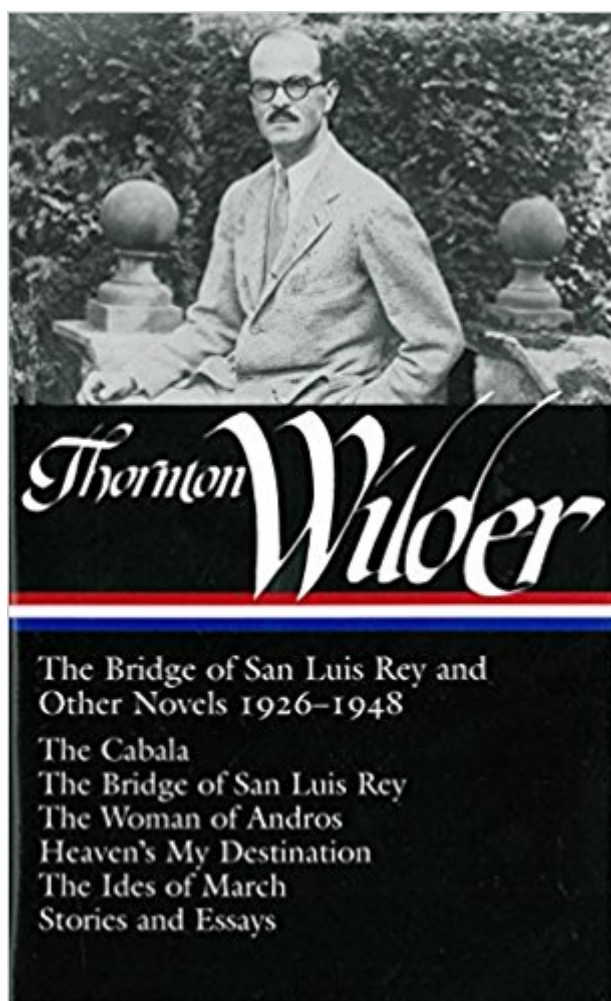


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Thornton Wilder: The Bridge Of San Luis Rey And Other Novels 1926-1948 (Library Of America No. 194)



Synopsis

Thornton Wilder was the rare writer whose achievements as a playwright were matched by equal abilities as a novelist. As companion to its volume of Wilder's collected plays, *The Library of America's* edition of his early novels and stories brings together five novels that highlight his wit, erudition, innovative formal structures, and philosophical wisdom. Drawing on the post-collegiate year he spent in Rome, Wilder fashioned in *The Cabala* a tale of youthful enchantment with the Eternal City in the form of a fictitious memoir of an American student and the enigmatic coterie of noble Romans who draw him into their midst. He followed this debut novel two years later with *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, which catapulted him to literary prominence and earned him the first of his three Pulitzer prizes. "The Bridge," Wilder later wrote, "asked the question whether the intention that lies behind love was sufficient to justify the desperation of living." Set in 18th-century Peru, the book is a kind of theological detective story concerning a friar's investigations into the lives of five individuals before they were killed in a bridge collapse. An elegantly told parable, with credible historical ambience and psychologically rounded characters, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* is primarily a probing inquiry into the nature of destiny and divine intention: Why did God allow these particular people to die? *The Woman of Andros*, based on the *Andria* of Roman writer Terence, is a meditation on the ancient world filtered through the sensibility of a meditative courtesan; *Heaven's My Destination*, a departure from Wilder's historical themes, is a picaresque romp through Depression-era America; and *The Ides of March* takes up the story of Julius Caesar's assassination by imagining the exchange of letters among such prominent ancient figures as Catullus, Cleopatra, Cicero, and Caesar himself, "groping in the open seas of his unlimited power for the first principles which should guide him." The volume concludes with a selection of early short stories—among them "Præcautions Inutiles," published here for the first time—and a selection of essays that offers Wilder's insights into the works of Stein and Joyce, as well as a lecture on letter writers that bears on both *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* and *The Ides of March*.

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Customer Reviews

Thornton Wilder (1897-1975) is the only writer to win Pulitzer Prizes for both fiction and drama. J. D. McClatchy is the author of numerous collections of poems, prose, and libretti. He has edited editions of the poetry of James Merrill and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He teaches at Yale University, where he was the longtime editor of the Yale Review.

He was such a fine writer. Our Town, which is not in this book, was one of those plays we had to read in high school and resonates to this day. But I had never read The Bridge of San Luis Rey, so I bought this book to read that and to sample some of his other novels. I took my time reading every word (sometimes reading sections more than once) and tried to absorb all of his detailed descriptions, which really add to the richness of the experience. I thought the Bridge of San Luis Rey was wonderful. I liked all of the other stories, although some more than others. I learned something from each novel - either about his time and place or the times and places he created. It was all worth the effort. One observation: The font is very small and the line spacing practically non-existent, so you might need an index card or something like that to make the reading easier.

An excellent book. Liked the ribbon bookmark. Wilder had an unusual theme in the "Bridge". Read it about 65 years and it is still interesting.

For novels and stories written more than half-a-century ago, it's amazing how true to the moment Thornton Wilder's characters are. A lot of his work deals with religious themes, but not in an overbearing, evangelical way. Rather, he seems to get to the heart of asking how faith and humanity interact and the failings of both in the effort! He has such an outstanding eye for human nature--you'll read about people you know in his work. And the story lines always have an interesting little twist in the end.

I enjoyed reading this book as it asked the question--"Were the people that died in the story selected by God to die and why?" Wilder is a great writer and asks some good questions about our faith in God. Book Lover in Oregon

Ideal compilation of Wilder's novels. It is disappointing that the great Wilder plays could not be included. Library of America editions are always great

The Library of America is a "can't lose" situation for purchasers and this volume is no exception. The book includes an excellent selection, is intelligently edited, includes a good summary of Wilder's life, is bound and printed well, and is a financial bargain.

A wonderful book. I had forgotten just how moving and how beautiful this classic truly is. I recommend it to any serious reader. It makes much contemporary writing seem very thin indeed.

I don't know why, but I have often found myself drawn to the works of Wilder, and I was so glad to see this collection of Wilder's early writings. There is no denying the power of "The Bridge of San Luis Rey." I have no qualms with the texts themselves, but the editorial aspect bothers me. Wilder's sexuality is completely left out, and this is important when you consider that the third act of "Our Town" (not in this text) was drafted at the home of his lover, Samuel Steward. Steward's pen name, Phil Andros, is also shared by Wilder's novel "The Woman of Andros." Coincidence? I think not. Again, I love the Library of America (I have just about every volume), and I love the novels in this collection, but the editor, J.D. McClatchy could have been a little more honest in his notes.

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