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## A Wilder Joyce: Influence, Borrowing, Appropriation, Theft

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This article re-examines the unintended consequences of American novelist and playwright Thornton Wilder's lifelong passion for the work of James Joyce, as Wilder was writing what would become his second Pulitzer Prize winning play, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, while in the midst of 'unriddling' Joyce's final novel, *Finnegans Wake*. Subsequently, accusations of plagiarism arose from two major Joyce scholars, Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson, who not only questioned the borrowings of a particular playwright in creating a new artwork for the stage but also challenged the practices of commercial theater and contemporary theories of originality and textuality. Exploring *The Skin of Our Teeth* as an intertext, on the other hand, simultaneously validates Campbell and Robinson's initial assessment and encourages a rethinking of Wilder's commitment to Joyce as both a scholar and something of a collaborator. Such a shift would allow the critical community to ask theoretical questions about how this 'collaboration' works to afford accessibility and so opens *Finnegans Wake* to a wider audience. Wilder might thus be seen as offering something like a thematic catalogue to the novel in parallel to the 'theme keys' he outlined in his Joyce journals. Such recalibration would reposition Wilder's contributions, not only as an American playwright but as a pioneering critic and crusading intellectual: a European-focused writer wholly in the American grain, an avant-garde champion like his compatriot Edmund Wilson, one who could recognize, invoke, and engage simultaneously with the European avant-garde and the American theatrical and critical traditions.

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Whenever I'm in a theater group and discussion turns to the essential American playwrights—the ones whose accomplishments define our culture—I'm always startled and confused that Thornton Wilder's name comes to the fore so infrequently.

Edward Albee (Qtd in Niven, 2012: xi)

In March 1941, American playwright, novelist, literary critic, instructor of French and translator Thornton Wilder was asked, at news of James Joyce's death, to write a tribute for *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* (Wilder, 1941: 370–5). He was a natural choice given his life-long interest in or obsession with Joyce (see Burns and Gaylord, 2001) and, more broadly, as a defender of the era's most experimental writers. He had, for instance, met Gertrude Stein on her visit to the University of Chicago in 1934 (see Burns and Dydo, 1996) and would write introductions to two of her works, *Narration* (1935) and *The Geographical History of America* (1936) by the time of the *Poetry* invitation, with a third to follow in 1947 for the posthumously published *Four in America* (Wilder, 1979: 181–222). On news of Joyce's death, Wilder was telephoned 'long distance' by Harriet Monroe, editor of *Poetry*, and asked for a statement (Feshbach, 1994: 498; Wilder, 1979: xvii). In response, Wilder produced something of an overview essay or eulogy, 'James Joyce, 1882–1941'. He would subsequently publish 'Joyce and the Modern Novel', a 1954 lecture, in 1957 and 'Giordano Bruno's Last Meal in *Finnegans Wake*', which appeared in *Hudson Review* in spring 1963, a distillation of some 290 pages of notes on Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (Feshbach, 1994: 515). All three essays were published posthumously in a volume called *American Characteristics and other Essays* (Wilder, 1979: 165–80, 278–86), the title referencing Wilder's lectures at Harvard University. These were delivered as part of his year-long appointment as Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry, 1950–51 (T. S. Eliot had held the post in 1932–33) and subsequently published as 'Toward an American Language', 'the first of several installments' in the *Atlantic Monthly* beginning in July 1952 (Wilder, 1952: 29–37; Wilder, 1979: 1–64). Writing to Adaline Glasheen during his Norton tenure, however, Wilder cited some friction between his Joyce work and the growing community of Joyce scholars:

I found that F\_\_\_\_\_s Wake addicts are a curious brand of cats. They think everybody else is a benighted flounderer and that *they*—each one—holds the answer. They don't want to pool their insights; they don't want to contribute to a Master-Copy. I came away from the meeting very angry. (Burns and Gaylord, 2001: 3)<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The meeting was held at the Grolier Club 4 December 1949, organized by John J. Slocum, founding member of the James Joyce Society (NY) (Burns, 2001: 4n2).

With Glasheen, however, Wilder found a kindred spirit, someone with whom he could share his insights and work toward a 'Master-Copy', and he did so until his unexpected death in December 1975, a letter to her on his desk unfinished.

The depth of Wilder's commitment to Joyce and his work is evident in his correspondence with Glasheen, published in 2001 as *A Tour of the Darkling Plain: The 'Finnegans Wake' Letters of Thornton Wilder and Adaline Glasheen, 1950-1975*. Wilder and Glasheen shared their readings of *Finnegans Wake* on paper, that is, through the mails. Glasheen, who would publish the *Third Census Of 'Finnegans Wake': An Index Of The Characters and Their Roles* two years after Wilder's death, calls the period 'the amateur age of unriddling'. As she is quoted in the introduction to *A Tour of the Darkling Plain*: 'In the late 1940s some friends and I took to playing around with *Finnegans Wake*, enjoying ourselves and doing our best to unriddle bits of that difficult and entertaining book' (Burns and Gaylord, 2001: xiii). The characterization of this work as 'amateur' or mere 'playing around' understates the intensity of this long collaboration, yet it is one that Geert Lernout, citing Glasheen's comment, accepts and repeats in his review of the volume, where he asserts 'Glasheen and Wilder were amateurs' (Lernout, 2006: 384). Wilder, of course, had been writing about, or perhaps even re-writing the *Wake* at least since its full publication in 1939, as his *Journals* reveal (Feshbach, 1994: 498). His densely annotated copy of *Finnegans Wake* along with two sizeable notebooks of 'theme keys' devoted to the novel are on deposit at Yale University.

The opening paragraph in Wilder's *Poetry* tribute lays out the tensions he saw in Joyce's life and so in his life's work:

... bound to Dublin in love and hate, parallel, irreconcilable, each emotion whipping on its contrary; a love that could only briefly make peace with the hatred through the operation of the comic spirit; a hatred that could only intermittently make peace with the love through the intensity of artistic creation. This unresolved love and hate recurred in every aspect of his life: it went out toward his youth, toward the religion in which he was brought up, toward the rôle of the artist, toward the very phenomenon of language itself. It compelled him to destroy and to extol; to annihilate through analysis and to make live through passionate comprehension.

The price that must be paid for a love that cannot integrate its hate is sentimentality; the price that must be paid for a hate that cannot integrate its love is, variously, empty rhetoric, insecurity of taste, and the sterile refinements of an intellect bent on destruction. (Wilder, 1941: 370-1)

‘Like Cervantes’, Wilder continues, Joyce ‘groped confusedly for his subject and his form.... Like Cervantes, unsuccessfully, Joyce tried poetry and drama’ (Wilder, 1941: 370–1). Of the poetry, Wilder would admit its ‘watery musicality, a pinched ventriloquial voice’, and of Joyce’s one play he would be ‘astonished at the woodenness of ... *Exiles*’ given Joyce’s expert handling of dialogue in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Wilder, 1941: 371). Brooks Atkinson would review Joyce’s play for the *New York Times* in 1957, and he seemed to echo Wilder’s assessment: ‘It was an attempt at spiritual expression by a man who has lost faith in “luminous certitudes” and is doing penance every day of his life’. For Wilder, Joyce’s major achievement was his depiction of consciousness:

*Ulysses* brought a new method into literature, the interior monologue. The century-long advance of realism now confronted this task: the realistic depiction of consciousness. To realism, mind is a babbling, a stream of fleeting odds and ends of image and association. Joyce achieved this method with a mastery and fullness of illustration that effaces any question of precursors.... Yet all art is convention, even the interior monologue. Joyce’s discovery has the character of necessity, a Twentieth Century necessity, and again it was wrung from him by the operation of his love and hate. (Wilder, 1941: 371)

Wilder’s interest in Joyce and the more progressive writing of his day is manifested in his own fiction and his writing for and about theater as early as 1926, as he referenced much of that tradition in his first novel, *The Cabala*, dedicated to ‘my friends at the American Academy in Rome, 1920–1921’ (Wilder, 1926: front matter). In it, the narrator visits an enlightened, erudite but ‘unbelieving’ Cardinal in Rome—part of the ‘cabal’—and observes that ‘A pile of volumes lay on the table beside him: *Appearance and Reality* [by English philosopher F. H. Bradley], [*The Decline of the West* by Oswald] Spengler, *The Golden Bough*, *Ulysses*, Proust, Freud’ (Wilder, 1926: 185). Wilder spoke as a literary critic in his own voice in the preface to *Three Plays: Our Town, The Skin of Our Teeth, The Matchmaker* (1957) drawing distinctions between print and performance: ‘I believed every word of *Ulysses* and of Proust and of *The Magic Mountain*, as I did of hundreds of plays when I read them. It was on the stage that imaginative narration became false’ (Wilder, 1957a: viii). In the same preface, Wilder would celebrate theater’s immediacy with what is perhaps a nod to Molly Bloom: ‘Of all the arts the theater is best endowed to awaken this recollection within us—to believe is to say “yes”; but in the theaters of my time I did not feel myself prompted to any such grateful and self-forgetting acquiescence’ (Wilder, 1957a: viii).

One of the works with which Wilder attempted to redress what he deemed the falsity in contemporary theater was *The Skin of Our Teeth*, which premiered at the Shubert Theatre in New Haven on 15 October before moving to the Plymouth Theatre on Broadway

on 18 November 1942, the year after Joyce died and after the *Poetry* tribute appeared. The play takes its title from the Book of Job—‘My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth’ (*Holy Bible*, Book of Job: 19.20)—and the convention-breaking, myth-driven piece is laden with overt biblical imagery with a focus on the genesis of humankind. But the depth of Wilder’s commitment to Joyce’s work upset noted Joyce scholar Joseph Campbell and novelist Henry Morton Robinson, who detected other unacknowledged sources and saw Wilder’s play as at least heavily derived from, if not a wholesale but silent appropriation of *Finnegans Wake*. That is, by 1940, Wilder was already rewriting or adapting not only biblical but contemporary, avant-garde material from European authors for the Broadway stage in his attempt to counter the ‘imaginative narration [that] became false’ on stage (Wilder, 1957a: viii). In response to the play’s success and its nomination for the Pulitzer Prize for drama, Campbell and Robinson wrote the selection committee to make the group aware of their findings – to no effect, however, since the committee had already voted to award Wilder his third Pulitzer, his second for theater. Their letter to the Pulitzer committee followed up findings and accusations published in a high-profile essay, ‘The Skin of Whose Teeth? —The Strange Case of Mr. Wilder’s New Play and *Finnegans Wake*’ (Campbell and Robinson, 1942: 3–4), which appeared in the *Saturday Review* barely a month after the play’s Broadway opening. Their conclusions were based on their pioneering and very influential study, *A Skeleton Key to ‘Finnegans Wake’*, on which they were still at work and which would be published in 1944. Campbell would write his own short ‘Obituary Notice’ for Joyce for his university newspaper, *The Campus*, on 22 January 1941 (Campbell, 2003: xxi–ii, 293n4). Their research led them to conclude that ‘Mr. Wilder’s play, *The Skin of our Teeth*, was not entirely an original composition but an Americanized recreation, thinly disguised, of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*’ (Campbell, 2003: 257). Such a level of borrowings in Wilder’s play, they contended, went far beyond the bounds of what was professionally and ethically acceptable: ‘Important plot elements’, they continue, ‘characters, devices of presentation, as well as major themes and many of the speeches, are directly and frankly imitated, but with the flimsy veneer to lend an American touch to the original features’ (Campbell, 2003: 257). As they detail parallels between Joyce’s novel and Wilder’s play, they conclude again, ‘There are, in fact, no end of meticulous unacknowledged copyings’ (Campbell, 2003: 259).

Wolcott Gibbs, a champion of Wilder’s play, suggested yet another source for Wilder’s borrowings to, perhaps, offset Campbell and Robinson’s charges. In the December of 1942 issue of *The New Yorker*, he claimed that ‘The truth of the matter is that, instead of being partially borrowed from Mr. Joyce’s work, “The Skin of Our Teeth” was actually

taken almost in toto from an early novel of my own, called “Nabisco” (Roycroft Press, \$1)’ (Gibbs, 1942: 34). If that accusation sounds preposterous given the oddly named novel published by an inexistent press, it is, as Edmund Wilson points out in his reply to the Campbell and Robinson critique in *The Nation*, a reply that includes his own *Finnegans Wake* parody, which he thought to send on to Wilder as a joke and then, wisely, thought better of the idea (82). Wilson points out the ineptitude of the Gibbs parody of Campbell and Robinson since it is clear, to him at least, that Gibbs never got beyond the first page of Joyce’s final novel. As early as 1940, Wilder and Wilson thought to collaborate on their own ‘key’ to *Finnegans Wake* and proposed it to publisher Benjamin W. Huebsch, who had just turned down the Campbell and Robinson volume on the basis of ‘preliminary material’. Huebsch, who had published *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) in the United States, expressed interest in the Wilder–Wilson proposal (Niven, 20012: 546). The Campbell and Robinson essays in *Saturday Review* generated ‘A long, heated exchange of letters to the editor ... most of them defending Wilder. This brought more publicity for *The Skin of Our Teeth* but some unwelcome notoriety for Wilder, who, on his lawyer’s advice, declined public comment’ (Niven, 2012: 547; Wilder and Bryer, 2008: 412n91).

Wilder’s publishers HarperCollins have since leapt to the rescue to counter what amounts to charges of plagiarism with an online blog defending the American playwright and the play, which is popular in school curricula. Such a return to the issue tends, however, to do little more than keep the matter of plagiarism before the public:

Wilder’s own reputation was seriously damaged by Joseph Campbell and Henry Morton Robinson’s entirely unjust accusation that Wilder had plagiarized James Joyce’s difficult novel *Finnegans Wake*. Campbell and Robinson’s article was believed by some because Wilder declined to defend himself, very few reporters then or now were likely to read the enormously complicated *Wake*, and the play does borrow some of its ideas from Joyce. Although the distinguished critic Edmund Wilson refuted the charge by pointing out that playwrights have always borrowed from previous writers, and differences of tone and characterization between the two works are great, for a long time the unfair aspersion lingered in memory—Robinson repeated it in 1957 in connection with another Wilder success, *The Matchmaker* [a ‘reworking’ of *The Merchant of Yonkers*], which eventually was turned into the musical *Hello Dolly*. (HarperCollins, n.d.)

The comment above from the publisher’s study guide, a ‘Note to Teachers’, offers at best a tepid and perhaps misleading defense of their author to the effect that the scholarly detailed allegations from Campbell and Robinson are ‘believed by some



because Wilder declined to defend himself'. The cause and effect here is curious, as when *Saturday Review* asked Wilder for a response, he drafted one but ultimately did not send it. He did, however, send the fully drafted response to his sister, Isabel—who would select and edit her brother's letters for posthumous publication—on 17 December 1942, that is, in advance of the *Saturday Review* essay's appearance, and so it seems to have been designed to appear alongside the Campbell and Robinson essay. Wilder's instructions were as follows: 'Send this to the *Saturday Review*' (Wilder and Bryer, 2008: 412) and then added a request that she go to his study and verify a detail about Joyce's novel. He closed the letter, however, with final, curious instructions: 'After which erase this note' (Wilder and Bryer, 2008: 412). Whether Wilder meant to eliminate just his note to her or the entire letter of defense is rendered ambiguous by his closing, 'Love and giggles' (Wilder and Bryer, 2008: 412). In his 1983 biography, Gilbert Harrison summarizes Wilder's defense thus: 'In that unpublished statement he explains that in deciphering Joyce's novel the idea had come to him that one aspect of it might be expressed in drama', but he soon realized that 'any possibility of dramatization was "out of the question"' (Harrison 1983: 231; Wilder and Bryer, 2008: 413). Wilder would finally conclude: 'I can think of no novel in all of literature that is further removed from the theater than "Finnegans Wake"' — that is, Joyce's 'night-language', 'the thoughts of the mind while asleep', was unstageable (Wilder and Bryer, 2008: 413-4).

The defense attributed to the 'distinguished critic' Edmund Wilson 'that playwrights have always borrowed from previous writers' (HarperCollins, n.d.) seems more applicable to an Elizabethan stage than to the contemporary world of copyright, but the publisher distorts and misrepresents Wilson's 'defense' as well. Wilson, in fact, doesn't exactly 'refute' the claims of Campbell and Robinson; rather, he agrees with them and offers only a reservation about their tone: 'I did not approve of the tone of the article, but its principal contentions were true, and since they generally have been received with incredulity, I may as well produce my burlesque' (81). That parody may have been intended to deflect criticism of Wilder's efforts by suggesting that we all do parodies of Joyce. Wilson finally affirms the accusations, noting further that:

It is probably true, however—though what Wilder is trying to do is quite distinct from what Joyce is doing—that the state of saturation with Joyce in which the play was written has harmed it in certain ways: precisely, in distracting Wilder from his own ideas and effects; and that it suffers, as a serious work, from the comparison suggested with Joyce. (Wilson 1950: 83-4)

Wilson seems to suggest here that Wilder's play contains few of 'his own ideas and effects', and that is the issue central to any reassessment of Wilder's play and of his critical reputation.

Furthermore, Edward M. Burns and Joshua A. Gaylord, the editors of Wilder and Glasheen's published correspondence, also seem to miscast Wilson's critique:

At the time, Wilder did not defend himself or his play. Edmund Wilson, an early and enthusiastic reader of *Finnegans Wake*, did, however, in an essay. ... Wilson and Wilder had had long talks and had exchanged letters about Joyce. In a note to a reprint of his seminal essay, 'The Dream of H. C. Earwicker' [a review of Joyce's novel published in *The New Republic* on 28 June 1939], Wilson writes about Wilder, 'I have also had the advantage of discussions with Mr. Thornton Wilder, who has explored the book more thoroughly than anyone else I have heard of. It is to be hoped that Mr. Wilder will someday publish something about *Finnegans Wake*'. (Burns and Gaylord, 2001: xxiv)

Wilder would, of course, 'publish something' on *Finnegans Wake* but not the collaborative book he had proposed to Huebsch in 1940 (Niven, 2012: 546). On the other hand, perhaps *The Skin of Our Teeth* represents just such a 'something'. If Burns and Gaylord's comments represent their best defense of Wilder, it remains hardly more compelling than that offered by Wilder's publisher (for Wilder's more compelling and expanded defense, see Niven, 2012: 547-9).

In 1994, Sidney Feshbach, former president of the James Joyce Society (NY), offered his defense of Wilder in terms of modernist intertextuality:

Many other writers also figure in his work; he used them in quotation, in imitation, in echoes, in transformations, and in analogies, as did Joyce himself in all his work and as did T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* (which, when first published, some described as a pastiche, parodied, and then wondered where quotation and plagiarism left off) and Ezra Pound in the *Cantos*. (1994: 500)

Feshbach continues to stress Wilder's methods: that he 'constantly engaged in adaptation, reapplication, and transformation of others' work. Joyce is only one of many authors that he used (1994: 510).

Furthering the subject of 'borrowing', Christopher J. Wheatley argues that:



Wilder operates in a Humanist tradition that sees the relationship between new and prior works of art as collaborative. That is, a dialogue exists between works of art and their sources that shapes our understanding of both. Originality occurs as a reinterpretation of existing material, not as the creation of something without literary precedent. (2018: 4)

Feshbach seems to suggest further that Wilder himself is the best judge of such issues: 'When Wilder took what he did from *Finnegans Wake*, he would not have felt that he was doing anything wrong' (1994: 511). What Wilder 'felt' was ethically right or wrong, however, may not be the issue here, nor should we necessarily accept the judgments of authors about their own work. Feshbach further invokes the traditions of '*imitatio* and *emulatio*' (1994: 511), which would seem finally to be in accord with Campbell and Robinson who remain adamant on the issue of originality. Where they disagree most is on the issue of acknowledgement:

It is a strange performance that Mr. Wilder has turned in. Is he hoaxing us? On the one hand, he gives no credit to his source, masking it with an Olson and Johnson technique [American rubber chicken comedians of *Hellzapoppin* fame whom Wilder acknowledged as influences]. On the other hand, he makes no attempt to conceal his borrowings, emphasizing them, rather. (Campbell, 2003: 260)

Wilder's unsent defense addresses this issue in a curious and evasive manner as he offers to make direct reference to his sources under the following conditions: 'Should a group of men of letters represent to me that the dependence of my play on Joyce's novel is so close as to justify adding a note of acknowledgment to the theatre program, I would willingly accede to their opinion' (Wilder and Bryer, 2008: 414). Campbell and Robinson, and perhaps Wilson as well, evidently do not meet Wilder's qualification of 'a group of men of letters'.

Several weeks after their initial publication, Campbell and Robinson followed up their original findings that were based on the play in performance with further details based on their reading the published play. They tempered their judgment some by suggesting that Wilder may be toying with his readers: 'the appearance of the play in book form offers abundant evidence that Mr. Wilder not only vigorously adapted the play from *Finnegans Wake* to the Broadway temper, but also intended that someone, somewhere, someday should recognize his deed for what it is' (261). Their commitment to their accusations is reinforced, however, in that both pieces are reprinted in Campbell's *Mythic Worlds: Modern Words: On the Art of James Joyce*

(1993, 2003), and so the essays have become canonized, part of Campbell's official Joyce legacy which appear in his 'Collected Works'. Editor Edmund L. Epstein, a former student of William York Tindall at Columbia College, augmented the essays by adding 'An Editor's Afterword' in which he cites Wilder biographer Gilbert Harrison's overview of Wilder's unsent response to the *Saturday Review* articles and includes Wilder's notes for a 1948 British production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*, starring Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh (Campbell, 2003: 265-7).

Others, too, have continued the defense by citing additional sources on which Wilder drew. The Wilder Society web page follows up the publisher's 'Note to Teachers' with a critique by Ashley Gallagher:

Influenced by James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* and 'German expressionism, vaudeville, burlesque, and Wilder's own one-acts,' *Skin of Our Teeth* pays homage to those sources in its depiction of the Antrobus family. In his 'Preface' to *Three Plays*, Wilder goes further: '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 torch race than a furious dispute among heirs'. (Gallagher, n.d.)

Gallagher's Thornton Wilder Society-sanctioned summary of influence is not exactly what Wilder wrote, however: 'The play is *deeply indebted* to James Joyce *Finnegans Wake*' (Campbell, 2003: 267, emphasis added). Wilder finally admits that he is 'not an innovator', 'not one of the new dramatists':

The theater has lagged behind the other arts in finding the 'new ways' to express how men and women think and feel in our time. I am not one of the new dramatists we are looking for. I wish I were. I hope I have played a part in preparing the way for them. I am not an innovator but a rediscoverer of forgotten goods and I hope a remover of obtrusive bricabrac. (Wilder, 1957a: xiv)

*New York Times* theater critic Mel Gussow returns to most of these issues in his review of a 1988 New York revival of *Our Town*, as he references 'Wilder's response to James Joyce and "Finnegans Wake", the source of his play "The Skin of Our Teeth"' (1988: Section 2, page 7). Feshbach would merely dismiss Campbell and Robinson, or at least disparage their aggressive tone: 'They used such inflammatory innuendo that, without their actually using the term, "plagiarism" was obviously what they were referring to' (1994: 498). Campbell and Robinson did, in fact, use the term in their formal complaint to the Pulitzer Prize Committee when it awarded the Pulitzer to the drama: 'We protest ... against the conferring of literary honors on Major Wilder until he has cleared himself of charges of possible plagiarism' (Yale University Pulitzer Prize Newspaper Clippings

1943). And Feshbach admits that ‘Wilder had, indeed, alternated working on the play with reading the *Wake*—but their charge was absurd’ (1994: 498). Wilson, however, leans the other way: ‘The general indebtedness to Joyce in the conception and plan of the play is as plain as anything of the kind can be; it must have been conscious on Wilder’s part’ (83). It is thus surprising that as late as 2018, Wheatley asserts that ‘The charge against Wilder was fundamentally mistaken, as Edmund Wilson and others pointed out’ (2018: 4).

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Stuart Gilbert’s *James Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’* would appear in 1930 (revised in 1950), and Frank Budgen’s comprehensive *The Making of Ulysses* finally appeared in 1934, both works the product of their authors’ near-daily meetings with Joyce. In her ‘Notes and Acknowledgments’ to the *Third Census of ‘Finnegans Wake’*, Glasheen acknowledges that Joyce oversaw these studies and that they ‘contain information provided by Joyce himself’ (1977: xiv). (She cites Samuel Beckett among those Joyce coached as well.) Wilder will reference the complexity of the schema these authors detail at the opening of his James Joyce Society (NY) lecture, ‘Joyce and the Modern Novel’, in February 1954, and Wilder would defend the novel’s symbolic scaffolding and narrative intricacy. Such defense also returns us to the issue of literary borrowings that plagued Wilder’s career:

Joyce was hunting for a style that would reveal the extent to which every individual—you and I, the millions of people that walk this earth—is both sole and unique and also archetypal. To establish that each individual is archetypal, he had to draw on the human being he knew best: himself. So the book is likewise confession, and its confession is at a very deep and agonizing level. (Wilder, 1979: 172)

That is, in essence, Wilder lays out the underpinning of what would become *The Skin of Our Teeth*. In his review of Campbell and Robinson’s *Skeleton Key*, Wilson would take much the same universalist, mythical approach as Wilder, and Campbell and Robinson, for that matter, but Wilson criticizes Campbell and Robinson for avoiding the novel’s ‘real situation’ in ‘their simplification’:

The sleeper [of *Finnegans Wake*, i.e., HCE] who passes from fatigue to refreshment, from death to resurrection, is enacting a universal drama which is enacted every night by every man in the world; but every man is a particular man, and this man is a particular Dubliner, asleep on a certain night, in a room above a certain pub in the bosom of a certain family. The authors of *The Skeleton Key* have pretty much combed

the real family away in presenting their simplification of the myth. (Wilson, 1950: 187)

Such mythic and archetypal features, however, would run counter to an entrenched, prevailing realism—particularly on the eastern side of the Atlantic. By September 1928, a critical tone was established by Rebecca West in her essay, ‘The Strange Case of James Joyce’, published in *The Bookman*. In it she attacked non-conventional, experimental writing, and so Modernism itself, but her principal target was James Joyce. Her essay opens with an anecdote of buying a book of poems in Paris, James Joyce’s *Pomes Pennyeach*, from its original publisher, Shakespeare & Co. (West, 1928: 9). She focuses on the poem ‘Alone’ from this collection, which she quotes in full and concludes that it ‘may seem inconceivable that this poem should bring pleasure to any living creature ... this is plainly an exceedingly bad poem’, concluding that ‘Mr. James Joyce is a great man entirely without taste’ (West, 1928: 9). Writing in the journal of international Modernism, *transition*, no. 15, in February 1929, William Carlos Williams responded to West with a summary of and rejoinder to her essay point by point. ‘A Point for American Criticism’ offers a defense of Joyce and a critique of English criticism, which Williams finds pot-bound, but he also argues for a distinctly American approach and idiom to literary criticism. The essay might have been part of Williams’ essay collection *In the American Grain*, but its subject is not an American author. Its subject, however, is very much American receptivity to literary experiment and particularly to the work of James Joyce, then appearing in serial form in *transition*, a Parisian journal edited by two American expatriates, Eugene and Maria Jolas:

In summary: Rebecca West makes (is made by) a mold; English criticism, a product of English literature. She states her case for art. It is an excellent digest but for a world panorama inadequate. She fails to fit Joyce to it. She calls him, therefore, ‘strange’, not realizing his compulsions which are outside of her sphere. In support of this, she builds a case against him, using Freudian and other nonliterary weapons. She is clever, universal in her informational resorts. What is now left over — Joyce’s true significance — his pure literary virtue — is for her ‘nonsense’. Of literature and its modus showing that she knows nothing. America, offering an undeveloped but wider criticism, will take this opportunity to place an appreciation of Joyce on its proper basis. (Williams, 1929: 86)

Williams’ defense was reprinted in the 1929 essay collection published in anticipation of what would finally be titled *Finnegans Wake, Our Exagmination ‘Round His Factification for Incamination of ‘Work in Progress’*, and this counter-attack on West is notable,

additionally, for its appearance among other notable essays. The volume opens, for instance, with Samuel Beckett's essay detailing Joyce's sources and his extensive borrowings. Beckett lays them out in the title of his essay, developed under Joyce's careful guidance and thus with his approval. With its quirky but chronological punctuation, the title outlines and so celebrates Joyce's chief sources and their culmination in 'Joyce': 'Dante ... Bruno . Vico . . Joyce' (Beckett, 1929: 5–13).

West, in turn, would fold her thinking about Joyce's strangeness into a much longer, autobiographical essay on aesthetics. Called at first *A Hypothesis*, the essay is combined with other literary journalism into the book-length collection, *The Strange Necessity: Essays and Reviews*, the title essay—'Strange Necessity'—comprising over half the book's length (pp. 13–198). Her 1928 essay on Joyce's strangeness from *The Bookman* opens that lead essay, and as she moves from Joyce's bad poetry (sentimental in her estimate), she is taken by Molly's soliloquy, which she finds offers her some peace and which she will play against Ivan Pavlov's *Conditioned Reflexes*. The conjunction drives her thinking about why art—even bad art, as she claims Joyce's is—has such appeal, 'this mystery of mysteries' with its 'strange necessity' for the human species (West, 1987: 58).

Undeterred by accusations of plagiarism, Wilder would continue his methods of adaptation for the American theater. In 1948 he translated and, in the process, adapted Jean-Paul Sartre's play *Mort sans sépulture* [*Unburied Dead*, perhaps] as *The Victors*, which was produced in New York by the New Stages Company in 1948. Much of Wilder's work on that adaptation is available at the Morgan Library.<sup>2</sup> In 1955, Wilder would retranslate Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* for American director Alan Schneider, and it was Wilder's uncredited retranslation that was staged in Coral Gables, Florida in January 1956. Mel Gussow would observe that 'Perhaps part of Wilder's enthusiasm for "Godot" was a reflection of the dark undercurrents in "Our Town", an aspect of the play that has long been neglected' (1988, Section 2, p. 7). We might add further that Wilder's attraction to Beckett's play, which he saw in Paris and London, may reflect his earlier preoccupation with and adaptation of *Finnegans Wake*. That Wilder method is detailed in the 'Introduction' to *The Collected Translations and Adaptations of Thornton Wilder* by Ken Ludwig, who had adapted George Farquhar's *The Beaux' Strategem* with Wilder:

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<sup>2</sup> The Morgan Library in New York holds 'Several versions of Wilder's adaptation of Sartre's work: (1) carbon typescript on 83 leaves, with a few typed revisions, with envelope; (2) mimeographed typescript of 76 leaves, heavily marked up and revised in pencil and colored pencil on rectos and versos, perhaps by the stage manager or prop master, marked on first blank leaf: "Lamar Caselli c/o New Stages, 159 Bleeker St."; (3–4) two mimeograph copies of typescript, ca. 70 pages each, without revisions or markings' (see <https://www.themorgan.org/literary-historical/234557>).

Here is a man who knows the classics backwards and forwards. Nothing could have been more natural to him than to draw upon these giants of the past, stand on their shoulders and weave their ideas and techniques into the texture of his own writing in order to forge something new and original. (Wilder, 2001)<sup>3</sup>

Such an assessment, a statement of creative method, would include, of course, Wilder's work with or on Joyce and, perhaps, in 1955, on Samuel Beckett as well. At issue, however, is whether what Wilder produces is 'something new and original'.

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These figures—Thornton Wilder, Joseph Campbell and Edmund Wilson, along with William York Tindall, former president of the James Joyce Society (NY) and author of *James Joyce: His Way of Interpreting the World* (1950)—were pioneers, American voices for Joyce, critical and theoretical voices in an American grain, part of that 'wider criticism' and 'an appreciation of Joyce on its proper basis' that William Carlos Williams called for (Williams, 1929: 86). Three-time Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award winner Archibald MacLeish would call Wilder 'the most felicitous speaker on cultural subjects in America' (MacLeish cited in Leaf, 2009). These were principal players in the years of serious literary journalism during the nascent years of American Joyce studies before the field was institutionalized in American universities, beginning with Tindall's work at Columbia and the founding of the *James Joyce Quarterly* (JJQ) in 1963 at the University of Tulsa by Thomas F. Staley, who was the journal's editor for its first 25 years. During those years, the University of Tulsa would gather a coterie of Joyce scholars around the JJQ as the field of study and student interest burgeoned into what is not infrequently called the 'Joyce industry'. The *Finnegans Wake Society* and *The James Joyce Society* had been functioning through New York's Gotham Book Mart since 1947, with Padriac Colum as its President and T. S. Eliot as its first member. The society has had a strong public, that is, outreach function, particularly in the New York City area. Wilder was a regular at these meetings, and his 1954 lecture to the group, 'James Joyce and the Modern Novel', was taped, adapted, and published in *A James Joyce Miscellany* (Wilder, 1957b: 167–71; reprinted in Wilder, 1979: 172–80). Its conclusion might be deemed

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<sup>3</sup> See also the announcement for the 2020 Thornton Wilder Prize for Translation: 'Though Wilder's dramatic reputation soared with the premiere of *Our Town* (1937), his first Broadway shows were translations: André Obey's *Lucrece* (1932) and *A Doll's House* (1937) by Henrik Ibsen. He also translated Jean Paul Sartre's *The Victors* [*Mort sans sépulture*] from French at Sartre's personal request, and *The Bride of Torosko* by Otto Indig from German for producer Gilbert Miller. *The Victors* was produced off-Broadway in 1948 at The New Stages Theatre in the West Village, directed by Mary Hunter Wolf. Wilder's translation of *The Bride* has never been produced in the United States' (see <https://www.thorntonwilder.com/blog/2020/8/21/the-2020-thornton-wilder-prize-for-translation#:~:text=In%20May%202020%2C%20the%20American,the%20works%20of%20Milan%20Kundera>).



an indirect riposte to the Rebecca Wests of the literary world: 'The terrible thing is to live in our twentieth century with a nineteenth century mentality' (Wilder, 1979: 180). Williams' language is more pointed, if not harsh, but like Wilder his focus is on entrenched resistance to the new: 'Here Joyce has so far outstripped the criticism of Rebecca West that she seems a pervert. Here is his affinity for slang. Even if he has to lay waste the whole English structure. It is *that* the older critics smell and — they are afraid' (85).

Despite what may be appropriation, or an 'homage' of indebtedness—said 'homage' usually more credible when acknowledged as such—the work is what Sidney Feshbach admits is 'deeply indebted'. Wilder's curious implication that *Finnegans Wake* may have been forgotten goods by the time of Joyce's death notwithstanding, he was a decidedly astute reader and critic of Joyce's work, which his 1941 eulogy punctuates. Wilder's focus on Joyce's 'realistic depiction of consciousness' may be old news to us now, but his extended analysis still rings true as Joyce 'explores three souls, Stephen Dedalus and the Blooms, one failure and two great triumphs' (Wilder, 1941: 371). Of Dedalus's failure, Wilder asks, 'how can unreconciled love and hate make a self-portrait?' The answer for Wilder lies not only in Stephen's sentimentality but in his ability to mock himself. In contrast, Wilder cites the Blooms:

The miracle of the book is Leopold Bloom, Joyce's anti-self, *l'homme moyen sensual*, and his wife Marion—transcendent confirmations of the method itself. If we could surprise the interior monologue of any person—it seems to affirm—we would be obliged to expand the famous aphorism: to understand that much is not only to forgive that much; it is to extend to another person that suspension of objective judgment which we accord to ourselves. (Wilder, 1979: 169)

*Ulysses* as a whole is, in Wilder's estimation, 'a homage to the life force itself in the play of consciousness relegating all questions of approval and disapproval' (Wilder, 1979: 169).

For Wilder, moreover, Joyce has mastered the 'long book', where Proust, among others, has failed—that is, like Cervantes, 'he found in the dimensions of the long book, his form and his theme' (Wilder, 1979: 168). Wilder attributes that success to

curious architectural devices and the comic spirit ... [enhanced by] complicated schematization: each chapter marked by one color; each chapter representing an organ in the human body; each under the sign of a theological virtue and its allied

vice; each bearing a relation—partly as parody, partly for emotion—to a corresponding book of the *Odyssey*. (Wilder, 1979: 169)

West, on the other hand, castigates such correspondence as one of ‘two colossal fingerprints left by literary incompetence on “Ulysses” which show that a pedantic accuracy about the letter and an insensitivity about the spirit can lead him wildly astray even while he is still loyal to the classicism’. Finally, she asks, ‘what the devil is the purpose that is served by these analogies’ (West, 1928: 28).

For Wilder, the lingering issues of his creative practices, the ethics of his intertextual borrowings or his strategies of translation and adaptation have overshadowed his Joyce studies as they continue to be addressed on his publisher’s and the Wilder Society’s web pages: what the publisher calls ‘the contentiousness of the play’s historical context, political, theatrical, and literary’. Assessing an international Wilder conference at the College of New Jersey in 2008 for *The Magazine of the National Endowment for the Humanities*, Jonathan Leaf offers the following assessment on the issue of Wilder and Joyce:

The principal false charge against Wilder—which he faced repeatedly during his career—was of plagiarism. An influential essay cowritten by the Jung scholar Joseph Campbell [and Henry Morton Robinson] on the delightful comedy *The Skin of Our Teeth* succeeded in convincing many that the play was a rip-off of Joyce’s high-falutin’, lengthy, and mostly inscrutable final work, *Finnegan’s Wake* [sic]. Among those who affirmed this idea was critic Edmund Wilson, and the notion can be encountered still in essays on the modern theater. Yet, as Wilder himself said, there is almost nothing to it. Wilder freely acknowledged that from Joyce he ‘received the idea of presenting ancient man as an ever-present double to modern man’. But the episodes and characters in the play are not taken from Joyce. (2009)

Paula Vogel’s 2009 foreword to *The Skin of Our Teeth* takes on the issue yet again and so permanently binds it to the text of the play:

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.

Like most defenders of Wilder, Leaf drags out his version of the ‘everybody does it’ defense. Like those defenders, as well, his rhetorical strategies are analogy and

the rhetorical question, which are the defenses of last resort, as every politician knows: ‘Would it make sense to accuse Tom Stoppard of plagiarism in writing *Arcadia*, the outline of whose plot was, by his admission, suggested by an A. S. Byatt novel?’ (Leaf, 2009). The keys, of course, are ‘suggested by’ and ‘by his admission’, as Wilder continually engaged with *Finnegans Wake* throughout the writing of *The Skin of Our Teeth* but what admissions were made were grudging and belated. And so Wilder seems permanently, inescapably bound, rightly or wrongly, fairly or unfairly, to James Joyce for all the wrong reasons since it puts the American author’s originality and critical acumen indisputably in dispute. Rather than adjudicate this issue that will not die and attempt to render a summary judgement on its persistent contentiousness, on the ethics of such fairly common practice, particularly in commercial theater, we might suspend the ethical debate and focus on qualitative production: Wilder as critic and early champion of Joyce and Wilder as playwright and professional theatrical entrepreneur, as the editors of *Thornton Wilder in Collaboration* outline in their introduction:

The book’s authors use the term ‘collaboration’ in its broadest sense, at times in response to Wilder’s critics who faulted him for ‘borrowing’ from other, earlier, literary works rather than recognizing these ‘borrowings’ as central to the artistic process of collaboration. (Bryer, Hallet, and Oczkowicz, 2018: viii)

Reviewing the essay collection, Scott Proudfit picks up the thread of the centrality of creative borrowing and uses that thread to challenge the

concept of the modern writer as singular, independent and the sole determiner of text’s meaning. This collection [of Wilder essays under review] reclaims Wilder as a theatrical writer, essentially collaborative in his process, whether he is writing the play *The Skin of Our Teeth*, the film *Shadow of Doubt* [for Hitchcock], or the novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* [based on newspaper accounts]. This adjustment of our concept of Wilder reminds readers that the ‘myth of the author’, as Foucault would have it, is never more obvious than when it [that is, authorship, not myth] is unsuccessfully applied to the communal work of those who primarily make their living in the theater. (2019: 242)

Reviewing the 1955 revival of *The Skin of Our Teeth*, directed by Alan Schneider the year before Schneider would collaborate with Wilder on a full rewrite of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (see Hallquist, 2021: 47–67), the venerable Harold Clurman alludes to the lingering issues of Wilder’s borrowings and hence foregrounds accusations of, at least, *unoriginality*:



**Figure 1:** *The Skin of Our Teeth*, Vivian Beaumont Theater, New York, 25 April – 29 May 2022, directed by Lileana Blain-Cruz, with additional cultural updates by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins (Publicity photo by Julieta Cervantes).

Though Wilder when we look closer has a mark of his own, his work strikes one as that of an ‘arranger’ rather than a creator. His arrangements are artful, attractive, scrupulously calculated, and unmistakably gifted. They are delightfully decorative patterns created from the raw material dug up by other men [that is, Joyce in this case]. To put it another way, he arranges ‘flowers’ beautifully, but he does not grow them. In this sense he resembles certain modern Frenchmen rather than one of our own playwrights. (Clurman, 1955: 210)

Clurman’s metaphor of the flower arranger seems to echo one example from Campbell and Robinson’s charges of Joyce being recast in *The Skin of Our Teeth*, the difference between the inventor of the wheel and the subsequent adapter who adds it to a chair: the former is Joyce, the latter Wilder (Campbell, 2003: 265). By the time of the lavish, visually stunning revival of the play at the Vivian Beaumont Theater in New York in 2022 (**Figure 1**), Joyce is forgotten, the textual issues replaced with an emphasis on the flower arrangements and contemporary social issues of climate change and continuing American racial struggles. The production, directed by Lileana Blain-Cruz, featured an

African-American cast and additional cultural updates by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins; it would receive six Tony nominations, including one for best direction, but earned a win only for costume design.

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Rather than try fully to uncouple these two authors, or to attempt to adjudicate the plagiary accusations, we might invoke Wilder's assessment of 'Mrs. Marion Bloom', sobriquet Molly—there is a spirit, an energy, a life spark in Wilder's passion for and insights into Joyce that deserve further reflection if not celebration, as this article attempts. Our appeal is to recalibrate and retheorize the work on a major American intellectual, an astute and dogged literary critic, especially of Joyce, and to think in terms of a professional dramatist who understood that theater, at least, is always and inevitably a collaborative art form. The long shadow cast by Campbell and Robinson, interesting, insightful and scandalous at the time, is more questionable in a contemporary critical climate for the theoretical assumptions that it exposes. It has occluded a clear assessment of Wilder's contribution as an American playwright and more so as a scholar of 20<sup>th</sup>-century European experimental art. Campbell and Robinson's flawed assumption is that such interface, such intertext is linear rather than reciprocal. They focus on what Wilder does to or takes from Joyce and all but ignore what Wilder does for or adds to Joyce. Such a one-way theory of the intertext has resulted in considerable neglect of Wilder's creative and critical accomplishments. On the other hand, they do admit of the 'great letter' of *Finnegans Wake* and *The Skin of Our Teeth* that 'Mr. Wilder's description of this letter is the most sensitive, most complete, most convincing interpretation yet to appear of this great Joycean theme' (Campbell, 2003: 263). Admitting the industry of his detractors in his unsent defense, Wilder addresses but quickly dismisses this issue of 'supposed' parallel use of 'the great letter' in play and novel, the one recovered in a dung heap by 'Maggie Earwicker' (Anna Livia), the other that 'Maggie Antrobus' 'throws into the sea over the heads of the audience' (Wilder and Bryer, 2008: 414). More damning, perhaps, because it seems a straightforward appropriation, 'The writers of the article in the Review', as Wilder addresses his detractors, argue of the unexplained shift of locale in Act II of Wilder's play that 'Wilder simply transplants Joyce's Irish tavern bacchanal to an Atlantic City Convention' (Campbell, 2003: 263).

Janet Dunleavy's reassessment of the early years of Joyce criticism, *Re-viewing Joyce Criticism*, may also contribute to the Wilder neglect as it pays scant attention to Wilder's pioneering criticism (nor much to Edmund Wilson's, for that matter, except slight mentions of his *Axel's Castle* of 1931 (8–9) and his review of Campbell and Robinson (36) [he is misplaced in the index as well]). While Adaline Glasheen's *Census*



of *Finnegans Wake* (1956) and *Third Census of 'Finnegans Wake'* (1977) are featured in a chapter by Bonnie Kime Scott (46–59),<sup>4</sup> the Wilder connections are perfunctory, although Scott acknowledges Glasheen's embrace of him as one of the 'donors' she lists in a 1959 'appendage' to the first *Census*. This is, however, relegated to a footnote (57–8n3, such notes not indexed), and she cites Wilder's comment that Glasheen 'is a lady who sits and thinks' (47). Scott's assessment underplays Glasheen's own 'Acknowledgment to the First Census', in which she writes:

When my list was inchoate and contained no identifications, I had it mimeographed and sent it to a few Joyceans. One of these was Mr. Thornton Wilder, who treated it with heavenly kindness and generosity. He gave me many valuable identifications and wrote me at length about *Finnegans Wake* [see Burns and Gaylord, 2001]. I am especially indebted to him for interesting me in the four fascinating old men [the 'Mamalujo episode', see also *Third Census*, 97].<sup>5</sup> Most of all he encouraged me to expand the *Census* and add as many identifications as I could. (rpt. in 1977: xx)

Dunleavy's 1991 critical retrospective may be one measure of Wilder's erasure from contemporary Joyce discourse, and thereby his demotion in the pantheon of American letters and intellectual life, all of which may have resulted from the persistent *Finnegans Wake* controversy. We should, on the other hand, take up the challenge implicit in Campbell and Robinson's critiques of a hidden or disguised referentiality, that, as they admit, Wilder 'makes no attempt to conceal his borrowings, emphasizing them rather, sometimes even stressing details which with a minimum of ingenuity he could have suppressed or altered', or again that 'Mr. Wilder goes out of his way to wink at the knowing one or two in the audience, by quoting from and actually naming some of his characters after the main figures in Joyce's masterpiece'. In the more textually detailed Part II of their critique, they return to alleging such a knowing wink: 'Mr. Wilder is giving the wink of the fraternity to any Finnegan fan who may chance to be in the theater' (Campbell and Robinson, 2003: 260, 257, 264). Campbell and Robinson go on to suggest that Wilder's play is something of a theatrical collage or palimpsest which they finally condemn as uncreative. More contemporary critics, on the other hand, might deem such a strategy postmodern, late modernist or even post-dramatic, in what critic Lincoln Konkle calls 'a cornucopia of quotations', but

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<sup>4</sup> Glasheen credits 'Mr. Wilder of Connecticut' in the 'Note to the *Second Census*' (1963), reprinted in the *Third* (1977: xxii).

<sup>5</sup> 'As far as I know, Joyce was the first artist to set senility down at length. Listening to an educated man, dying of hardening of the arteries, I realized that he spoke in the manner and matter and very rhythm of the Four. Joyce does not prettify his senescent Four—they are boring, repulsive, sinister—but he does leaven them. A crazy beauty hangs about the honeymoon section ...' (Glasheen, 1977: 97).



in Wilder the cornucopia is not exclusively from Joyce (2018: 20). Critics like Konkle may justify something of contemporary creative process in Wilder, the gesture an attempt at redemption or recuperation, but none addresses the interface with Joyce and *Finnegans Wake* to the extent that Campbell and Robinson outline, especially after the republication of those essays in 2003 (Campbell, 2003). That would take a most unusual scholar, one who had invested as deeply in Joyce's final novel as Wilder himself had.

Something of a recalibration may have begun in 2001, however, with the publication of *A Tour of the Darkling Plain* (Burns and Gaylord, 2001), followed in 2008 by the *Selected Letters of Thornton Wilder*, which included the entirety of Wilder's unsent defense (Wilder and Bryer, 2008: 413–15). By fully acknowledging and accepting Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* as an intertext, we simultaneously validate Campbell and Robinson's initial assessment and open the possibilities of re-viewing Wilder's commitment to Joyce as both scholar and something of a collaborator. Such a theoretical shift would allow the critical community to advance to the point where it can raise seminal theoretical questions about how the—let us call it collaboration—affords accessibility to and opens possibilities of approaching *Finnegans Wake*, as Wilder might be seen as offering something of a thematic catalogue to Joyce's novel in parallel with the 'theme keys' he detailed in his Joyce journals, creating something like a 'Joyce in the American Grain'. The Yale University Wilder archive offers the following description of Wilder's work on Joyce:

In the case of Joyce's *FINNEGANS WAKE*, Wilder's always extensive notetaking on his reading evolved into an extensive personal study of the novel, culminating in not one but two sizeable 'theme keys' assembled in the course of his frequent returns to Joyce's text. These keys are located in folders 3039–3049, and are accompanied by Wilder's heavily annotated copy of the 1939 edition of the work.

Such recalibration as we are suggesting would help reposition Wilder's contributions not only as a playwright but as a pioneering critic and crusading intellectual, a European-focused writer wholly in the American grain, an avant-garde champion like his compatriot and potential collaborator, Edmund Wilson, one who could recognize, invoke, and finally engage simultaneously with the European avant-garde and the American theatrical and critical traditions.

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