

# **Wilder, Thornton (1897-1975)**

## **Encyclopedia Article**

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## Wilder, Thornton (1897-1975)

Thornton Wilder, with an enthusiasm for experimentation and keen observation of human experience, enlivened the American literary scene in the middle years of the twentieth century. He received numerous awards, including the first Presidential Medal of Freedom, and two Pulitzer Prizes for drama—*Our Town* (1938) and *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1943). In 1927 he received his first Pulitzer Prize for his novel, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1923), which established his reputation as a leading novelist. One of his most popular plays—*The Matchmaker* (1956)—became the mega-musical *Hello, Dolly*, an international box office success. Gertrude Stein became a close friend and influence during his last 12 years of major work. In 1997, one hundred years after his birth, cultural festivals throughout America celebrated the enormous talent of a man whose command of the classics was so great he was nicknamed, "The Library."

### Further Reading:

Burns, Edward, and Ulla Dydo. *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Thornton Wilder*. Edited by William Rice. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1996.

Cunliffe, Marcus, *The Literature of the United States*. New York, Viking Penguin, 1986.