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THE NOVELS OF THORNTON WILDER

by

Mary Ellen Williams

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I hereby recommend that this dissertation prepared under my direction by Mary Ellen Williams, entitled The Novels of Thornton Wilder, be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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SIGNED: Mary Ellen Williams
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ABSTRACT

The major unifying factor in the novels of Thornton Wilder is the philosophy of time which he presents in them. As do many of his contemporaries, he finds linear, historical time, with its precisely measured and fixed segments, inadequate and unrealistic. He proposes, instead, the reality of an eternal time in which all moments in human time are coexistent. This concept has determined both the techniques and the thematic emphases of his novels. He constantly places his characters in relationship to eternal time and cosmic space.

In the development of this concept, he adopts a cyclical theory of time. He relates the cycles in the life of man to the cycles of the universe. He demonstrates that the repetitions within the cycles give continued existence to that which is repeated. Therefore, Wilder's repetitions of character types, of situations, of life patterns throughout his novels are both a consequence of, and a means of developing, his philosophy of time. Wilder accepts the premise that all moments in human time are both beginnings and endings of cycles and uses this premise to refute the absolute authority of linear, historical time. He emphasizes this idea by consistently employing circular
structures for the novels. Wilder's contention that the significance of characters and events does not depend upon their relationship to a fixed moment in linear, historical time is developed also through the fragmented, spatial form of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, *The Ides of March*, and *The Eighth Day*. The same contention determines the deliberate anachronisms in some of the novels. In placing his characters against an eternal backdrop, Wilder also draws upon the scientific knowledge which caused his own re-evaluation of the linear, historical time concept. Paradoxically, he uses this knowledge both to remind man of the vast expanses of time and space which surround him and to identify man as a significant part of that vastness. To further emphasize the eternity of his characters, Wilder identifies certain of them with mythic or legendary figures. He also creates mythic atmospheres in his own novels, through his emphasis on the timeless in human existence.

The major themes in Wilder's novels directly result from his philosophy of time. His continued concern with the theme of destiny versus chance is a reflection of his desire always to place the apparently accidental events of man's life in the phenomenal world of time within the ordered universe of supraphenomenal time. The prominence of the love theme is a consequence of Wilder's belief that all kinds of human love are a reflection of the eternal
love which is an ordering force in a timeless universe. The conflicts which envelop his characters result from their inability to perceive the eternality which exists outside of but informs their existence or from their momentarily losing sight of that eternality. The resolution to these conflicts is almost invariably a mystical one, a resolution which emphasizes that a supraphenomenal time and reality exist, even though man can be assured of their existence only through brief, intuited glimpses.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this analysis is to investigate the treatment of time in Thornton Wilder's novels. Study of Wilder's work reveals that a primary purpose of his art is to transcend linear, historical time—more than that, to deny the validity of that concept. Consequently in his novels he posits the reality of an eternal time in which all human times are coexistent. In the development of this idea, he employs the concept of human time as cyclical, which in its eternal recurrence and repetition conveys a sense of timelessness and eternal existence. By demonstrating that moments in time are simultaneously both beginnings and endings of cycles, Wilder asserts the presence of all times in one time.

Wilder's preoccupation with time is part of the general modern literary exploration of different attitudes toward time. One of the major directions taken has been influenced by Henri Bergson's concept of durée, which proposes as real time a qualitative, internal time which cannot be measured quantitatively.1 Bergson's influence

on the modern novelist resulted, according to Dorothy Richardson, from his "putting into words something then dawning within the human consciousness: an increased sense of the inadequacy of the clock as a time-measurer."\(^2\)

Bergson's concept of time, reinforced by Einstein's theory of relativity, became so prevalent in Western thought and literature that Wyndham Lewis felt compelled to write a rather lengthy attack upon the whole "time school," as he called it.\(^3\)

The other major direction is that which Wilder has taken—an adoption of external time systems which emphasize eternal, transcendent reality. Modern cyclical conceptions of time, such as Wilder has developed, are, in fact, reassertions of time concepts of archaic man. Archaic man's cyclical concepts derive from observation of the lunar phases. Mircea Eliade explains that the predominant aspect of all archaic man's cosmic-mythological lunar conceptions is

the cyclical recurrence of what has been before, in a word, eternal return. Here we . . . find the motif of the repetition of an archetypal gesture, projected upon all planes—cosmic, biological, historical, human. But we also discover the cyclical structure of time, which is regenerated at each new


\(^3\) Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man* (London, 1927).
"birth" on whatever plane. This eternal return reveals an ontology uncontaminated by time and becoming. . . . [The] primitive, by conferring a cyclic direction upon time, annuls its irreversibility. Everything begins over again at its commencement every instant. The past is but a prefiguration of the future. No event is irreversible and no transformation is final.4

The repetition, then, both defines the reality of events—as imitations of an archetype—and suspends time. Eliade thus sees the modern re-emergence of the cyclical conceptions—in political economy, in philosophy, in history, in literature—as evidence of "a revolt against historical time, an attempt to restore this historical time, freighted as it is with human experience, to a place in the time that is cosmic, cyclical, and infinite."5 Certainly, this assessment can be applied to Wilder's own adoption of a cyclical theory which corresponds very closely to the archaic conception described by Eliade.

Wilder does not appear to be indebted to a particular theory of cyclical time and history, as James Joyce is to Giambattista Vico's cyclical theory of history. Wilder does allude to Oswald Spengler's cyclical theory of history in The Cabala by including his name in the list of the Cardinal's reading matter, but he includes in the same list


5. Ibid., p. 153.
Proust, Freud, Ulysses, The Golden Bough, and F. H. Bradley's Appearance and Reality. What is more significant about this list than the fact that Spengler's name occurs in it is that in various ways all these writers and works have affected the time sense of the twentieth century.6

That this list appears in his first novel is a significant early indication that Wilder himself was involved in a re-evaluation of his ideas of time and history. It is generally accepted that much of the modern re-evaluation of history and time resulted from the nineteenth-century discoveries in archaeology, geology, anthropology, and biology which began to reveal the tremendous age of the universe, the earth, and the human species itself. These discoveries emphasized the great weight of historical time under which man exists. It is certain that Wilder's own re-evaluation resulted from his association with one of these sciences—his participation in archaeological diggings from 1920 to 1921 while he was studying at the American Academy in Rome. It was an experience which made an indelible impression upon him. In 1957, he told Michael Goldstone: "Once you have swung a pickax that will

6. Commenting on Wilder's allusion in The Cabala to different layers of time, Helmut Papajewski remarks that the listing of these works and authors points to Wilder's acceptance of the idea that modern and archaic layers of time can correspond to each other in Strukturzyklen, in Thornton Wilder (Frankfurt am Main, 1961), p. 17.
reveal the curve of a street four thousand years covered
over which was once an active, much-traveled highway, you
are never quite the same again."

In an elaboration of
this idea, Wilder has frequently written of the awareness
which science in general has given him and most modern men
"that millions and billions have lived and died, and that
probably billions and billions . . . will live and die." Significantly, too, in his novels which have a twentieth-
century setting--The Cabala, Heaven's My Destination, and
The Eighth Day--Wilder frequently alludes to these sciences
and, paradoxically, employs his knowledge of these very
sciences which have given many modern men an oppressive
time consciousness to aid him in emphasizing the relation­
ship of a particular time and place to universal time and
space.

7. Malcolm Cowley, ed., Writers at Work: The
"Paris Review" Interviews, intro. Malcolm Cowley (New York,
1958), p. 113. Isabel Wilder, in a commemorative piece
written for the Thornton Wilder Issue of Four Quarters,
cites a slight variation of this statement as one of the
six sentences she has heard her brother repeatedly use
almost "like a prescription." See Isabel Wilder,

8. Thornton Wilder, "Joyce and the Modern Novel,
A James Joyce Miscellany, ed. Marvin Magalaner (New York,
1957), p. 14. For other similar statements by Wilder, see
also such diverse sources as Wilder's 1951 Harvard Com­
mencement Address, "Fraternity of Man," Time, July 2, 1951,
p. 61, and a paper presented at the Goethe Bicentennial
Convocation in 1949, "World Literature and the Modern
Mind," Goethe and the Modern Age, ed. Arnold Bergstraesser
Although there will be no attempt made here to prove direct literary influences on Wilder's concept of time, it is significant that those modern authors to whom he acknowledges general indebtedness or in whom he has expressed great interest are ones who have explored new attitudes toward time. For example, in a discussion of the problem of "belief" in literature, Wilder wrote that he "believed every word of Ulysses and of Proust and of The Magic Mountain ... when [he] read them."\(^9\) In several commentaries and most significantly perhaps in his heavy borrowing from Finnegans Wake for The Skin of Our Teeth, he has revealed his great interest in Joyce, particularly. He has also said that he was "deeply indebted to Ezra Pound and Mr. Eliot."\(^{10}\) He has praised the work of T. S. Eliot, Joyce's Finnegans Wake, and Pound's Cantos because each contains a juxtaposition of material drawn from all time and all cultures and thus each reveals an awareness (produced, Wilder says, by a century and a half of scientific activity) that "no description of mankind is adequate which does not find its proportionate place within a realization of all the diversity of life on the entire planet.


\(^{10}\) Cowley, ed., Writers at Work, p. 115.
over a vast extent of time."\textsuperscript{11} Wilder's indebtedness to Gertrude Stein is discussed in some detail in Chapters VI and VII of this study.

The growing number of critical works on the subject of time in literature attests to the increasing awareness that an understanding of how the literary artist treats time is essential to an understanding of his work as a whole. One of the major evaluations of time in literature, which is based on this awareness, is Georges Poulet's \textit{Studies in Human Time}, in which he explores time concepts in French literature from Montaigne to Proust and in American literature from Emerson to Eliot.\textsuperscript{12} A. A. Mendilow's \textit{Time and the Novel} (London, 1952) and Hans Meyerhoff's \textit{Time in Literature} (Berkeley, 1955) are influential general time studies to which this analysis of Wilder's work is indebted. The influence of Bergson's time theory on modern literature has been explored in Shiv Kumar Kumar's \textit{Bergson and the Stream of Consciousness Novel} (New York, 1962) and Margaret Church's \textit{Time and Reality: Studies in Contemporary Fiction} (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1963). Two important recent studies are Daniel D. Pearlman's \textit{The Barb of Time: On the Unity of Ezra Pound's "Cantos"} (New York, 1969), which proposes that


the time theme—which is developed through the opposition of cyclical and linear time—is the unifying theme in the Cantos, and John F. Lynen's The Design of the Present: Essays on Time and Form in American Literature (New Haven, 1969), which maintains that Puritan doctrine formed the cultural background for the American writer's assumption that the only ultimately relevant points of view from which experience is to be viewed are the present and eternity. Joseph Frank has proposed that a new concept of form in literary art has developed in the twentieth century as a result of the time consciousness of modern literary artists.\(^{13}\) \(^{13}\) Frank's theory of spatial form serves as a basis for the analysis of the form of The Ides of March in Chapter VI of this study and is discussed in detail in that chapter.

Although critics who have made extended analyses of Wilder's novels have briefly mentioned various aspects of Wilder's treatment of time, none have recognized that his concept of time is basic to a complete understanding of both the form and the content of the novels. Rex Burbank, for example, criticizes the "fantasy" elements in The Cabala and considers the structure of The Bridge of San Luis Rey weak because it does not allow a single,

progressively developed narrative line,\textsuperscript{14} when in fact these elements and this structure are means that Wilder uses to present his time philosophy. Joseph Firebaugh makes a similar, but more general, comment that Wilder's most serious technical fault is "a lack of narrative movement," since his novels begin and end at the same point.\textsuperscript{15} Malcolm Goldstein, who writes that "the concept of eternity as all-important to the activities of man" is Wilder's major literary theme,\textsuperscript{16} fails to examine the techniques whereby Wilder presents the concept of an eternal time. Helmut Papajewski has most consistently noted Wilder's methods of treating time, but his comments are very brief and form only a small part of his general analysis of the novels.

This study is intended to demonstrate that Wilder's philosophy of time is indeed the central unifying factor in his otherwise widely diverse novels. Malcolm Cowley has called Wilder "the man who abolished time" and has written that his early novels all "embody or suggest the same feeling of universally shared experience and eternal return.

\textsuperscript{14} Rex Burbank, \textit{Thornton Wilder} (New York, 1961).


Everything that happened might happen anywhere, and will happen again. The analyses in the following chapters investigate the means by which Wilder has indeed abolished the concept of linear, historical time in all his novels: through the use of circular structures, through fragmented narratives, through repetition of character types and situations, through deliberate anachronisms, through the use of myth, through the emphasis on mystical resolutions. Each chapter is divided into a treatment of the particular techniques used in each novel to present Wilder's concept of time and a treatment of themes arising out of his philosophy of time. Most prominent among the latter is the love theme. Its prominence is a result of Wilder's belief that love in any form is the primary revelation of an eternal reality and, hence, of an eternal time. The prevalence of the destiny versus chance theme arises from Wilder's attempts always to place the apparently accidental existence of man's earthly time against a broader, ordered eternal time. The novels are dealt with chronologically. The chronological treatment reveals that there is no essential change in Wilder's concept of time from his earliest novel to his latest. It does reveal, however, that he progresses from somewhat indirect and tentative expressions

of it to more direct and more definite expressions. His very explicit statements in The Eighth Day are a decided plea for a recognition of a philosophy of time which most of his readers have rather obtusely overlooked.
CHAPTER II

THE CABALA

Thornton Wilder's first novel, The Cabala, may be accurately viewed as an artistic response to his archaeological experience. This experience was certainly prominent in his mind at the time he wrote The Cabala, which was published in 1926, only five years after he returned from Rome. There are frequent references in the novel to archaeology. James Blair, the narrator's American friend, has been an archaeological adviser to a motion picture company. The Cardinal is a member of the Papal Archaeological Society. And a famous Danish archaeologist brings news of Blair to the narrator. Moreover, the novel is dedicated to Wilder's "friends at the American Academy in Rome, 1920-1921." The Cabala very definitely reveals the attitude toward time and history which grew out of this experience.

In The Cabala Wilder asks the reader to consider that a group of highly influential, somewhat eccentric, twentieth-century Romans are in fact re-embodiments of the ancient Roman gods. This possible connection between the group (the Cabala of the title) and the gods is overtly suggested to the narrator only in the last book of the
novel by one of the group, Miss Elizabeth Grier, after he has asked her to explain to him "what you all meant, how you found one another, and what made you so different from anyone else."¹ She does not insist that he believe her and refuses to tell him whether what she suggests is "true, or an allegory, or just nonsense" (p. 219). The reader is put in the same position as the narrator of the novel. Wilder does not insist upon the acceptance of the suggestion. He assigns no equivalences between members of the group and specific gods, except that Miss Grier tells the narrator that she believes he is the new god Mercury. Wilder does strongly imply another equivalence—-that the Cardinal is Jupiter—through the narrator's surprised comment to Miss Grier: "I asked about the Cardinal and you have gone back to Jupiter" (p. 219).

This linking of the modern Romans with the ancient gods is not simply the highly romanticized fantasy of a young writer, somewhat out of place in a decade during which American fiction was chiefly realistic and naturalistic. Instead, it is a method of presenting Wilder's time concept. By clearly implying that these modern Romans are indeed reincarnations of the ancient gods and that the gods will continue to reappear in other mortal forms once these

¹. Thornton Wilder, The Cabala (New York, 1926), p. 218. Future page references to the novel will be placed in parentheses in the text.
particular embodiments "give in" and "go over," Wilder asserts the simultaneity of all time. The gods become symbolic in The Cabala of a timeless, supraphenomenal reality. They are changeless, and their continual reincarnations are symbolic of the eternal return of the same. In order to affirm the existence of all time in one time, and hence, timelessness, Wilder very carefully creates in The Cabala the effect of many levels of time coexisting.

In The Cabala, then, time is a continuum without distinctions between past and present. History, here, is ahistorical. Joseph Frank remarks on the same conceptions of time and history in other modern writers and, in an evaluation which is equally suited to Wilder's work, describes the result of these conceptions as "the transformation of the historical imagination into myth—an imagination for which historical time does not exist, and which sees the actions and events of a particular time only as the bodying forth of eternal prototypes." This attitude toward history and time has led Pound, Joyce, and Eliot to identify "modern figures and events with various historical or mythological prototypes" and thus to juxtapose "aspects of the past and present so that both are fused in one comprehensive view." According to Hans

2. Frank, p. 60.
3. Ibid., pp. 58-59.
Meyerhoff, the motivation for the use of myths is "to suggest, within a secular setting, a timeless perspective of looking upon the human situation; and to convey a sense of continuity and identification with mankind in general. . . . [The myth] is timeless in that it is ever present, a constant reminder of the eternal return of the same." Wilder obviously makes the same fusion of past and present in The Cabala. He does so for the same reasons, which in his words are finding "the dignity in the trivial of our daily life" and establishing "the validity of each individual's emotions." The result in The Cabala is a mythic atmosphere which pervades the book and which allows for Miss Grier's revelation at the end.

To help create this atmosphere, Wilder subordinates details of the contemporary setting. Although the action of the novel takes place in and around Rome one year in the early 1920's, twentieth-century Rome is seen only dimly—in the motor cars, in a mention of strikes and the Fascists, in a quick description of a street scene, in a disparaging description of a home on the Via Po as "an example of that modern German architecture that has done so much for factories" (p. 139), in a visit to a cabaret run by Russian refugees. The reader is instead continually reminded that


modern Rome contains the Romes of many centuries. In the opening paragraph of Book One, the narrator describes his slow journey by train across the Campagna toward Rome: "It was Virgil's country and there was a wind that seemed to rise from the fields and descend upon us in a long Virgilian sigh, for the land that has inspired sentiment in the poet ultimately receives its sentiment from him" (p. 7). With this description, Wilder begins to create the mythic, ahistorical atmosphere which persists throughout the novel and is reinforced at the end as the narrator describes his departure from the bay of Naples: "It was Virgil's sea that we were crossing; the very stars were his: Arcturus and the showery Hyades, the two Bears and Orion in his harness of gold" (p. 225).

Besides many references to Virgil, there are continual allusions to other illustrious Italians of the past: Palestrina, Dante, Machiavelli, Horace, Ariosto, Tacitus, Livy, Terence, Leonardo. The references serve as reminders that the city is shrouded with the spirits from hundreds of centuries. It is not beyond believing that after a year in the Eternal City, where one can easily imagine "the ghost of Palestrina in a soiled cassock letting himself out at a side door [of Santa Maria Maggiore] and rushing home to a large family in five voices" (p. 15), the narrator is able
to invoke the actual ghost of Virgil on the steamer as he is leaving Italy, sailing on "Virgil's sea."

The antiquity of the dwellings in which most of the action takes place is a further indication of the time continuum, of the past in the present. The rooms of the narrator's apartment are "high and damp and bad Eighteenth Century" (p. 17). The Villa Colonna-Stiavelli, country home of the Duchess d'Aquilanera, is a famous Renaissance villa, on the grounds of which is an ancient altar, "drum-shaped and bearing an almost effaced frieze" (p. 100). And the favorite gathering place of the Cabala is the Villa Horace, owned by Mademoiselle Marie-Astrée-Luce de Morfontaine, who insists that it is the villa given to Horace by Maecenas. The narrator gives her reasons for her claim:

... local tradition affirmed it; the foundations were of the best opus reticulatum; and the location fulfilled the rather vague requirements of classical allusion; even onomatopoea testified, declared our hostess, asserting that from her window the waterfall could be literally heard to lisp

'... domus Albuniae resonantis
Et praeceps Anio ac Tiburni locus et uda
Mobilibus pomaria rivis' (p. 66).

Although this introduction to the Villa Horace is dry humorous and tends to undermine somewhat Astrée-Luce's claims, the Villa Horace is, nevertheless, the one setting which Wilder describes in considerable detail. The detailed description emphasizes the importance of this ancient villa, of undetermined age, and therefore outside
of time, as the gathering place of those timeless beings, the gods.

Also contributing to the timeless quality is the fact that most of the significant action in the novel takes place at night, the passage of which is not so clearly marked as is that of day. The narrator enters and leaves Rome at night. He spends a night of crisis with each of three of the Cabalists: Marcantonio, Alix, and Astrée-Luce. Marcantonio dies at night. The Cardinal and Astrée-Luce quarrel at night. Alix's fateful encounter with Blair and the narrator at the séance is at night.6

The mythic and timeless quality of the characters, especially the members of the Cabala and their close associates, is subtly insisted upon from the beginning. The narrator is first told about the Cabala by his American friend, James Blair, as the two are riding the train into Rome, where the narrator is going to study the ancients. Blair suggests that the narrator, before settling down to that study, should first learn something about Roman moderns--specifically about this group called the Cabala. He tells the narrator that the Cabalists are extremely wealthy and influential, that the Romans all fear them, that they are fiercely snobbish intellectuals. They are

6. Helmut Papajewski, in Thornton Wilder, p. 14, also notices that important action occurs mainly at night, but he does not relate this fact to Wilder's handling of time in the novel.
"frightfully bored. They've had everything so long. The chief thing about them is that they hate what's recent" (p. 11). Blair also reports that in many ways "they're medieval. Just in their appearance for one thing. And in their ideas" (p. 12). They are "losing sleep over a host of notions that the rest of the world has outgrown several centuries ago: one duchess' right to enter a door before another; the word order in a dogma of the Church; the divine right of kings, especially of Bourbons" (p. 12). Blair's friend, Mme. Agoropoulous, who is on the fringe of the Cabala's circle, has expressed to him her belief that they are supernatural. Blair concludes his description by saying: "Each one of them has some prodigious gift, and together they're miles above the next social stratum below them. They're so wonderful that they're lonely" (p. 13).

By the end of this conversation, the narrator is already thinking of the Cabala as "semi-divine personages" (p. 14). When Blair stops speaking, the narrator becomes aware of the very mundane conversations being carried on among the various groups of other travellers in their railroad car. He considers that "Perhaps it was in revulsion against such small change that the impulse first rose in me to pursue these Olympians . . . " (p. 15).

The following evening at a dinner party at Miss Grier's home, the narrator pursues his study of the Cabala,
learning from one of his fellow guests, a senator's daughter, that the members of the group are neither all rich nor all intellectuals, as Blair had implied. What they have in common, says the girl, is that "they despise most people, you and me and my father and so on. They've each got one thing, some great gift that binds them together" (p. 39).

Thus prepared by the accounts by Blair and the girl, the narrator expects to be overwhelmed by the brilliance of the conversation of the whole Cabala meeting together for dinner at the Villa Horace the following weekend. But he is somewhat surprised to find that the dinner conversation is "not unlike that of a house party on the Hudson" (p. 78) and thinks that perhaps his presence prevents the group from performing at their best. He writes:

I recalled the literary tradition that the gods of antiquity had not died but still drifted about the earth shorn of the greater part of their glory—Jupiter and Venus and Mercury straying through the streets of Vienna as itinerant musicians, or roaming the South of France as harvesters. Casual acquaintances would not be able to sense their supernaturalism; the gods would take good care to dim their genius but once the outsider had gone would lay aside their cumbersome humanity and relax in the reflections of their ancient godhead. I told myself that I was the obstacle, that these Olympians chattered and chaffed for a season until my departure, when the air would change, --what divine conversation . . . (p. 78).

Here, as in the earlier references to the Cabala, their supernatural, godly significance is not insisted upon.
In this passage, however, the narrator makes an explicit comparison between the group and the ancient gods. It is the first such comparison made, other than the second-hand suggestion of the Cabala's supernaturalism proposed earlier by James Blair. The comparison seems a natural one for the narrator to make, since he is a young man with a classical education who has had the Cabala's eliteness impressed upon him by other persons more familiar with the group at the time than he is. His enthusiastic identification of the Cabala with the ancient gods is, however, a part of the novelist's preparation for the revelation at the end of the novel and is part of the means he uses for building up the mythic quality of the group.

Further references to the group as a unit are slight, but the information that is given is likewise preparation for the ending. At the beginning of Book Three, the narrator gives a very short account of the doings of the Cabala as a group. He realizes that he "had arrived on the scene in the middle of the decline of their power" and that "the century had let loose influences they could not stem" (p. 108).

Toward the end of Book Four, one is reminded that the "decline of their power" is accompanied by the dissolution of the group. Miss Grier voices her sorrow to the narrator: "Our wonderful company is dissolving. Alix no
longer trusts us. Leda is losing her good old commonsense. Astreé-Luce has quarreled with the Cardinal. I'd better leave Rome and go back to Greenwich" (p. 205).

At the beginning of Book Five, the last book, the narrator describes his various leave takings from the group as "the last offices of piety, piety in the Roman sense" (p. 215). "Piety in the Roman sense" is, of course, paying one's respects to the gods. It is in the last performance of these offices, in his visit to Miss Grier, that the narrator's yearlong reverence of the Cabala is justified and confirmed to a certain extent.

Miss Grier reads to him part of a document written by a "Hollander who became the god Mercury in 1912" (p. 220). The document is an account of how the Hollander became aware of his new divine status and how he went to Rome where he sought out the other gods and goddesses in their modern guises. When the narrator asks what happened to the Hollander-Mercury, Miss Grier replies:

Finally he decided to die, as they all do. All gods and heroes are by nature the enemies of Christianity—a faith trailing its aspirations and remorse and in whose presence every man is a failure. Only a broken will can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Finally tired out with the cult of themselves they give in. They go over. They renounce themselves (p. 225).

The desolation in Miss Grier's voice prevents the narrator from "eagerly demanding of her the application to the Cabala of all these principles" (p. 225). But he really
needs no further enlightenment; he can make the appli-
cations for himself. Certainly in the course of the year
that the narrator has spent in Rome he has seen the dis-
solution of parts of that magic circle. Marcantonio, after
a terrific losing struggle against his debauched nature,
has shot himself. The Cardinal has died en route to China,
following a shocking quarrel with Astrée-Luce which re-
sulted in her nearly shooting him and which revealed to him
his complete loss of faith. Astrée-Luce herself has
returned to France and lives there on her estate in deep
retirement, not even opening her letters.

Wilder has, then, in his descriptions of the Cabala
as a group, continued to build up the mythic, timeless
atmosphere which he has also developed in his settings and
allusions. The individual portraits of the members of the
group sustain this atmosphere. Miss Grier, the leader of
Rome's international set, is the last member of an ex-
tremely wealthy American family. An only child, she had
been "dragged without rest from New York to Baden-Baden,
from Vevey to Rome, and back again," so that in the course
of her childhood she had formed no "attachment to place or
person" (p. 29). Such a person, with no ties to anything,
is essentially a free, timeless spirit.

Astrée-Luce is first described as having a "high
white face" which recalls "some symbolical figure in a
frieze of Giotto . . . radiating gaunt spiritual passions" (p. 35). She is a "Second Century Christian" who gives away her coat and walks miles with friends who ask her to accompany them to the road. She is prone to meditative trances and penetrating intuitive insights. She inspires in the Cabalists both a condescending love, for her child­ish unreasoning manner, and awe, from their awareness of being in the "presence of something of infinite possibility. Whom were we entertaining unawares? Might this, oh literally! be an . . . ?" (p. 174). In spite of the fact that Wilder has slipped in this passage into a cloying coy­ness, Astrée-Luce's otherworldly quality is here adequately emphasized.

The Duchess d'Aquilanera is the product of an enormously ancient, lofty, and diverse lineage. When the narrator meets her, she is fifty years old, "a short, black-faced woman with two aristocratic wens on the left slope of her nose" and "lame with the limp that pursues the Della Quercia, just as her aunt had been epileptic with the epilepsy of the true Vani" (p. 54). The narrator calls her the Black Queen, "this witch who at once, and by the black­est art, made one like her" (p. 59). She is heiress to titles which no longer exist, because the political organi­zations, such as the Holy Roman Empire, which gave them their validity have crumbled. Her son, Marcantonio, is the
symbolic expression of the fact that the family d'Aquilanera belongs to all the times of Rome. The fact that within the "incredibly slight," elegant, sixteen-year-old frame of "this frail and emptied spirit" is carried all the aristocratic history of Rome is dramatically expressed in the description of the discovery of Marcantonio's body by an opportunistic American:

What luck Mr. Perkins had always had! Even now when he brought to bear all his American determination and broke into the gardens of the forbidden Villa, what guardian angel arranged that he should see the Villa at its most characteristic? Surely a rich old Italian villa is at its most characteristic when a dead prince lies among the rosebushes. When Frederick Perkins of Detroit leapt the wall in the crystal airs of seven in the morning, he discovered at his feet the body of Marcantonio d'Aquilanera, 14th prince and 14th duke of Aquilanera and Stoli, 12th duke of Stoli-Roccellina, marquis of Bugnaccio, of Tei, etc., baron of Spenestra, of Gran-Spenestra, seigneur of the Sciestrian Lakes; patron of the bailiff of the order of San Stephano; likewise prince of Altdorf-Hotenlingen-Cramburg, intendant elector of Altdorf-H-C.; prince of the Holy Roman Empire, etc., etc.; chamberlain of the court of Naples; lieutenant and cousin of the Papal Familia; order of the Crane (f. class); three hours cold, and with a damp revolver clutched in his right hand (pp. 103-104).

This listing of titles provides the character of Marcantonio with more archetypal force than perhaps any other of the characters. He is the present manifestation of the aristocratic cycle and through him, as A. A. Mendilow says in a discussion of Thomas Mann's novels on biblical themes, "there opens up the perspective of a serialistic pattern endlessly repeating itself, what Mann calls 'time-coulisses.'
The formation itself is timeless. . . . The past is the present. . . . Also the present is the past.7

The Cardinal embodies the history of the Church, just as Marcantonio and his mother embody the aristocratic history of Rome. The Cardinal is "perhaps the greatest of all the Church's missionaries since the Middle Age"(p. 71) and has spent twenty-five years in the remote province of Sze-chuen in Western China. When the narrator meets him, he is eighty years old, and with his yellow face, drooping mustache, and pointed beard he resembles "a Chinese sage that has lived a century"(p. 69). He is "the only person living who could write a Latin that would have entranced the Augustans. . . ."(p. 77). And he is "the last man who would be able to hold in his head at one moment all the learning of the Church. . . ."(p. 77). He is feared and hated both by his fellow churchmen and by the populace of Rome--by the former because he has never revealed the customary ambition of a churchman and by the latter because strange rumors about his Oriental service and his affinity for Oriental customs have become rife in Rome. As a result, he has become a legendary figure.

Wilder expresses the antiquity of the Princess Alix d'Espoli, her timelessness, in a more direct method. The narrator says of her that she is "not really modern. As

scientists gazing at certain almost extinct birds off Australia are able to evoke a whole lost era, so in the person of this marvelous princess we felt ourselves permitted to glimpse into Seventeenth Century and to reconstruct for ourselves what the aristocratic system must have been like in its flower" (p. 110).

Wilder's use of the scientific metaphor here echoes an earlier passage in which Blair, while describing the whole Cabala to the narrator, says: "... you've heard of scientists off Australia coming upon regions where the animals and plants ceased to evolve ages ago? They find a pocket of archaic time in the middle of a world that has progressed beyond it. Well, it must be something like that with the Cabala" (p. 12). Both passages, along with the earlier mentioned references to archaeology, are reflections of Wilder's interest in the sciences which have been so influential in causing modern reassessments of ideas about time. In these passages, Wilder has taken from the natural sciences the physical fact that within nature there are juxtapositions of ancient plant and animal life with modern forms and from archaeology the knowledge of the vast stretches of human history and has used this information, or the awareness of time that comes from this information, in the development of his characters.
Wilder juxtaposes past and present very carefully by identifying the principal characters, who are living rather uneasily together in the present, with past eras. However uneasily they do live in the twentieth century, they demonstrate, nonetheless, that the past can and does exist in the present, that time distinctions have no meaning. The cumulative effect is that this particular twentieth-century cycle of time contains within it all past cycles. The d'Aquilanera family projects into the present all past generations of the Roman aristocracy, especially the golden period of the Italian Renaissance. The power of the Church's Middle Ages is apparent in Cardinal Vaini. Astrée-Luce is a relic of the earliest Christian era. The Princess brings with her the brilliance of seventeenth-century drawing rooms. And, as E. K. Brown has noted, Miss Grier embodies the brownstone age of New York. 8

Wilder employs this same method in presenting characters closely associated with the Cabala. James Blair, with his incessant research into any and all fields of study, makes the famous Danish archaeologist feel as if he has "brushed against a Leonardo, really, a Leonardo" (p. 163). The Rosicrucian seer, Sareptor Basilis, from whom Alix seeks counsel, is sought out by Blair as a direct descendant of the ancient alchemists.

Wilder uses the anachronistic quality of all these characters to put them at a remove from their lives as actual twentieth-century beings and to increase the plausibility of their being reincarnations of the ancient Roman gods. But, as has been previously noted, no direct equivalence between them and specific gods is assigned. The one character in the novel whose reincarnation is specifically designated is the narrator, who Miss Grier believes is the new god Mercury. But no anachronistic quality is established for the narrator during the course of the novel. Instead, nothing about his prior history is given. Even his real name is never revealed, although the Cabalists give him the nickname Samuele. The only facts about him that are revealed are that he is a twenty-five-year-old American with an interest in classical Rome.

As Miss Grier reads the Hollander's account of his journey to Rome and the role he played as Mercury, the facts about the narrator's actions during his year in Rome are seen in retrospect closely to parallel those of the Hollander-Mercury. The first obvious parallel is the trip to Rome, where the gods "were last worshipped under [their] own names." (p. 221). Mercury is the historian of the

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9. Malcolm Cowley in his Introduction to A Thornton Wilder Trio (New York, 1956), p. 18, suggests the following list: Miss Grier-Minerva; Alix-Venus; Blair-Adonis; Marcantonio-Pan; the Cardinal-Jupiter. Rex Burbank gives the same list except that for him Miss Grier is Demeter (p. 35).
gods. The narrator has been "the biographer of the individuals" although "not the historian of the group..."
(p. 107). The Hollander was called to Rome to act as secretary and messenger for the gods. The narrator has played an intermediary role between Alix and Blair and has carried messages between the Cardinal and Astrée-Luce. The Hollander-Mercury discovered that he was empowered to sin without remorse. The narrator apparently feels no guilt about his part in Marcantonio's death. Mercury loves "discord among gods and men"(p. 222). Certainly the narrator has been in the midst of the discord within the Cabala.

Once the role played among the gods by the narrator is made clear, i.e., as the new Mercury, it also becomes clear why Wilder has used this nameless young man, who has no known history, as the narrator. He, without a history, exists outside of time. He, like the other gods, appears in mortal form in what men call the twentieth century. But, like the other gods, he belongs not just to the apparent, phenomenal time of this century. The effect of his experiences among the Cabala is to define for him his supra-phenomenal role. He, the new Mercury, will return to the New World and in New York will build a new Rome. But the implication is clear: designations such as "new" and "old," "past" and "present," have no meaning. Just as the narrator
is an embodiment of a supposed dead past, so the "New" World contains within it the past of all previous worlds. Reality, then, for the narrator is redefined. It lies outside designations of past and present, of cause and effect.

To reinforce his intention of communicating just such a definition of reality, Wilder has the Hollander-Mercury comment in his account of his experiences on the meaninglessness of cause and effect, and by so doing makes explicit the mystical conception of time and reality which is evident throughout the novel. The Hollander wrote:

Scientists will tell you that they have never seen the sequence of cause and effect interrupted at the instance of prayer or of divine reward or retribution. Do they think, the fools, that their powers of observation are cleverer than the devices of a god? The poor laws of cause and effect are so often set aside that they may be said to be the merest approximations (p. 221).10

The disregard of causality is the province of the mystic, as well as of the gods.11 Wilder would have his

10. Martin Gardner, in "Thornton Wilder and the Problem of Providence," The University of Kansas City Review, VII (1940), 83-84, in a discussion of Wilder's approach to the problem of providence in his first four novels, has classified Wilder as a mystic, who relies neither on revelation nor on pure reason, but rather upon intuition, insight, or faith. Gardner cites this passage, but capitalizes God, and calls it, without amplification of his point, "an unusual defense of the method by which Providence may operate" (p. 86).

11. Lawrence Durrell, in Key to Modern Poetry (London, 1952), pp. 29-30, has pointed out that the theory of relativity has certain affinities to mysticism since it also "sidetracks causality" so that reality becomes "somehow extra-causal." Thus, it opens up the possibility of the scientific validity of intuited reality.
readers see with the eyes of mystics, that is, with the
eyes of those who disregard as do the gods the limits of
phenomenal time. So that they may do so, Wilder has abol­
ished the factors which limit conceptions of time. He has
denied the absolute operation of cause and effect, has de­
clared all experience illusory, has halted time in Rome to
a mythological standstill, has shrouded the city with the
spirits of Virgil and Dante. Thus the fantasy of the nar­
rator that the exalted beings who rule over Rome are
indeed the ancient gods in modern dress becomes no longer
fantasy; instead, it is a perception of the reality that
underlies appearance.

Likewise, given the abolishment of these factors,
and thus the creation of a situation in which distinctions
in time have no meaning, the narrator and Blair are able to
visit the dying Keats. Wilder does not call the tubercular
poet by name, but he gives adequate basis for making the
connection. For instance there are the following facts
given about the poet that the two visit: the disease it­
self, the fact that the poet has published in England, and
the poet's love for Greek verse, especially for Chapman's
Homer, which he knows well. When the narrator recognizes
during the visit the need of the poet to hear the world
which he is leaving praised, he delivers a long history of
poetry, praising that part of the world which is dearest to
the poet. This praise of life at the point of death has something of the same mystical quality that Lawrence Durrell has pointed out in Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, in which an affirmation of both life and death appears as a result of the belief that these states are both parts of a single unity.¹²

Mysticism in all its forms posits a "timeless dimension in experience" and emphasizes eternity in opposition to temporality. It considers both nature and experience to be illusory and unreal. It supports a "transcendent, eternal order of Reality" which is revealed in the mystic experience.¹³ The narrator's vision of Virgil at the close of the novel has many elements of the mystical experience. The narrator asks Virgil if he is wrong to leave the city that was Virgil's whole life. Virgil replies: "Let us be brief. This world where Time is, troubles me. My heart has almost started beating again,—what horror! Know, importunate barbarian, that I spent my whole lifetime under a great delusion,—that Rome and the house of Augustus were eternal. Nothing is eternal save Heaven"(p. 229). Virgil reacts with horror to the narrator's being alive. He


exclaims: "How can you endure it? All your thoughts are
guesses, all your body is shaken with breath, all your
senses are infirm, and your mind ever full of the fumes of
one passion or another. Oh, what misery to be a man.
Hurry and die!" (p. 230). Virgil has here expressed the
goal of the mystic which is "to escape from the Karma of
reincarnation, the endless cycle of birth and death, crav­
ing and evil, and to enter into a state of consciousness
(Nirvana) which is timeless, hence, a liberation from the
experience of time."14

Walter Sutton has attempted to refute Joseph Frank's
theories about time and myth in modern literature cited
earlier in this chapter, and part of what Sutton has to say
is pertinent to this examination of The Cabala. Sutton
writes that "the juxtaposition of images from past and
present has less the effect of establishing identity than
of enforcing contrasts. A persistent motif may be recog­
nized in human experience—for example, the Odyssean quest
as developed by Pound, in his Cantos, and by Joyce, in
Ulysses—but the treatment emphasizes historical variations
upon the classic theme."15 He contends that the effect is


15. Walter Sutton, "The Literary Image and the
Reader: A Consideration of the Theory of Spatial Form,"
The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, XVI (September
1957), 116.
to point up "the meaningless and atomistic point of view of modern man . . . in contrast with what the disillusioned poet regards as the more orderly world views of earlier historical periods."\textsuperscript{16} To read literature as myth ignores "the tension and conflict involved in the interplay of past and present, with the necessary historical elements of change and novelty. . . ."\textsuperscript{17}

Rex Burbank, whose important study of Wilder is generally thoughtful and well balanced, has interpreted \textit{The Cabala} according to principles such as Sutton enunciates. He finds at the heart of the novel two basic conflicts which provide the unifying themes of the five episodes: "an historical conflict between past and present; and a moral conflict, growing out of the historical one, between the modernistic spirit of rationalism and materialism and the humanistic spirit of the past."\textsuperscript{18} Examining the novel on this basis, Burbank concludes that Wilder has not been completely successful in his attempt to weave together these conflicts in the novel. One major breakdown is the inadequate development of the historical theme in the Alix episode. Burbank also cites the recitation of Miss Grier's family history and the shorter portrait of Madame Bernstein

\textsuperscript{16} Sutton, p. 116.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 123.

\textsuperscript{18} Burbank, p. 37.
as "other violations of unity." He objects as well to the unsatisfactory combination of realism and fantasy in the novel.

Burbank's objections to the novel ignore the stated intention of the narrator. He is "the biographer of the individuals and not the historian of the group . . . ." (p.107). Miss Grier's family history and the portrait of Madame Bernstein are in keeping with his purpose, since the two women are two of the individuals that make up the Cabala. The rather lengthy passage devoted to Miss Grier is appropriate to her importance in the novel. Although she does not have an episode devoted especially to her, as do Marcantonio, Alix, and Astrée-Luce and the Cardinal, she plays a prominent role in both the opening and closing books. It is through her and at her home that the narrator makes his "first encounters" with the other members of the group. And it is through her and again at her home that the narrator learns the complete significance of what he has witnessed. The much shorter portrait of Madame Bernstein is in keeping with her lesser importance in the novel.

Burbank's other objections--to the combination of realism and fantasy and to the breakdown of the historical theme of the conflict between past and present--are negated by an awareness of Wilder's concepts of time and history,

the exploration of which has been the purport of this chapter. Reality and fantasy are meaningless distinctions in a mythic, mystical world. The past and present do not conflict when they are viewed as existing simultaneously. The effect of the "fantasy" of Virgil's ghost appearing to the narrator at the end of the novel is to reinforce the view of time and history which has been developed throughout the novel. He tells the narrator that "Romes existed before Rome and when Rome will be a waste there [sic] will be Romes after her" (p. 229). One is also reminded that there will be further reincarnations of the gods who have given in and gone over. There will be a continual melding of past and present. In the ending of one era is the beginning of the next.

Although earlier in this chapter stress has been placed on the mythic qualities which Wilder gives his characters, it is important to recognize also that these mythic qualities reside in very human, very realistically developed characters. The agonizing conflict in Marcantonio which results from his guilt at his debaucheries and his frustrated efforts to find release from them in his religion, the despair in Alix's fateful attraction to men who cannot return her love, and the tragic loss of faith experienced by Astrée-Luce and the Cardinal are all
authentically realized. These are gods, indeed, but because their godhood is enveloped in mortal form, they are subject to mortal emotions and become involved in human dilemmas. The conflict between their mortal natures and fates and their destinies as reincarnations of the gods eventually leads to the destruction of their desire to retain their divine status—they decide to "give in" and "go over," as Miss Grier says. But the destruction of their mortal natures which comes with the renunciation of their godhood does not destroy the transcendent, timeless reality represented by the godhood. That reality remains and is re-embodied, reincarnated, in another mortal.

Their mortal natures, however, like their godhood, reflect a timeless quality, in that they are repetitions of patterns of human nature. Wilder makes clear, as has previously been noted, that the d'Aquilaneras repeat the pattern of the aristocracy of the Italian Renaissance, the Princess repeats the pattern of the seventeenth century, and other members of the Cabala repeat in their mortal natures various other eras. Therefore, Wilder carefully delineates their human dilemmas and their human characters, as well as their beings as gods, because these are representative of recurrent and hence timeless patterns.

In the three central books of the novel, Wilder focuses on the four members of the Cabala who give their
names to the books: Marcantonio, Alix, and Astrée-Luce and the Cardinal. In the course of these episodes Wilder presents the human conflicts which determine finally the decline of these particular reincarnations of the gods. It becomes apparent that the Cabalists are unable to cope successfully with the phenomenal world of time in which their mortal natures must reside. The destruction of the gods results partly from the fact that while the Cabalists exist in the present, they are nonetheless tied to a certain extent to the past eras of which they are representative in the novel. Their desire to hold on to the past is revealed in their attempts to stem the influences which "the century had let loose" (p. 108). Wilder reveals in the central episodes that this desire has caused them to cling to forms which ignore the substance of life and which allow the corruption of moral, religious, and artistic responses to life. In portraying the human dilemmas of the gods, Wilder presents in these central episodes opposing ways of reacting to certain universal human problems--morality, love, the search for knowledge, faith. He presents these reactions through contrasting Puritan America and decadent Europe, sterile knowledge and intelligent sensibility, and intuitive religion and skepticism.

In the Marcantonio episode, the narrator is asked by the Duchess d'Aquilanera to persuade her sixteen-year-old
son Marcantonio to abandon the life of debauchery which he has been living. He has carried to an extreme the normal Italian practice for young boys, who all "go that way when they are sixteen . . ." (p. 60). The Duchess makes the request because Miss Grier has told her that typically Americans of the narrator's age are "naturally . . . good," a condition which the Duchess finds almost incredible. Thus the opposing attitudes of Puritan America and decadent Italy toward matters of morality are established.

The Cardinal is also called upon to help persuade the narrator to "save" Marcantonio, and in the conversation between the two the difference in attitudes is more highly developed. There is in this scene a wry irony--the greatest missionary since Paul admitting his defeat with Marcantonio and exhorting the product of Puritan evangelicalism to take on the "missionary enterprise" that the Duchess has proposed to him. In the course of the conversation the narrator accuses the Cardinal of being ineffective with Marcantonio because he himself does not truly believe in temperance. Then follows a revealing exchange:

Believe in it. Of course I do. Am I not a priest? Then why not make the boy . . . ?
But after all, we are in the world (p. 86).

The narrator breaks into almost hysterical laughter and thinks to himself: "I thank thee for that word. How clear it makes all Italy, all Europe. Never try to do anything
against the bent of human nature. I came from a colony guided by exactly the opposite principle" (p. 87).

Despite some misgivings the narrator finally agrees to undertake the mission. The enterprise climaxes in a scene in which Marcantonio pours forth a two-hour long history of his real and imagined debaucheries, during which he reveals his utter contempt and hatred for women. At the end of this despairing monologue, the narrator gleefully begins a vindictive Puritan harangue of the boy, which eventually has him begging the narrator to stop. The narrator says: "Heaven only knows what New England divines lent me their remorseless counsels" (p. 98). He becomes "possessed with the wine of the Puritans" and alternates "the vocabulary of the Pentateuch with that of psychiatry. . ." (p. 98). The tirade has "the energy and sincerity which the Puritan can always draw upon to censure those activities he cannot permit himself,—not a Latin demonstration of gesture and tears, but a cold hate that staggers the Mediterranean soul" (pp. 98-99).

The final irony in Marcantonio's disintegration and collapse is that it is another product of Puritan America—the brash, opportunistic businessman from Detroit—who discovers the body of the young Prince, who, driven to despair by the narrator's harsh indictment, has shot himself.
In this contrast of cultural reactions to human error neither attitude is depicted in a particularly favorable manner. Wilder criticizes both lax, skeptical Catholicism and vehement Puritanism. In its catering to the inherent sensuality of the individual, the European Catholicism of the Cabala has become a matter of recognition of the forms of religion without a true belief in the substance that should accompany these forms. This attitude is further revealed after Marcantonio's death when his mother blames herself for not foreseeing that "continence was not to be expected of a mere lad. . ." (p. 107). The narrator's Puritanism, on the other hand, reveals the delight that an extreme form of that belief takes in harsh condemnation of any individual sensual aberration. Furthermore, although the European regard for tradition and formality has partly been responsible for Marcantonio's death, the American businessman's complete disregard for these things is certainly not commendable. Even as he lies dead, Marcantonio epitomizes an admirable wealth of culture and heritage which it is impossible for Mr. Perkins of Detroit to comprehend, despite his determination to see the "best" of Italy and his ability to wangle an admittance where other tourists are not permitted.  

20. E. K. Brown, pp. 359-360, writes that Wilder is most interested in The Cabala in "the fundamental superiority of these people to the common run of North Americans."
There is, of course, in this contrast—and, in fact, in the situation of the whole novel—an echo of Henry James's portrayal of naive Americans confronting the complexities of European society. But as Rex Burbank points out, Wilder has given an ironic twist to the situation. For, contrary to the typical Jamesian outcome, by the end of his year in Rome, the narrator has gained "a new appreciation of the possibilities of culture in America." He returns to New York with a determination to bring to bear the best of the old culture upon the new one.²¹

The Alix episode centers around the problems of love and the search for knowledge and contrasts the intelligent, but flawed, sensibility of Princess Alix d'Espoli and the sterile knowledge of James Blair. The episode details Alix's most debilitating experience in the phenomenal world of time—her love for James Blair, who is one of the young Nordic men to whom she is fatefully attracted and who are incapable of responding to her. Ironically, Alix's great gift which endears her to the Cabala—the "sweetest strain of gaiety that we shall ever see" (p. 111)—arises out of her compulsive attraction to such young men combined with a long series of other tragedies in her life, so that what she displays is "a pure well of heartbroken frivolity" (p. 111).

²¹ Burbank, pp. 36, 37.
It is in the portrayal of the relationship between Alix and Blair—"an abject and agonizing love on the part of a superior for an inferior person"—that Edmund Wilson has found a Proustian influence on Wilder. Wilson has grounds for his assertion. Certainly, Alix's love is agonizing and abject and certainly Blair, in spite of his great learning, is a spiritually inferior person. He can never comprehend the import of the narrator's explanation to him that "the mere fact of being loved so, whether one could return it or not, put one under an obligation. More than an obligation to be merely kind, an obligation to be grateful" (p. 127).

James Blair is a compulsive researcher. But his search for information lacks any humanizing quality. He "studied the saints and never thought about religion" (p. 116). He "knew everything about Michelangelo yet never felt deeply a single work" (p. 116). His scholarship is a wall he has built to shield himself from a world which seems to him on the point of dissolution. His never-ending search for facts is for him an escape from life, by which he had been frightened very early. He can only dimly sense that

there is in the Princess something that allies her to the "great ladies" of his researches. To her love for him, he responds at first indifferently and then coldly and rudely.

When the Princess begins to realize that Blair has indeed completely rejected her, she turns to the narrator for help, as Marcantonio has done before, and as Astrée-Luce is to do later. He responds with praise of her great gift. This response echoes his praise, earlier in the novel, of poets and poetry, by which he has brought solace to the dying Keats. Praise of life in the face of sorrow and death is a recurrent motif in Wilder's fiction. Malcolm Goldstein has pointed out that "The principle embodied in the act [of praise] requires for acceptance a disposition not only to love life in its infinitely various aspects, but to enjoy each event as it occurs with such intensity as to recognize perfectly, before death comes, how much pleasure one has experienced through one's years." As a result of the praise, Alix determines to exercise her gift to its fullest extent and begins a frenzied social life among the bourgeoisie and the artist colony in Rome—a time in her life which the Cabalists called "Alix aux Enfers." Her activities are as pointless as has been Blair's research—she, like Blair, is trying to fend off panic.

23. Goldstein, p. 41.
When Blair and Alix accidentally meet for the last time—as a result, suggests the narrator, of "a certain spiritual law that requires our tragic coincidences" (p. 152)—the circumstances of their meeting enforce the contrast between the attitudes of mind of which they are representative. The meeting occurs at a midnight séance of a Rosicrucian seer. Blair has returned to Rome to complete research on his present subject, the ancient alchemists. He has, then, sought out the seer as a consequence of his sterile search for knowledge. Alix, on the other hand, in the extremity of her wounded sensibility, has turned to the seer for spiritual solace.

The attempts of both Alix and James Blair to give meaning to their lives are in part commendable. Alix seeks meaning in love. But while she loves selflessly, she loves compulsively. James Blair seeks meaning in scholarship and learning, but while doing so he rejects all human emotions. Joseph Firebaugh points out that Wilder's "respect for the poet and scholar constitutes one part of his respect for the eternal. Yet he balances his regard for pure learning with an awareness of its limitations." The result of the lack of such an awareness is the inhumanity revealed in James Blair. The inability of a highly developed sensibility to cope with "cold intellectualism" is expressed in

the unbalancing of Alix's "exquisite" nature. An extremity in either of the attitudes represented by Alix and Blair can lead to the same kinds of desperation, with the same inevitably destructive results. Alix's nature is highly commendable, but even her great talents can be prostituted under extreme duress; her flights through bourgeois society are a parody of her former brilliance. Blair's virtuosity is in the great tradition of Leonardo, but without a humanizing factor it is pointless. It has "no fruit in published work" and brings "no intrinsic aesthetic pleasure" (p. 117).

In the episode centered on Astrée-Luce and the Cardinal, Wilder contrasts the reactions of intuitive religion and rational skepticism to the problem of faith. Once again, the gods are shown confronting and succumbing to the phenomenal world of time. In this episode, however, Wilder demonstrates a possible resolution to the confrontation—the healing power of enlightened love. Astrée-Luce represents "the futility of goodness without intelligence" (p. 171). Completely good and pious, but lacking brains, she is sent into religious reveries by mentions of fish and fishing; she insists on meeting and entertaining an unsuspecting American schoolteacher who happens to have the initials I. H. S. Her major goal in life is to have the divine

25. Burbank, p. 43.
right of kings promulgated as a dogma of the Church, so
that the Bourbons may be reinstated on the throne of France.

The destructive conflict between Astrée-Luce and
the Cardinal begins when she asks him to discuss the effi­
cacy of prayer. Already bitterly amused by her asking for
his support of her position on the divine right of kings,
the Cardinal reacts vindictively. He brings to bear upon
the simple woman his great rational powers and destroys all
the arguments she puts forth in support of her position.
The dispute over the efficacy of prayer broadens into a
questioning of the idea of a benignant God.

The Cardinal defends his actions to the narrator on
the grounds that it is good for Astrée-Luce to be "fed on
some harsher bread" (p. 196). Her main problem, he had
earlier complained to the narrator, is that she has never
suffered. But the Cardinal not only makes her suffer; he
also destroys her faith. When the narrator answers her cry
for help, he is as unsuccessful in saving her as he has
been with Marcantonio and Alix. Revulsion for the Cardinal
causes her eventually to see him as the very incarnation of
Satan, and she attempts to shoot him.

The shot causes an awakening in the Cardinal. As a
result of her extreme action he realizes that "belief had
long since become for him a delectable game. One piled
syllogism on syllogism, but the foundations were
diaphanous" (p. 211). The cynicism about the workings of the Church that had led him to go to China "where he would be answerable to no fool" (p. 71) had gradually overcome the faith that had sustained him in his twenty-five-year mission there. The cynicism had been nourished by the reactions of his fellow churchmen and of the Roman populace to what he had accomplished. Furthermore, in his retirement he had lost touch with the real life of the Church, its responsiveness to humanity. He also had been affected by his vast reading, in part of which was the "ordure" of twentieth-century skepticism.

In contrasting the two positions represented by the Cardinal and Astrée-Luce, Wilder reveals the dangers implicit in the Cardinal's rationalism. Not only is it destructive to those lacking intelligence and reasoning, such as Astrée-Luce, but also it can destroy even an intelligent, enlightened faith, such as that the Cardinal once had. But Wilder broadens his censure to include Astrée-Luce as well. Faith without reason is insufficient. The Cardinal's questioning of the efficacy of prayer and the reality of a benignant God "would have had no effect on sound intellectual believers. It was disastrous for Astrée-Luce because she was a woman without a reason who just this once was trying to reason" (p. 195).
The situation between Astrée-Luce and the Cardinal is resolved, however, unlike those situations of the earlier episodes. After the shooting incident, Astrée-Luce is horrified at what she has done. Her fear that she will not be forgiven by the Cardinal makes her more miserable than she has been living in a world without faith. The Cardinal is equally horrified at the realization of the harm he has done to her. A reconciliation between the two is effected when they discover that they are "living in a world where such things can be forgiven, that no actions were too complicated but that love could understand, or dismiss them . . ." (pp. 211-212). This reconciliation through enlightened love demonstrates an important means that man has at hand for coping with time and history. It is a theme which recurs throughout Wilder's fiction. Part of the failure of the characters in the other episodes is their failure to love well. Even more destructive than Alix's compulsive love and Blair's rejection of love is the degeneration of Marcantonio's capacity for love into lust and hatred. The exploration of various manifestations of love begun in The Cabala becomes a major theme in Wilder's next novel, The Bridge of San Luis Rey.
CHAPTER III

THE BRIDGE OF SAN LUIS REY

Asserting the validity of each individual life in the face of the vast expanses of time and space which surround man is one of the primary problems to which Thornton Wilder has addressed himself. Part of this problem is finding a unifying force in the apparently fragmented circumstances of the individual's progress through historical time. The cyclical theory of time provides a way of asserting each individual's validity by conveying an impression of a continuous unity and identification with all of mankind's history. Under this theory, the one unchanging, and therefore timeless, rule of history is the inevitable cycle of birth and death. It is timeless because all time remains present in the endless, cyclic repetition of human types and human situations. Thus, "man's greatness and hope for transcending himself and the historical situation in which he lives may be seen to lie precisely in his coming to terms with . . . the inexorable law of the eternal return of the same."¹ In his novels, Wilder accepts that law and affirms that the eternal return of the same is

¹. Meyerhoff, pp. 104-105.
in fact evidence of a transcendence of historical time. In The Cabala, the year that the narrator spends in Rome is representative of one of the cyclic patterns. In the course of that year, the declines of the gods represent the ending of other cycles which will immediately begin again in their next reincarnations. In The Bridge of San Luis Rey, published in 1927, Wilder uses a circular structure which is symbolic of cyclical time. He employs this cyclic structure and the repetitions of the structural patterns within its parts to reinforce his theme of life endlessly circling back upon itself, of mankind endlessly being faced with the questions of destiny and chance--hence, with the meaning of life.

The Bridge of San Luis Rey bears certain structural resemblances to The Cabala. Both have five parts, with the first and last parts serving as prologue and epilogue. In both, the three central parts are episodes dealing primarily with particular characters whose names are used as the titles of the parts. Apart from these surface resemblances, however, there are important differences. In The Cabala, the events described in the central episodes occur consecutively during the course of one year. The result of the crisis in each episode is different for each individual involved, although each one demonstrates a decline of a god. In The Bridge of San Luis Rey, on the other hand, each
episode ends where the novel begins, with the breaking of the bridge. Each episode begins at a time determined by the birth of the adult character whose name is the title of the episode, traces the personal history of that character, and recounts the incident which causes him to be on the bridge at the moment it falls. Similar information is given for the two child victims, whose histories are given in the episodes dealing with the adults who are in charge of them.

There are differences in the opening and closing parts as well. In *The Cabala*, the events described in the prologue, which relates the beginning of the narrator's year in Rome, occur, in time, prior to the three central episodes. The events described in the epilogue occur, in time, after the three central episodes and complete the year in Rome. In *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, the opening and closing parts deal primarily with a frame story about a Franciscan friar, Brother Juniper, who had himself examined the lives of the victims of the fall of the bridge. The story of his acquisition of mere facts about the lives of these five serves as a contrast to the more knowledgeable inquiry into the same lives by the omniscient narrator, whose findings are presented in the three central episodes of the novel.

Nor do the opening and closing parts of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* relate different material, as they do in
The Cabala. Instead, the material sketched in the first part is elaborated upon in the last part. The opening part, entitled "Perhaps an Accident," begins with the following statement: "On Friday noon, July the twentieth, 1714, the finest bridge in all Peru broke and precipitated five travellers into the gulf below." There is a mention of the funeral service for the victims, followed by a report of the unusual and profound effect the disaster had on the people of Lima, an effect which is surprising in that country where "those catastrophes which lawyers shockingly call the 'acts of God' were more than usually frequent" (pp. 16-17). The remainder of the epilogue concentrates on Brother Juniper and his inquiry. Brother Juniper witnesses the fall of the bridge and resolves on the instant "to inquire into the secret lives of those five persons, that moment falling through the air, and to surprise the reason of their taking off" (p. 19). The fall of the bridge presents him with an opportunity that he has long awaited—a chance to prove that what appears to be merely an accident is really the result of a plan in the universe. He spends six years collecting facts about the victims. His collection of facts goes into a huge book which is eventually

2. Thornton Wilder, The Bridge of San Luis Rey (New York, 1927), p. 15. Future page references to the novel will be placed in parentheses in the text.
burned in the square of Lima, although a secret copy sur-
vives.

The omniscient narrator evaluates Brother Juniper's achievement and concludes: "Yet for all his diligence Brother Juniper never knew the central passion of Doña María's life; nor of Uncle Pio's, not even of Esteban's" (p. 23). He counters that evaluation with a comment on his own efforts: "And I, who claim to know so much more, isn't it possible that even I have missed the very spring within the spring?" (p. 23). The first part ends with a summation of the opposing ways of viewing life and death: "Some say that we shall never know and that to the gods we are like the flies that the boys kill on a summer day, and some say, on the contrary, that the very sparrows do not lose a feather that has not been brushed away by the finger of God" (p. 23). With this statement of the philosophical problem of the novel, the narrative returns figuratively to the moment of the breaking of the bridge and the mystery that surrounds it.

The closing part of the novel, entitled "Perhaps an Intention," repeats the pattern of the first part and thereby emphasizes the repetitive nature of the cycles of mankind. It begins again with the bridge of San Luis Rey and the importance that its collapse retained for the people of Lima. There is a return to Brother Juniper's book, to his
reasons for undertaking the study, and to an elaboration of the kinds of facts that he obtained about the five. There is a description of his burning as a heretic because of the book. There is also an elaboration upon the funeral service for the five.

The last part closes again with a figurative return to the bridge. Camila Perichole and Doña Clara have come to the Abbess, Madre María del Pilar, to seek an answer to what has befallen them. The Abbess' answer is a resolution of the opposing views stated at the end of the first part of the novel:

Even now . . . almost no one remembers Esteban and Pepita, but myself. Camila alone remembers her Uncle Pio and her son; this woman, her mother. But soon we shall die and all memory of those five will have left the earth, and we ourselves shall be loved for a while and forgotten. But the love will have been enough; all those impulses of love return to the love that made them. Even memory is not necessary for love. There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning (pp. 234-235).

What the Abbess perceives as the ultimate answer to the meaning of life is a transcendent love which exists outside of and yet informs the conditions of being. This love is an eternal reality which is sufficient in itself. The Abbess' recognition is a mystical perception of the meaning of life, arising, as Rex Burbank points out, out of the mystery that surrounds the lives of the characters and
their deaths on the bridge. Hans Meyerhoff writes that in mysticism, "the aspect of eternity found in experience is interpreted as a warrant for the belief that there is an eternal order of Reality—though few statements can be made about this kind of Reality other than that it is eternal." Just so, Wilder has interpreted the quality of love evidenced in different ways in the lives of these characters as reflections of an eternal order of love. It is undoubtedly this evaluation by Wilder which has led Malcolm Cowley to call The Bridge of San Luis Rey a fable which is "perhaps more Buddhist than Christian in its feeling."

Similar to the repetition in the opening and closing parts of the novel is the repetition in the structures of the three central episodes. Each begins with an account of the life of the title character from his birth. There is then an account of a love relationship which is the most important part of the character's life. Finally, in each episode, the reasons are given for these people's being on the bridge at the moment of its collapse. The reasons arise from the love relationships. The Marquesa de Monte-mayor has gone to the shrine at Santa María de Cluxambuqua

3. Burbank, pp. 53-54.
to pray for her daughter's well-being at the coming birth of her child and is returning with Pepita, her companion, to Lima. Esteban is returning from Cuzco in order to sail with Captain Alvarado on his next voyage and thus to attempt to escape from his despair at the death of his brother Manuel. Uncle Pio has received permission from Camila to take her son Don Jaime for a year to teach him Castilian and the gentlemanly arts and is returning with him to Lima from Camila's villa in the hills near Santa María de Cluxambuquía.

Each episode ends with a terse, understated, unemotional announcement of the deaths on the bridge. The deaths of the Marquesa and Pepita are described thus: "Two days later they started back to Lima, and while crossing the bridge of San Luis Rey the accident which we know befell them" (p. 86). Esteban's death is described similarly: "When they reached the bridge of San Luis Rey, the Captain descended to the stream below in order to supervise the passage of some merchandise, but Esteban crossed by the bridge and fell with it" (p. 139). The third episode ends with a more ironic, but just as unemotional, comment. Don Jaime feels the onset of an epileptic attack and dreads the embarrassment of the attack in front of the other travellers he and Uncle Pio had just encountered on the road. His embarrassment is forestalled, however, as the last
sentence of the episode reveals: "Uncle Pio said that when they had crossed the bridge they would sit down and rest, but it turned out not to be necessary" (p. 207). The tone of these pronouncements is the same as that of the opening sentence of the novel. They indicate also a structural return to the moment at the beginning of the novel.

Rex Burbank calls this episodic structure the most apparent weakness of the novel, because it prevents a single, progressive narrative line. A single, progressive narrative line is not, however, necessarily a standard of excellence. J. Arthur Honeywell has remarked that twentieth-century novelists have turned from the construction of logical or rational plot sequences to a structuring which develops an aesthetically consistent "vision of reality." He concludes that "The temporal progression of plots of this kind can then be described as a movement from appearance—the maze of apparently unrelated facts—to reality—the structural relations which, when apprehended, give significance and meaning to the facts." Wilder has not fragmented his story to the extreme that some modern authors have. Each episode in itself is very clearly and consecutively developed, yet each is a fragment of the


total picture of reality which Wilder presents in the novel. As Joseph Warren Beach has remarked about the structure of The Bridge of San Luis Rey, "It is a composite picture, a pattern made up of many lives set side by side."  

Wilder is quite obviously trying to demonstrate that unrelated facts of the kind that Brother Juniper collected about the five victims could not get at the true significance of their lives and their deaths. The vision of reality which Wilder constructs out of his own set of facts, presented as they are in a series of separate biographies, is essentially a mystical one—a vision of the "magic unity of purpose and chance, of destiny and accident" that Wilder believes inform all life. The episodic structure of the novel reinforces this vision. The fact that the three central episodes end where the novel begins reinforces the fact that in the ends of the lives of the victims is a beginning of awareness in their survivors. The falling of the bridge becomes an arrested moment in time which contains within it the past, present, and future of both the victims and their survivors.


As the biographies of the victims are related, it becomes apparent that what is being examined in this inquiry into the problem of destiny versus chance is different kinds of love. It is in the awareness of these "central passions" in the lives of the victims that the narrator's recounting of the lives differs from Brother Juniper's. Furthermore, it becomes apparent that the lives follow a similar pattern from involvement in a more or less perverse love relationship to at least a beginning of a new perception of love. Through the exploration of these lives, Wilder demonstrates that although much of man's life in the phenomenal world of time is apparently governed by chance, he can exercise some control over the accidental circumstances of his life, and a powerful force at his command is the ability to love selflessly. He also demonstrates through the Abbess' perception that love is in fact a revelation of an eternal order and eternal time.

The Marquesa's life has been ruled by an "idolatrous" love for her daughter, Doña Clara, who from the time of her childhood has rejected her mother's "fatiguing" love. The relationship between the two, with its "recriminations, screams and slamming of doors" (p. 29), reduplicates the Marquesa's relationship with her own mother. The Marquesa is aware of the taint on her love. Although her despair at the knowledge that her love will never be returned causes
her to doubt the sincerity of all the demonstrations of love she sees between other people, she also knows that she loves her daughter "not for her daughter's sake, but for her own" (p. 39).

Recognition of the tyrannical quality of her love cannot, however, free the Marquesa from her passion. Although she realizes that she will never be able to rule her daughter as she would like, she makes piteous efforts to elicit some faint expressions of love from Doña Clara. The most important result of these efforts is the magnificent series of letters that the Marquesa writes to her daughter after Doña Clara has married and gone to live in Spain, in order to escape the direct displays of her mother's love. The letters are born of despair; the Marquesa "would have invented her genius had she not been born with it, so necessary was it to her love that she

10. Wilder has acknowledged that he modeled these letters on those of Madame de Sévigné, and has also acknowledged his indebtedness to Prosper Mérimée in a conversation related in Glenway Wescott, Images of Truth; Remembrances and Criticism (New York, 1962), p. 243. Walther Fischer, in "Thornton Wilders The Bridge of San Luis Rey und Prosper Mérimées Le Carrosse Du Saint-Sacrement," Anglia, LX (1936), 234-240, has examined Wilder's borrowing from Mérimée's play Le Carrosse du Saint-Sacrement for characters and setting in The Bridge of San Luis Rey, but points out that Wilder has developed the characters that he borrowed far beyond the comedic dimensions given them in the play.
attract the attention, perhaps the admiration, of her dis
tant child" (p. 33).  

There are less admirable and more destructive re-

sults of the Marquesa's love. The Marquesa, who had from her 
childhood "lived alone and thought alone," becomes even more 
egocentric after her daughter's departure. She acts out 
endless mental scenes of reconciliation with her daughter. 
She neglects her appearance. She takes to drink, remaining 
in a drunken stupor except for the one week of each month 
that she spends combing the city for news to include in her 
monthly letters to her daughter. She loses her beliefs in 
religion and in the sincerity of other people. After she 
loses her faith in religion, she replaces the loss with 
superstition, with a belief in "religion as magic." When 
she learns that her daughter is to bear a child, the super-
stition becomes quite pagan, and she inaugurates a system 
of taboos in order to propitiate the "malignant Nature" 
which holds Doña Clara in its hands. She also, as part of 
her superstition, tries to satisfy the requirements of 
Christianity. Her belief in the "great Perhaps" remains, 
however, a superstitious one, and her pilgrimage to the 
shrine of Santa María de Cluxambuqua is only one more in 

11. Edmund Wilson discerns here another Proustian 
influence. He finds that the Marquesa's creation of "mar-
velous literature from her love" corresponds to Vinteuil's 
creation of "marvelous music from his insulted love for his 
[daughter]" (p. 386). He also finds repeated in The Bridge 
of San Luis Rey the Proustian theme of the tortured love of 
a superior person for an inferior one (p. 385).
the long series of propitiations performed in the service of her love.

It is finally through her fourteen-year-old companion, Pepita, that the Marquesa is able to break free from her debilitating love. After her return from the shrine to her inn, she happens to read a letter which Pepita has written to the Abbess. Pepita had been placed with the Marquesa by the Abbess as part of Pepita's training to take over the Abbess' work at her death. The girl had been subjected to abuse by the Marquesa's other servants and had been ignored and neglected by the Marquesa. Her letter, too, has arisen from despair—at having received no sign that the Abbess, who was "the only real thing in her life" (p. 79), either remembered or cared for her.

The Marquesa is envious of the Abbess for being able to command such complete devotion as she sees in Pepita's letter. But she is envious also of the simplicity of the love revealed in the letter, so much in contrast to the pride and vanity of her own. When Pepita refuses to send the letter, explaining only that it is a bad letter because it is not "brave," the courage that Pepita exhibits gives the Marquesa herself courage. For the first time, she writes her daughter a "free and generous" letter out of a courageous, disinterested love. She has learned a lesson
about life, as well as about love. She is ready to "live now," to "begin again."

Thus the Marquesa appears to have triumphed over the circumstances which she recognizes have controlled her life previous to her experience with Pepita. In analyzing what has happened to her, she says: "It's not my fault that I was so. It was circumstance. It was the way I was brought up. Tomorrow I begin a new life" (pp. 84-85). As Rex Burbank notes, "When she decides to 'begin again,' therefore, she affirms the triumph of her will over circumstance. Yet, ironically, she seems to lose to circumstance finally when the bridge falls." 12

The "central passion" of Esteban's life is his love for his brother. Esteban and Manuel are identical twins, foundlings who were reared like Pepita in the Abbess' orphanage. The relationship between them is a "tacit almost ashamed oneness" (p. 95). Their identification is so complete that they communicate frequently by telepathy. They speak together a secret language of their own invention. The unity of their life and their love is finally disturbed when Manuel falls in love with Camila Perichole, after seeing her performance at the theater. Esteban is then faced with a new knowledge, that "even in the most perfect love one person loves less profoundly than the

other" (p. 100). But Manuel's love for his brother, while not so all inclusive as Esteban's is for him, is more generous. When Manuel becomes aware, through a telepathic vision, of Esteban's misery because of his love for the Perichole, he immediately renounces this love. The pleasure he derives from his secret love for the actress is not worth the misery it causes Esteban.

When Manuel injures his knee and dies of an infection, Esteban is driven nearly to insanity. In his refusal to accept his brother's death and in an effort to keep him alive, he gives Manuel's name when the Abbess asks him to identify himself. Esteban finally gains some release from his torment through the agency of the Abbess. Unable to help Esteban herself, the Abbess seeks the aid of Captain Alvarado, who has himself lost the great object of his own love, a young daughter. The Abbess has, however, had a greater effect on Esteban than she has realized. When Captain Alvarado asks Esteban to come work for him on his next sea voyage, Esteban agrees, but he asks the Captain to pay him his wages in advance so that he might buy the Abbess a gift before he leaves. He has been touched, without the Abbess' realizing it, by her telling him of a great loss that she too had suffered. Esteban's selfless desire to alleviate the Abbess' pain is the beginning of his own rehabilitation. That he gives Captain Alvarado his own
name instead of Manuel's when they meet is another indication of his growing ability to cope with the fact of his brother's death.

Esteban's ability to assert his will over his circumstances is not as complete as that of the Marquesa, however. Just before he and the Captain are to leave Cuzco to return to Lima, he makes a direct suicide attempt. In his earlier conversations with the Captain, he has revealed that his religious beliefs have prevented his killing himself before, although he has attempted suicide indirectly by entering a burning house to save somebody else. He is saved from his last attempt by Captain Alvarado, only to receive in the fall of the bridge the complete release that he has hoped for.

The "great secret and reason" (p. 180) of Uncle Pio's life is Camila Perichole. When he discovers her at the age of twelve singing in cafés, there begins a relationship that combines "the three great aims of his life: his passion for overseeing the lives of others, his worship of beautiful women, and his admiration for the treasures of Spanish literature" (p. 159). Uncle Pio plays Pygmalion and drives her relentlessly to a perfection of her art, so that she becomes the finest actress in the Spanish world. Uncle Pio's love for the actress is apparently generous and selfless. It is, at any rate, more disinterested than the
Marquesa's or Esteban's. But there is in it nevertheless something of the tyrannical. He does after all enjoy the power that comes from "overseeing" her life. Also, his driving her to perfect her art is for his own sake as well as for hers. He seeks to confirm through her his own convictions about acting and the theater. When Camila is summoned by the Viceroy and begins a long affair with him, Uncle Pio is at first anxious and then well pleased, because her association with the viceregal court adds a new polish to her acting. Both his anxiety and his pleasure are a result of his proprietorial interest in her as an instrument of his own art, for Uncle Pio is more the artist than is Camila.  

When Camila is disfigured by smallpox a few years after she has quit the stage in a bid for respectability, Uncle Pio stands by her just as earlier in his life he had supported other faded beauties. But from Camila he does exact a kind of repayment—the guardianship of her son Don Jaime for one year. Although with the boy Uncle Pio will again have the chance to exercise his function as teacher and thus will be able to "oversee" yet another life, his shift of interest to the boy does mark an enlarging of his capacity for love. The boy cannot satisfy, as Camila has done, the other two great aims of Uncle Pio's life. His

interest in the boy is more truly selfless than has been his interest in Camila. He is answering a real need in the life of Don Jaime, for the child has been badly neglected as a result of Camila's grief and despair after the loss of her beauty.

Wilder shows, then, that just previous to the fall of the bridge there has occurred in the lives of the three adult victims an enlargement of the potential for love. This demonstration is Wilder's attempt to reveal that the inner life of man, "the spring within the spring," has as much power over the direction of his life as do the external influences upon it. As these lives illustrate, however, and as the titles to the first and last parts of the novel reiterate, there is no definitive answer to the question of whether "we live by accident and die by accident, or we live by plan and die by plan" (p. 19). There is always a "Perhaps." 14 The complexity of the victims' lives precludes easy solutions. The circumstances in their lives lead them to be where they are at the moment of their deaths, but perhaps because of where they are in their moral lives and because of what their deaths awaken in their survivors there is an intention as well.

14. As Helmut Papajewski has noted in Thornton Wilder, p. 28, Wilder reinforces this central mystery of existence by the repeated use of the word "perhaps" throughout the novel.
The inadequacy of the explanations of both orthodox science and orthodox religion in the face of such a mystery is exhibited in Brother Juniper's study, which is a parody of both the disciplines he employs. Brother Juniper tries to apply to the lives of the five the scientific principle of cause and effect to prove a religious point. In an earlier study in which he attempted to weigh the worth of the victims of a pestilence against the worth of the survivors of the pestilence, the result showed that "The discrepancy between faith and the facts is greater than is generally assumed" (p. 215). This study proves to be as fruitless. Brother Juniper's conclusions about the deaths are those of the religionist: "He thought he saw in the same accident, the wicked visited by destruction and the good called early to Heaven. He thought he saw pride and wealth confounded as an object lesson to the world, and he thought he saw humility crowned and rewarded for the edification of the city" (p. 219). But even Brother Juniper is aware that his conclusions are open to doubt: "It was just possible that the Marquesa de Montemayor was not a monster of avarice, and Uncle Pio of self-indulgence" (p. 219).

If there is an answer to the meaning of the lives and deaths of the victims, it lies in the "impulses of love" which inform the lives of both the victims and their survivors. These "impulses of love" are not of uniform
excellence, as Wilder has made clear in the biographies of the victims. The ideal is selfless, disinterested love. In contrast to this ideal, Wilder has presented, in addition to the exploration of the central love relationships in the lives of the victims, other kinds of love which stand at various removes from it. On the lowest level is the mere gratification of the sexual impulse. This was the only kind of heterosexual love that the brothers Esteban and Manuel had known prior to Manuel's love for Camila. They "had possessed women, and often, especially during their years at the waterfront; but simply, latinly . . ." (p. 99). Uncle Pio, too, "carried his money to the obscurer parts of the city" (p. 155), since he never expected any love in that sense of the word from the beautiful women whom he worshipped and served.

Uncle Pio is aware, however, that sexual passion can be part of the love which educates. He regards "love as a sort of cruel malady through which the elect are required to pass in their late youth and from which they emerge, pale and wrung, but ready for the business of living" (p. 181). He watches Camila to discover if she has this "capacity for love (or rather for suffering in love)" (p. 181), but never finds it in her.

Camila has many short-lived affairs with actors, bullfighters, and the like, which are in their way
comparable to the experiences of the twins and Uncle Pio. She appears to enter a new stage in her ability to love in her role as the Viceroy's mistress, because "Contrary to all the traditions of the stage and state she adored her elderly admirer . . ." (p. 171). One very important part of this love is that the Viceroy teaches her many things. That the teaching process is "one of the sweetest ingredients of love" (p. 171) for Camila is a direct result of Camila's relationship to Uncle Pio, the first man who ever treated her kindly and who, as part of his love for her, taught her many things. Although Camila bears the Viceroy three children (one of them is Don Jaime), she apparently never undergoes the true suffering in love required of the elect. She never achieves in her acting the "mastery of certain effects" (p. 182) which would have resulted from such a love. She eventually becomes bored with the Viceroy and returns to the transitory affairs with which she had previously occupied herself.

Camila is incapable of voicing her love for Uncle Pio and chides him when he expresses his love for her, telling him that "It's in the theatre you find such things" (p. 193). And while she is never "cross" to her son,

15. The theme of love closely tied to the passion of the teacher is also evident in the Abbess' relationship to Pepita and in The Ides of March in the relationship of Caesar to Cleopatra, as Mary K. Christen points out in Estudio de los temas generales en Thornton Wilder (N. p., 196-), p. 79.
neither is she demonstrative toward him. It is the fact that she has never been able to "speak once to Uncle Pio and tell him of her love and just once offer her courage to Jaime in his sufferings" (p. 226) that gives her almost unbearable pain after their deaths. Part of her inability to do so is a result of her having never expressed love except love as passion. Her despair at the loss of her beauty and her inability to believe that anyone could still remain devoted to her when she is no longer beautiful result from the same cause. Her expressions of love have been essentially egocentric, since love as passion, according to Wilder,

though it expends itself in generosity and thoughtfulness, though it give birth to visions and to great poetry, remains among the sharpest expressions of self-interest. Not until it has passed through a long servitude, through its own self-hatred, through mockery, through great doubts, can it take its place among the loyalties. Many who have spent a lifetime in it can tell us less of love than the child that lost a dog yesterday (p. 196).

Camila is awakened from her egocentricity by the shock of Don Jaime's and Uncle Pio's deaths. Wilder relates in a typically understated manner that she finds the way to express her new maturity in love through working with the Abbess: "Suddenly she [the Abbess] disappeared a moment to return with one of her helpers, one who had likewise been involved in the affair of the bridge and who had formerly been an actress" (p. 233).
Another kind of love is presented in the character of the Abbess. Her love for the people surrounding her is subordinated to her love for her work. She directs a convent, an orphanage, and a hospital, and she is passionately devoted to the idea of attaching "a little dignity to women" (pp. 59-60). The other side of this coin is her hatred of men. While she grows to love the young boys Manuel and Esteban, she watches them for evidences of the traits in men that she hates—"all that ugliness, all that soullessness that made hideous the world she worked in" (p. 90). Her kindliness and idealism have been subordinated to generalship in her struggles to obtain money from her church superiors in order to carry on her work. Just so, her love for Pepita is subordinate to her desire to train Pepita for what in essence will be the same sort of generalship. In her desire to teach the child everything she needs to know for the work, the Abbess talks to her as an equal and forgets the child in Pepita that needs succoring. She realizes after Pepita's death that her generalized love for humanity has not been sufficient. However selfless and valuable it has been to many afflicted and suffering persons, it has been acted out in devotion to an idea, an "idol" which she tears from her heart following Pepita's death. She recognizes, finally, that it is not important that her work be carried on after her death; that
"It seemed to be sufficient for Heaven that for a while in Peru a disinterested love had flowered and faded" (p. 224).

Wilder has himself pointed out that at the end of the novel he used the bridge as "a connection to a 'meaning of life', i.e., via love." In the inevitable cycle of life, the ability of man to love and to express that love gives meaning to his history. Wilder put forth this idea at a time and in an intellectual climate when such a solution seemed simplistic and sentimental. He himself was evidently quite aware of the probable reaction to his solution; and in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* he comments indirectly on his own temerity in making such a proposal. He says of Captain Alvarado's efforts to comfort Esteban that "there are times when it requires a high courage to speak the banal" (p. 139).

Banal the ultimate message may seem, but it has not been arrived at easily. The "whole purport of literature," Wilder says in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, "is the notation of the heart" (p. 34). The hearts and lives of the characters that Wilder has notated in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* are complex and many-sided. The characters, far from being sentimental, are utterly human, a mixture of noble and base.

qualities. Most of them are, also, like so many figures in modern literature, alone and isolated. Uncle Pio and Don Jaime are illegitimate sons of noble families. Don Jaime is further isolated by his epilepsy. The twins and Pepita are orphans. The Marquesa de Montemayor had a lonely and bitter childhood. Camila has an uncertain heritage. That they each arrive at some stage of hope through love, an emotion at the other end of the scale from the despair of the isolatos of existentialism, does not lessen the validity of that emotion.

17. Papajewski points out, in Thornton Wilder, pp. 25-26, that the structure of the novel, the telling of the stories in separate episodes, reinforces the isolation of the characters.
CHAPTER IV

THE WOMAN OF ANDROS

The Woman of Andros, published in 1930, is based in part on a play, Terence's comedy *Andria*, which Wilder has cast in tragic form. For *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, Wilder used certain characters and the setting from another comedy, Mérimée's *La Carosse du Saint Sacrement*. But he did not retain basic elements of the plot. *The Woman of Andros*, on the other hand, retains not only characters and setting but also the basic question of Terence's play—will the boy be allowed to marry the girl? That question in the novel, however, has been greatly subordinated to another question—how does one live his life?¹ This latter question is hinted at in the play, for as one translator of the play remarks, Terence has to a certain extent made his play a study of conflicting loyalties.² To help in arriving at an answer to the latter question, Wilder has developed as

1. Hermann Stresau, writing in 1963, said that this question could stand als Motto for the complete body of Wilder's work existing at that time. In *Thornton Wilder* (Berlin, 1963), pp. 66-93, he examines at some length how this question is dealt with in both the novels and the plays and reaches conclusions about *The Woman of Andros* similar to those presented later in this chapter.


77
one of his major characters Chrysis, the hetaira, who is already dead at the opening of Terence's play. He has also given added dimensions to Pamphilus, Terence's love-sick young hero, and has invented a character, the young priest of AEsculapius and Apollo, who is not found in Terence. Furthermore, he has broadened the implications of his answer to the major question of the novel by the timeless frame of reference within which he tells his story. His characters are representative of eternal, recurrent human types who play out their roles in that one time which contains all time—a cycle of human history.

It is apparent from the opening paragraph of The Woman of Andros that Wilder views the events that he describes in the novel in the context of recurrent human types and situations:

The earth sighed as it turned in its course; the shadow of night crept gradually along the Mediterranean, and Asia was left in darkness. The great cliff that was one day to be called Gibraltar held for a long time a gleam of red and orange, while across from it the mountains of Atlas showed deep blue pockets in their shining sides. The caves that surround the Neapolitan gulf fell into a profounder shade, each giving forth from the darkness its chiming or its booming sound. Triumph had passed from Greece and wisdom from Egypt, but with the coming on of night they seemed to regain their lost honors, and the land that was soon to be called Holy prepared in the dark its wonderful burden. The sea was large enough to hold a varied weather: a storm played about Sicily and its smoking mountains, but at the mouth of the Nile the
water lay like a wet pavement. A fair tripping breeze ruffled the Aegean and all the islands of Greece felt a new freshness at the close of day.3

In this paragraph Wilder suggests the many cycles of growth and decline through which human history has passed and will pass. The cycles are ending in Greece and Egypt, but another is beginning. The darkness, both natural and spiritual, which covers the Mediterranean area is a creative darkness. In the inevitable cycle, from it will come light, both natural and spiritual. That Wilder intended this description not only to provide the setting for the novel, but also to convey a cyclical view of time and history becomes even more apparent when it is compared to Ezra Pound's remarkably similar and somewhat more explicit statement in his prefatory remarks to The Spirit of Romance: "It is dawn at Jerusalem while midnight hovers above the Pillars of Hercules. All ages are contemporaneous. It is B.C., let us say, in Morocco. The Middle Ages are in Russia. The future stirs already in the minds of the few."4


This opening paragraph also provides the kind of "planetary" reference for the setting of the novel which accords with the cyclical view of history. The island of Brynos, one of the least significant of the Greek islands but the center of the world for most of the characters, is placed through this paragraph in its proper proportion in relation to its immediate area and to the Earth as a whole. It is indeed small when compared with its context, but paradoxically it takes on significance by being a part of that very context. This situating of Brynos is like Wilder's situating of Grover's Corners in Our Town through the letter addressed to "Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America; . . . Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God." As Erwin Stürzl, who has also recognized the similarity of the opening paragraph of The Woman of Andros and this address, remarks, Wilder in these passages gives Brynos cosmic proportions and connects Grover's

5. Wilder uses this term in his essay "World Literature and the Modern Mind" to describe the twentieth-century literature that "assumes that the world is an indivisible unit. Its subject has become planetary life" (p. 218). After commenting on Eliot, Joyce, and Pound in this context, he continues: "For better or worse, world literature is at hand. Our consciousness is beginning to be planetary. A new tension has been set up between the individual and the universe" (pp. 218-219).

Corners to the universe. The result for Our Town, as Bernard Hewitt has indicated, is that the enormous background, "the backdrop of eternity," does not minimize the importance of Wilder's immediate setting and characters; instead, "The daily routine and the individual life cycle of birth, marriage, and death are revealed as part of the eternal rhythm of the universe." The same effect is achieved in The Woman of Andros.

Besides this analogous placement, there is another direct connection between The Woman of Andros and Our Town which emphasizes the cyclic, repetitive nature of man. In The Woman of Andros, Chrysis tells the story of a hero who after his death is allowed to return to Earth to relive one day in his fifteenth year—the least significant day of his life. In return for allowing this favor to the hero, the King of the Dead insists that it be accompanied by "some difficult and painful condition" (p. 34). The condition decided upon is that the hero must live that day as both participant and onlooker. In Our Town Emily is allowed a similar return with the same condition. The result is the same in both the play and the novel. Emily and the hero


both discover that "the living too are dead and that we can only be said to be alive in those moments when our hearts are conscious of our treasure . . . " (p. 36). The purpose of the incident in both play and novel is to illustrate the importance of living life with awareness, whether it is lived on an insignificant Greek island in the pre-Christian age or in an insignificant New England small town in twentieth-century America. Wilder's use of the incident in these two rather widely different works demonstrates his conception of the repetitive nature of human life—both the perception that is accorded to some and the blindness that is the state of many. The fable thus has significance in any century.2

At the end of The Woman of Andros, Wilder re-emphasizes the larger context within which the people of

9. See Helmut Viebrock, "Thornton Wilders Hauptmotive," Die Neueren Sprachen, NS X (1961), 349-363, for an extended study of Wilder's use of the "return from the dead" myth. In The Woman of Andros, in addition to detailing the story of the hero who returns from the dead, Wilder alludes to the Alcestis myth. Chrysis, who does not understand why "we suffer," looks forward to the day when she will be "among the shades underground and some wonderful hand, some Alcestis" will give her that understanding (p. 79). Helmut Papajewski observes in Thornton Wilder, p. 50, that Wilder's allusion to this myth, with its story of a sacrificial death, is a very conscious paralleling to the sacrificial death of Jesus which brought the kind of knowledge Chrysis was seeking. Wilder also alludes in The Woman of Andros to the myth of AEscurapius and Apollo, which is essential to the novel, since it is that myth which provides for the temple of the young priest. Wilder's allusions to both myths are, of course, further emphases by implication on the timeless and eternal qualities of mankind and his history.
Brynos live and die. The night that Glycerium and her child die, rain falls after a months-long drought. Wilder utilizes the rain to place Brynos again as part of the cosmos: "Slowly at first and steadily, the rain began to fall over all Greece. Great curtains of rain hung above the plains; in the mountains it fell as snow, and on the sea it printed its countless ephemeral coins upon the water"(p. 159). While in Greece the rain breaks the drought, "behind the thick beds of clouds the moon soared radiantly bright, shining upon Italy and its smoking mountains. And in the East the stars shone tranquilly down upon the land that was soon to be called Holy and that even then was preparing its precious burden"(p. 162). With these two sentences, which close the novel and which repeat some of the wording of the novel's opening passage, Wilder returns to the idea that another cycle in the life of mankind is beginning. Furthermore, with this description Wilder has once again ended a novel where it began and has thus again used technique to emphasize idea.

Wilder's view of the repetitious, cyclic nature of mankind and man's history is further evidenced in The Woman of Andros in the repetition of certain character types which he portrayed in the earlier novels. In Chrysis, the title character of the novel, Wilder combines character traits earlier encountered in Alix in The Cabala and in
Camila and the Abbess in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. One meets again, as in Alix and Camila, the beautiful, talented woman who loves language and literature. The same human type is repeated later in Cytheris in *The Ides of March*. Like Alix's, Chrysis' full powers as a conversationalist are at their height in a dinner party setting—in Chrysis' case, the hetaira banquets which she gives for the young men of Brynos. Furthermore, Chrysis' great gift is exercised, as Alix's is, as a defense against the "unresponsiveness and instability" (p. 40) of her world. Like Camila, Chrysis loves and performs the literary treasures of her age. Camila embodied the great heroines of Calderón and Moreto. Chrysis recites Euripides, Aristophanes, and Sophocles for the young men. Chrysis experiences the same kind of "brief and humiliating approaches to love" (p. 39) that Alix and Camila experience. These experiences, arising sometimes out of her professional contact with men and sometimes not, are the most troubling experiences in Chrysis' life. Like Alix, she finally falls deeply in love with a younger man who does not return her love.

Chrysis' other defense against her hostile world is that she adopts "stray human beings" (p. 42) who need her. In this trait, Chrysis is precisely like the Abbess in *The
Bridge of San Luis Rey. Chrysis provides, as the Abbess does, a home for her "sheep" through a generous love that does not ask for expressions of gratitude. Her concern for these people is Christian-like and is quite similar to the attitude for which she mentally chides Pamphilus and which she perhaps does not recognize in herself. Her thoughts about Pamphilus, however, are really a plea for herself and her own condition:

He thinks he is failing. He thinks he is inadequate to life at every turn. Let him rest some day, O ye Olympians, from pitying those who suffer. Let him learn to look the other way. This is something new in the world, this concern for the unfit and the broken. Once he begins that, there's no end to it, only madness. It leads nowhere. That is some god's business. . . . Oh, such people are unconscious of their goodness. . . . Pamphilus, you are another herald from the future. Some day men will be like you (pp. 77-78).

Chrysis loves Pamphilus for this very quality in him. The realization that he responds as she does to the conditions of their world releases her from the feeling of isolation that has overwhelmed her, "the dim notion that lies at the back of many minds: the notion that we are not necessary to anyone, that attachments weave and unweave at the mercy of separation, satiety and experience" (p. 40). Chrysis, like many of Wilder's characters, is isolated from her world, as much by her wisdom and beauty as by her

10. Chrysis shares with the Abbess another characteristic. Centuries before the Abbess' time, Chrysis is also "jealous of the dignity of women. . ." (p. 50).
profession, and feels her isolation. Her cry, "I have lived alone and I shall die alone" (p. 46), reflects a realization that comes to her rather late. She had considered herself "dead," and thus she was not troubled by the inconveniences of her profession, or the villagers' sneers, or her dependents' ingratitude. The bond between her and Philocles, the ship captain, has been based primarily on the recognition between them that "they had both died to themselves. They lived at one remove from that self that supports the generality of men, the self that is a bundle of self-assertions, of greeds, of vanities and of easily-offended pride" (p. 86). While Chrysis does not fall back into such a deplorable, egocentric state, she nevertheless does realize that she has not "died" completely, that even "dead" as she is, she needs reassurance that her life is not completely "Vain. Empty. Transitory . . ." (p. 56).

In the character of Chrysis, Wilder demonstrates to his readers, if not to Chrysis herself, a means for overcoming the oppressive sense of isolation which confronts her. By showing that Chrysis, individual though she may be, is not unlike Alix, Camila and the Abbess, he provides a connection between her apparently transitory time on earth and other ages of man. The realization that human traits such as these characters embody are repeated in each cycle in history provides an identification with all mankind and
removes those traits and those characters from their temporal nature, placing them instead in the realm of the universal and eternal.

Also through the character of Chrysis, Wilder again demonstrates the impossibility of man's knowing the ultimate meaning of his life and death. He suggests that the most man can hope for is brief, intuited glimpses of an order in the universe. Thus, as he has done in The Cabala and in The Bridge of San Luis Rey, he asserts a mystical acceptance of a timeless order which exists outside, but informs, man's temporal existence; it is perceived only briefly and infrequently, but it is nevertheless there. Chrysis, on her deathbed, comforts herself with remembering such moments of intuition. Her final response to life on the verge of her death is an affirmation of living life with awareness, a mystical praise of life like that in The Cabala: "I have known the worst that the world can do to me, and . . . nevertheless I praise the world and all living. All that is, is well. Remember some day, remember me as one who loved all things and accepted from the gods all things, the bright and the dark" (p. 107).

Wilder has emphasized the repetition of human types not only in Chrysis, who repeats character traits of Alix, Camila, and the Abbess, but also in Philocles, who repeats the character traits of Captain Alvarado in The
Bridge of San Luis Rey. Philocles, like Captain Alvarado, is the outstanding sea captain of his time. Like Captain Alvarado's, his sea exploits are not undertaken for the sake of adventure or gain. Rather they are a means of filling the void in his life caused by the death of a beloved daughter and of passing the time until his death. Just as it has been the isolated Marquesa de Montemayor who has fully understood the reason behind Captain Alvarado's life, so it is an equally isolated Chrysis who similarly discovers the secret behind Philocles' adventures. There are some differences in the situations of the two characters. Philocles, at the time of the action of The Woman of Andros, has been reduced to a babbling idiocy as the result of wartime torture and is one of the stray human beings that Chrysis has taken into her household. Captain Alvarado, on the other hand, is himself the rescuer of another human being, Esteban. There is no doubt, however, that the two characters are basically the same person.

Wilder has so completely transferred this character from the earlier novel that he uses almost identical wording in his descriptions of the two men. Of Captain Alvarado, Wilder writes:

He was blackened and cured by all weathers. He stood in the Square with feet apart as though they were planted on a shifting deck. His eyes were strange, unaccustomed to the shorter range,
too used to seizing the appearances of a constellation between a cloud and a cloud, and the outline of a cape in rain.11

The following description of Philocles is almost a verbatim copy of that of Captain Alvarado:

He was blackened and cured by all weathers. He stood in the squares of the various ports of call, his feet apart as though they were forever planted on a shifting deck. He seemed to be too large for daily life; his very eyes were strange--unaccustomed to the shorter range, too used, to seizing the appearances of a constellation between a cloud and a cloud, and the outlines of a headland in rain (pp. 84-85).

Both Captain Alvarado and Philocles are silent men, and this characteristic is described similarly in the two novels. In The Bridge of San Luis Rey, Wilder writes: "They [Manuel and Esteban] had worked for him [Alvarado] a short time and the silence of the three of them had made a little kernel of sense in a world of boasting, self-excuse and rhetoric."12 Of Philocles, Wilder writes: "... it astonished her [Chrysis] to find someone laconic in a chattering world and with quiet hands in a gesturing civilization" (p. 84).

The fact that Wilder uses the same character, but under a different name and in a different historical circumstance, in The Woman of Andros as he does in The Bridge of San Luis Rey and that he incorporates in Chrysis

12. Ibid., p. 130.
character types from his earlier novels emphasizes Wilder's cyclical concept of time and history. Historical settings may change, social conditions may differ, but humanity remains the same and repeats itself endlessly. There is a comfort in viewing the life of mankind in such a way. Wilder has Simo, the father of Pamphilus, express the conflict which also confronts modern Western man in his dilemma about time and life and history: "Viewed from a distance . . . life is harmonious and beautiful. . . . But the present remains: this succession of small domestic vexations. I have lived such a life for sixty years and I am still upset by its ephemeral decisions. And I am still asking myself which is the real life: the present with its discontent, or the retrospect with its emotion" (pp. 137-138).

Wilder's answer to the question is that the two are the same. All times—past, present, and future—exist simultaneously and with equal reality. It is significant that Wilder has described Pamphilus as a "herald from the future," a description which signifies the existence of future, as well as past, in this vexatious present in which

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13. Italics mine. As Helmut Papajewski remarks in *Thornton Wilder*, p. 50, this unusual use of the preposition appears to make the course of world history reversible, allowing Pamphilus to be a herald out of the future and from Christianity.
Simo must find his way. The Woman of Andros thus reveals the same attitude toward time that T. S. Eliot expresses in the opening lines of "Burnt Norton":

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future, 14
And time future contained in time past.

Running throughout the basic plot—which is taken from Terence and is concerned with whether Pamphilus will be allowed to marry Glycerium—and adding moral and philosophical dimensions to the novel is the story of Chrysis, who attempts to translate the ideals of classical humanism into action and searches "for a final justification in religion for its values." 15 Wilder emphasizes the story of Chrysis and her effect on the other characters because in this novel, as in The Bridge of San Luis Rey, Wilder wished to reveal the inner forces in man's life which help to control his destiny. He has Pamphilus ask himself "whether the associations in life are based upon an accidental

14. Erwin Stürzl, who recognizes the expression of the cyclical element in human development in Our Town, equates the spirit which speaks in this passage from "Burnt Norton" to that which animates the Stage Manager's jumping from the people of Babylon to the people of a thousand years hence in Our Town (p. 343). It is rather interesting that he does not make the same comparison with The Woman of Andros, although he is aware of the close relationship between the novel and the play.

encounter or upon a profound and inner necessity" (p. 133). It is through Chrysis, Pamphilus, and the young priest of AEsculapius and Apollo and their effect on Simo that Wilder explores the major, timeless question of the novel--how does one live his life? Part of the answer to living life and finding meaning in life is through an identification with other similar lives in other cycles of human history. This answer has been suggested by Wilder through the various methods discussed earlier in this chapter. Through Chrysis, Pamphilus, and the young priest, Wilder presents another part of the answer. Through love they intuit a timeless reality outside their transitory state.

Simo realizes that these three have "some secret about living. . . . They know something that prevents their blundering about, as we do" (p. 130). What Wilder means to demonstrate as the secret which the priest, Pamphilus, and Chrysis possess is their knowledge about love and their willing acceptance of all of life, which includes accepting and loving "the unfit and the broken." Simo and Sostrata, his wife, illustrate the usual reaction of the islanders to the suffering of others, which is to regard such things as ailments, poverty, and uncleanness as "mere bad citizenship" (p. 127). Chrysis, on the other hand, responds with compassion, as is evidenced by her household. Glycerium, explaining the household to Pamphilus, says simply, "All of
them in the house,—she just found them somewhere. That's what she does" (p. 69). Unlike the Abbess, Chrysis has no social or religious justification for her actions. She proceeds as she does because of a "vague idea, that there lies the principle of living" (p. 49). This idea causes her to harangue herself when she is distressed by the hostility of her dependents toward her, chiding herself instead of them: "The fault is in me. It's my lack of perseverance in affection. I know that. Now, Chrysis, you must begin your life over again. . . . You must devote yourself with all your mind to your sheep. . . . It's cowardly of me to be able to love people only when they are new. . . . If I love them enough, I can understand them. . . ." (pp. 46-47).

The same spirit informs the priest's life. His function as a healer of the sick is determined by his priestly office at the temple of AEsculapius and Apollo, one of the many temples erected in honor of the master healer AEsculapius after he was slain by Zeus in his anger at the mortal's ability to raise the dead. Thus, the young priest's duties are grounded in ancient Greek belief. Nevertheless, he has a strange and unusual power over the sick and distressed among whom he spends so much of his life, an identification with them which renders him impersonal and rather alien to the healthy. His healing is based more on love and acceptance of the individual than on
medical potions, as Wilder emphasizes in a description of his curative powers: "... there is one thing greater than curing a malady and that is accepting a malady and sharing its acceptance" (p. 128).

Pamphilus does not exhibit directly the qualities which Chrysis and the young priest act upon. Wilder apparently intends merely to show the young man struggling with these new moral principles against the traditional Greek heritage, to illustrate, as Simo says, that there is "something of the priest trying to make its way in him" (p. 130). This comment by Simo is one of several which emphasize Pamphilus' special role as a "herald from the future." In his internal struggle, Pamphilus exemplifies Chrysis' observation that "It is true that of all forms of genius, goodness has the longest awkward age" (p. 55). The struggle climaxes during the course of a twenty-four-hour period of fasting and silence, while Pamphilus ponders what course he must take in regard to his life and his relationship to Glycerium. He returns to thoughts of Chrysis' last words to him, and he too praises "the whole texture of life, for he [sees] how strangely life's richest gift flowered from frustration and cruelty and separation" (pp. 148-149). He intuits that the "secret of the world" rests in "a sad love that [is] half hope, often rebuked and waiting to be reassured of its truth" (p. 149). His joy at this realization
of the beauty of life is dampened by Glycerium's subsequent death. He gains some courage from remembering Chrysis' injunction to another young man who had lost a sister: "You were happy with her once; do not doubt that the conviction at the heart of your happiness was as real as the conviction at the heart of your sorrow" (p. 161). This injunction could serve as Wilder's own humanistic credo. It is such an attitude toward life that allows him to write affirmatively and optimistically, in the best sense of that word, of the human race. It is not a complete defense against despair, however. But it can give one, as it does Pamphilus, in his "confusion and with [his] flagging courage," the faith to repeat: "I praise all living, the bright and the dark" (p. 162).

One of the most interesting aspects of The Woman of Andros is the effect that these three unusual people—Chrysis, Pamphilus, and the young priest—have on Simo, who is revealed as a man who is trying very hard to sort through the complexities of his life. He perceives that the codes of island life do not deal justly with all situations. He does not gloat on the island's gossip about Chrysis. He is capable of realizing, as Chremes would not be, that Chrysis is a "sovereign" personality. He leaves her, after his first meeting with her, filled with astonishment at the encounter, seeking some generalization to describe the
diversity of life and "its power of casting up from time to
time on the waves of tedious circumstance such star-like
persons" (p. 31).

Simo does not embrace another custom of the islands,
one which encourages fathers "in the luxuries of blustering
and tyranny" (p. 114). Instead, he treats his son Pamphilus
with deference, although he is confused by his own attitude
and considers it a weakness. Instead of forbidding Pam­
philus' marriage to Glycerium and insisting on his marriage
to Chremes' daughter, Simo restricts his comments to a
presentation of the case against the marriage. His monolo­
logue on the subject is an apt dramatization of his own
comment on his attempts to live life well. He blunders
about, knowing there is a "secret about living," unable to
get through the "mystery and ceremonial" that surround it.
But Simo is wise enough and humble enough to recognize the
greatness in those three individuals who have approached
that secret. He himself has come close enough to it to act
unhesitatingly on behalf of Glycerium. Willing to brave
the inevitable censure of his neighbors, he rescues her
from the slavetrader and takes her without question into
his thoroughly Greek home. In Simo, more realistically
than in the other characters in the novel, Wilder has
demonstrated his view of man's basic blundering nature.
Man lives blindly most of the time, but is occasionally
blessed with the humility and courage to exceed himself, intuiting rather than having absolute knowledge of that which is eternal.
CHAPTER V

HEAVEN'S MY DESTINATION

In the fall of 1930, Marxist critic Michael Gold attacked Thornton Wilder in a review of his first three novels and his first published collection of plays, *The Angel that Troubled the Waters*. Disturbed because Wilder's work did not portray the current American scene and the struggles of the working class, Gold called Wilder "the poet of the genteel bourgeoisie." He accused Wilder of promoting Anglo-Catholicism—"that newly fashionable literary religion that centers around Jesus Christ, the First British Gentleman." Finally, he derided Wilder's polished style:

And this is the style with which to express America? Is this the speech of a pioneer continent? . . . Is this the language of the intoxicated Emerson? Of the clean, rugged Thoreau, or vast Whitman? Where are the modern streets of New York, Chicago and New Orleans in these little novels? Where are the cotton mills, and the murder of Ella May and her songs? Where are the child slaves of the beet fields? Where are the stockbroker suicides, the labor racketeers or passion and death of the coal miners? . . . Is Mr. Wilder a Swede or a Greek, or is he an American? No stranger would know from these books he has written.1

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Gold's attack raised a critical furor which continued for several weeks in the *New Republic*. It even caused comment in other publications.²

Although Wilder never responded directly to Gold's charges, the next novel that he published, *Heaven's My Destination*, in 1935, was set in America's dust bowl--Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri--and the action took place from the late fall of 1930 to the late fall of 1931. Although there is no mention of Ella May and the child slaves, there is a failing bank and the near-suicide of a dejected real estate broker. Remarks about the depression form a litany behind the story of George Brush. The modern streets of the large cities do not appear, but the small town life of general stores and Chatauqua camps is clearly portrayed. The seamy side of American life is vividly there--in the portrayal of Queenie Craven's boarding house and its inhabitants and in the small hotels of the traveling salesman. The style aptly suits the characters and situations portrayed; the language is the colloquial speech of the American heartland. The cataloging of the names of towns and schools along George Brush's sales route is reminiscent of Whitman's catalogs. The religion on display

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² Henry Hazlitt, for example, in "Communist Criticism," *Nation*, CXXXI (November 26, 1930), 583-584, points out the ridiculous standards Gold used for judging literature and calls Gold irresponsible.
is about as far in the Christian tradition from Anglo-Catholicism as it could be. The protagonist, George Brush, embodies fundamental evangelical American Protestantism. Finally, the novel is based on a completely American folk situation—the old joke of the traveling salesman and the farmer's daughter.

It would be an over-simplification, however, to accept the novel merely as Wilder's attempt to prove to his critics that he could write about America. It is much more accurate to view it as Wilder's proof to himself that the American scene would provide him with particular materials through which he could express the kind of timeless, universal ideas with which he has always been preoccupied. He spoke of this matter to Richard Goldstone:

I think you would find that the work [all of it] is a gradual drawing near to the America I know. . . . I began, first with Heaven's My Destination, to approach the American scene. Already, in the one-act plays, I had become aware of how difficult it is to invest one's contemporary world with the same kind of imaginative life one has extended to those removed in time and place. But I always feel that the progression is there and visible; I can be seen collecting the practice, the experience and courage, to present my own times.3

Wilder's continued concern with time and his intention to reaffirm an eternal, timeless reality are revealed most obviously in the cyclic structuring of Heaven's My Destination. Once again, Wilder has used the framing cycle

of one year in the life of a young man, as he did in The
Cabala. The year in Heaven's My Destination is from George
Brush's twenty-third birthday to his twenty-fourth. By
chance, Brush finds himself in Wellington, Oklahoma, on the
morning of his twenty-third birthday. He proposes to spend
the day in meditation. Armed with a list of his virtues
and his faults and his resolutions for the coming year, he
walks out to the edge of town, lies face downward beside a
pond, watches turtles and water snakes, and hears the birds
announce a hot day: "Tremendous were the good resolutions
adopted that morning. It was to be a great year. He never
forgot the solemnity of that hour, even though, at the end
of it, still on an empty stomach, he fell asleep."  

The events of this occasion which begins the yearly
cycle are repeated at the end of the cycle, an end which is
also the beginning of the next cycle. George Brush is
again in Wellington, Oklahoma, this time by arrangement,
for his twenty-fourth birthday.

He returned to the path through the deep weeds and
came to the pond near the deserted brick factory.
Again there were turtles on the log; again the
birdcalls foretold a hot day. He lay flat on his
face and finally fell asleep, but not before he
had passed an earnest hour (p. 303).

The yearly cycle which begins at that moment will in all

4. Thornton Wilder, Heaven's My Destination (New
York, 1935), p. 17. Future references to the novel will
be placed in parentheses in the text.
likelihood be a repetition of the cycle which has preceded it, as Wilder makes clear in the short résumé with which he ends the novel.

Within this wider cycle which encloses the novel, there are other cyclic patterns. Brush's occupation as a textbook salesman requires him to travel a circuit between Kansas City, Missouri, and Abilene, Texas. The novel opens with Brush in the middle of a return trip to Kansas City. The first four chapters recount his adventures along the way. Chapters five and six relate incidents that occur in Kansas City, ending with Brush's hospitalization from a beating by three men with whom he was accustomed to room. Chapter seven begins with an account of Brush's setting out again "on that long swing of the pendulum between Kansas City and Abilene, Texas, that was his work" (p. 149). Again there is a block of six chapters, ending with another crisis--the dissolution of his marriage--in Kansas City. The thirteenth chapter begins as the seventh did: "Again George Brush set out on the long swing of the pendulum to Abilene, Texas . . . " (p. 292). The novel ends in the midst of this final circuit, as it has begun in the midst of an earlier one. Helmut Papajewski has written that the forward progress of the novel occurs in a spiral pattern, with the basic structure being discharged in elevation and
constant repetition. The cyclical movements of a spiral and the constant repetition involved in such a movement are quite obviously there. But whether there is an elevation of the movement is open to question.

One of the major repetitions in the novel emphasizes the similarity between the pattern in the first six chapters and the pattern of the next six. But it is a repetition with variation. In the first chapter, on the train out of Fort Worth, Brush, acting on his evangelical convictions, approaches a stranger about religion with the words: "Brother, can I talk to you about the most important thing in life?" (p. 4). The man replies: "If it's insurance, I got too much. . . . If it's oilwells, I don't touch 'em, and if it's religion, I'm saved" (p. 4). Brush refuses to accept the man's statement at face value and presses his point. The man reacts angrily: "I'm saved . . . from making a goddam fool of myself in public places. I'm saved, you little peahen, from putting my head into other people's business" (p. 5). Brush replies, in all the assurance gained from his college course entitled "How to approach strangers on the subject of Salvation," "You're angry, brother, . . . because you're aware of an unfulfilled life" (p. 5). Brush's persistence leads to the man's throwing his briefcase out the train window.

On the circuit which begins in the seventh chapter, after Brush's release from the hospital, Brush is himself approached by an evangelist on the train from Waco to Dallas. The evangelist uses a slight variation of Brush's own opener: "Young man, have you ever thought seriously about the great facts of life and death?" (p. 151). Just as Brush had earlier refused to accept the other man's account of his spiritual state, the evangelist brushes aside Brush's attempts to prove to the man that he is "saved."

In the accepted rhetoric of the fundamentalists, the evangelist tells Brush that he is "puffed-up" and "stiff-necked." And Brush's own attitude toward others comes home to him in the evangelist's words, "I want to tell you it's not enough to say that you've been saved" (p. 154). When Brush moves away from the man in embarrassment and dismay, the evangelist harangues the rest of the passengers, holding Brush up as an example of moral cowardice, reacting in exactly the same way Brush had earlier to the stranger's anger.

Besides exemplifying a repetition of a pattern, this incident also parodies Brush's own approach to life. The pattern of the evangelist's life is revealed to be a distorted reflection of Brush's own life pattern. Thus, Brush's human type recurs in the evangelist, but with grotesque variations. Not only does the evangelist carry to
an extreme Brush's habit of approaching people on trains, but also it is revealed that the evangelist's whole situation is a grotesque extension of some of Brush's favorite theories. Brush has taken a vow of voluntary poverty and gives away all of his money that he does not use for necessities. When Brush questions the evangelist about what he lives on, the man replies:

I'll tell you. The Lord doesn't neglect his workers. No, sir-reee, no, sir. He touches the hearts of people here and there, sometimes one place, sometimes another. Money? What's money? Brother, I don't believe in money. Matthews six twenty-five. This minute, boy, I have one dollar between me and the birds of the air . . . . Two dollars between me and the fowls of the air. But am I afraid? No. I live by faith and prayer.

Psalms thirty-seven twenty-five (p. 156).

When Brush had earlier expressed his own beliefs about voluntary poverty to Mrs. Margie McCoy, the "cousin" of another traveling salesman, she had asked him what he was going to use for money when he got married: "How do you know your wife'll be willing to throw away all your money every month, and how do you know she'll be willing to look forward with a big thrill to the poorhouse, like you do?" (p. 36). Brush replies to her question with unhesitating assurance: "Oh, she will" (p. 36). Mrs. McCoy's question is pertinent because one of the major goals in Brush's life is to found "an American home." He tells Mrs. McCoy: "You know what I think is the greatest thing in the
world? It's when a man, I mean an American, sits down to Sunday dinner with his wife and six children around him" (p. 38).

Just as Brush's theory of voluntary poverty has been parodied by the evangelist's religious clichés, all the more grotesque coming from the unshaven man in soiled clothes whose breath reeks with the odor of rotting teeth, this major goal in Brush's life is also parodied by the evangelist's home situation. He tells Brush that he has "a noble wife and six fine children" (p. 157). Under further questioning, he reveals that his wife has "found it best to take a place as laundress in a Dallas hotel" (p. 157). Of the six children, who Brush was led at first to believe were all doing well in school, "gradually it came out that the oldest two boys had run away, another had joined the navy, and that one daughter was bedridden; that left two children doing well in school" (p. 157).

There are other repetitions within the two major sections of the book. In each case, just as with the incident on the train, the second version of the incidents holds more pain for Brush than the first has. In the first section, Brush is arrested for expounding on his theories

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6. This scene, with Brush questioning the evangelist about how he lives and about his family, is also a repetition with some variation of the scene in which Mrs. McCoy questions Brush about his ideas—with Brush here, of course, taking the role played by Mrs. McCoy earlier.
about money in a bank. He is detained for only a short
time and then is sent on his way. In the second section,
he is arrested, jailed, and brought to trial on charges of
attempted kidnapping and robbery. Once again he is re­
leased and told to leave town. These arrests because of
"misunderstandings" are part of the pattern of Brush's life.
He reveals that he has been arrested before the time of the
action of the novel for riding a Jim Crow car. In the
résumé of events which occur after his twenty-fourth birth­
day, Wilder reports that Brush is arrested once again.

There is also the repetition of crises in Brush's
life which occur just before Brush sets out again on "the
swing of the pendulum." As noted above, at the end of the
first section, Brush is brutally beaten by his roominghouse
companions and is hospitalized. At the end of the second
section, Brush is brutally beaten psychologically by the
complete failure of his marriage and his attempts to found
an American home. This psychological and emotional wound­
ing leads to a much more serious hospitalization for Brush
in the midst of the circuit which begins in the thirteenth
chapter.

What occurs, then, is that the pattern of the cycle
of the first six chapters is repeated in the cycle of the
second six chapters with progressively darker overtones.7

7. Within these incident patterns, there are also
numerous minor repetitions--for example, Brush's repeated
formulas about himself and the inevitable, repeated com­
ments of "He's nuts" or "He's crazy" about Brush by other
people.
Brush's growing depression is an adequate measure of this progression. In the first section, Brush tells Queenie Craven that he is not feeling well and explains, "It's not anything special. I'm just sick of hotels and trains. I'm sick of lots of things" (p. 109). He then surprises both of them by asking her, "Did you ever wish you were dead, Queenie?" (p. 109). In the second section, these expressions of a vague unease have progressed to more definite feelings. Brush declares to Queenie after they have visited the dying Herb Martin that he doesn't "want to go on living" (p. 190). He then asks another question—one which is far more terrifying to him than the possibility of death: "Queenie, wouldn't it be terrible if I lost my faith?" (p. 191). Eventually, the worst occurs; he loses his faith.

In addition to using circular, repetitive structural patterns, Wilder reveals his concern with time in the fact that he also provides for this novel a "backdrop of eternity." On the street car ride to the park with Roberta and Lottie, Brush tells Lottie that he intends to show them markings on the rocks in the park left by the ice-cap. He explains that the North Pole had once extended to Kansas City, the ice being two thousand feet thick at the point where they presently are. When Lottie asks Brush when all the things he is talking about happened, Brush replies, "About eight hundred thousand years ago" (p. 272). With
this scene, Wilder reminds his readers of the almost incomprehensible stretches of time which surround his characters. This geological information helps to situate the action of the novel against universal time. A reminder of the immensity of space which also engulfs his characters (and a further reminder of cosmic time) is contained in another of Brush's theories, which is that children should be allowed to stay up late enough to see the stars because viewing the stars is "an important element in the spiritual education of mankind" (p. 284). Although Wilder does not elaborate on this theory, he demonstrates its meaning by showing that the cyclical patterns and rhythms in the life of George Brush correspond to and thus connect his life with the timeless, cyclical patterns and rhythms of the universe. The apparently linear, finite time of the particular individual is thus absorbed into the reality of the eternal time of the universe.

George Brush's cyclic, rhythmic journey is without real end or beginning, just as the cycles of the universe are without real end or beginning. It is highly likely that Wilder intended Brush to be regarded as an American Quixote, for his journey, like Don Quixote's, involves him in a series of clashes between the real and the ideal. But more important, his journey, like Don Quixote's is a timeless one. Certainly it is most accurately viewed in the
light of observations which Wilder himself has made about Don Quixote. Although there are spatial implications in Wilder's remarks, the temporal considerations are of major significance in understanding Wilder's own handling of time. He has written that he finds in Cervantes' story "the consciousness of the human as multitude and of time as incommensurable" on its "road which seems to have no beginning and no end." 8

The character which Wilder created to make a time­less journey on his own quixotic "road which seems to have no beginning and no end" is both a saint and a fool. George Brush is representative, as are Pamphilus in The Woman of Andros and Astrée-Luce in The Cabala, of a time­less human type, the naively good, idealistic human being, the so­called "holy fool." The fact that Wilder intends to show in George Brush a repetition of the human type exemplified by Pamphilus is made explicit through one of the epigraphs of Heaven's My Destination, Chrysis' statement from The Woman of Andros: "Of all the forms of genius, goodness has the longest awkward age." George, like Pamphilus, is trying to work out a new way to live. 9 He says

9. Wilder emphasizes the fact that Brush is very like Pamphilus by having Brush repeat an act that Pamphilus has performed. He, like Pamphilus, spends twenty­four hours in silence and fasting. Unlike Pamphilus' family and acquaintances, however, the people whom Brush encounters during his fast do not understand what he is doing, and the result of his communication by writing with a little girl during this period is a charge of attempted kidnapping.
at one point, "I think all the ideas that are going around now are wrong. I'm trying to begin all over again at the beginning" (p. 170). He himself is aware that he is going through an "awkward age." He tells Roberta, "I know I'm kind of funny in some ways . . . but that's only these earlier years when I'm trying to think things out. By the time I'm thirty all that kind of thing will be clearer to me, and . . . and it'll all be settled" (p. 281).

There is a difference in Brush's and Pamphilus' awkwardness, however. Pamphilus' search for a new way to live involves finding a new way to relate to people. Brush's theorizing, on the other hand, mainly ignores people and concentrates on negative rules of moral conduct based on his religious beliefs and on idealistic approaches to social problems. What Pamphilus is seeking, the advent of Christianity brought some answers to. George Brush, on the other hand, begins his search by building on the solidified code of the more fundamental Baptists. He accepts without question the rigid dogma of his brand of Christianity which places emphasis on a particular kind of personal salvation, on literal interpretation of the Bible, on not smoking and not drinking and not getting a divorce—all of which in the main ignore the basic tenets of Christianity.

In his wholly emotional acceptance of his religious principles, Brush resembles Astrée-Luce. In spite of all
the thinking he professes to do, he obviously has never thought rationally about his religious convictions. As Burkin points out to him, he is "full of evasions" (p. 266). Just as Astrée-Luce's unthinking faith is easily demolished, so is Brush's, although Brush's faith is not destroyed as hers is by a rational, skeptical man.

Wilder's conception of his comic masterpiece is in keeping with observations he has made about the comic spirit in literature. In an essay published in 1957, Wilder wrote of the comic spirit in connection with James Joyce and *Finnegans Wake*:

> The comic spirit is constantly relieving us of the burden of life's logical implications. Confront life logically and you might as well resign at once. Human beings cannot bear much wrong and cannot bear much logic and they cannot bear too much self-examination; and the comic spirit was given us as reconciliation and as an alibi from drawing the last deductions. Push *Don Quixote* and *The Misanthrope* just a little further and you find agonizing material; the comic spirit has saved them from the precipices over which they hang: defeat and despair. It is necessary to remember this book [*Finnegans Wake*] was written over just such a precipice.10

In an interview in the same year, Wilder commented on the comic spirit as it relates directly to *Heaven's My Destination*, amplifying in his comments the close

resemblance between George Brush and the young Thornton Wilder.

I came from a very strict Calvinistic father, was brought up partly among the missionaries of China, and went to that splendid college at Oberlin at a time when the classrooms and student life carried a good deal of the pious didacticism which would now be called narrow Protestantism. And that book is, as it were, an effort to come to terms with those influences.

The comic spirit is given us in order that we may analyze, weigh, and clarify things in us which nettle us, or which we are outgrowing, or trying to reshape. That is a very autobiographical book.  

In view of these statements, it is not surprising that *Heaven's My Destination* also skirts the brinks of defeat and despair. George Brush's personal life is a compound of highly comic but often near tragic contradictions which exemplify the clash between the idealistic concepts by which he tries to live and the realities with which he is faced. He is a traveling book salesman who has taken a vow of voluntary poverty, but he continues to get raises in pay in the midst of the depression. He is an avowed pacifist who is frequently violent. He espouses the ideas of Tolstoy and Gandhi, and his religious conversion came about at a tent meeting conducted by a sixteen-year-old girl evangelist who was a drug addict. He always introduces himself with a short, clear factual account of himself, but people have trouble remembering his name. He spends a night

in a barn with a farmer's daughter, and then feels obligated to hunt her down again and marry her. He got the highest grades at Shiloh Baptist College, but he is naive to the point of stupidity. He is "the perfectly logical man" (p. 217), whose perfect logic seems like insanity to most people whom he encounters.

The despair that confronts George Brush occurs when he loses sight of the eternality which is his goal and allows himself to get caught up in historical time. He lives by idealistic theories which he believes partake of the eternality toward which he is heading. He has formulated these theories from his reading of Gandhi's autobiography, the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and various pamphlets which he carries around in his pockets—*Sayings of Leo Tolstoi*, *Thoughts from Edmund Burke*, *Sayings of Great Statesmen*, *Sayings of Great Philosophers*, *Stories from Famous After-dinner Speakers*. His life seems to illustrate the answer to Margie McCoy's angry outburst after he has explained some of his theories to her and Remus Blodgett:

"Where do they get yuh, your the'ries and your ideas? Nowhere! Live, kid,—live! What'd become of all of us sons-a-bitches, if we stopped to argue out every step we took?" (p. 47). Brush, however, expects his theories to get him to Heaven, because to his mind "Heaven's [the] destination" of his saintly, foolish, timeless journey. His certainty
of his destination is revealed in the other epigraph to the novel:

George Brush is my name;  
America's my nation;  
Ludington's my dwellingplace  
And Heaven's my destination.

Wilder notes that this is "Doggerel verse which children of the Middle West were accustomed to write in their schoolbooks." As Donald Haberman points out, however, the same verse is used by James Joyce in The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, but without the certainty found in Wilder's use:

Stephen Dedalus is my name,  
Ireland is my nation.  
Clongowes is my dwellingplace  
And heaven my expectation.

Stephen's European passivity is displaced by Brush's American surety: "George's way may be rough and unclear with much backtracking and many detours, but he knows precisely where he will arrive at the end of his journey."\(^{12}\)

It is Brush's devotion to his idealistic theories which causes much of the roughness and many of the detours on his journey. This devotion leads him to push those theories to their logical extreme. In Brush's situation Wilder reveals the defeat and despair which may result from such relentless logic and which the comic spirit saves

most human beings from. Brush's theory of voluntary pov-
erty causes him to withdraw his five hundred dollar savings
from a bank in Armina, Oklahoma. He refuses to collect the
interest because he does not believe that money should earn
money. He explains to the bank president his theory that
money and banks are the result of fear and breed fear.
Because he delivers these opinions in rather ringing tones
and because he is misunderstood by his hearers, a run is
started on the bank which will lead inevitably to its clos-
ing—and will prove the validity of Brush's theory.

His theory of ahimsa, which he got from Gandhi,
combined with his theory of voluntary poverty, leads him to
assist a hold-up man at a general store in Ozarkville,
Missouri. Brush explains his theories to Judge Carberry at
his trial following his arrest for this assistance with a
naive but unanswerable logic: "... a poor person ... is a person whose head's always full of anxious thoughts about money"(p. 239). Consequently, "the poorest persons in the world ... are beggars and robbers. ... When you give money to a robber you do two things: you show him that he's really a beggar at heart, and you make a certain strong impression on his mind"(p. 240). The impression is created through the practice of ahimsa, that theory being, as Brush has previously explained at a point where he failed to practice it, that "if bad people are treated
kindly by the people they insult, why, then they start thinking about it and then they become ashamed . . ." (p. 169). Under probing by the judge, Brush continues to defend his belief in ahimsa even to the point of affirming that the spread of ahimsa is important enough to allow thousands of sisters to be attacked without opposition and to allow criminals to be released from imprisonment.

Judge Carberry is obviously both dismayed at Brush's foolishness and moved by his saintly sincerity. He releases Brush and attempts to give him some advice: "Go slow; go slow. See what I mean? I don't like to think of you getting into any unnecessary trouble. . . . The human race is pretty stupid. . . . Doesn't do any good to insult 'm. Go gradual. . . . Most people don't like ideas" (p. 247). Brush is so convinced of the rightness of his own way, however, that he is just as puzzled by the judge's comments as he had been by Margie McCoy's more earthy statements. He is convinced, as he has shouted at one of the roomers who also tried to give him some advice, that "It's the world that's crazy. Everybody's crazy except me; that's what's the matter. The whole world's nuts" (p. 148).

Brush has other theories about life that do not cause him quite as much trouble. He has a fine tenor voice and frequently offers his services as a soloist, but he will never accept payment because he believes that his
voice is "just a thing of nature, like any other. Niagara Falls and the caves of Kentucky and John McCormack are just gifts to the public" (p. 40). He has a theory that "all sickness comes from having lost hope about something" (p. 46); that nurses are "the true priestesses of our time" (p. 296); that no one should accept the commission of giving away money for someone else because one should feel his gift with every inch of himself; and, finally, his favorite theory, that "the world's full of wonderful people . . . if you know where to look" (p. 140).

As Brush travels his circuitous and quixotic path, his devotion to his theories evokes the same response from most people he encounters—they consider him "crazy" or "nuts." As E. K. Brown remarks, this attitude of the world toward Brush is one which has appeared in Wilder's earlier novels, because "In Mr. Wilder's view excellence of a rare sort always excites hatred and mistrust. . . . For Mr. Wilder the malevolence of the Mississippi Valley is not an iniquity peculiar to it, but merely the local form of [a] universal baseness. . . ." Regardless of how the world reacts, however, Brush feels that he has adequate justification for his beliefs and actions. Early in the novel, Margie McCoy comments: "Your ideas aren't the same as other people's, are they?" (p. 36). Brush replies, "I should

think not. I didn't put myself through college for four years and go through a difficult religious conversion in order to have ideas like other people's" (p. 36). In the second section of the novel, Judge Carberry makes exactly the same observation and Brush makes exactly the same reply.

Brush's assurance, however, is shaken during the course of the novel. His frequent statement that he is the happiest man he knows takes on an edge of hysteria by the time he says it to Lottie when it is obvious that his marriage is a complete failure. By this point also it is obvious that the world is not wonderful and full of wonderful people. Brush has helped to prevent a suicide. He has been tricked into getting drunk and visiting a brothel by men he considered his friends, men who later beat him severely. He has seen Herb Martin dying in absolute cynicism. He has been offered thirty-five thousand dollars to marry the stupid daughter of an equally stupid state legislator. Finally, he has seen the wreckage of his own American home.

The collapse of Brush's American home is inevitable. His religious beliefs cause him to hunt down the farmer's daughter whom he seduced or was seduced by one rainy night outside Kansas City. As far as he is concerned, because of the seduction, they are married for life. It is a highly
comic idea—a shotgun wedding between a traveling salesman and a farmer's daughter, with the salesman holding the shotgun. But the situation contains within it the seeds of despair and defeat. Brush tells Margie McCoy: "It's not important if I love her or not. . . . All I know is that I'm her husband until she or I dies. When you've known anybody as well as that, it means that you can never know anybody else as well as that until one of the two of you dies" (p. 44). At this point, Brush is not even certain of the girl's name. When he finally locates her with the help of a detective, he discovers that she wants no part of him. Through the agency of her sister Lottie, he finally gets Roberta to agree to the marriage. He tells Lottie: "I'll love her pretty well. I'll love her almost perfectly, you'll see. She'll never notice the difference" (p. 275).

Here again, however, Brush's devotion to a theory—a religious one in this case—ignores the human realities. Love and understanding are important. An "almost perfect" love cannot be willed into existence. Thus, theologically correct as the marriage is according to Brush's fundamentalist beliefs, its failure is inevitable.

The dissolution of his marriage does to Brush what no amount of argument or contempt has done before. He begins to doubt and to break his rules of Christian conduct. One day he discovers that he has lost his faith. As if in
proof of his own theory about illness, with the loss of his faith comes the loss of his health. His whole physical system collapses, and he lies in a hospital near death for weeks. When he is visited one day by Dr. Bowie, a Methodist minister, his condemnation of religion is as harsh as has been that of George Burkin, the unemployed motion-picture director whom Brush meets in jail in Ozarkville, Missouri. Burkin, an intelligent, well-educated, but completely cynical man, expresses his contempt for Brush's ideas about religion, telling him: "You've got the gaseous ideas of a sick girl. It has nothing to do with life. You live in a foggy, unreal, narcotic dream. Think it over. Listen, benny, can't you see that what you call religion is just the shiverings of the cowardly" (p. 264). In an effort to educate Brush in the realities of life, Burkin explains to him about primitive man and the jungle, nature myths, astronomy, "the pretentions of subjective religious experience; the absurdity of conflicting prayers, man's egotistic terror before extinction" (pp. 266-267). Burkin, that is, attempts to explain to Brush something about the sciences and the modern research which have reassessed man's notions about time and space and man's position in the universe. Burkin, like many contemporary men, has concluded that in the light of this knowledge each individual man and man's religious beliefs have very little validity.
Brush shouts Burkin down. When Dr. Bowie attempts to pray for him in the hospital, however, he shouts the minister down also, using his own case to illustrate the inefficacy of prayer: "The more I asked the worse I got. Everything I did was wrong. Everybody I knew got to hate me. So that proves it" (p. 300). To the minister's horror, he continues: "The second thing that shows that there is no God is that he allows such foolish people to be ministers. I've secretly thought that for a long time, and now I'm glad to be able to say it. All ministers are stupid—do you hear me?—all. . . . I mean: all except one" (p. 300). These statements by Brush express the anguish of a completely disillusioned idealist, an anguish which is even more pronounced in his comment that "I made the mistake all my life of thinking you could get better and better until you were perfect" (p. 299).

In Heaven's My Destination Wilder once again provides a mystical resolution to the conflict which engulfs his central character. The mystical experience in this novel, however, is placed within the Christian tradition. Significantly, the revelation comes about through an act of disinterested love. Brush is restored to health and renews his faith through a gesture on the part of the one minister whom he excepts from stupidity, Father Pasziewski, a Catholic priest whom he never meets. At a nurse's insistence,
Brush allows Dr. Bowie to open a package that is lying at his bedside in a large accumulation of unopened mail. The package contains an ordinary silver-plated spoon, a bequest from Father Pasziewski. Brush accepts the coincidence that he receives the spoon on Friday, which is the day on which the priest had always prayed for him, as a mystical sign of Providence. The coincidence is proof to him of the efficacy of prayer, and it also reveals again to him a reality outside time that he had lost sight of—in his case, the reality of a benevolent God and an eternal Heaven. Wilder has given one assessment of modern Western man's circumstances through Burkin. Through Brush's experience, he gives another answer to the problem of the individual's validity. Although the immediate return of Brush's faith and the immediate improvement in his health as a result of this incident are almost comical in their abruptness and even though Wilder has placed Brush's experience within the confines of a particular tradition, he does assert that the life of an individual takes on meaning through the intuitive perception of transcendent realities which cannot be logically determined and which are independent of time and place.

14. Like Astrée-Luce, that other fool in Christ, Brush in his sorrow and disillusionment has refused to receive visitors or to open his mail.
Although the moment of renewed faith is a dramatic one which perhaps causes one to expect resultant dramatic changes in Brush's life, in fact Brush's reawakened faith, which in essence is a reacceptance of an eternal time, causes little outward change in his approach to life, since his previous life had also been guided by his faith. In Wilder's résumé of Brush's activities following the restoration of his faith, he makes it clear that Brush continues on his journey in much the same way that he has conducted himself during the twenty-third year of his life. His idealism continues to clash with the realities of the world around him. The one indication of some change in the pattern is that Brush arranges for the college education of a young waitress whom he discovers reading Darwin's *The Cruise of the "Beagle."* This incident reflects a change in attitude on his part, since he has previously been horrified by another young girl's belief in the evolutionary theory. The change that occurs, however, is not simply a liberal tolerance of a theory which conflicts completely with Brush's fundamentalist religious beliefs. Instead, the incident indicates a new awareness on Brush's part that he must at times operate on his own beliefs in a manner different from the kind of violent, destructive confrontations with which he has previously met a disagreement of opinion. It indicates a new willingness in the light of
the evidence of Father Pasziewski's own disinterested love for him to accept the human race, to praise, as Pamphilus does, "all living, the bright and the dark." That Wilder thus portrays Brush continuing on his journey in much the same way, repeating the cycles which have already been defined as the pattern of his life, intensifies the perception of that journey as a timeless one, without beginning or end. The mystical experience which has renewed Brush's faith becomes an intuitive confirmation of the kind of timeless reality which Wilder constructs through Brush's endless journey.
CHAPTER VI

THE IDES OF MARCH

Thirteen years elapsed between the publication of Heaven's My Destination and the appearance of Wilder's fifth novel, The Ides of March. During those intervening years Wilder wrote primarily for the stage. Our Town, first performed in 1938, and The Skin of Our Teeth, first performed in 1942, won for Wilder his second and third Pulitzer Prizes.¹ During this period, The Merchant of Yonkers also had its unsuccessful first performance.²

Wilder's turning to the theater and his subsequent technical innovations in The Ides of March are partly a result of his association during the late 1930's with Gertrude Stein. In a frequently cited Time interview, Wilder is reported as saying that it was the distinction made by Miss Stein between human nature and the human mind which made clear to him the significance of his archaeological experience in Rome and the relationship of it to the

¹. The first had been for The Bridge of San Luis Rey in 1928.

². Slightly revised, and retitled The Matchmaker, it was successful in New York in 1955. It has had a continuing success on the stage and the screen as the musical comedy Hello, Dolly!

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statement made by his teacher at Oberlin, Professor Charles Wager, that "Every great work was written this morning."3

Wilder explains Miss Stein's distinction between human nature and the human mind in his introduction to her book The Geographical History of America, or the Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind. He reports that the book was a result of her inquiries into the question of what makes a work a literary masterpiece. She discovered that the answer lay in the relationship that masterpieces possessed to the problems of identity and time. To discuss the treatment of these problems in literary masterpieces, she distinguished between the concepts of human nature and the human mind. Her distinction is summarized by Wilder as follows:

Human Nature clings to identity, its insistence on itself as personality, and to do this it must employ memory and the sense of an audience. By memory it is reassured of its existence through consciousness of itself in time-succession. By an audience it is reassured of itself through its effect on another. . . . From Human Nature, therefore, come all the assertions of the self and all the rhetorical attitudes that require the audience—wars, politics, propaganda, jealousy, and so on. The Human Mind, however, has no identity; every moment "it knows what it knows when it knows it." It gazes at pure existing. It is deflected by no consideration of an audience, for when it is aware of an audience it has ceased to "know." In its highest expression it is not even an audience to itself. It knows and it writes, for its principal expression is in writing and its highest achievement has been in literary

masterpieces. These masterpieces, though they may be about human nature are not of it. Time and identity and memory may be in them as subject-matter—as that existing at which the Human Mind gazes—but the absence from the creative mind of those qualities has been acknowledged by the vast multitudes of the world who, striving to escape from the identity-bound and time-immersed state, recognize that such a liberation has been achieved in these works. 4

The significance of Wilder's remark to the Time interviewer is clear. His experience in Rome had made him aware of the vastness of historical time and the weight it placed upon the individual. Because of that experience, he himself had attempted in various ways in his novels to transcend "the identity-bound and time-immersed state."
The eternal present of literary masterpieces, according to Miss Stein, was that they had achieved that transcendence.

Wilder turned to the theater because he felt that the realistic method of the novel limits that transcendence. He wrote in 1941:

The characters in them [novels], it is true, are represented as living moment by moment their present time, but the constant running commentary of the novelist ... inevitably conveys to the reader the fact that these events are long since past and over.

He concluded:

A play is what takes place.
A novel is what one person tells us took place.

A play visibly represents pure existing. A novel is what one mind, claiming to omniscience, asserts to have existed.5

In 1957, nearly a decade after the publication of The Ides of March, Wilder discussed this problem again with Richard Goldstone. His remarks reveal both that his vision is not historical, but ahistorical, and that literature's temporal form, the traditional narrative structure in time, is an uneasy vehicle for the expression of such a vision. He commented:

The problem of telling you about my past life as a writer is like that of imaginative narration itself; it lies in the effort to employ the past tense in such a way that it does not rob those events of their character of having occurred in freedom. A great deal of writing and talking about the past is unacceptable. It freezes the historical in a determinism. Today's writer smugly passes his last judgment and confers on existing attitudes the lifeless aspect of plaster-cast statues in a museum. He recounts the past as though the characters knew what was going to happen next.6

In the same year, in his preface to a collected edition of Our Town, The Skin of Our Teeth, and The Matchmaker, Wilder enlarged upon his conception of the differing abilities of the novel and the play to present the general kind of truth, or the "pure existing," for which he strove. The novel, he said, stresses the "unique occasion," the


fact that all human actions, thoughts, and emotions have occurred only once, in one time and place. Even the most commonplace kinds of utterances are never exactly the same, because each time they are spoken in a unique circumstance.

He remarked, however, that

the more one is aware of this individuality in experience . . . the more one becomes attentive to what these disparate moments have in common, to repetitive patterns . . . . The theater is admirably fitted to tell both truths ["that of the isolated occasion" and "that which includes and resumes the innumerable"]. It has one foot planted firmly in the particular, since each actor before us . . . is indubitably a living, breathing "one"; yet it tends and strains to exhibit a general truth since its relation to a specific "realistic" truth is confused and undermined by the fact that it is an accumulation of untruths, pretenses and fiction. The novel is pre-eminently the vehicle of the unique occasion, the theatre of the generalized one. It is through the theatre'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.7

The theater, then, displays what the unique occasions bound to a particular time and place have in common, the timeless, universal "repetitive patterns."

Wilder realized, however, that the theater could be "devitalized" by an emphasis on place, such as through the realistic stage settings for Shakespeare's plays in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He wrote: "When you emphasize place in the theatre, you drag down and limit and harness time to it. You thrust the action back into

7. Wilder, Preface to Three Plays, pp. x-xi.
past time, whereas it is precisely the glory of the stage that it is always 'now' there.\textsuperscript{8}

Just as Wilder realized that the theater could fall short of its possibilities, he also recognized the possibility that the novel could rise above its limitations, albeit rarely. In an essay on Joyce also published in 1957, Wilder expressed his belief in the possibility for the novel to reveal generalized truth if it transcends the realistic method of the novel and the particular time consciousness of that method. Wilder wrote that the awareness of the vastness of time which science has given to most people of the twentieth century has two major effects on the expectations one brings to a novel. The first is the lessened interest in the anecdote, in the plot; the second is "an urgent search for the validity of individual experience." He concluded:

Now Joyce is the great novelist of these two things. He is the novelist who has most succeeded in placing man in an immense field of reference, among all the people who have lived and died, in all the periods of time, all the geography of the world, all the races, all the catastrophes of history. And he is also the one who has most drastically engaged in a search for the validity of the individual as an absolute.\textsuperscript{9}

The hero of \textit{Finnegans Wake} is both "the most 'generalized' character in all literature" and a unique individual. The

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{8} Wilder, Preface to \textit{Three Plays}, p. xi.
\end{itemize}
truth of the characterization lies in Joyce's technique, which constantly oscillates between the "homeliest particularizations and the vastest generalization." It is a technique that broke free of the limitations of the realistic method.

Wilder's highest tribute to Finnegans Wake lies in the fact that he drew heavily on the novel for his play The Skin of Our Teeth. That he did so caused another critical furor similar to that which Michael Gold began in the thirties. Henry Morton Robinson and Joseph Campbell saw the play while they were preparing their "Key" to Finnegans Wake. They recognized that the play made use of the method, themes, characters, and plot of the novel and implied that Wilder was a mere plagiarist. Wilder refused to take part in the ensuing controversy, but he wrote in the preface to Three Plays that his play is "deeply indebted" to the novel. That his attitude toward his borrowings was not that of a plagiarist is revealed in the remark that follows his declaration of indebtedness: "I should be very happy if, in the future, some author should feel similarly indebted to any work of mine." As Rex Burbank points out,


and as has been demonstrated here in the preceding discussions of Wilder's novels, *Finnegans Wake* was an "agreeable source" for Wilder to borrow from because Wilder had already been making use of cyclical structure, of mystical resolutions, and of the idea of the resemblance between human cultures.¹³

The similarity between Wilder's conception of time and history and that of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and James Joyce has previously been noted. There is a further similarity in the effect that such conceptions had on the literary forms through which these writers expressed themselves. Joseph Frank maintains that such conceptions have resulted in an effort to give spatial form to an art which is naturally temporal and which is usually apprehended as a sequence.¹⁴ Spatial form in literature involves the juxtaposition of "disparate images spatially, in a moment of time," so that there is a simultaneous fusion of past and present.¹⁵ It is an effort to liberate literature from

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¹³. Burbank, p. 103.

¹⁴. Walter Sutton has attempted to refute Frank's analysis and has remarked that it is difficult to accept such a theory of form in modern literature partly because "the oppressive time-consciousness of a particular place and time in history—the cosmopolitan world of displaced Europeans and expatriated Americans in the post-World-War-I years" had a marked influence on the poetry of Eliot and Pound (p. 120). The point is, however, that such a time-consciousness led to attempts to break free from it. One way of doing so was to attempt to free literary art from its traditional temporal limitations.

time and space limitations. It began in modern literature, according to Frank, with the Imagist poets. Pound's definition of the image and Eliot's description of the psychological origin of the image in the poetic process are inherently spatial. As a result of this conception of the nature of poetry, in the Cantos and The Waste Land,

syntactical sequence is given up for a structure depending on the perception of relationships between disconnected word-groups. To be properly understood, these word-groups must be juxtaposed with one another and perceived simultaneously. Only when this is done can they be adequately grasped; for, while they follow one another in time, their meaning does not depend on this temporal relationship.

What is at work here is the aesthetic "principle of reflexive reference," under which the reader is asked "to suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal reference can be apprehended as a unity." Frank maintains that this principle has influenced all modern poetry and that similar experiments with form in the novel are based upon the same principle.

Joyce, according to Frank, achieved spatial form through fragmentation of the narrative structure. Proust achieved it through "discontinuous presentation of character." What is achieved through what Frank calls spatial form is, according to Pound, "that sense of sudden

17. Ibid., pp. 18, 24.
liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art."

It is obvious that Wilder was seeking the same kind of liberation and freedom, and that he connected that freedom with the form in which a literary work is presented. Although Wilder has not stated as much, he must have recognized some formal principle such as Frank describes at work in the writings of these artists whom he openly admires and to whom he has expressed indebtedness. At any rate, The Ides of March is an experiment with the novel form which undoubtedly has its roots both in Wilder's association with Gertrude Stein and in his theatrical work, and it is also an experiment which makes use of the principle of reflexive reference.

The Ides of March is an effort to present, as in a play, "what takes place," to represent "pure existing." One of the major factors which destroys the illusion of "pure existing" in the novel, Wilder has frequently said, is the intervening narrator. Undoubtedly part of his admiration for Joyce stems from the fact that Joyce's technique does, to a remarkable extent, efface the narrator. Wilder effaces the narrator in The Ides of March by having the

characters speak for themselves through a series of personal letters, journal entries, official papers, and other such documents. The method is highly dramatic. As in the theater, the reader learns about the characters only through the characters themselves and through the comments of other characters. The documents themselves are dramatic, in that they are so-to-speak character in action, revealing all the qualities of character which are reported by the other actors in the novel. The evil and duplicity attributed by others to Clodia Pulcher and her brother are quite clear in their personal correspondence. Pompeia's silliness and immaturity are aptly demonstrated in her foolish letters to Clodia. The many sides of Caesar's character are dramatized in the various kinds of documents which he himself writes.

The arrangement of these documents which relate events in the last few months of the life of Julius Caesar, operating on the principle of reflexive reference, attempts to show many events occurring simultaneously. The documents are grouped in four books, with each of the latter three books beginning at a point in time earlier than and ending at a point later than that of the book which precedes it. Those in the first book cover the month of September, 45 B. C. The documents in Book Two begin on August 17 and end on October 28. Those in Book Three begin on
August 9 and end on December 3. The first document in the fourth book is dated August 8; the book ends with an account of Caesar's assassination on March 15, 44 B.C. The same period of time is thus broken into four fragmented layers and the complete comprehension of it is possible only by apprehending the complete pattern of internal reference as a unity.

Not only does each layer represent only one fragment of the total unity, completely understandable only when fused with the other layers, but also each layer itself is fragmented. The documents, by their very nature, cannot record the events of those months as a continuous, descriptive account of all that occurs. Each document is an account of a certain event, or events, only as those events appear to the individual responsible for the document. Nearly all of the documents are precisely dated. Thus, as the reader progresses through each of the books, his attention is called by the dates to the fact that he is being given yet another glimpse into the totality of the time period that is called, for example, August 17. He is also reminded that August 17 is taking place and that it can continue to take place as long as the possibility exists for the revelation of other fragments.

The documents are numbered consecutively throughout the novel. This numbering gives the illusion, according to
usual notions about enumeration and time, that those docu-
ments counted last, or numbered last, must necessarily
follow in time those counted or numbered first. Wilder
upsets this notion by having documents with widely differ-
ing numerical designations dated the same. For example,
documents I and LX are both dated September 1. The result
of this technique is that it forces a re-examination of the
concept that time can be measured and numbered and that
moments related in time assume a definite position in rela-
tion to past, present, or future. In other words, it
illustrates the principle of reflexive reference by showing
that even though the documents succeed one another in time,
their meaning is not dependent upon this temporal relation-
ship.

Caesar's journal-letters to Lucius Mamilius Tur-
rinus, the most important group of related documents, are
also numbered consecutively, supposedly using Caesar's own
numbering, according to the time sequence in which they
were written. Included in the novel are notations of or
entire entries for most of the journal-letters between
numbers 942 and 1023. Once again, however, Wilder disturbs
the concept of consecutive numbering in time by displacing
these documents from their supposed historical time se-
quence and placing them in a new sequence in the novel
which disregards their numbering by Caesar. Within each
book of the novel, the entries from the journal that are used in that book do appear in chronological order, as do most of the other documents. The journal entries in each successive book of the novel, however, begin with a number earlier in time than the last entry in the preceding book, so that, for example, the last entry from the journal used in Book One of the novel is 996, which appears there as part of document XXI, while the first entry from the journal used in Book Two is 942, which appears as part of Document XXIII. The first journal entry in each book is not, however, always earlier than the first entry of the preceding book—that is, the pattern of the journal entries does not completely correspond to the expanding time pattern of the books themselves.

The fact that these journal-letters carry two sets of numbers—both Caesar's numbers and the document numbers—displaces even further notions of consecutiveness in time. Since Wilder uses in each book only those entries which are relevant to the layer of time dealt with in that book, entries which are consecutive according to Caesar's numbering are widely separated according to the numbering of the documents in the novel. For example, entries 970-982 appear first in VIII, in Book One of the novel. The determinism of this consecutive sequence is broken, however, by the fact that entries from the sequence also appear in other documents—973 as XLII-B and 975 as XLI-A in Book Three;
979-982 as parts of LXI in Book Four. What happens here is that Wilder demonstrates that these entries have multiple time identities—an identity according to Caesar's numbering and an identity according to the numbering of the novel. Entries 980-982, for example, are given by those numbers one time identity, as part of the sequence of Caesar's journal-letters. By their being numbered as parts of VIII and LXI, they are given other time identities, as part of the sequence of the documents of the novel. Thus the same material must be considered as 980-982, as VIII, and as LXI. The disparity between the numbers indicates that the idea of time as past, present, and future which can be indicated by consecutive numbering has no validity. Instead, the time identities inherent in the numbers must be juxtaposed and perceived simultaneously. They must be fused—as it were, spatially—in a moment of time.

From this discussion of the time ranges in each of the books, it is obvious that Wilder has employed once again a circular structural pattern, a means he consistently uses for transcending time limitations. The major cyclical patterns of repetition which accompany this pattern are, first of all, the repetition of the actual time period itself, and secondly, the repetition of a pattern of crisis. The first book opens with a not altogether favorable report to Caesar from the Master of the College of Augurs, the
report ending with the salutation "Health and long life to the Supreme Pontiff."\(^{19}\) Ironically, the book ends with Caesar's near assassination and his subsequent epileptic seizure. Book Two opens with reports of Cleopatra's coming to Rome for a state visit and ends with an estrangement between Caesar and Cleopatra. Book Three begins with a letter from Caesar to the President of the College of the Vestal Virgins about freeing the ceremonies called the Mysteries of the Good Goddess from certain barbaric obscenities. The book ends with an account of the profanation of those ceremonies by Clodia Pulcher and her brother and Caesar's decision to divorce Pompeia for her rumored connection with that defamation. Book Four opens with a letter from Brutus' mother, Servilia, urging Brutus to participate in the assassination of Caesar. It ends with an account of the assassination.

Paradoxically, perhaps, Wilder employs these very techniques which he utilizes to transcend time to create also the effect of an inexorable march toward a particular historical moment in time—the death of Caesar. The crises at the end of each of the first three cycles build toward the major crisis at the end of the fourth cycle. The placement of these crises, even the final crisis, within the

cyclical framework, however, negates their finality, their pastness. The implication from the structure is that even the final crisis could signal, as the earlier ones have signaled, the beginning of another cycle.

Wilder employs the consecutive numbering of the documents within the novel in much the same way. While his juxtaposition of widely separated numbers with the same dates purposely upsets the time concept inherent in the numbering, he nevertheless utilizes this very concept to aid in building toward the inevitable fact of Caesar's death. Once again, however, his juxtaposition has negated the finality of the last number.

Just as the form of The Ides of March denies temporal relationships, the content fuses historical past and present. This fusion causes past and present to be apprehended spatially, by combining them in a timeless unity which denies by their juxtaposition any sense of succession. Wilder makes clear in his prefatory remarks to The Ides of March that he disclaims the authority of historical time progression. He points out deliberate distortions of historical time within the novel:

Historical reconstruction is not among the primary aims of this work. It may be called a fantasia on certain events and persons of the last days of the Roman republic.

The principal liberty taken is that of transferring an event which took place in 62 B. C.—the profanation of the Mysteries of the Bona Dea by
Clodia Pulcher and her brother—to the celebration of the same rites seventeen years later on December 11, 45.

By 45 many of my characters would have long been dead: Clodius, murdered by bullies on a country road; Catullus, though we have only St. Jerome's word for it that he died at the age of thirty; the younger Cato, a few months earlier in this very year, in Africa, resisting Caesar's absolute power; Caesar's aunt, widow of the great Marius, had died even before 62. Moreover by 45, Caesar's second wife Pompeia had long been replaced by his third wife Calpurnia (p. vii).

Besides these juxtapositions, which are another way of freeing the past from a particular determinism, Wilder has also fused past and present through two characterizations. Just as Wilder has shown John Keats dying in Rome in the 1920's in *The Cabala*, he places the twentieth-century playwright Edward Sheldon in *The Ides of March*, only slightly disguised as Lucius Mamilius Turrinus, Caesar's friend and confidante. And Wilder models the conspiratorial activities of the poet Catullus on the activities of the twentieth-century Roman poet Lauro de Bosis, who shares the dedication of the novel with Sheldon.

The spatial form of *The Ides of March* reflects something of a difference in Wilder's spiritual outlook. Wilder uses the fragmented form to present a world view that is more pessimistic than he had expressed before. In *Heaven's My Destination*, Wilder had created George Brush,
who was supremely confident in his religious faith and in his destiny. *The Ides of March*, on the other hand, attempts, as Wilder told a magazine interviewer,

to show the mind of a man like Julius Caesar, with enormous experience of men and affairs, trying to separate the elements of superstition from those of religion . . . and attempting to ascertain whether his great role in the Roman state was of his own making or whether he was the instrument of a Destiny Force beyond his knowledge.20

Caesar reveals his concern with these matters particularly in his journal-letters to Lucius Mamilius Turrinus. In the first journal entry in the novel, Caesar writes, "Man--what is that? What do we know of him? His Gods, liberty, mind, love, destiny, death--what do these mean?" (p. 8). The course of the novel shows Caesar trying to find answers to these questions. Although Caesar is not by nature philosophical, he comments to Turrinus that writing the journal-letters causes him to examine matters which he does not otherwise consider.

Caesar is a man of action--not reflection. Richard Burbank calls him "the embodiment of the Sartre hero."21 And as one reads the novel it becomes clear that *The Ides of March* was "written under the sign of Kierkegaard," as

20. Robert van Gelder, "Interview with a Best-Selling Author: Thornton Wilder," *Cosmopolitan*, April 1948, p. 120.

Wilder indeed portrays Caesar essentially as an existential man—in his commitment to decision and action, in his isolation, in his sense of the absurdity of much of human existence. The existential position also carries with it its own conception of time. Time has only a psychological validity. It becomes real only as it is acted upon. Decision within the existential moment is an assertion of being. The moment of being becomes the only real moment in time. Most of Caesar's pronouncements and actions tend to confirm this view of time. But, even though Wilder implies this view of time through his central character, *The Ides of March* is not an affirmation on his part of the existential time concept. Instead, as the following discussion will reveal, Wilder—and his hero—cannot dismiss the possibility of a force outside human existence, a force whose existence implies an eternal reality, hence, an eternal time. For Wilder, the existential concept of living decisively, with awareness, does help to give immediate meaning to life, but in the course of the novel Wilder subordinates the existential moment to eternal time.

Caesar's commitment to acting within the existential moment is apparent when he writes that "The first and last schoolmaster of life is living and committing oneself

22. van Gelder, p. 120.
unreservedly and dangerously to living; to men who know this an Aristotle and a Plato have much to say; but those who have imposed cautions on themselves and petrified themselves in a system of ideas, them the masters themselves will lead into error" (p. 35). Thus, he deprecates the upbringing of the wealthy, privileged young Roman women which has kept from them the knowledge "that the crown of life is the exercise of choice" (p. 15).

He knows the isolation, the solitude, of the existential man. His is greater than usual, because, as he writes to Cleopatra, "The condition of leadership adds new degrees of solitariness to the basic solitude of mankind. Every order that we issue increases the extent to which we are alone, and every show of deference which is extended to us separates us from our fellows" (p. 105). He has had an existential confrontation with death and writes:

The type of the Inevitable is death. . . . I can now appraise at a glance those who have not yet foreseen their death. I know them for the children they are. They think that by evading its contemplation they are enhancing the savor of life. The reverse is true: only those who have grasped their non-being are capable of praising the sunlight (p. 184).

Like a Sartre hero, he knows "there is no liberty save in responsibility" (p. 238). He is angered and tormented by accusations that he has robbed Romans of their freedom. The Romans, he writes, "have become parasites upon that freedom which I gladly exercise—my willingness to arrive
at a decision and to sustain it—and which I am willing to share with every man who will assume its burden" (p. 238). He understands, as his enemies do not, that "it is by taking a leap into the unknown that we know we are free" (p. 238).

One of the major elements in society which inhibits man's freedom, Caesar believes, is his religion. Caesar's impatience with the augurs and their declaration of lucky and unlucky days and the consequent effect of these pronouncements on the Roman populace causes him to write an edict abolishing all religious observances, pointing out instead that "man was alone in a world in which no voices were heard than his own, a world neither friendly nor unfriendly save as he made it so" (p. 37). He destroys this edict without executing it because he realizes that he cannot with absolute certainty declare that "there is no mind behind our existence and no mystery anywhere in the universe" (p. 37). He cannot do so because he recognizes in four areas of life the possibility of this mystery—in love, in great poetry, in his epileptic visions, and in his role as ruler of Rome. Throughout the novel Caesar explores these areas—especially love, poetry, and his role as dictator—in a continuing effort to understand the source of that mystery he divines in them. Wilder uses observations
of other characters on the same subjects to extend the range of inquiry for his readers, if not always for Caesar.

Caesar declares to Turrinus that "poetry is indeed the principal channel by which all that most weakens man has entered the world; there he finds his facile consolations and the lies that reconcile him to ignorance and inertia; I count myself second to no man in my hatred of all poetry save the best—but great poetry, is that merely the topmost achievement of the man's powers or is that a voice from beyond man?" (p. 39). From Catullus, in whose poetry Caesar has found the possibility of mystery, he gets something of an answer. At a dinner party symposium based on this question, Catullus begins to tell the story of Alcestis, explaining its relevance to the evening's discussion by pointing out that she too "wished complete assurance that the Gods existed and that They were attentive to her . . ." (p. 82). The import of Catullus' Alcestiad appears to be, as Malcolm Goldstein says, "that it is impossible to distinguish between the spirit of the gods and the spirit of man. . . ."^23

One of the most unexplainable matters to Caesar about the poetry of Catullus is that the object of his love and the subject of his great love poetry is the evil and depraved Clodia Pulcher. Caesar writes to Turrinus that he

ascribes to great poets "the power to gaze fixedly at the whole of life and bring into harmony that which is within and that which is without them" (p. 33). He considers that perhaps it is such a power in Catullus that prompts the love which he expresses for Clodia. His queries about Catullus and his love for Clodia relate to his perception of the possibility of mystery even in erotic love. He declares to Turrinus that "all, all love is one, and . . . the very mind with which I ask these questions is awakened, sustained, and instructed only by love" (p. 39).

Wilder uses a letter from Catullus to Clodia to express further the same belief and to reveal Catullus' (and Wilder's) belief in love as a timeless reality and a major source of meaning in the world:

Never, never, can I conceive of a love which is able to foresee its own termination. Love is its own eternity. Love is in every moment of its being: all time. It is the only glimpse we are permitted of what eternity is.

. . .

While the God of Love gazed at you through my eyes age could not touch your beauty. While we spoke to you, your ears could not hear the tongues of the world, envy and detraction and all the gusts that are blown about in the malignant air of our human state; while we loved you you could not know the solitude of the soul . . . (pp. 108-109).

Caesar's own powerful erotic passion is for Cleopatra. His love for her is based partly on his power to teach her. He writes that "There are few pleasures equal
to that of imparting to a voracious learner the knowledge that one has grown old and weary in acquiring" (p. 93).

From what she sees of Caesar's relationship to Pompeia, as well as to Cleopatra, Cytheris, the actress whose love affair with Marc Antony has also been partly a teaching relationship, recognizes both Caesar's conception of love and the dangers inherent in such a love:

Caesar is a teacher; it is a sort of fury in him. He can only love where he can instruct; the return he asks is progress and enlightenment. . . . Love as education is one of the great powers of the world, but it hangs in a delicate suspension; it achieves its harmony as seldom as does love by the senses (p. 192).

Cytheris compares Caesar's disappointments in love to his shortcomings as a ruler: "Caesar is a tyrant—both as husband and as ruler. It is not that, like other tyrants, he is chary of according liberty to others; it is that, loftily free himself, he has lost all touch with the way freedom operates and is developed in others; always mistaken, he accords too little or he accords too much" (p. 194).

Caesar's inquiry into the question of destiny centers primarily on his own role as ruler of Rome. He writes to Turrinus: "It may well be . . . that I am the most irresponsible of irresponsible men, capable long since of bringing upon Rome all the ills that a state can suffer, but for the fact that I was the instrument of a higher wisdom that selected me for my limitations and not for my
strength" (pp. 39-40). He expects his death by assassina-
tion. If his destiny is in the hands of the gods, he con-
jectures that the man who kills him will reveal some
insight into the nature of the gods. But he does not truly
expect such a revelation, because

The Gods hide themselves even in their choice of
instrument. We are all at the mercy of a falling
tile. We are left with the picture of Jupiter
going about dislodging tiles which fall upon a
lemonade vendor or upon Caesar. . . . It is prob-
able that my last moment of consciousness will be
filled with the last of many confirmations that
the affairs of the world proceed with that sense-
lessness with which a stream carries leaves upon
its tide (pp. 217-218).

This view of the chaotic absurdity of much of existence is
reflected in Caesar's dream of the void. He describes this
dream to Turrinus:

It is not, as I once thought, the image of death
and the grin of the skull. It is the state in
which one divines the end of all things. This
nothingness, however, does not present itself to
us as a blank and a quiet, but as a total evil un-
masked. It is at once laughter and menace. It
turns into ridicule all delights and sears and
shrivels all endeavor (p. 231).

Caesar's complete acceptance of this dream as the reality
of existence is prevented by the opposing vision which
comes to him in his epileptic seizures. That vision is one
of harmony and bliss in the universe. To Caesar, each
vision is a part of the total reality and neither can be
dismissed.
Caesar does not ever reconcile that sense of mystery that he feels in his epileptic trances and in love, great poetry, and his role as ruler with the Roman worship of the gods. Even the highest expression of worship in his time—the celebration of the Mysteries of the Good Goddess—is tainted with eroticism and obscenity. The reconciliation that Caesar fails to make is provided by Wilder in a gloss to a quotation from Goethe's Faust that is the epigraph of the novel: "Out of man's recognition in fear and awe that there is an Unknowable comes all that is best in the exploration of his mind,—even though that recognition is often misled into superstition, enslavement, and over-confidence." Thus, love may spring from many impulses; poetry may both weaken and ennoble; Caesar's role may have conformed to his own ideas about what Rome should be, but it may also have been directed by the gods; his epileptic seizures may be rooted in his physical nature, but they bring visions of universal harmony. Likewise, religion may have sunk to the superstitions connected with the auguries, but it may also bring indescribable happiness and enrichment as it does to the participants in the Mysteries of the Good Goddess, tainted though those ceremonies may be.

While Caesar cannot actively embrace a belief in the gods, he cannot with complete certainty deny the
existence of a force in the universe outside man. He writes: "Life has no meaning save that which we may confer upon it. It neither supports man nor humiliates him. Agony of mind and uttermost joy we cannot escape, but those states have, of themselves, nothing to say to us; those heavens and hells await the sense we give to them . . ." (pp. 232-233). Man, that is, in his existential state must create for himself the meaning for his life. The fact that there remains an unknowable, however, does not invite Caesar to a surrender to the dream of the void. He finds that the mystery in human existence prevents him "from reaching any summary conclusion concerning our human condition" (p. 239). Instead, he declares, "Where there is an unknowable there is a promise" (p. 239).

That Wilder has his great, tragic existential hero affirm the promise of the Unknowable in spite of the apparent absurdity of the world reveals Wilder's own inability to accept the complete meaninglessness of the universe and the consequent concept of time posited by Sartre and other existential writers. Wilder cannot with certainty deny, just as Caesar cannot, the existence of certain eternal realities. Perhaps the most powerful evidence of these is the force of love. In The Bridge of San Luis Rey Wilder affirmed a transcendent love which gave meaning to life. That he intended to convey the same belief in The Ides of
March is confirmed by remarks he made to Richard Goldstone:

I always see beneath it [love in any form] . . . the urge that strives toward justifying life, harmonizing it—the source of energy on which life must draw in order to better itself. In The Ides of March I illustrate its educative power . . . and its power to "crystallize" idealization in the lover . . . . This attitude has so much the character of self-evidence for me that I am unable to weigh or even "hear" any objections to it.24

CHAPTER VII

THE EIGHTH DAY

Because in *The Ides of March* Wilder used a form which attempted to rid the novel of the voice of the narrator and to approximate the pure existing which he found in the theater, it is perhaps surprising that his latest novel, *The Eighth Day*, published in 1967, bears a closer resemblance to *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* than it does to *The Ides of March*. *The Eighth Day* opens, as does *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, with a statement of the bare facts of a tragic and ultimately mysterious event. In both novels, the event serves as the basis for an inquiry into the problem of destiny and chance. In both the inquiry is conducted by an omniscient narrator who is very much in evidence.

That Wilder chose to return to the method of the earlier work is not, however, quite so surprising when one recognizes that there are similarities in the conception of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* and that of *The Ides of March* and thus that the return is not a repudiation of the method of the latter. The method of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* does incorporate, on a certain level, the principles of spatial form. The narrative is fragmented, in that the
novel is developed by the recounting of the histories of the victims in separate books. The reader must fuse the histories himself in order to perceive fully the relationships among the victims and among them and other characters in the novel. The fusion is also necessary in order to perceive the totality of individual characters—the Abbess and Camila Perichole, in particular. The meaning of the histories is not dependent upon their succession in time, but upon their fusion in a moment of time.

It is in this same way that *The Eighth Day* is fragmented. Each of the first sections, while complete in itself, deals with one fragment of the total picture. There is a repetition of time periods and with each repetition a new fusion of material must be made. Five of the six sections end in 1905, the year of John Ashley's death. Two of the sections deal with the histories of the Ashley and the Lansing families in Coaltown from the time they arrive there until 1905. Section one, which concentrates on the Ashleys, begins in 1885; section five, which concentrates on the Lansings, in 1880. Sections two and three deal with exactly the same time period—1902 to 1905. Section two details John Ashley's flight to Chile; section three, Roger Ashley's life in Chicago. The last section is set in Coaltown, at Christmas in 1905. Although the fourth section, set in Hoboken, New Jersey, in 1883, does not
conform to the circular pattern, it does treat a time period which is covered again in section five. This circular structure is used in *The Eighth Day*, as it is in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, to reinforce Wilder's philosophical position. In *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, Wilder demonstrates that the fall of the bridge is not an ending. In *The Eighth Day*, he demonstrates that John Ashley's condemnation as a murderer and his escape from execution are not a beginning.

In *The Eighth Day* Wilder explicitly states the philosophy of time and history which he has only implied in earlier novels. In the last section, he writes:

>This is a history.

But there is only one history. It began with the creation of man and will come to an end when the last human consciousness is extinguished. All other beginnings and endings are arbitrary conventions—makeshifts parading as self-sufficient entireties, diffusing petty comfort or petty despair. The cumbersome shears of the historian cut out a few figures and a brief passage of time from that enormous tapestry. Above and below the laceration, to the right and left of it, the severed threads protest against the injustice, against the imposture.

It is only in appearance that time is a river. It is rather a vast landscape and it is the eye of the beholder that moves.

Look about you in all directions—rise higher, rise higher!—and see hills beyond hills, plains and rivers.

This history made the pretense of a beginning: "In the early summer of 1902 John Barrington Ashley of Coaltown, a small mining center in southern Illinois, was tried for the murder of Breckenridge
Lansing, also of Coaltown." The reader has long been aware of how misleading those words are—regarded as the beginning of anything.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

History is one tapestry. No eye can venture to compass a hand's-breadth of it. There were once a million people in Babylon.

Then look again at a miscarriage of justice in an unimportant case in a small Middlewestern town.¹

With these statements, Wilder openly expresses his belief in the coexistence of all time and all history—in the timelessness, that is, of all events. He states that beginning and ending are invalid distinctions—that each event is both beginning and ending. He denies distinctions between past, present, and future. To emphasize the philosophy contained in these statements, in the last section of the novel Wilder fuses past, present, and future in one "vast landscape" of time through a fragmentation not found within the first five sections, although the six sections of the novel represent a similar fragmentation and fusion of the whole matter of the novel itself.

The cycles of life, time, and history which make it impossible to distinguish beginnings and endings are emphasized throughout the novel. Dr. Gillies makes a prophetic speech immediately after a midnight which is both beginning

and ending of three cycles. Midnight on December 31, 1899, ends a day, a year, and a century, but it also signals the beginning of three new cycles. Dr. Gillies' speech portrays man as both the end of one cycle and the beginning of another:

Nature never sleeps. The process of life never stands still. The creation has not come to an end. The Bible says that God created man on the sixth day and rested, but each of those days was many millions of years long. That day of rest must have been a short one. Man is not an end but a beginning. We are at the beginning of the second week. We are children of the eighth day (p. 16).

Wilder emphasizes the repetition which is part of the cyclic pattern in several ways. One is in his description of the beliefs of the men who have dominated the Coal-town region. First there was the Kangheela tribe, whose Book of Beginnings and Endings had an account of the creation of the universe and man, the laws of the All-Father, man's fall from grace, the multiplicity of man, and the role of the Kangheela as the chosen of the All-Father. This book differs only in details, not in essentials, from the account of such matters brought by the white men who next mastered the region and began the next cycle in its development.

Roger Ashley's experiences in Chicago repeat in many respects John Ashley's experiences in his flight to Chile. Among other things, the men take some of the same kinds of jobs; they are both introduced to Buddhism; they
both encounter the ancient gods in modern form; they both are asked to help create a new Athens.

Various characters also speak directly of the repetitive nature of history. Dr. Gillies does not believe his own prophecy that "Mind and Spirit will be the next climate of the human" (p. 18), partly because he has recognized the repetition. He expects the new century to be "too direful to contemplate—that is to say, like all the other centuries" (p. 17). He is convinced that "Any community is a portion of the vast body of the human race" (p. 17), that all men are essentially alike. His reading of history has "confirmed his sense that Coaltown is everywhere. . . . There are no Golden Ages and no Dark Ages. There is the oceanlike monotony of the generations of men under the alternations of fair and foul weather" (p. 18).

Maestro Lauri in Chicago expresses the same sentiment to Roger:

History is the record of man's repeated failures to extricate himself from his incorrigible nature. Those who see progress in it are as deluded as those who see a gradual degeneration. A few steps forward, a few steps back. Human nature is like the ocean, unchanging, unchangeable. Today's calm, tomorrow's tempest—but it's the same ocean (p. 264).

Roger himself speaks of the cycles by citing to Lily particularly dark examples:

Fifty years ago in Bengal a hundred thousand peasants made a bare subsistence from weaving cotton. Soon the British government forbade them to do any weaving; Manchester was getting its cotton from
America. So the Indians went down on all fours and groped for roots and bulbs to eat. Slow starvation, malformation, and death. The Civil War breaks out. No cotton for Manchester. Terrible times in Manchester—slow starvation, malformation, and death. After the war the routes are open again, but improvements in mechanical processes have eliminated twenty workers for every one that's kept on. The Negroes get down on all fours and grope for roots and bulbs. Slow starvation, malnutrition, and death . . . (p. 276).

The Deacon of the Covenant Church describes Hell as "the place in which there is no hope or possibility of change: birth, feeding, excreting, propagation, and death—all on some mighty wheel of repetition" (p. 431).

These statements appear to contradict the implied consolation for man derived from his identification with the cycles of history which Wilder's use of the circular structure symbolizes. In reality they do not. For Wilder attempts to demonstrate in this novel that within the cycle, the endless repetition, there is hope and possibility for change. The Deacon describes changeless cycles as hellish, but he finds hope and sees the possibility of change in the mysterious circumstances in the lives of the Ashleys. Although Roger realizes that variations in the cycles are minute and remarks that "one would have to live ten thousand years to notice any change," he does not deny change and tells Lilly, "One must feel it inside--that is, believe it" (p. 276). The cynicism of Dr. Gillies and Maestro Lauri arises from their inability to believe
without seeing, as Roger does, and their inability to accept the mysterious as a sign of hope, as the Deacon does.

The Eighth Day, so similar to The Bridge of San Luis Rey, is also comparable to Our Town. It is set like Our Town primarily in a small American town at the beginning of the twentieth century. More important, however, is the similar setting of the two towns against time and space. Wilder says in his preface to Three Plays:

Our Town is not offered as a picture of life in a New Hampshire village; or as a speculation about the conditions of life after death. . . . It is an attempt to find a value above all price for the smallest events in our daily life. I have made the claim as preposterous as possible, for I have set the village against the largest dimensions of time and place. The recurrent words in this play . . . are "hundreds," "thousands," and "millions." Emily's joys and griefs, her algebra lessons and her birthday presents—what are they when we consider all the billions of girls who have lived, who are living, and who will live? Each individual's assertion to an absolute reality can only be inner, very inner.2

In The Eighth Day Wilder explores the mystery which surrounds a small event in the daily life of America—an unimportant murder case in a small, unimportant town—and attempts to understand its meaning, to find its value. He has again "made the claim as preposterous as possible" by setting the event against "the largest dimensions of time and place." The recurrent words in The Eighth Day are

2. Wilder, Preface to Three Plays, p. xii.
also "hundreds," "thousands," "millions," and "billions."

To place the village in Our Town, Wilder has Professor Willard deliver a "scientific account" of Grover's Corners:

Grover's Corners lies on the old Pleistocene granite of the Appalachian range. I may say it's some of the oldest land in the world. . . . A shelf of Devonian basalt crosses it with vestiges of Mesozoic shale, and some sandstone outcroppings; but that's all more recent: two hundred, three hundred million years old.

Some highly interesting fossils have been found . . . two miles out of town. . . . They can be seen at the museum in our University at any time. . . .

After providing this geological information, he gives a brief anthropological sketch of the area:

Early Amerindian stock. Cotahatchee tribes . . . no evidence before the tenth century of this era . . . now entirely disappeared . . . possible traces in three families. Migration toward the end of the seventeenth century of English brachiocephalic blue-eyed stock . . . for the most part. Since then some Slav and Mediterranean--

Wilder supplies the same kind of geological setting for Coaltown:

There must have been a great shallow lake here to have produced all that sandstone, but the land rose and most of the water flowed off into the Ohio and the Mississippi. There must have been great forests to have produced all that coal and centuries of earthquakes to have lifted the hills and folded them over the forests like pancakes over jelly. The great cumbersome reptiles were unable to waddle away in time and left their imprints in


4. Ibid., p. 22.
stones—you can see them in the museum at Fort Barry. What stretches of time are required to complete the procession of a marsh to a forest (p. 12).

He also provides an anthropological sketch. The first men in the Coaltown area were also Indians; prominent among them was the Kangaheela tribe. Then the white man came.

The large dimensions of time and space surrounding Coaltown are re-emphasized in Dr. Gillies' New Year's speech:

He described the earth before the appearance of life—millions of years of steam arising from the boiling waters . . . The noise, the terrible winds, the waves . . . the noise. Then tiny floating organisms choking the seas. Passive . . . then, here and there, one and other, acquiring the ability to propel themselves toward light, toward food. A nervous system began to take shape in the Pre-Cambrian age; fins and feet began to afford sufficient strength to walk on dry land in the Upper Devonian; blood grew warmer in the Mesozoic (p. 16).

He traces the division of the plants from the animals and of the birds from the fish, the multiplication of the insects, the appearance of the mammals and, finally, of man.

This situation of Coaltown, like the situation of Grover's Corners, as a part of the vast tapestry of history—surrounded by enormous and almost incomprehensible distances in time and space—gives the town and its inhabitants an importance which would not be readily recognizable if it were placed against a lesser backdrop. The very vastness of that of which it is a part increases, rather than diminishes, its claim to validity.
In the Prologue to *The Eighth Day* the narrator explains that less than ten years after John Ashley's trial and escape, his children had displayed such great talent and genius that their accomplishments caused people to re-examine the Ashley case and to ask questions about the Ashley family, about Coaltown, "about those old teasers Heredity and Environment, about gifts and talents, and destiny and chance" (p. 10). These are like the questions that Brother Juniper and the narrator asked in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. And, as in that novel, Wilder here opposes the questions and answers of the general public against those of the narrator. In the Prologue, Wilder details the extent of the inquiry:

This John Ashley—what was there in him (as in some hero in those old plays of the Greeks) that brought down upon him so mixed a portion of fate: unmerited punishment, a "miraculous" rescue, exile, and an illustrious progeny?

What was there in the ancestry and later in the home life of the Ashleys that fostered this energy of mind and spirit?

What was there in this Kangacheela Valley as geographical matrix, as spiritual climate, to shape such exceptional men and women?

Was there a connection between the catastrophe that befell both houses and these later developments? Are humiliation, injustice, suffering, destitution, and ostracism—are they blessings?

Nothing is more interesting than the inquiry as to how creativity operates in anyone, in everyone . . .
Pallas Athene's Athens, like a lighthouse on a hill, sending forth beams that still illuminate men in council;

Palestine, for a thousand years, like a geyser in the sand, producing genius after genius. . . .

Is there more and more of it, or less and less?

Is the brain neutral between destruction and beneficence?

Is it possible that there will someday be a "spiritualization" of the human animal? (p. 10).

Wilder reveals the marked and continuing influence of Gertrude Stein on his thought by proceeding to answer these questions partly in terms of Miss Stein's distinctions between human nature and the human mind, the latter term denoting that aspect of being which transcends the time-immersed state. As he explains in his introduction to her *The Geographical History of America*, she believed that the appearance of the human mind as it is manifested in literary masterpieces depends upon the geographical situations of the authors. Wilder interprets her theory thus:

The valley-born and the hill-bounded tended to exhibit a localization in their thinking, an insistence on identity with all the resultant traits that dwell in Human Nature; flat lands or countries surrounded by the long straight lines of the sea were conducive toward developing the power of abstraction. Flat lands are an invitation to wander, as well as a release from local assertion. Consequently, a country like the United States, bounded by two oceans and with vast portions so flat that the state boundaries must be drawn by "imaginary lines," without dependence on geographical features, promises to produce a
civilization in which the Human Mind may not only appear in the occasional masterpiece, but may in many of its aspects be distributed throughout the people.5

In *Four in America*, Miss Stein developed further her concept of the human mind revealed in Americans. As Wilder comments in his introduction to that work, Miss Stein describes the "abstractedness of the American mind" by showing that "It does not draw its assurance of knowing anything from an intense localization in time and place. The endless procession of phenomena separate themselves from their specific contingency and reform themselves as a generalized knowing."6

Wilder based his Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard in 1950-1951 on these concepts about the American mind and the American character.7 The many correspondences between the published forms of these lectures and the characterizations in *The Eighth Day* show that he wishes to demonstrate that the Ashleys' creativity arises from those qualities in the American character which he identifies with the concept of the universal human mind. In the


lectures he partially clarifies these concepts about the American mind and the American character by distinguishing between the European and the American concepts of identity. The European, according to Wilder, draws his identity from his time-immersed and time-sanctioned surroundings. An American cannot draw such an assurance from his surroundings because of his "unprecedented and peculiarly American consciousness of multitude and distance and magnitude." On the contrary, "Americans are disconnected. They are exposed to all place and all time. No place nor group nor moment can say to them: we were waiting for you; it is right for you to be here. Place and time are, for them, negative until they act upon them, until they bring them into being." He continues: "Americans are abstract. They are disconnected. They have a relation, but it is to everywhere, to everybody, and to always."8

From his geographical situation, the vast distances surrounding him, the American acquired the sense of boundlessness. From the great waves of immigrants from many nations that poured into his boundary-free land, he acquired the sense of multiplicity, which caused him to understand that "Billions have lived and died, billions will live and die; and this every American knows--knows in that realm beyond learning, knows in his bones." Because

such knowledge causes ceaseless questioning of one's own identity, Wilder sees the American "bent on isolating and 'fixing' a value on every existing thing in its relation to a totality, to the All, to the Everywhere, to the Always." The American, then, because of his geographical situation is freed of the time and place limitations of the European. He does not see himself in relation to a particular group of people and to a particular location which is justified by its immersion in historical time. He sees himself rather in relation to the billions who have lived and will live, to an unbounded universe, and to an eternal time.

Wilder maintains that the first settlers of America had certain common characteristics which were deeply engraved into their natures by their living conditions and by their institutions. These basic traits, which were evidence of the human mind appearing through geographical circumstance in many people of a nation, received considerable opposition after the boundaries of the country were reached and the big city and an industrial society became ascendant. In the conflict between the old characteristics and the new conditions, "many basic American traits split. They did not merely become watered down into compromise and approximation. They were converted into their opposites. American independence and self-sufficiency became conformity and

the fear of other men's opinion; American abstraction became a new American literalness and concentration on concrete detail."\textsuperscript{10} In other words, those qualities arising from the human mind were converted into those arising from human nature. But, Wilder maintains, "The force and prestige of the original traits remained. . . . One has the feeling that their expression--personal, social, literary--has been driven underground. Perhaps they are so powerful that they will yet be able to furnish a framework--a religion, a social thought, and an art--within which an entire continent can understand itself as unity and as growth."\textsuperscript{11}

The perversion of the original traits changed an awareness and understanding of boundlessness to an insistence on localization with a consequent pride in place. Wilder comments in \textit{The Eighth Day} on the perversion that occurred between the first waves of settlement and the first World War, which caused Americans once again to move around all over the country. In this intervening period, every man, woman, and child believed that he or she lived in the best town in the best state in the best country in the world. This conviction filled them with a certain strength. It was reinforced by an unremitting depreciation of any neighboring town, state, or country. This pride in place was inculcated in children and the prides and humiliations of childhood are tenacious. Children applied the principle to the very streets on which they lived. (p. 7).

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{10} Wilder, "Toward an American Language," p. 31.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\end{footnote}
Such pride in place is symptomatic of the excesses of human nature. Human nature thrives in bounded areas. It "clings to identity," to a localization in both time and place. It requires an audience to reassure itself of its identity. It is self-assertive. From it come those attitudes directed to audience, such as wars, politics, propaganda, jealousy, moralizing.\textsuperscript{12}

In The Eighth Day, Wilder dramatizes these basic theoretical concepts about the American character. He does so frequently by employing the same phrases that he has used in his Harvard lectures. He both demonstrates the perversions of the original traits and explores the remaining force of those traits. He examines, that is, the manifestation of both human nature and the human mind in Americans, by contrasting the people of Coaltown--and particularly Breckenridge Lansing--with the Ashleys. The former are symbolic of human nature. Coaltown is situated in a narrow valley, between steep bluffs. The town receives almost no direct sunlight. Its inhabitants rarely see a sunrise or a sunset and only fragments of constellations. Their sight--both literally and figuratively--is limited. Coaltown convicts John Ashley partly because at his trial he shows no fear and affords "no fascinating

\textsuperscript{12} Wilder, Introduction to Geographical History, pp. 7-8; Introduction to Four in America, p. xiii.
spectacle of mounting terror and remorse" (p. 5). He does not, that is, require or respond to an audience. If Breckenridge Lansing had been on trial, on the other hand, he would have gratified the requirements of human nature. Wilder writes: "What a splendid trial it would have been if Lansing had shot Ashley! What a performance he would have put on! The town would have seen to it that he was first thoroughly frightened--cowering--and then acquitted him" (p. 6).

Arising from the American's inability to confirm his identity in his environment is American gregariousness, a trait of human nature, which appears hollow and strained to the European visitor, particularly as this gregariousness is manifested in the vows of the college fraternity ("brothers till death") and the businessmen's clubs ("one for all and all for one") and in the "febrile" cocktail party.13 The gregariousness becomes a substitute for identity. Certainly, Lansing lacks the ability to confirm his identity in any other way. Consequently,

He was gregarious; he belonged to every lodge, fraternal order, and association that the town afforded. He loved the rituals: tears came to his eyes--manly tears; he wasn't ashamed of them--when he swore for the hundredth time to "maintain friendship with the brothers until death" and "to live under God in virtue and to be prepared to lay down his life for his country." It's vows like that, by golly, that give meaning to a man's life (p. 6).

Because he requires an audience to assure himself of his identity, Lansing is a failure as resident manager of the Coaltown mines. He has no memory for the facts concerning their operation: "Memory is the servant of our interests and Lansing's primary interest was the impression he made on others. Numerals, charts, carloads do not applaud" (p. 30). He is a failure as a husband and father. He is a success only in his clubs and lodges and at the taverns on River Road where he spends several nights a week and from which he returns exhausted at dawn "with that multiplication of fatigue that follows exertions spent--above a ground bass of self-doubt and despair--in search of pleasure" (p. 321). Lansing's boasting increases in ratio to his despair. Finally, "wretched, frightened, and bewildered," he becomes physically ill. Throughout the spring of 1902, in all night talking sessions he displays a gamut of attitudes arising from human nature--aggression, slyness, maudlin self-assertiveness, cruelty, hypocrisy, jealousy.

In contrast to these perversions, Wilder demonstrates in the Ashleys "the force and prestige of the original traits" of Americans. When the Ashley children became famous, admirers and detractors both recognized certain common traits in them. They lacked a sense of competition "with its concomitants of envy and retaliation..."
They were without self-consciousness, had no deference whatever toward the opinion of others, and were without fear. . . . All were without a sense of humor. . . . They were not self-regarding. Some who knew them best described them as being 'abstract!' (p. 9).

Roger was the most puzzling of the remarkable Ashley children:

He exhibited no signs of ambition; he effaced himself, unsuccessfully. After the age of twenty-one he never signed an editorial in those various newspapers he was constantly buying, reshaping, and abandoning to others. He held strong views, but he was not combative. Readers recognized his voice—reasonable without being argumentative, earnest without being ponderous, and always brief. It was the voice of ethical persuasion. Finally his admirers and enemies found relief in the formula that he was "old-fashioned." He seemed to speak for the America of one's grandparents—of that age before the great city imposed itself (p. 207).

He spoke, that is, out of those basic American traits arising from the human mind, which were most prevalent before the ascendance of the large city and an industrial society caused them to split.

One of the most virulent critics of the Ashley children heaped his greatest scorn on them because they were "indubitably (he hated to say it, but the truth must come out; they were indubitably) Americans" (p. 306). Ironically, he assesses their characters correctly, but his own limited awareness causes him to damn their excellence. He scorns them, that is, for the very fact that they embody
those basic American traits. He recognizes in them the "abstraction" and "disattachment" which are qualities of the human mind. Because he himself is a product of human nature, he finds these traits disagreeable. He is extremely annoyed to find that they exhibit no traits arising from human nature—that "They were unable to distinguish shades of rank, wealth, birth, color, or servitude" and that they were "slow to anger" and "serene under snub and insult" (p. 306).

The "quality of abstraction," the "freedom from self-reference" in the Ashleys is explained partially by information about their ancestors. Wilder drew his generalizations about the original traits of Americans from a similar examination of the ancestors, one might say, of all Americans. In "Toward an American Language," he observes:

The American characteristics were the result, first, of a selection, then of a cultivation.

When I think of those who founded this country I soon find myself thinking of those who did not come.

Of those who almost came.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Those who came were a selection of a selection in Europe. But to say that it was a selection is not to say that it was an elite. Here was the bigot, the fanatic, the dreamer, the utopian, the misfit, the adventurer, the criminal. By the middle of the eighteenth century the phrase was already current: "He has skipped to America."

They all had one thing in common.
Their sense of identity did not derive from their relation to their environment. The meaning which their lives had for them was inner and individual. They did not need to be supported, framed, consoled, by the known, the habitual, the loved.

The independent.\textsuperscript{14}

This assessment of the character of the original Americans is implicit in Wilder's description of the Ashley genealogy, which repeats both the sentiment and some of the wording of the passage from which the preceding excerpts are quoted. John Ashley himself is one of the independent who move on.

This independence causes Americans to repudiate the Old World and to feel that the "whole world's thinking has to be done over again"; thus, "Americans are still engaged in inventing what it is to be an American."\textsuperscript{15} John Ashley wants "all things new. He must be the first man who has earned his bread, to take a wife, to beget a child" (p. 300). Likewise, his son Roger wants "to invent the explanation for existence and the rules whereby men could live rationally side by side—to be the first philosopher, the first planner of the just community" (p. 224). When Roger decides that journalism is to be his life's work, he invents a new kind of journalism.

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\textsuperscript{14} Wilder, "Toward an American Language," pp. 31-32.
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In "Toward an American Language" Wilder comments upon another indication of the American "abstractedness" which is the American's interest in progress and planning. As opposed to the hollow gregariousness discussed above, true relationship between Americans comes when they are united in a project, by an idea. Such planning and progress give the American a sense of identity which has nothing to do with his location:

Place and environment are but décor to his journey. He lives not on the treasure that lies about him but on the promises of the imagination.

"I am I," he says, "because my plans characterize me."

Abstract! Abstract!  

John Ashley and his children are "interested in growth and progress and planning" (p. 403). Ashley, although charged with having little imagination, is a planter of trees, a deviser of improved mining techniques, an inventor of mechanical devices. Roger, like his father, improves conditions wherever he is. Constance becomes a leader of crusades. Sophia singlehandedly opens a boardinghouse at the age of fourteen. Lily plans to build a city for children. She tells Roger: "I think my city is going to be in Switzerland by a lake with mountains all around us. And I'm going to plant a grove of oak trees,

like Papa's. I'm going to choose all the teachers myself.— Won't it be wonderful? Can't you hear the children from here? Now can you see why I'm happy all the time?" (p. 268). Roger replies: "Because of your plans" (p. 268).

As the preceding discussion indicates, Wilder demonstrates that the Ashleys' creativity arises from their embodying the basic American traits which he identifies with the concept of the time-transcending, universal human mind. He also makes clear in The Eighth Day his belief that faith and hope are indispensable elements in creativity. He comments in connection with Sophia's efforts: "Hope (deep-grounded hope, not those sporadic cries and promptings wrung from us in extremity that more resemble despair) is a climate of the mind and an organ of apprehension" (p. 57). Lily is described as having her father's "inner quiet, his at-homeness in existence. This was the voice of faith, selfless faith. John Ashley and his ancestors, Beata Kellerman and her ancestors, were contributing of their creativity, of their consciousness of freedom--hundreds of them from beyond the grave" (p. 85).

Wilder describes John Ashley as a man of faith and lists as characteristics of the man of faith those he has also described as arising from the human mind. The man of faith, he says, lacks "those traits--our bosom companions--
that so strongly engage our interest: aggression, the domi­
nating will, envy, destructiveness and self-destructiveness" (p. 107). He is "fearless, not self-referent, uninteresting, humorless, so often unlearned" (p. 107). The value of men of faith lies in the fact that in a world in which chance and circumstance appear to dominate existence, "They are certain that one small part of what is given us is free. They explore daily the exercise of freedom. Their eyes are on the future" (p. 107). It is difficult for them to explain what they have faith in, but their faith is evidenced in their creativity. Wilder writes:

There is no creation without faith and hope.

There is no faith and hope that does not express itself in creation. These men and women work. The spectacle that most discourages them is not error or ignorance or cruelty, but sloth. This work that they do may often seem to be all but imperceptible. That is characteristic of activity that never for a moment envisages an audience (p. 107).

Faith also transcends time limitations. Wilder comments: "The leave-takings of the children of faith are like first recognitions. Time does not present itself to them as an infinite succession of endings" (p. 203). John Ashley, a man of faith, appears to be "that alien body from another climate—from the future, perhaps—who, in all times and places, has been expelled" (p. 351). Ashley is the second of Wilder's characters to be designated as coming "from the future." The designation is used here, as it
is in *The Woman of Andros* for Pamphilus, to signify the simultaneous existence of all time. It is also used to signify that the creative mind is free of time limitations.

In order to further emphasize John Ashley's freedom from time limitations, Wilder identifies him with many traditions. Beata Ashley recognizes the similarities between her husband's plight and Don Quixote's and finds "not humor but truth in the adventures of the knight for whom the world was filled with evil necromancers and with those bitter injustices which a man must put right" (p. 67). Ashley is also Ulysses, watched over in his voyage to far countries by the grey-eyed Pallas Athene, who appears to him three times in the guise of an old woman--as his remembered grandmother; as Mrs. Hodge in Illinois; and as Mrs. Wickersham, who helps him escape from Manantiales when his identity is learned and who must, therefore, give up her dreams of building with him a new Athens in the Andes.

Ashley encounters other gods besides Pallas Athene. Dr. MacKenzie, the resident manager of the mines at Rocas Verdes, identifies himself with Hephaestus. Mr. Smith, a high official of the mining company, is a Saturn. Hermes appears to Ashley as Wellington Bristow, the "rat catcher" who discovers Ashley's identity. Wilder's use here of the idea of the ancient gods appearing in modern guise does not correspond exactly to his use of the same idea in *The*
Cabala, although both uses develop his philosophy of time. In The Eighth Day Wilder makes a wider application of the idea by having Dr. MacKenzie explain to Ashley that the Greeks "made gods out of the various types of human personality" (p. 163). Thus, at any time, there are many Saturns, Apollos, Hephaestuses. This wider application supports, however, the concept of a timeless, supra-phenomenal reality. The ancient gods continually exist as they are reflected in the human personality traits which gave them their original being.

Dr. MacKenzie suggests Ashley's identification with another tradition. After unsuccessful attempts to discover which of the Greek gods Ashley reflects, he remarks:

Maybe you take after a god in some other religion. The Greeks didn't know everything. There are types of personality that the Greeks hadn't observed. They were rare in Greece so they weren't elevated to gods. Take Christianity, for instance. Christianity is a Jewish religion. Most un-Greek thing in the world. Maybe that's where you come in. You Hebrews came along and tossed us off our thrones. You brought in that unhappy conscience of yours—all that damned moral anxiety. Maybe you're a Christian (p. 166).

Ashley's physical appearance after his miraculous escape seems to enforce this identification. When he lets his

17. Three Saturns advise Roger in Chicago: Mr. Bittner, who comes to him as the representative of a committee of twelve who want Roger to help them create in Chicago a new Jerusalem, an Athens; the Archbishop of Chicago; and Maestro Lauri. Apollo appears to him as Thomas Garrison Speidel.
hair and beard grow in order to disguise himself, something "preposterous" occurs. He resembles "one of the Apostles--a John or a James--as they are pictured in art, particularly in bad art, on name-day cards, and votive medals, or as wax or plaster statues. People stopped to stare at him; later, in the southern hemisphere, passersby furtively crossed themselves" (pp. 121-122).

Wilder also identifies Ashley with the Buddhist tradition. He suggests that Ashley is high on the Buddhist ladder. In Chicago, Ruby believes Roger is also in a high position and explains her reasons for believing so: "You are not attached to things. You do not want fame or riches. You do not want to crush people with your power. You do not envy others. You are not proud. You have no hates" (p. 258). These are attributes John Ashley shares with his son. Roger finds proof of his father's high position on the ladder in his conduct at his trial, where he was "out of reach of curiosity and malice and to all appearances at home in the courtroom and his extremity" (p. 221).

Finally, Ashley's role as a messenger "from the future" is proposed by the Deacon of the Covenant Church. He believes that the Ashley family is a Messiah-bearing family. He tells Roger that "It has been a mistake of the Jews and Christians to believe that there is only one Messiah" (p. 429). He says that "The Bible is the story of
a Messiah-bearing family, but it is only one Bible. There are many such families whose Bibles have not been written" (p. 430). He believes the Ashleys are close on the family tree to a Messiah. He asks Roger: "Can it be that your family has been marked? Can it be that your descendants may bring forth a Messiah, tomorrow or in a hundred years? That something is preparing" (p. 430). He admits that he cannot with certainty answer these questions and concludes: "It may be that this family and this America are mirages of my old eyes. Of my impatience. There are other lands and other 'trees' that I know nothing of. Four or five in five thousand years are sufficient to nourish hope" (p. 431).

The Deacon believes in a special destiny for the Ashley family because of the mystery that surrounds their lives. Wilder's own answer to the problem of destiny and chance in The Eighth Day resides also in the recognition of the mysterious in the life of man. Mrs. Wickersham says to John Ashley, after hearing his story of what has befallen him: "I don't believe in miracles, but I couldn't exist if I didn't feel that things like miracles were happening all around me. Of course, there's an explanation for what you've told me--but explanations are for people who carry dull minds through dull lives" (p. 197). Although in the last section of the novel the murder of Breckenridge Lansing and John Ashley's "miraculous" rescue are
"explained," the fact that these and other incidents in the lives of the Ashleys can be explained does not necessarily remove the mystery that they should have happened at all. In The Ides of March, Caesar declares, "Where there is an unknowable there is a promise." Some find in that unknowable a proof that there is a divine plan which guides man's life. In The Eighth Day, Wilder comes far closer to asserting that there is such a plan, rather than, as in The Ides of March, simply being unable to deny such a plan, for he says explicitly of John Ashley: "He was a link in a chain, a stitch in a tapestry, a planter of trees, a breaker of stones on an old road to a not yet clearly marked destination" (p. 108). Nevertheless, in an ending remarkably reminiscent of a passage in The Bridge of San Luis Rey, Wilder once again refuses to take sides:

There is much talk of a design in the arras. Some are certain they see it. Some see what they have been told to see. Some remember that they saw it once but have lost it. Some are strengthened by seeing a pattern wherein the oppressed and exploited of the earth are gradually emerging from their bondage. Some find strength in the conviction that there is nothing to see. Some (p. 435)

The Eighth Day ends thus in midsentence, as Finnegans Wake does. Wilder obviously ends his novel in this manner partly to indicate the impossibility of ending. The dangling word indicates the "severed threads" which tie

18. Wilder, The Ides of March, p. 239.
this "history" to all history. One may also evaluate his ending, as that of Joyce's novel has been evaluated, as a device for showing how "the beginning and end of the rivers of time and life form a unity within the most bewildering multiplicity." Although Wilder says here that "only in appearance . . . time is a river," certainly he intends something of the same kind of effect that Joyce does. John Ashley's physical odyssey to Chile is also a spiritual odyssey in search of a unity to explain the bewildering diversity of his experience. He makes the traditional mystic's descent into the dark night of the soul, but his ascent and final perception of the whole is never completed. When he dreams the dream of the void, María Icaza tells him that this dream is sent to him by God: "Your understanding is like a little fetus . . . trying to be born. When God loves a creature He wants the creature to know the highest happiness and the deepest misery--then he can die. He wants him to know all that being alive can bring. That is His best gift" (p. 135). She scornfully dismisses Ashley's claims to prior happiness: "There is no happiness save in understanding the whole. You are a creature whom God loves--particularly loves. You are being born" (p. 135). Although John Ashley dies before being completely reborn into an understanding of the whole, Wilder suggests through

the strangeness of his life and through the timelessness of his characterization that there are eternal realities beyond the phenomenal world. The perception of these realities is accorded to those who can see with the eyes of mystics and who do not require "explanations."
CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The task Thornton Wilder sets himself in his novels is to find—as John Ashley tries to find—a unity within the diversity of all life. Such a search necessitates a confrontation with the phenomenal world of apparent time. The resolution to the confrontation is for Wilder—inevitably perhaps—a mystical one. He affirms through characterization, through structure, through thematic development that there exist certain eternal verities which are unaffected by and which give meaning to the phenomenal world in which man exists. He repeatedly demonstrates that the concept of time and history usually accepted by man—that time can be divided into distinct periods and that events gain much of their significance because of their occurrence within certain distinct time periods—is illusory.

All of the novels deny by their circular structure the validity of the idea of time as absolute progression from one never-recurring moment to another never-recurring moment. Although within a circular structure there may indeed be progression, the fact that the end of the progression within the structure occurs at a point which has
also been the beginning of the progression belies the concept of absolute linearism. Wilder has consistently employed this method. It is implicit in his beginning and ending The Cabala with the narrator's meditations on Virgil's pervasive influence on Italy and in his opening and closing The Woman of Andros with descriptive passages which emphasize the same idea—that another cycle in the life of mankind is beginning—and which are worded in part exactly alike. It is more emphatic in his using specific events both to begin and to end Heaven's My Destination and The Bridge of San Luis Rey—George Brush's celebration of his birthday in the former and the fall of the bridge in the latter. In The Bridge of San Luis Rey, The Ides of March, and The Eighth Day, the parts of the novel conform to the circular pattern. Each of the central episodes of The Bridge of San Luis Rey also ends with the bridge's fall. Similarly, each of the sections of The Eighth Day, with the exception of one, ends in the same year, 1905. Thus, in each of these novels, each succeeding part returns to an exploration of a time period which has already been treated. The books of The Ides of March likewise are four separate treatments of essentially the same time period. This structure is a direct technical result of Wilder's attempt to place the individual outside chronological time, in which moments have only one particular existence, and
historical place, which is tied to a particular moment in time. Wilder's use of the circular structure helps to identify the lives of his characters with the eternal cycles of the cosmos.

Wilder's demonstration of the cycles in the life of mankind is an affirmation of eternality. The repetition in the cycles gives eternal existence to that which is repeated. It exists so long as there are recurrent manifestations of it—whether it be a character type, a situation, an emotion or whatever. The revelation that the end of one cycle is not a true ending, but is equally the beginning of an inevitable other cycle is a declaration that time cannot with validity be separated into past, present, and future, but exists as a continuum.

Besides using the circular structure, Wilder insists upon the recognition of the cycles through various other techniques. The Cabala and Heaven's My Destination are framed by cycles—a year in the life of one man. The Cabala also demonstrates the ending of one cycle in the life of the gods and implies the beginning of another in their certain reincarnations. Heaven's My Destination emphasizes the cyclic patterns in George Brush's life by showing the repetitious nature of the circuits which he follows while performing his job. Wilder more explicitly places the characters and events of The Woman of Andros,
Heaven's My Destination, and The Eighth Day against a background of universal cycles. The opening paragraph of The Woman of Andros suggests the innumerable cycles through which human history has passed and thus causes the events on the island of Brynos to be viewed as part of those cycles. In Heaven's My Destination and The Eighth Day, Wilder uses scientific information about the locale in which the action occurs to emphasize the endless evolutionary cycles which precede and which encompass the characters and events of those novels. The Eighth Day also contains explicit discussion of the cycles in the life of mankind.

In addition, Wilder comments upon the cyclic, repetitive—hence, eternal—nature of man's life through the use of recurring character types. Astrée-Luce in The Cabala, Pamphilus in The Woman of Andros, and George Brush in Heaven's My Destination are all holy fools. Alix in The Cabala, Camila in The Bridge of San Luis Rey, Chrysis in The Woman of Andros, and Cytheris in The Ides of March are all intuitive actresses who embody a love for the language. Chrysis and the Abbess in The Bridge of San Luis Rey are both ones who feel compelled to shelter and love the destitute. Captain Alvarado in The Bridge of San Luis Rey and Philocles in The Woman of Andros are essentially the same character, described in each novel in essentially the same wording. Wilder uses these recurrent character types, the
implicit and explicit comment about cycles, and the circular structure to reinforce the concept that time has no absolute ending and beginning and that all moments in time are coexistent.

Wilder employs other direct methods to refute the conception that time can only be measured in discrete, unique moments. His deliberate anachronisms—John Keats dying in the twentieth century, Edward Sheldon living in Caesar's time, the distortion of the sequence of historical events in The Ides of March—insist upon a denial of compartmentalized time. Besides this dislocation of historical characters and events, he gives anachronistic qualities to other characters. Pamphilus in The Woman of Andros and John Ashley in The Eighth Day are both described as coming "from the future." The major characters in The Cabala are all described as belonging, in essence, to past eras. Besides these anachronisms, another direct method of insisting that characters and events be viewed as existing independent of a time progression is the fragmentation of the narratives of The Bridge of San Luis Rey, The Ides of March, and The Eighth Day. In these novels, the events have meaning not according to their placement temporally within the novels, but according to their fusion spatially with other events.
The themes which predominate in Wilder's novels arise from his overwhelming concern with the placement of man in universal time. His preoccupation with the theme of destiny versus chance—which receives major treatment in The Bridge of San Luis Rey, The Ides of March, and The Eighth Day--arises from his awe at the ultimate mystery of man's temporal existence. His attempts to resolve this problem lead him to a mystical acceptance of an unknowable but eternal ordering principle. The most frequently intuited evidence of a supra-phenomenal reality in the novels is love, and love in its various guises is one of Wilder's major themes. That Wilder considers all kinds of love--the perverse and perverted forms, as well as the highest, selfless, form--as reflections of a pure eternal love which gives meaning and direction to experience is evident. In The Bridge of San Luis Rey, which explores the love relationships in the lives of all its characters, the Abbess perceives the meaning of life to be in these various manifestations of love which "return to the love that made them" (p. 235). Chrysis and Pamphilus also intuit that it is love that gives meaning to existence. It is partly the mysterious nature of the love relationships which he observes that causes Caesar to be unable to deny order in the universe. Among their other failures, the characters in The Cabala fail to love well. George Brush's
American home collapses partly because he misunderstands the quality of love; he is saved from sure death through Father Pasziewski's act of selfless love.

The themes relating to the individual which are prominent in the novels—the validity of the individual, the importance of living life with awareness, the importance of accepting all that life has to offer—result from Wilder's recognition of a cosmic, eternal order. Although the individual is essentially isolated (another prominent theme), the very fact that he is a part of this cosmic whole, that the cycles of his life reflect the cycles of the universe, imbues him and his life with an eternal importance. His apparently transitory human time is subsumed in cosmic, eternal time.
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