

Cultural Daily

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Thank you, Thornton, Peter and Rainer, for the Words

Hoyt Hilsman · Wednesday, November 23rd, 2011

I am eternally thankful for the work of Thornton Wilder, who was in my view our greatest playwright. In *Our Town* and *Skin of Our Teeth*, Wilder widened the American family drama to universal and spiritual dimensions. His integration of the everyday and the cosmic represented a triumph of playwriting craft. And his risky and innovative approach to theatrical conventions forever changed the American stage. He brought wisdom and insight to our lives, and managed to be both avant-garde and popular at the same time. Although *Our Town* is routinely subjected to the trials of high school and community theater productions, it still stands as a quintessential American play. Even Wilder's *Merchant of Yonkers*, later reworked as *The Matchmaker*, has an iconic place in American theater as the musical *Hello, Dolly*. While we desperately need another Thornton Wilder to light up our stages, we will never see another one like him for a long time.

–*Hoyt Hilsman is an award-winning screenwriter, critic and former Congressional candidate. He was a critic for Daily Variety and is a regular contributor to The Huffington Post. His novel, 19 Angels, a political thriller, is in development as a feature film.*

Thank you, Peter Weiss for *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*. The first time I saw it performed was the Jerome Kilty production at Chicago's Goodman Theatre. Weiss's vivid imagery roots the play in historical fact while yoking art to madness and setting it all to music inspired by Bertolt Brecht. A brilliant drama with galvanizing insights into politics, religion, and the human condition. And given Occupy Wall Street, it is as relevant today as the day Weiss wrote it.

– *Garner Simmons is a writer and filmmaker who lives and works in Los Angeles.*

Thank you, Herr Rilke for your *Ninth Duino Elegy*, and to Stephen Mitchell, for your translation. It's like an ur-text for me with its faith in language, and undeniability of impermanence. "Oh, not because happiness exists, that too-hasty profit snatched from approaching loss..." Just this week, again, the line: "What, if not transformation, is your urgent command?" directs me back to [Karaniya Metta Sutta](#): The Buddha's Discourse on Loving-Kindness, which I still know and still

need to know (forgetting to recite) after so many years.

So, really, it is the homo sapien mind I thank for being able to take poems and suttas inside the mouth, onto the tongue, then cooking in the neurological cauldron, and, gracias a diós, for the way those inherited words fly back up and out at the oddest, most perfect times.

– *Irene Borger is a writer, teacher, congenital muse, and director of the Alpert Award in the Arts.*

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