mind" to seeing instantaneously the whole play when I am out walking and have walked long and hard.

(3) *Inspiration without emotion*. This is the only phrase I can find to describe the moments when the material is really forwarded. The great danger these days is that when I do get "inspiration" it comes in tides of tears which not only



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are, as formerly, the legitimate tears of nervous excitement, but... bring with them the distortion of the material into a host of humanitarian, "pathetic," didactic directions which are not fundamentally real to me, but which are self-admiring or substitute self-pitying interferences.

Will these difficulties clear up?

I cannot say. I may say on my own behalf that the subject (and the treatment, which is the only way I could treat it) is indeed difficult; that, at least, I bring to it my sense of making the whole stage move and talk, and my characteristic style, which weaves back and forth between the general and the particular.

If I am bogged down, the reason is not far to seek: my mind's daily thinking for twenty years has not been of sufficient largeness to prepare me to rise to the height of this Argument.<sup>1</sup>

### NESHOBE ISLAND<sup>2</sup>, LAKE BOMOSEEN, VT DECEMBER 2, 1941

On Act Three of My Play [*The Skin of Our Teeth*]

Again bogged down and frightened. Last month in New Haven not only did I tighten up Acts One and Two—I think I can say that with the exception of a short passage in Act Two they are finished, and good—but I wrote a "through" Third Act; but it is not right.

The employment of the "Pullman Car Hiawatha" material<sup>3</sup> is: (1) Dragged in indigestibly; (2) Insufficiently related to the surrounding material; (3) An incorrect statement of the central intention of the Act — is that intention, by the way, to be "save the cultural tradition?" — and (4) It smacks of the *faux-sublime*.

To go back to first principles: what does one offer the

audience as explanation of man's endurance, aim, and consolation? Hitherto, I had planned here to say that the existence of his children and the inventive activity of his mind keep urging him to continued and better-adjusted survival. In the Third Act I was planning to say that the ideas contained in the great books of his predecessors hang above him in mid-air furnishing him adequate direction and stimulation.

- (1) Do I believe this?
- (2) Have I found the correct theatrical statement for it?
- (3) Is it sufficient climax for the play?

Taking these in turn: (1) I do believe it. I think the only trouble with it is that there is the point where the vast majority of writers hitherto would have planted the religious note. It's not so much that I deny that religious note as that it presents itself to me only intermittently and in terms too individualistic to enter the framework of this place.

(2) The statement that the ideas and books of the masters are the motive forces for man's progress is a difficult one to represent theatrically. The drawbacks against the "Pullman Car Hiawatha" treatment are that (a) the Hours-as-Philosophers runs the danger of being a cute fantasy and not a living striking metaphor, and (b) ... I cannot find citations from the philosophers' works that briefly and succinctly express what I need here.

At all events, I have begun work as usual by excision. Out go the "people who had died in the house"—we have had enough of the common men who preceded our Antrobus. Out also goes, I think, the natural history, though maybe that might be useful, not as giving the arch of the natural world that surrounds us, but as making more easy the identification of Stars and Hours with Philosophers and Artists. Out go the allusions to the various calendars—partly because it is so difficult to choose one day to cite. Into the earlier part of the Act should go, if I can keep Hours-Philosophers, much more reference to Mr. Antrobus's books.

Couldn't the quarrel between Henry and his father hang on Henry's contempt for the books that had led his father astray?•

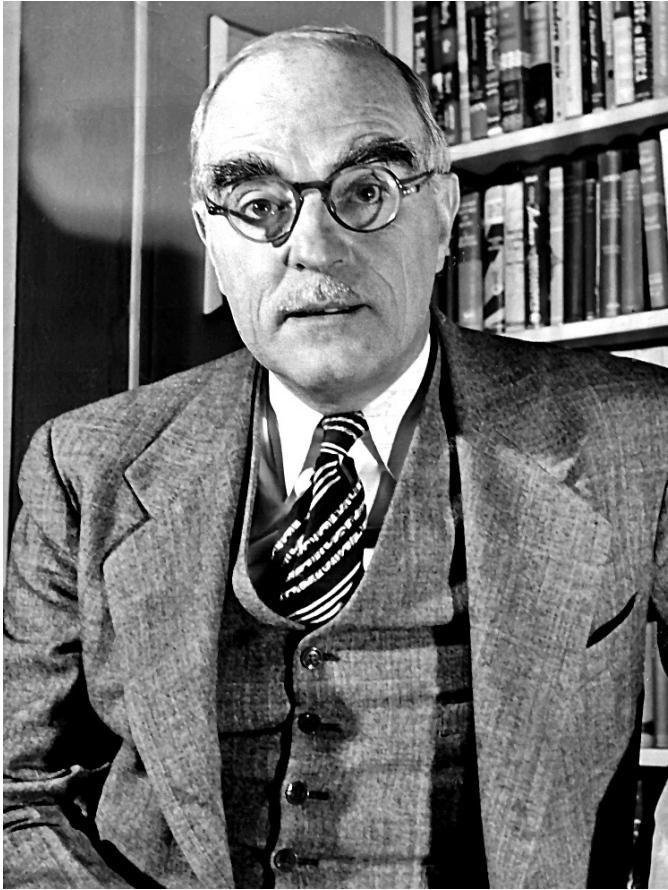
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1 Cf. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book I, lines 22-26:  
"...What in me is dark  
Illumine, what is low raise and support;  
That to the highth of this great Argument  
I may assert Eternal Providence,  
And justify the ways of God to men."

2 Owned by Alexander Wollcott

3 In *Pullman Car Hiawatha*, published in the volume *The Long Christmas Dinner & Other Plays in One Act* (1931), minutes appear as gossips, hours as philosophers, and years as theologians.

# THE PLAYWRIGHT THORNTON WILDER



Thornton Wilder (1897-1975)  
Author of *The Skin of Our Teeth*

Press photo of Thornton Wilder, 1948.

Thornton Wilder was a pivotal figure in the literary history of the twentieth-century. He is the only writer to win Pulitzer Prizes for both fiction and drama. He received the Pulitzer for his novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927) and the plays *Our Town* (1938) and *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942). His other novels, all but one a best seller, include *The Cabala*, *The Woman of Andros*, *Heaven's My Destination*, *The Ides of March*, *The Eighth Day* and *Theophilus North*. His other major dramas include *The Matchmaker* (adapted as the musical *Hello, Dolly!*) and *The Alcestiad*. *The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden* and *The Long Christmas Dinner* are among his well-known shorter plays.

Wilder's many honors include the Gold Medal for Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the National Book Committee's Medal for Literature and the Goethe-Plakette Award (Germany).

Wilder was born in Madison, Wisconsin, on April 17, 1897. He spent part of his boyhood in China and was educated principally in California, graduating from Berkeley High School in 1915. After attending Oberlin College for two years, he transferred to Yale, where he received his BA in 1920. His post-graduate studies included a year spent studying archaeology and Italian at the American Academy in Rome (1920-21) and graduate work in French at Princeton (Master's degree, 1926).

In addition to his talents as a playwright and novelist, Wilder was an accomplished essayist, translator, research scholar, teacher, lecturer, librettist and screenwriter. In 1942, he teamed with Alfred Hitchcock on the classic psycho-thriller *Shadow of a Doubt*. Versed in foreign languages, he translated and adapted plays by Ibsen, Sartre and Obey. He read and spoke German, French and Spanish, and his scholarship included significant research on James Joyce and Lope de Vega.

Wilder enjoyed acting and played major roles in several of his plays in summer theater productions. He also possessed a life-long love of music and wrote librettos for two operas based on *The Long Christmas Dinner* (composer Paul Hindemith) and *The Alcestiad* (composer Louis Talma).

One of Wilder's deepest passions was teaching. He began this career in 1921 as an instructor in French at The Lawrenceville School in New Jersey. During the 1930's he taught courses in Classics in Translation and Composition at the University of Chicago. In 1950-51, he served as the Charles Elliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard.

During WWII, Wilder served in the Army Air Force Intelligence. He was awarded the Legion of Merit Bronze Star, the Legion d'honneur and the Order of the British Empire.

In 1930, with the royalties received from *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, Wilder built a home for himself and his family in Hamden, Connecticut. Although often away from home, restlessly seeking quiet places in which to write, he always returned to "The House that The Bridge Built." He died here on December 7, 1975.



# THE PLAYWRIGHT "A MOST IMPORTANT BROADCAST"



First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, December 1940  
Courtesy of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Public Domain Photographs, 1882 - 1962,  
National Archives Identifier #195376

*On September 27, 1940, Thornton Wilder, alongside other prominent writers and actors, including Edna Ferber, Katherine Hepburn, Elmer Rice, and Robert Sherwood, joined First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt for an NBC radio broadcast in support of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's bid for an unprecedented third term of office.*

*Referring to the cataclysm of the Great Depression and the uncertainties of a world already at war, Wilder, who had served in the First World War and would re-enlist upon America's entrance into World War II, spoke of the necessity of action, optimism and perseverance in a democracy.*

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT: Good evening, everybody. Last Sunday afternoon I asked a group of my friends to picnic with us at Hyde Park. As we sat about the open fire at Val-kill Cottage broiling hamburgers and hot-dogs, we discussed the subject each and every one of us believes is of vital interest today. What my friends had to say seems to me so important, that I wanted you all to hear them, and so they have unselfishly joined me here tonight to bring us their

message as we celebrate Democratic Women's Day...

These friends of mine mean a great deal to every person in this country, regardless of political affiliation, and I know you will all be interested in what our guests have to say. And remember, they have joined me here tonight, not because they are members of the Democratic party, but because they have something they want to say to you. Because they're outstanding personalities as writers, dramatists and as actors, you are going to have an interesting opportunity to look into the souls of people who usually show you other people's souls, but rarely bare their own.

First let me introduce Thornton Wilder. Mr. Wilder, in your great Pulitzer Prize play *Our Town*, you inspired us with your true picture of all the "Our Towns" which make up our country, and with your deep faith in America. Yet the other day at the picnic you told us there was a time when you almost lost faith in America.

MR. WILDER: That's right, Mrs. Roosevelt. In 1932 I must confess I almost did backslide from faith in our Democratic form of government. In the town where I live, we vote in the firehouse. On the steps we stop and talk with our neighbors, our grocer, our firemen and our school teachers. And we suddenly look at one another in a new light. That one single vote we each possess seems a very exciting thing. We enter the booth with a feeling of awe. Many of us remember the blood that has been shed to make that possible; that slow rising tide of curbs against absolute power.

But eight years ago I lost that feeling. The country was in confusion and distress. All around us was smoldering resentment. It seemed as though there were about to be an explosion. The government was frightened, but it was sluggish, timid, and self-centered. I said to myself: It takes the administration in a democracy scores of years to move from any one point to any other point.

My one single vote looked a poor, measly thing. I thought that maybe an explosion was best. And then a surprising thing happened. President Roosevelt entered. He acted with promptness and courage. The majority of the agencies he set in motion are still with us. The very opponents who fought them bitterly, step by step, have now incorporated them into their platform of promises. But I think they are best administered by

## "A MOST IMPORTANT BROADCAST" THORNTON WILDER & ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

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those who shaped them and who lived through the years of adjusting them to the public need.

Now about the voting booth in the fire house, there is a still larger world of confusion and danger. This time we vote not only with the country, but with the whole world, in mind. It is President Roosevelt who has made me see that Democracy can move and create and represent us all; my vote is not only one of confidence, but of gratitude.

*Roosevelt's warm words for Our Town on the broadcast may have come as an amusing vindication to Wilder; in her syndicated "My Day" column of [March 2, 1938](#), the First Lady had written:*

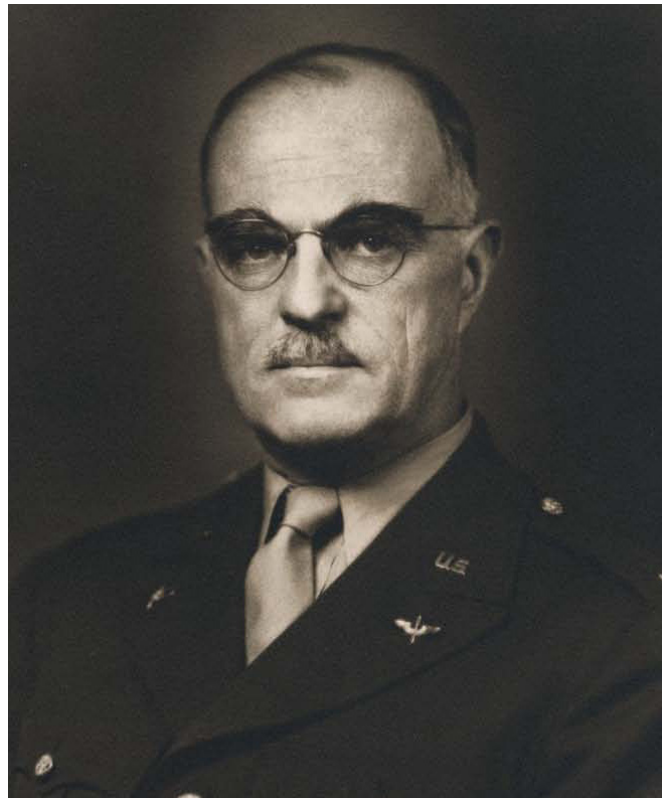
*"When I went to see Our Town, I was moved and depressed beyond words. It is more interesting and more original and I am glad I saw it, but I did not have a pleasant evening. Sometimes we need a pleasant evening, so why must we have all our plays in the same vein? Why can't the critics have standards for different types of plays and give us an idea of the kind of an evening we may*

*have if we go to this play or that? Usually I want to be amused, then again, I want to be stirred. But it is rather rare that you can find out what kind of a play you are going to see by reading any of the criticisms."*

*She was considerably more taken with The Skin of Our Teeth, writing in her "My Day" of [November 30, 1942](#): "On Friday night we saw Thornton Wilder's play: The Skin of Our Teeth. Everybody around me at the end of the first act was asking: "What on earth is it all about? It is amusing, but what does it mean?" Gradually, as the play progressed, one began to understand that the whole panorama of human nature was being spread out before one, and the last act is very impressive.*

*I think this play would bear reading several times after it is seen. It seemed to me that Miss Tallulah Bankhead, Mr. Fredric March and Miss Florence Eldridge and, in fact, the whole cast, did a remarkable piece of interpretive acting. It is no easy play to act, because the actors have to be so different and put different types across to the audience. I would have doubted its popular success, but perhaps we all like to be mystified. Certainly the audience is mystified through a good part of the play, and it surely is a popular success."•*

Thornton Wilder, from left to right: As an Army Corporal in the First World War; and as a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army Air Force, 1943.  
Images courtesy of the Yale Collection of American Literature, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Call Number YCAL MSS 108, Object ID's [#10557579](#) and [#2003522](#)





# INTERVIEW BACKWARDS TO THE FUTURE

ALISA SOLOMON IN CONVERSATION WITH ARIN ARBUS



Mary Wiseman in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*.  
Photo by Gerry Goodstein.

On a break from rehearsals, director **Arin Arbus** sat down for a conversation with **Alisa Solomon**, a member of Theatre for a New Audience's Council of Scholars.

**ALISA SOLOMON** Last year you direct Thornton Wilder's translation or adaptation –

**ARIN ARBUS** Version.

**ALISA** – version of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. *The Skin of Our Teeth* is stylistically quite far away from Ibsen, except maybe for the very first line of the first act, when the maid, Sabina, says, "Oh, oh, oh. Six o'clock and the master not home yet!" That sounds just like the opening of a 19th-century, well-made play – the kind both Ibsen and Wilder overturned.

**ARIN** Yeah.

**ALISA** Do you sense the Thornton Wilder of that *Doll's House* in *The Skin of Our Teeth*?

**ARIN** *The Skin of Our Teeth* is a play that I've been thinking about for much longer than I even knew about his *Doll's House*. This is the Wilder that I've always known, I guess.

**ALISA** Have you long wanted to direct this play?

**ARIN** My mother, who was an actress and now teaches acting at Loyola Marymount University in California, directed a production of *The Skin of Our Teeth* in 2002, and that was the first time I had encountered the play. I thought, "Wow! This is a play that is about this moment!" It was right after 9/11, and it was like, "Oh, this is so urgent, and I would love to work on this play, but if I don't do it now, it probably won't be as relevant later."

**ALISA** Right. Because we're never going to have a beauty pageant judge become the president, as happens in this play!

**ARIN** Yeah. But for the last 15 years I've been continually thinking, "This is a play about this

## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ARIN ARBUS ALISA SOLOMON

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moment right now,” and of course now it feels even more relevant than ever.

**ALISA** Let’s talk about that relevance. The play has a strange, three-act, cyclical structure. In the first act, the family survives the Ice Age, in the second, the Biblical flood, and in the third, global war. The play was premiering in 1942 shortly after the U.S. entered the Second World War –

**ARIN** – and so did Wilder.

**ALISA** And so did Wilder, enlisting in the U.S. Army and serving as an Air Force intelligence officer. He didn’t even see the opening of *The Skin of Our Teeth* because he was on duty.

**ARIN** Right.

**ALISA** It seems like the Ice Age and the Flood were metaphorical for Wilder in the early 1940s – would the world survive the war? And if we did, who would

be be? – but they seem more literal for us now.

**ARIN** To me, it feels really literal. Part of what’s so amazing about the play is that he wrote it in 1939–’40, anticipating Hiroshima, anticipating global warming or climate change. It’s a moment where the end of the world feels right within our reach. Nigh.

**ALISA** That prescience is even in the very name of the family, Antrobust – from *anthropus*, the human kind of primates we are. I can’t help but hear echoes of ‘Anthropocene’ – the name geologists just recently gave to the epoch we’re now in, one in which human beings have had an irreversible impact on the earth.

**ARIN** So, it was prescient when Wilder wrote it, and it feels so prescient still. That is the miracle of the play.

**ALISA** The play depends on some ideas of miracle – theatrical miracle. That is, the stage directions call for all kinds of unlikely events. There are a lot of challenges in staging of this play.

Arin Arbus in rehearsals for Theatre for a New Audience’s production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.





## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ARIN ARBUS ALISA SOLOMON

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**ARIN** Tell me about it!

**ALISA** Some of the stage directions just seem absurd – like a dinosaur and a mammoth pop their heads through the house’s window. Or the scenery falls down. Or everyone on stage disappears. Is that intimidating? Exciting? Opening up your imagination?

**ARIN** Right now, I don’t feel paralyzed with anxiety about them. Wilder is continually trying to make the production theatrical and alive. So, the impossible tasks, because they’re impossible, ignite the imagination. I don’t know if it’ll all work out, but the different moments you’ve named come about for different reasons, which you can try and honor in whatever way you – along with the group of people you’re working with – come up with.

**ALISA** So, the reasons for the dinosaur and the mammoth poking their heads in?

**ARIN** First, that’s a laugh. But the bigger reason for the dinosaur and the mammoth, is that these are

species that have gone extinct, and the question that the family is continually facing is, will we ourselves go extinct?

**ALISA** And the family lets those animals go extinct for their own survival.

**ARIN** Yes.

**ALISA** We’re a sorry lot.

**ARIN** Yeah, I know. But it’s hard to live with a dinosaur and a mammoth in your living room.

As for the set falling down, that meta-theatrical strand runs so strongly through this play. Wilder is so inventive! Just think of *Our Town* versus this play, and versus *Matchmaker*. They couldn’t be more different from one another. The radical sense of experimentation and bold theatricality in Wilder’s passionate desire to shatter the stale theatrical conventions of his day is so amazing. I think that’s part of the set falling down.



Fred Epstein, David Rasche, and Eric Fisher in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.



## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ARIN ARBUS ALISA SOLOMON

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In his preface to his collection, *Three Plays*, he talks about the middle class and the fallacies that the aristocracy is based upon. And he talks about the theater of his day and how he grew to hate the theater that he was seeing and found himself going only to admire one actor's performance. He speaks so clearly and passionately about his loathing of what was happening in Broadway houses during the time, and what he was trying to do with his plays.

**ALISA** It's mostly the character of Sabina who strikes a meta-theatrical stance, breaking the frame and talking to the audience and complaining about the play. That might seem familiar in *Wilder*, but she is so different from the Stage Manager in *Our Town*.

**ARIN** I know! The Stage Manager in *Our Town* seems, to me, to be close to Thornton Wilder himself. I love that he puts Sabina at the center of this play, this woman who couldn't be more different from who I imagine him to be. She's the total opposite of him.

I think the actors in the play are experiencing the

same crises, or the play itself is experiencing the same crises, that the characters within it are experiencing: continually encountering one catastrophe after another and being at risk of not being able to survive, and yet they find a way to go on.

**ALISA** I heard you pronounce the character's name as "Su-bine-uh".

**ARIN** I say "Su-bine-uh." Other people say "Su-bee-nuh." I say "Su-bine-uh" just because it makes you think of Sabine.

**ALISA** Exactly. That's what I wanted to ask about. One line in the play says that Mr. Antrobus, "raped her home." In this play, we have Homer, we have the Bible, we have a lot of mythology. Why do you think Wilder associates Sabina with that story of abduction, possibly violent, sexual-violation abduction?

**ARIN** Well, George Antrobus says all of us are covered in blood. Wilder is not setting out to create idyllic people or an idyllic family.



David Rasche and Mary Wiseman in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Henry Grossman.



## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ARIN ARBUS ALISA SOLOMON

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**ALISA** To say the least!

**ARIN** The characters have some good qualities and they have really horrendous qualities and it's difficult to put up with each other. As Mrs. Antrobus says, "Save the Family. It's held together for over five thousand years: Save it!" It's really hard to keep a family together when it's made of humans.

**ALISA** It's striking that Mrs. Antrobus says her marriage stays together because of the promise it's based on, not because of love, not because of devotion or companionship or solidarity. . .

**ARIN** Right. Because of an agreement or a promise. The promise is stronger than either of them as individuals.

**ALISA** Why does that promise matter to them so much, do you think?

**ARIN** Why does it matter that they stay together? Interesting. The first thing that comes to my mind is

that they need each other to survive. He comes close to shattering, to destroying, his family. It's sort of luck that they stay together.

**ALISA** Luck that disaster's coming along.

**ARIN** Yeah. That he gets a slap in the face from the weather. And in a crisis, he doesn't want Sabina. Sabina's of no use in a crisis. What's interesting is actually what happens – this is where I see the most progression in the course of the play: in the relationship between Mrs. Antrobus and Sabina. Mary Wiseman, who is playing Sabina, said, "I think the only person that Sabina actually feels love for is Mrs. Antrobus." I think that's true. When they reunite, that's a real event for both of them. Mrs. Antrobus starts crying.

**ALISA** Is that melodramatic? There are so many styles in this play. You could change the acting style with every beat, practically.

**ARIN** I know. It's killing me! It's really hard. The



David Rasche, Andrew R. Butler, and Kecia Lewis in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.

## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ARIN ARBUS ALISA SOLOMON

way it works is so strange, actually. The way the language works in it.

**ALISA** Say more about how the language works. You've directed Shakespeare so effectively over the last half-dozen years. The way Wilder's language functions is so different.

**ARIN** In Shakespeare, everything you need is there in the language and anything that happens is talked about. You've got words for it. Or, if, on the rare instance where you don't have words, you have a little pause in the line, which also tells you something. But in *Skin* there are these big events that aren't given language. And it's not like it's implied in subtext, you know, it's not Pinter! And then with the style of it going from these very real moments to these heightened moments of absurdity –

**ALISA** By “real” you mean emotionally real?

Handbill for the original 1942 Broadway production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Illustration by Don Freeman. Public domain, via [Wikipedia](#).



**ARIN** Yes. With history and relationships and character. I think the relationships between the characters in the family are very complicated and rich.

**ALISA** And also self-consciously clichéd. Especially with the son and –

**ARIN** All of 'em. And the daughter, and the vamp, and the wife, and the husband: they are all archetypes. But that's not all they are. I don't think it works if that's all they are, and they all break those archetypes in extreme ways.

**ALISA** Is Mr. Antrobus ridiculous? Wilder describes him as having the face of a Keystone Comedy Cop, which suggests a certain kind of buffoonish, comic style, yet there is gravity in this play.

**ARIN** A lot. It's a tragic comedy concept.

**ALISA** Although during the first production, after the audiences were walking out, the producers threw in a program note just calling it a comedy.

**ARIN** Right. Telling them it's okay to laugh.

**ALISA** Is it playing funny?

**ARIN** We're going to find out! The tricky aspect of the play and the thrilling aspect of the play, is that it slips from absurdity into – I don't know, a Eugene O'Neill family drama or into Greek tragedy, then into vaudeville, and it does that seamlessly without any notice. That is the nature of it, so just trying to find that path is the thing that is the most amazing about the play and probably also the most challenging.

**ALISA** How do you square that Keystone Cop reference – and how ridiculous Mr. Antrobus does seem sometimes – with the gravity?

**ARIN** We're trying to figure it out. I think he is both. There are moments where he's a buffoon, and there are moments when he expresses the highest, the most decent aspect of humanity. And there are times when he's awful and cruel and violent. He can't be reduced to one thing; we wouldn't survive if we weren't all those things.



## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ARIN ARBUS ALISA SOLOMON

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**ALISA** If we didn't have the capacity to let the animals go extinct?

**ARIN** To let the animals go extinct. To be violent. To invent amazing, incredible contraptions and systems –

**ALISA** Arithmetic. Wheels.

**ARIN** The alphabet. In the argument that he has with Mrs. Antrobus about whether to let the refugees into their house, he takes an amazing position.

**ALISA** Does he? Doesn't he take them because of who they are – Homer, Moses? Because of the knowledge that they have and the history that they carry? If they were just some ordinary refugees, would he still have protected them?

**ARIN** Well, that's the argument he makes to his wife, who is very resistant to inviting anybody into the house. I don't know. I think underneath, there is

a belief that you take care of one another.

**ALISA** There's a way that the play appeals to the audience for a kind of ethic of care, right? At the end of the first act, for instance, Sabina appeals to the audience: Give us your chairs for the fire.

**ARIN** Well, I haven't thought about it that way. I struggled with that moment. For a long time I thought, "Oh, this is the moment where Wilder wants the audience to feel like they're saving the human race, and so he brings them into the action." But then I realized, actually in the original Broadway production, they weren't taking their chairs up, and so perhaps it's the opposite. Perhaps Wilder is showing how Sabina is trying to enlist the audience, and they aren't doing anything, and they become aware of the fact that they aren't doing anything.

**ALISA** So, do you know how you're going to do it?

**ARIN** Well, I'm not going to do it with fake chairs coming up the aisle. I think we just have to sit there

The company in rehearsals for Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.



## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ARIN ARBUS ALISA SOLOMON

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and have Sabina really ask the people to do it.

**ALISA** So we won't be standing up for Act 2?

**ARIN** No. You won't have to stand up for Act 2!

**ALISA** One of the most striking things about the play, of course, is the way that it lives in a bunch of time zones all at once, several eras all at once. So, whether it's Biblical time or the Ice Age, there is also, always, the theatrical now of the moment: the meta-theatrical time, where there's a Stage Manager, and actors who break character. That was 1942 when the play was first done. When is the theatrical now of your production?

**ARIN** 2017. Now. Today. Then there are the three different non-literal theatrical realities – the settings of each act. It doesn't really make much sense to pin them down onto any time period. They are now and the Stone Age. They're theatrical. They're invented.

**ALISA** What implications does the 'now' of 2017 have for some elements of the play that may seem dated now, even disturbingly so? For instance, Wilder has a couple of characters in a brief scene that he calls the "Negro chair pushers."

**ARIN** Right. There are certain things that we are not doing as they were originally written and that is one of them. What I think Wilder was trying to depict was a class of people within American society who are exploited and who have little recourse. The son, Henry – this spoiled white kid – attacks someone who has a tough job, which is pushing people around in the sun all day long, who needs that job. I tried to find an equivalent, and I think there are equivalents in our society today.

**ALISA** To say the least.

**ARIN** It's two guys, both of whom are elderly, who are pushing chairs – who have this job they need but



Left: William Youmans; Right: Arthur French and Robert Langdon Lloyd in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photos by Gerry Goodstein.



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probably shouldn't be doing. They are in their 80s and pushing chairs. It's not the same, but it's some sort of equivalent.

**ALISA** What are some of the other places where you had to make adjustments? For example, how are you doing the newsreels?

**ARIN** For the first slide show we are going to try to have it be an actor playing an usher, so it is rooted in the present and not in the 1940s style. But it slips. It's a very slippery play! So it slips into some strange world halfway through. I think Wilder's intention in starting with the photograph of the outside of the theater and the photographs of the staff in the theater, was to get you into this room right now. To put it in the '40s is absolutely wrong for that moment. The second slide show is in a nostalgic style, just because that whole convention scene, and its language, feel not quite 2017.

**ALISA** With all the complexity you're describing and the grimness in the play, why do you think

Wilder has a reputation for being a simple sentimentalist?

**ARIN** I do not understand that fully, though I know it is so wrong. Probably it's because his work is misunderstood. A lot of people see high schools and community theaters do his plays, and he gets this reputation for being sentimental and sweet. Certainly in this play and certainly in *Our Town*, and in a lot of the short plays, I just don't find anything that is at all saccharine. And in terms of what Wilder was trying to do formally, he was an experimental artist who was trying to shatter the status quo and invent new forms. He was inspired by *Finnegan's Wake*.

**ALISA** Yes, there was that strange controversy with some people accusing him of having plagiarized Joyce. Do you care about that?

**ARIN** Well, I've read *Ulysses*, but I haven't read *Finnegan's Wake*. I would guess that it is very different from this play.



Mary Wiseman, David Rasche and Reynaldo Piniella in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.

## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ARIN ARBUS ALISA SOLOMON

**ALISA** Yes. That's what Wilder said: He invited people to actually read *Finnegan's Wake* and get back to him. End of argument!

I agree with you that it's not accurate to call this play sentimental. And yet George Antrobus gives a speech at the end that's trying so hard to be uplifting. And yet the theatrical action contradicts that mood because first of all, there's Henry, the son, glowering. A moment along the lines of: "I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you!"

**ARIN** Right. Wilder doesn't resolve that thread of the drama because it can't be resolved. It's just going to go on.

**ALISA** Do *Skin's* characters grow in any way through the course of the play?

**ARIN** That's a big question for me. Is there some change for these characters? I think Wilder is clear-

eyed and not in any way sentimental about showing that people don't change much, and yet, I do detect by Act 3 some evolution in most of the characters, even if it's not a traditional, dramatic reversal or character reversal.

I have a great quote from one of Wilder's journals – I don't have it on me right now and I'm gonna butcher it – but the gist is: we look down upon older civilizations, not realizing that we are going through exactly what they went through. It's by looking backwards, looking at the past, that he tells the future with this play.

**ALISA** Well, the Fortune Teller in Act 2 says nobody can tell the past.

**ARIN** Yeah, nobody can understand the past.

**ALISA** So we're doomed to repeat it?

**ARIN** That takes me back to George's final speech. Wilder wanted to have faith in humanity, and I think that he wanted to write a play that offered laughter and hope at that moment in history. Not simply for people to be dulled out of reality, but to have them connect with or recollect some profound aspect of their own experience in the play.

The laughter and the hope, I think, is not glossing over the darker tendencies of humanity. I think Wilder is dealing with those forces in the play. And he's also trying to find a way to not let it end there. ●

*This interview has been edited and condensed.*

ALISA SOLOMON is a teacher, writer and dramaturg living in New York City. She directs the Arts and Culture concentration in the MA program at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. Her criticism, essays and political reporting have appeared in a wide range of magazines and newspapers, including the *New York Times*, *Nation*, *Forward*, *Theater*, and *Village Voice* (where she was on the staff for 21 years). Her book, *Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Theater and Gender* (Routledge, 1997) won the George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism. She is the co-editor (with Tony Kushner) of the anthology *Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Grove, 2003). Her latest book is *Wonder of Wonders: A Cultural History of Fiddler on the Roof* from Metropolitan Books (Holt).



David Rasche and Kecia Lewis in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.



# THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

AUSTIN REED ALLEMAN (*Fred Bailey/Refugee/Musician*) TFANA and Off-Broadway debut. Theatre credits include Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Cymbeline* (New Orleans Shakespeare Festival), *Marat/Sade*, *Stage Door* (Purchase Rep). *Composer for Ten Days in a Madhouse* (Strangemen and Co.) and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Purchase Rep). Much gratitude to family, mentors, and everyone else who has supported him. BFA: SUNY Purchase Acting Conservatory. [www.austinreedalleman.com](http://www.austinreedalleman.com)

ANDREW R. BUTLER (*Homer/Act II Announcer/Musician*). Credits include: *FUTURITY* (Soho Rep/Ars Nova), *War Lesbian* (Dixon Place), *Political Subversities* (Joe's Pub), *Folk Wandering* (Ars Nova), *Doomocracy* (Creative Time), *Comfort Dogs...* (JACK). As a writer/composer Andrew has written commissions for Playwrights Horizons Downtown and TheaterWorksUSA, and received support and development from Ars Nova, Yale Institute for Music Theatre, Williamstown Theatre Festival, The Civilians, Fresh Ground Pepper, and The Polyphone Festival. Founding member of experimental theatre company harunalee. BFA: NYU:ETW. [www.andrewrbutler.com](http://www.andrewrbutler.com)

FRED EPSTEIN (*Dinosaur/Musician*) is a Brooklyn-based producer, singer, and multi-instrumentalist who has toured both nationally and internationally with a wide range of artists. Regional: *The Elementary Spacetime Show* (World Premiere, Philly Fringe 2016); *FUTURITY* (Soho Rep/Ars Nova); *Left of the Sugar Shack and Behind the Pantry* (La Mama); *The Fever* (MASS MoCA/Sundance). Recent projects include hip-hop duo BLOOD+SAND ([www.brooklynbloodandsand.com](http://www.brooklynbloodandsand.com)), electronic/house collaboration ANML ([www.soundcloud.com/brooklynanml](http://www.soundcloud.com/brooklynanml)), and SEX MEX, a monthly American-themed burlesque/variety show.

ERIC FARBER (*Mammoth/Musician/Percussion Designer*) is a percussionist and sound artist based in Brooklyn. Eric's performance and design work was featured in *FUTURITY* (Drama Desk nomination for Outstanding Set Design, Lortel Award for Outstanding Musical, OBA Award for Best New Musical – Soho Rep/Ars Nova) and The Foundry Theatre's *Good Person of Szechwan* (Drama Desk Nomination for Outstanding Music in a Play – Public Theater, LaMama). Eric is a member of The Lisps, and has an MFA from Bard College and a BA from The New School University. [www.kineticontology.com](http://www.kineticontology.com)

ARTHUR FRENCH (*Professor/Chair-Pusher*) was last seen on Broadway in *The Trip to Bountiful*. He is a Founding Member of the Negro Ensemble Co. and a recipient of the Actors' Equity 2015 Paul Robeson Award for distinguished contributions to the performing arts.

MAX GORDON (*Refugee/Musician*) is a music director, orchestrator, and music producer. He won the 2016 NYMF Award for Best Orchestrations for *Dust Can't Kill Me*, a new folk musical. He has worked as an audio engineer for Wynton Marsalis and Jazz at Lincoln Center, and as a vocal producer for artists on Universal Music Group and Capitol Records. His songwriting and production recently appeared on Charles Perry's debut album (Verve Records).



Andrew R. Butler in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Henry Grossman.

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KECIA LEWIS (*Mrs. Antrobus*) most recently created the role of Sister Rosetta Tharpe to critical acclaim in the Atlantic Theater Company's *Marie and Rosetta*, as well as the title role in *Mother Courage and Her Children* at CSC. Broadway/Off-Broadway: *Leap of Faith*, *Chicago*, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *Big River*, *Once on this Island*, *Dessa Rose* (Drama Desk nom.), and *Dreamgirls*. Television: "Conviction," "Blue Bloods," "Limitless," "Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt," and recurring on "Law & Order: SVU."

ROBERT LANGDON LLOYD (*Moses/Tremayne/Chair-Pusher*). Founding member of Peter Brook's company. Former member of the Royal Shakespeare Company. American theatre includes: *Marat/Sade*, *Conference of the Birds*, *Carmen*, *Mahabharata* (dir. Peter Brook); *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Much Ado*, *King Lear* (dir. Arin Arbus); *Hay Fever*, *Legacy*, *Up Centre Between* (dir. Shauna Kanter); *Burial at Thebes* (dir. Charlotte Moore). Film: *The Mahabharata*, Paul Scofield's *King Lear*, Julie Taymor's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Tell Me Lies*. Video: "Wrong Number" (The Cure).

KIMBER MONROE (*Gladys*) is excited to be back at TFANA! TFANA: *The Father/A Doll's House* (Bertha/Ellen). Broadway: *South Pacific* (Ensemble/u.s. Ngana and Jerome). Regional: *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* (Tillie). Film: *Applesauce* (Cameron). Commercial: National print/TV. Other: *She Kills Monsters* (Agnes Evans), *Macbeth* (Porter). Third-year BFA student at The New School. Much love to my ever-supportive mom and brothers Kai and Coco. Thanks to Dina Torres and everyone at GenerationTV.

SAM MORALES (*Muse/Hester/Boardwalk Girl*). TFANA: *Pericles* (dir. Trevor Nunn). NYC credits: Halley Feiffer's *It's Just Weird Now...* Regional: *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tavern*, *The Comedy of Errors* (Scranton Shakespeare Festival). Proud graduate of the University of Scranton. Thanks to Tessa Faye, Debby Brown & Harden-Curtis. She is thrilled to be back at TFANA!

REYNALDO PINIELLA (*Henry*) was last seen in *The Death of the Last Black Man...* (Signature Theatre Company). TV credits include "Sneaky Pete," "Greenleaf," "Law & Order: SVU," "NYC 22," "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," "Us & Them," "Louie," "Flesh & Bone," "The Carrie Diaries," and "The Plug" (pilot). He will next be seen in *Venus* at Signature Theatre Company. Follow him on Twitter and Instagram @ReynaldoRey. [www.reynaldopiniella.com](http://www.reynaldopiniella.com)

DAVID RASCHE (*Mr. Antrobus*) began his career at Chicago's famed The Second City. Broadway: *Speed the Plough*, *Lunch Hour* (dir. Mike Nichols), *Loose Ends*, *The Shadow Box*. Off-Broadway: *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Warrior Class* (Second Stage); *The Seagull* (CSC); *Regrets Only*, *Last Dance* (MTC); *Edmond* (Atlantic); *No One Will Be Immune* (Ensemble Studio Theater). Film: *In the Loop*, *Burn After Reading*, *Men in Black III*, *Flags of Our Fathers*, *Flight 93*, *The Sentinel*, *An Innocent Man*, *The Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*, *That Old Feeling*, *Delirious*, *Manhattan*. TV: recurring roles on "VEEP" and "Bored To Death" and the title character in "Sledge Hammer!"





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MARY LOU ROSATO (*Fortune Teller/Muse*). Broadway: *Once Upon a Mattress*, *School for Scandal*, *My Life as a Fairytale*, *The Suicide*, *Inspector General*, *Robber Bridegroom*, *Beggar's Opera*, *Measure for Measure*, *Time of Your Life*, *Three Sisters*. Off-Broadway: *Henry V* (TFANA), *Winter's Tale*, *Misanthrope*, *Mother Courage*, *Cradle Will Rock*, *Ten by Tennessee*, *School for Scandal*. Film: *Quiz Show*, *Hudsucker Proxy*, *The Wedding Banquet*, *Two Bits*, *Spike of Bensonhurst*, *Brenda Starr*, *Illuminata*. TV: "Titus," "Law & Order," "Caroline in the City," "Warehouse 13," "The Lot," "Miami Vice," "Stone Pillow." Drama Desk, Jeff Awards. Group 1 Juilliard.

JESSIE SHELTON (*Telegraph Boy/Muse/Ivy/Boardwalk Girl/Musician*). TFANA debut. New York: *Hadestown* (NYTW), *FUTURITY* (Soho Rep/Ars Nova), *The Black Crook* (Abrons), *Bone Hill* (UTR, Joe's Pub), *The Servant of Two Masters* (Sonnet Rep), *Lady Han* (Incubator). Elsewhere: *Party in the USA* (Edinburgh Fringe), 10x10 New Play Festival (Barrington Stage), *Camelot* (Capitol Rep). Film: *Feast of the Epiphany*. Ed: CMU, MXAT, RITL. Love and thanks to César, Arin, M&P, and Maya most of all. [jessieshelton.com](http://jessieshelton.com)

STORM THOMAS (*Act I Announcer/Broadcast Official/Refugee*) is a playwright, performer, puppet maker, and award-winning poet. Storm performed in the Off-Broadway production of *FUTURITY* (Mandolin) and has worked with César Alvarez since 2012. Since receiving an MFA from Sarah Lawrence, Storm co-founded To Rena, Love Us, the whimsical performance company, with Marisa Clementi. Storm has written *Notes on the Past* (Transgender Theater Festival @ The Brick Theater) and the musical *ANCIENT FUTURE*, which will be performed this summer. For more information go to [torenaloveus.com](http://torenaloveus.com).

MARY WISEMAN (*Sabina*) is a recent graduate of Juilliard. In New York she's appeared in *Therese Raquin* and Off-Broadway in *An Octoroon* at Theatre for a New Audience. She's performed the last two summers at Williamstown Theatre Festival in *Off The Main Road* and, most recently, *Romance Novels for Dummies*. TV credits include "Baskets" alongside Zach Galifinakis, Netflix's "Longmire," "The Characters," and Hulu's "Difficult People."

WILLIAM YOUMANS (Fitzpatrick) Broadway: *Wicked*, *The Little Foxes* (with Elizabeth Taylor), *Billy Elliot*, *The Farnsworth Invention*, *Bright Star*, *Big River*, *Titanic*, Baz Luhrmann's *La Bohème*, *Pirate Queen*, *Finian's Rainbow*. Off-Broadway: Public Theater; *Midsummer Night's Dream* (TFANA, dir. Julie Taymor), *Henry V*, *Flux*, *Coraline* (MCC), *Road Show* (Sondheim), *The Widow Claire* (Horton Foote, Circle in the Square), *Brundibar/Giraffe* (Tony Kushner, New Victory), and many more. Film: *Birdman*, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, *Mrs. Soffel*, *Compromising Positions*, *Nadine*, *Fresh Horses*, *A League of Their Own*. TV: "A Private History of a Campaign that Failed" (Peabody Award), "Little Match Girl," "Separate But Equal," many more.



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JOHN AMIR (*Ensemble*). Select past work includes shows with Geva Theatre Center's NEXTStage, Baryshnikov Arts Center, Gemini CollisionWorks, The Brick Theatre, and the Public's Under the Radar Festival.

MICHAEL BARTKIEWICZ (*Ensemble*) is thrilled to make his TFANA debut. Credits: *The Berenstine Bears Live!* (Off-Broadway), *Diviners*, *Eurydice*, *Hot L Baltimore*, *The Underpants*, *Hairspray*, and *Urinetown*.

ELEONORE CONDO (*Ensemble*) is very psyched to be making her TFANA debut! Credits include *Horse Girls* (the cell) and The Captain in *Woyzeck* (Philly Fringe.)

CHARLIE HARRINGTON (*Ensemble*). Off-Broadway debut. Recent stage credits include *The American Clock* (The New Studio on Broadway) and *Life Under Water* (Playwrights Horizons Theatre School). TV: "Becoming Warren Buffet" (HBO). BFA: NYU Tisch. Thanks and love to mom, dad, and Sarah.

CHARLOTTE HARVEY (*Ensemble*) is returning to the stage via The Shakespeare Forum and is thrilled to be joining the superb TFANA on this most timely production.

SARAH KEYES (*Ensemble*) is a Brooklyn-based artist originally from Kentucky. She is a proud graduate of Interlochen Arts Academy and Fordham University. For complete credits, please visit [www.sarahkeyes.com](http://www.sarahkeyes.com)

DAVID H. LITTLETON (*Ensemble*) is grateful and thrilled to be working with TFANA. Thanks to production and staff. Saving the world starts locally; visit [www.nyclu.org](http://www.nyclu.org).

MARILYN LUCCHI (*Ensemble*), a Bronxite, was a modern dancer with Nancy Hauser in Minneapolis, taught Creative Drama and Dance and performed in the Palace Theater School. In NY she was a company member of The Actors' Space. She was in *Casey 30 Years Later* at the Broadway Comedy Club, *Land of Fire* with New Yiddish Rep, and in film features and shorts.

ALEXANDRA MORO (*Ensemble*). NY Theatre: *HOUSEWORLD*, *Aftermath* (Ivy Theatre Company). Other theatre: *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Bacchae*, *Antigone*, and multiple new works. University of Washington B.A./B.S. An actor and dancer, Alexandra speaks Indonesian, Chinese and Spanish.

SOPHIE SAGAN-GUTHERZ (*Ensemble*) is thrilled to be making her Off-Broadway debut at TFANA. Recent credits include Ariel in *The Tempest* at the Brick Theatre. BFA: NYU.

BRIAN JOEL SANCHEZ (*Ensemble*) graduated from SUNY Purchase. Recent credits: *In the Red and Brown Water*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, and *All's Well That End's Well*.

This page: Austin Reed Alleman and Jessie Shelton in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Henry Grossman. Opposite page: Kecia Lewis and Kimber Monroe in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.





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JORGE I. SÁNCHEZ (*Ensemble*) is proudly making his TFANA debut. Latest credits: *Hamlet* (Hamlet) with Wombat Theatre Co. and *Twelfth Night* (Sir Toby) with STNJ's Next Stage Ensemble. A fuego.

ISREAL MCKINNEY SCOTT (*Ensemble*) is making his TFANA debut. Favorite roles: Dave Robinson in *LOMBARDI* (Harbor Lights Theater), Oliver in *As You Like It* (SD Shakes). Love to Colleen and Isabel! Education: MFA, The New School for Drama.

MARYN SHAW (*Ensemble*). TFANA debut. *The Tempest*, *Comedy of Errors* (Camden Shakespeare); *Pinkalicious*, *Clybourne Park* (Hangar Theater); *We are Proud...* (Fordham). Education: Fordham University, Interlochen. [www.marynshaw.com](http://www.marynshaw.com)

EILEEN SUGAMELI (*Ensemble*) TFANA debut! Off-Broadway: *That Physics Show*. NYC: *BAREKNUCKLE* (Vertigo Theatre). Film: *We Only Know So Much* (in theaters 2017). BFA: NYU-Tisch.

DENISE TURKAN (*Ensemble*) is a Turkish/American actress. Five years ago, she moved from Istanbul to new to continue to focus on her acting training. Top credits: *Vagina Monologues*, "Melissa," "Law & Order."

PABLO A. VAZQUEZ (*Ensemble*). Selected credits: *A Few Good Men* (Santiago), *The Laramie Project* (Aaron Kriefels/Jonas Slonaker), and *Balm in Gilead* (Xavier). Instagram: @PablitoVazquez112. Twitter: @PablitoVaz

MATTHEW VELEZ (*Ensemble*) graduated from the American Musical and Dramatic Academy. He would like to thank all those who supported him. He hopes you enjoy the show!

ARIN ARBUS (Director) is the Associate Artistic Director at Theatre for a New Audience for which she directed last season's repertory productions of *A Doll's House* and *The Father*, and, in previous seasons, *King Lear*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure* and *Othello*. She staged *La Traviata* for The Canadian Opera Company (8 Dora Nominations) and The Lyric Opera of Chicago as well as Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* at Houston Grand Opera. She was a Drama League Directing Fellow, a member of Soho Rep's Writer/Director Lab, a Princess Grace Award Recipient and spent several years making theatre with prisoners at Woodbourne Correctional Facility in association with Rehabilitation Through the Arts.

CÉSAR ALVAREZ (Original Music) is a composer/lyricist/librettist whose musical *FUTURITY* received the 2016 Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Musical. César also received the 2016 Jonathan Larson Award. Recent credits: *The Elementary Spacetime Show* (FringeArts/UArts); *FUTURITY* (Soho Rep/ Ars Nova, A.R.T., Walker Arts Center, Mass MoCA); *An Octoroon* (Soho Rep, TFANA; Drama Desk nom.), *Washeteria* (Soho Rep), *Good Person of Szechwan* (LaMama, Public Theater; Drama Desk nom.) César is a Visiting Associate Professor at The University of the Arts in Philadelphia and the Artistic Director of Polyphone, a festival of emerging musicals at UArts. [www.musicisfreenow.org](http://www.musicisfreenow.org)



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**SONYA TAYEH** (Choreographer) is a New York City-based choreographer. She has gleaned accolades for her work including two Emmy nominations for Fox's "So You Think You Can Dance" (2015 and 2013) and the 2014 Lucille Lortel and Obie Awards for Outstanding Choreography for her work on David Henry Hwang's dance-play *Kung Fu*, for which she also received a Drama Desk nomination. Credits include: *You'll still call me by name* (New York Live Arts Commissioned Artist/Directed and Choreographed); Andrew Lipka's *Wild Party* (City Center Encores!; dir. Leigh Silverman); Martha Graham Dance Company's *Lamentation Variations* series (Joyce); *Iphigenia in Aulis* (CSC; dir. Rachel Chavkin); *The Last Goodbye* (Old Globe; dir. Alex Timbers); *Kung Fu* (Signature; dir. Leigh Silverman).



**RICCARDO HERNANDEZ** (Scenic Designer). Broadway: *The Gin Game*, *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess* (Tony 2012 Best Musical Revival), *The People in the Picture* (Studio 54), *Caroline, or Change*, *Topdog/Underdog*, *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*, *Noise/Funk* (also National Tour and Japan), *Parade* (Tony/Drama Desk Noms), Hal Prince director, *The Tempest*, *Bells are Ringing*. Recent: *La Mouette*, *Jan Karski*, *Mon Nom Est Une Fiction* (both for Avignon Festival: *Cour d'Honneur*, Opera Theatre, France), *The Dead* (Abbey Theater, Dublin) *Il Postino* (L.A. Opera, PBS Great Performances), Philip Glass' *Appomattox* (SFO), *Lost Highway* (London's ENO/Young Vic) Over 200 Productions US/Internationally: NYSF/ Public, BAM, LCT, ART, Guthrie, Lyric Opera Chicago, NYCO, HGO, OTSL, Theatre du Chatelet, Festival Automne, Paris; Vienna's Theater an der Wien, Opera de Nice, Oslo National Theater, MXAT Moscow, Teatr Polski, Warsaw; London's National, Old Vic, Royal Court.

**CAIT O'CONNOR** (Costume & Puppet Designer) is a designer, painter and illustrator, working and exhibiting in the United States and abroad. Recent and upcoming projects include *Hamlet*, directed by Barry Edelstein, The Old Globe; *La Traviata*, directed by Arin Arbus, Canadian Opera Company (Dora Mavor Moore Award, Outstanding Costume Design); *Titus Andronicus*, directed by Michael Sexton, The Public Theater; *Inspiré*, Cirque du Soleil; *The Witch of Edmonton*, directed by Jesse Berger, Red Bull Theater (Lucille Lortel Award nomination); and *Hamlet*, The Wooster Group.

**MARCUS DOSHI** (Lighting Designer) designs for theatre, dance, opera, and non-performance-based work. With TFANA: the repertory productions of *A Doll's House* and *The Father*, *King Lear* (Henry Hewes nomination), *Othello* (Lortel nomination), *Hamlet* (Drama Desk & Henry Hewes nominations), *Measure for Measure*, *Macbeth*, *The Broken Heart*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*. Recent work includes *Party People* at The Public Theatre, *Svadba* at Angiers Nantes Opera, *Mary Page Marlow* and *Visiting Edna* at Steppenwolf. His designs have been seen at most major regional theatres and opera companies and internationally at Festival Lyric d'Aix-en-Provence, La Comédie-Française, La Monnaie, Venice Biennale, Holland Festival, Canadian Opera and the Sydney Festival among many others. Education: Wabash College and The Yale School of Drama. Teaching: Assistant Professor of Theatre at Northwestern University. [www.marcusdoshi.com](http://www.marcusdoshi.com)



## THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

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STOWE NELSON (Sound Designer). New York: *The Wolves* (Playwrights Realm); *Miles for Mary, Samuel & Alasdair* (Mad Ones, Drama Desk nom.); *Small Mouth Sounds* (Ars Nova); *Indian Summer* (Playwrights Horizons); *The Painted Rocks at Revolver Creek*, *The Wayside Motor Inn* (Signature); *Buyer & Cellar* (Barrow Street). Regional: *The Book of Will* (Denver Center); *The 39 Steps*, *4000 Miles* (Actors Theatre of Louisville); *Macbeth*, *An Iliad* (Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival). More info: [wingspace.com/stowe](http://wingspace.com/stowe)

PETER NIGRINI (Projection Designer). Broadway: *Dear Evan Hansen*, *An Act of God*, *The Heidi Chronicles*, *The Best Man*, *Fela!*, *9 to 5*. Elsewhere: *The SpongeBob Musical* (Chicago), *Grounded* and *Here Lies Love* (Public Theater), *Far From Heaven* (Playwrights), *Notes from Underground* (TFANA), Grace Jones Hurricane Tour, *Don Giovanni* (Santa Fe), *Blind Date* (Bill T. Jones), Nature Theater of Oklahoma, *No Dice* and *Life & Times* (Burgtheater, Vienna). Currently: *Amélie* (Broadway), *Monsoon Wedding* (Berkeley Rep).

DAVE BOVA (Hair/Wig & Makeup Designer). TFANA: *The Servant of Two Masters*, *A Doll's House/The Father*, *Pericles*, *The Killer*. Off-Broadway: *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Here Lies Love*, *Booty Candy*, *My Name is Asher Lev*, *Good Person of Szechwan*, *The Ohmies*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Nothing But Trash*, *Marie Antoinette*. Regional: *Last of the Boys* (Steppenwolf Theatre); *Two Gentleman of Verona*, *The Merchant of Venice* (DC. Shakespeare Theatre); *Guys and Dolls*, *Taming of the Shrew*, *Midsummer Night's Dream* (Great Lakes Theater Festival); *Les Mis*, *Light in the Piazza* (Weston Playhouse). Thank you to Zevie for all the love and support.

J. JARED JANAS (Hair & Makeup Co-Designer). Broadway designs include *Sunset Boulevard*, *The Visit*, *The Real Thing*, *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill*, *Motown*, *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*, *Peter and the Starcatcher*, *All About Me*, and *Next to Normal*. Recent off-Broadway designs include *The Liar*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Himself & Nora*, *Invisible Thread*, *Pretty Filthy*, and *Father Comes Home from the Wars*. TV/Films include "Gotham", "Mozart in the Jungle", "Inside Amy Schumer", and "30 Rock".

JON KNUST (Properties Supervisor) is a NYC-based prop master and artisan. Recent prop master credits include *The Painted Rocks at Revolver Creek*, *Big Love*, and associate prop master of *Appropriate* (Signature); *Peter and the Starcatcher* (1st National Tour); *Too Much Sun* (The Vineyard); *Marie Antoinette, ... The Death of Walt Disney*, and *We Are Proud to Present a Presentation...* (Soho Rep). Jon frequently does overhire prop work for many off-Broadway theatres including Signature, Playwrights Horizons, Roundabout, The Atlantic, and The Mint. Jon got his start in props at Williamstown Theatre Festival.

J. ALLEN SUDDETH (Fight Director). TFANA: *Pericles*, *Tamburlaine*, *The Killer*, *The Broken Heart*, *Henry V*, *Cymbeline*, *As You Like It*, and several more. J. Allen is a Broadway veteran of twelve shows, over 150 Off-Broadway shows, and hundreds of regional theatre productions. He has staged over 750 television shows and teaches at SUNY Purchase and Strasburg. Allen authored a book, *Fight Directing For The Theatre*.



Opposite page: John Amir, Storm Thomas, Sam Morales, Andrew R. Butler, David H. Littleton, and Brian Joel Sanchez; this page: Robert Langdon Lloyd and David H. Littleton in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photos by Gerry Goodstein.

## THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

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SHANE ANN YOUNTS (Vocal Coach). Broadway (selected): *Newsies*, *Clybourne Park*, *Mary Poppins*, *Lion King*, *Mamma Mia!*. Off-Broadway: *Permission*, *Stunning*, *Luck of the Irish*, *Winter's Tale*, *Midsummer* (Hudson Valley Shakespeare). Tours: *War Horse*, *Mary Poppins*, *Jekyll & Hyde*, *Les Mis*; *All's Well*, *Measure*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* (all Shakespeare in the Park); *Timon of Athens*, *Edward II*, *Duchess of Malfi*, *The Miracle Worker*, *1776*, *Steel Magnolias*, *Cyrano*. Guthrie: *Midsummer*, *Twelfth Night*, *Antony & Cleopatra*. Faculty – NYU Graduate Acting. [www.shakespearepronunciation.com](http://www.shakespearepronunciation.com)



RENEE LUTZ (Production Stage Manager). TFANA: *Pericles*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *All's Well*, *Merchant of Venice* (NY, RSC, National Tour), *Measure for Measure*, *Antony & Cleopatra*, etc. Off-Broadway: MTC, Playwrights, Signature, Public, Primary Stages, etc., and commercial productions. Regional: Barrington Stage (over 55 productions), Hartford (*Hamlet*), Goodspeed, La Jolla, ART, NJ Shakespeare, Berkshire Theatre, etc. She is a trustee of historic FDNY fireboat John J. Harvey. Best credit and longest run: her husband, actor Gordon Stanley.

PAUL VELLA (Assistant Stage Manager). TFANA: Debut! NYC: The Juilliard School, Prospect Theater Company, and New York Theater Workshop. Regional: Trinity Rep, Barrington Stage Company, Swine Palace Productions, Ocean State Theatre Company, Merry-Go-Round Playhouse, and Little Theatre of the Rockies. Paul is a graduate of the University of Northern Colorado and a proud member of Actors' Equity Association.

DEBORAH BROWN (Casting Director). This is Deborah Brown's 24th season with Theatre for a New Audience. She has cast for Broadway, Off-Broadway, and many of the leading regional theatres in the country. She shared an Emmy for the HBO series "From the Earth to the Moon." Other television includes "The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd" and New York casting on "Band of Brothers."

JONATHAN KALB (Resident Literary Advisor/Dramaturg) is Literary Advisor and Resident Artist at Theatre for a New Audience and Professor of Theatre at Hunter College, CUNY. He has twice won the George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism, which he received for his books *Beckett in Performance* (1991) and *Great Lengths: Seven Works of Marathon Theater* (2012). *Great Lengths* also won the Theater Library Association's George Freedley Award.

BLAKE ZIDELL & ASSOCIATES (Press Representative) is a Brooklyn-based public relations firm representing artists, companies and institutions spanning a variety of disciplines. Clients include St. Ann's Warehouse, Soho Rep, The Kitchen, Ars Nova, BRIC, P.S.122, Abrons Arts Center, Taylor Mac, LAByrnth Theater Company, StoryCorps, Irish Arts Center, Café Carlyle, Peak Performances, Batsheva Dance Company, The Playwrights Realm, Stephen Petronio Company, The Play Company, and FIAF's Crossing the Line Festival.

This page: Eric Farber and Fred Epstein in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Henry Grossman.

Opposite page: Kecia Lewis, Reynaldo Piniella, Kimber Monroe, and David Rasche in Theatre for a New Audience's production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Photo by Gerry Goodstein.



## THE PRODUCTION CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

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JEFFREY HOROWITZ (Founding Artistic Director) began his career in theatre as an actor and appeared on Broadway, Off Broadway, and in regional theatre. In 1979, he founded Theatre for a New Audience. Horowitz has served on the Panel of the New York State Council on the Arts and on the Board of Directors of Theatre Communications Group. He is currently on the Advisory Board of The Shakespeare Society and the Artistic Directorate of London's Globe Theatre. He received the John Houseman Award in 2003 and The Breukelein Institute's 2004 Gaudium Award.

DOROTHY RYAN (Managing Director) joined Theatre for a New Audience in 2003. She spent the previous ten years devoted to fundraising for the 92nd Street Y and the Brooklyn Museum. Ryan began her career in classical music artist management and has also served as company manager for Chautauqua Opera, managing director for the Opera Ensemble of New York, and general manager of Eugene Opera. She is a 2014 Brooklyn Women of Distinction honoree from Community Newspaper Group.

MICHAEL PAGE (General Manager) has been working in commercial and not-for-profit arts management for over ten years; this is his third season at TFANA. Prior credits include Nina Raine's award-winning *Tribes*, David Cromer's landmark production of *Our Town, Mistakes Were Made* by Craig Wright, and Fiasco Theater's *Cymbeline* (Barrow Street Theatre); Douglas McGrath's *Checkers*, Rajiv Joseph's *The North Pool*, Jenny Schwartz's *Somewhere Fun* (Vineyard Theatre), among others. MFA: Ohio University.

THEATRE FOR A NEW AUDIENCE founded in 1979 by Jeffrey Horowitz, is a modern classical theatre that produces Shakespeare alongside other major authors in a dialogue that spans centuries. The Theatre promotes the ongoing training of artists through the Actors and Directors Project, led by Cicely Berry, C.B.E., director of voice, Royal Shakespeare Company and Andrew Wade. The company's productions and affiliated artists have been honored with prestigious awards and nominations including Drama Desk, Lortel, Obie, and the Tony. The Theatre's production of *The Green Bird* by Carlo Gozzi directed by Julie Taymor opened Off-Broadway, toured to La Jolla Playhouse, and later moved to Broadway. In 2001, the Theatre became the first American company to be invited to bring a production of Shakespeare to the RSC. *Cymbeline* directed by Bartlett Sher opened at the RSC's Other Place, November 2001. In January 2006, the Theatre's production of *Souls of Naples* starring John Turturro toured to Naples, Italy, and in March 2007 we returned to the RSC with *The Merchant of Venice* starring F. Murray Abraham and directed by Darko Tresnjak. The Theatre created and runs the largest in-depth program for introducing Shakespeare in the NYC Public Schools. Over 127,000 young people ages 9–18 have been served since 1984. In partnership with The City of New York, which has provided leadership support through the administration of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the Department of Cultural Affairs, and Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz, Theatre for a New Audience has opened its first home. The building is named Polonsky Shakespeare Center, in recognition of a naming gift from The Polonsky Foundation.



## ABOUT THEATRE FOR A NEW AUDIENCE



### STAFF

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### About Theatre for a New Audience

Founded in 1979 by Jeffrey Horowitz, the mission of Theatre for a New Audience is to develop and vitalize the performance and study of Shakespeare and classic drama. Theatre for a New Audience produces for audiences Off-Broadway and has also toured nationally, internationally and to Broadway. We are guided in our work by five core values: a reverence for language, a spirit of adventure, a commitment to diversity, a dedication to learning, and a spirit of service. These values inform what we do with artists, how we interact with audiences, and how we manage our organization.

### Theatre for a New Audience Education Programs

Theatre for a New Audience is an award-winning company recognized for artistic excellence. Our education programs introduce students to Shakespeare and other classics with the same artistic integrity that we apply to our productions. Through our unique and exciting methodology, students engage in hands-on learning that involves all aspects of literacy set in the context of theatre education. Our residencies are structured to address City and State Learning Standards both in English Language Arts and the Arts, the New York City DOE's Curriculum Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in Theater, and the Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts. Begun in 1984, our programs have served more than 126,000 students, ages 9 through 18, in New York City Public Schools city-wide.

### A New Home in Brooklyn: Polonsky Shakespeare Center

After 33 seasons of award-winning and internationally-acclaimed productions, Theatre for a New Audience's new home, Polonsky Shakespeare Center, is a centerpiece of the Brooklyn Cultural District.

Designed by celebrated architect Hugh Hardy, Polonsky Shakespeare Center is the first theatre in New York designed and built expressly for classic drama since Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont in the 1960s. The 27,500 square-foot facility is a unique performance space in New York. The 299-seat Samuel H. Scripps Mainstage, inspired by the Cottesloe at London's National Theatre, combines an Elizabethan courtyard theatre with modern theatre technology that allows the stage and seating to be arranged in seven configurations. The new facility also includes the Theodore C. Rogers Studio (a 50-seat rehearsal/performance studio), and theatrical support spaces. The City of New York-developed Arts Plaza, designed by landscape architect Ken Smith, creates a natural gathering place around the building. In addition, Polonsky Shakespeare Center is also one of the few sustainable (green) theatres in the country, with an anticipated LEED-NC Silver rating from the United States Green Building Council.

Now with a home of its own, Theatre for a New Audience is contributing to the continued renaissance of Downtown Brooklyn. In addition to its season of plays, the Theatre is expanding its education and humanities offerings to include lectures and activities for families, as well as seminars, workshops, and other activities for artists, scholars, and families. When not in use by the Theatre, its new facility is available for rental, bringing much needed affordable performing and rehearsal space to the community.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## THEATRE FOR A NEW AUDIENCE MAJOR SUPPORTERS

*Even with capacity audiences, ticket sales account for a small portion of our operating costs. The Theatre expresses its deepest thanks to the following Foundations, Corporations Government Agencies and Individuals for their generous support of the Theatre's Humanities, Education, and Outreach programs.*

The 360° Series: Viewfinders has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Exploring the Human Endeavor. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this Viewfinder do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

A Challenge Grant from the NEH established a Humanities endowment fund at Theatre for a New Audience to support these programs in perpetuity. Leading matching gifts to the NEH grant were provided by Joan and Robert Arnow, Norman and Elaine Brodsky, The Durst Organization, Perry and Marty Granoff, Stephanie and Tim Ingrassia, John J. Kerr & Nora Wren Kerr, Litowitz Foundation, Inc., Robert and Wendy MacDonald, Sandy and Stephen Perl binder, The Prospect Hill Foundation, Inc., and Theodore C. Rogers, and from purchasers in the Theatre's Seat for Shakespeare Campaign.

Theatre for a New Audience's Humanities, Education, and Outreach programs are supported, in part, by The Elayne P. Bernstein Education Fund. For more information on naming a seat or making a gift to the Humanities endowment, please contact James Lynes, Director of Institutional Advancement, at 212-229-2819 x29, or by email at [jlynes@tfana.org](mailto:jlynes@tfana.org).

Theatre for a New Audience's productions and education programs receive support from the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature; and from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



**Council on  
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