

## **IP Statement on Author and Production History**

Thornton Wilder was born on April 17, 1897, in Madison, Wisconsin to Isabella and Amos P. Wilder. Wilder moved between the U.S. and China as a kid due to his father being appointed consul general to Hong Kong, and later Shanghai, by Theodore Roosevelt. After graduating from high school, Wilder attended college at Oberlin in Ohio. In 1917, he transferred to Yale University.

While in school Wilder wrote for different school publications, and after graduating, he started writing his first novel, *The Cabala*. During this time, Wilder taught French at the Lawrenceville School in Princeton for 4 years, resigning to get his M.A. in French at Princeton.

Wilder's works all have strong themes of his brand of humanism which Rex Burbank describes as "Wilder's humanism was akin to the New Humanism in its insistence upon the validity of human values inherited from the cultural past, but his, like [T.S.] Eliot's, had a religious foundation and a sensitivity to the aesthetic as well as the ethical qualities of literature ... [Wilder's] humanism had a religious base to give it an ultimate justification, it, by its very nature, held all dogmas and absolutes in suspension, and was often directed against the excesses of religious belief and puritanical moralism as it was against the coldness of the rationalistic temper" (29).

When it comes to the production history of *The Long Christmas Dinner*, we start at Yale University on November 5, 1931, where the play was first produced. It was later adapted into an opera by Paul Hindemith, with Wilder writing the libretto. For the sake of this paper, we will mostly just be looking at the play version and not the opera. From what I can tell, there were a few TV movies produced based off of the play, however, the only thing that really comes back is an IMDB page with no info other than actors, therefore I'm just going to mention it in passing. The next major review for a production of *Christmas Dinner*, is from the LA Times, reviewing a 1988 production by the Pacific Theatre Ensemble in Venice, with author Sylvie Drake opening with a line I think sums up the show really well, "Thornton Wilder's "The Long Christmas Dinner" is one of the shortest, and sweetest, theatrical meals in the repertory. And one of the more challenging, since this wistful

little one-act play (a scant act at that) requires its actors to riffle through 90 years in far less than that many minutes” (Drake).

When then move to 1993 Broadway production of *Wilder, Wilder, Wilder* which was a compilation of 3 short plays by Thornton Wilder, *The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden*, *The Long Christmas Dinner*, and *Pullman Car Hiawatha* respectively. After that, there is a bit of a gap until 2014, when the American Symphony Orchestra staged a double production of both the play and opera versions of *The Long Christmas Dinner* at Carnegie Hall. Fun fact, CMU special visiting faculty for Costume Design Olivera Gajic did the costumes for said production. Moving on, there is a 2015 off-Broadway production called *A Wilder Christmas* that consisted of *The Long Christmas Dinner* and *Pullman Car Hiawatha*. And finally, we come to the most recent major production, which is a run of the show in 2021 and 2022 by the national theatre of Ireland, The Abbey Theatre.

## Works Cited

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Page	Term	Description
4	Sciatica	Pain, weakness, numbness, or tingling in the leg due to injury or pressure on the sciatic nerve
5	Workbasket	Basket used to store sewing materials
6	Rheumatism	Inflammation and pain in joints, muscles, or fibrous tissue
15	Keen	Sharp, as in the wind
21	Stoic	a person who can endure pain or hardship without showing their feelings or complaining.

Birth/enter	Death	Major Event
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Plot Diagram	
Lucia 1, Roderick 1, & M. Bayard Enter	
Cousin Brandon Enters, 5 years since start	
M. Bayard Dies, ~6 years from start	
Charles 1 is born, ~7 years from start	
Genevieve 1 is born, ~19 years from start	
Roderick 1 gets sick from drinking, between ~20-24 years from start	
Roderick 1 Dies, 25 years from start	
Charles 1 Marries Lenora Banning, sometime after Roderick 1 dies	
Charles 1 and Lenora have an unnamed child that doesn't survive long	
Cousin Brandon Dies	
Lucia 1 Dies, shortly after Brandon	
Lucia 2 and Samuel 1 are born, probably a year after Lucia 1 dies, 50 years from start	
Cousin Ermengarde is invited to the house	Roderick 2 is born
Cousin Ermengarde arrives at the house	
Sam 1 Goes to war and dies	
Charles 1 chastises Roderick causing him to leave	Lucia 2 leaves to get married in parris
Genevieve 1 leaves the house, 25 years since Lucia 1's death	
Cousin Ermengarde and Charles 1 get sick, Cousin Ermengarde gets better	
Charles 1 dies	
Lenora leaves to stay with her children	
Lenora writes to Cousin Ermengarde detailing a situation that is very similar to the beginning of the show	

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## IP Statement of the World

In the *Long Christmas Dinner* by Thornton Wilder, the concept of Private and Public works are vitally important. The whole show hinges on the premise that the Bayard Family talks about their past years at their Christmas dinners through the years. Take for example, the life of Sam. It starts with him being wheeled in on a pram through the “Birth Portal” into the main hall. The next time we see him, he is a uniform of a naval ensign, and as he goes to war he goes through the “death portal”. Everything other than the dining room of the house is in all essence a private space. When it comes to the other elements of the play we see that the Bayard family moves into the house in the early 1800’s, as it seems to fall in line with what we know about western expansion in the United States, as well as the fact that Mother Bayard talks about how “Saint Louis and Kansas City were full of Indians” (Wilder 2). I’m also basing this assumption on the fact that we know that the play takes place over 90 years, due to the opening stage directions compounded with the fact that the play was written in 1931.

We know that throughout the show, the Bayard’s become quite important in the town that they live in, with them becoming one of the oldest families as well as owning major industries, which includes a factory.

We know that the show is perpetually in winter, as it is the *Long Christmas Dinner*. This can add to the somewhat eerie and, to me, kind of sad tone of the show. The show, while at times shows what’s best about life, it also shows the sadness and legacy of losing a loved one. This adds a quite somber tone overall.

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### IP Character Digest Draft

I'm going to start by saying that all in all, most of the family members don't have an objective other than to live life, to an extent anyways. That isn't to say that there isn't an objective, there just isn't a super deep objective. The best way to go about this is to go through the characters one by one, roughly in age order.

It seems to me that Mother Bayard exist to introduce the history of the family, as well as to set up the feeling of the world as it exists in the show. Out of Mother Bayard's 7 lines, 4 of them are devoted to the world around them and Mother Bayard's personal history, and the other 3 are about the Bayard family history.

Next is Roderick 1, who sets up the family's business and has kids. Like I said, these characters have very little objects or development. Anyways, we can see Roderick's character objects succinctly in this line, "Don't drop him, nurse. Brandon and I need him in our firm" (Wilder 6).

Next is Lucia, who acts as the Matriarch for the family for two generations. She has two children, Genevieve and Charles 1. Most of Lucia's interactions are with her kids or about her kids, "O my wonderful new baby, my darling baby! Who ever saw such a child! Quick, nurse, a boy or a girl? A boy! Roderick, what shall we call him? Really, nurse, you've never seen such a child!" (5).

Then there's Cousin Brandon, who doesn't really do much, he's just kind of there. I'm not really sure he has an objective, he shows up, talks about nothing in particular, then dies.

The rest of the children mostly live to die, with very little other characterization. So for the rest of the characters, I'm only going to highlight the ones worth talking about. Firstly, there is Samuel, who's literal only job is to go to war and die. That's truly the only thing he does. Lastly, at least when it comes to characters with anything important, there's Cousin Ermengarde, who acts as a spectator of sorts. She witnesses the exiting of Lucia 2, Roderick 2, and Lenora Banning, and she reads a letter from them that seems to start a sort of cycle from the beginning of the play. "Such a nice letter this morning from Mrs. Bayard, Mary. Such a nice letter. They're having their first Christmas dinner in the new house." (24). I feel like in a subversive way, Ermengarde serves as the most important character as she witnesses and influences the story in quite a strong way.