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م.م. سعاد حسين علي  
الجامعة العراقية / كلية الآداب

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## Allegory in Thornton Wilder's The Skin of Our Teeth

م.م. سعاد حسين علي  
الجامعة العراقية / كلية الآداب

### الملخص

(نجونا بأعجوبة) هي رائعة ثورنتون وايلدر التي قامت بكسر الحدود التقليدية المترسخة للمسرح في ذلك الوقت وربحت جائزة (Pulitzer) لأفضل عمل مسرحي في عام 1943. جاءت المسرحية لتزرع روح الامل والتفاؤل في قلوب وعقول جماهير فترة الحرب ( 1942 ) وذلك بترسيخ فكرة ان الانسان قادر على النجاة دائما ولاشي يستطيع ان يدمره.

ان هذه الدراسة هي محاولة لفهم وشرح اسلوب وتقنية وايلدر باستعماله للرمز (allegory) وذلك ليعبر عن افكاره بمستويات متنوعة لان الرمز (allegory) هو شكل من اشكال المجاز الواسع والذي يستطيع الكاتب من خلاله ان يقدم الشي في زي شيء اخر.

قسمت الدراسة على ثلاث نقاط رئيسية وخاتمة . اهتمت النقطة الاولى بحياة الكاتب بصورة مختصرة, اما النقطة الثانية فقد خصصت الى الحقائق المهمة حول المسرحية . ناقشت النقطة الثالثة موضوع (allegory) وتفرعت هذه النقطة الى ثمانية محاور والتي تقوم جميعها بشرح وتحليل الاشكال والصيغ المختلفة لاستعمال الرمز (allegory) في المسرحية.

تؤطر خاتمة البحث بخلاصة لاهم النتائج التي اظهرتها هذه الدراسة.

## Abstract

*The Skin of Our Teeth* is Thornton Wilder's masterpiece which broke the established theatrical conventions at that time, and won the 1943 Pulitzer Prize for best drama. The play came to plant hope and optimism in the hearts and minds of the wartime audience in 1942, by establishing the idea that Man could survive, and nothing could destroy him.

This study is an attempt to understand Wilder's technique and style of allegory that he uses to express his thoughts in various levels. Since allegory is a form of extended metaphor in which writers can present thing in the guise of another.

The study is divided into three main points and conclusion ; point one deals with the biography of Thornton Wilder in brief. Whereas point two is devoted to the main facts on Wilder's play *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Point three discusses the subject of allegory, and is divided into eight aspects which explain and analyze different shapes and forms of allegory in the play.

The conclusion sums up the findings of the study.

## 1-1-Thornton Wilder :

Thornton Wilder was considered one of the most celebrated figures of twentieth century. He enjoyed a writing career, as a novelist and a playwright which lasted more than fifty years. As a dramatist, Wilder's reputation depended on three full-length plays; **Our Town, The Skin of Our Teeth, and The Matchmaker.** These plays are outstanding in their speculation and theatrical technique.<sup>1</sup>

Wilder's exceptional wit and unique feelings were reflected with charming depth in his works. To him, a play was a kind of religious ceremonial events where the audience would think profoundly on the ritualistic meaning of life, the human nature and the relationship of man with the universe.<sup>2</sup> He frequently built his works on moral, religious, and metaphysical ideas, rather than focusing on social and psychological complexities. His ideas are not new; they appear in classical literature and philosophy of all ages.<sup>3</sup>

Wilder was seen as a keen observer of life, a poet and not a mere storyteller. He was an innovator who exploited different staging techniques and forms in order to show universal themes and values linked with life, family and love.<sup>4</sup> He was the only American writer to have the honor of winning the Pulitzer Prize for both drama and fiction. He won three Pulitzer Prize for his novel **The Bridge of San Luis Rey**(1928), and his plays **Our Town** (1938), and **The Skin of Our Teeth** (1943).<sup>5</sup>

## 2-1-The Skin of Our Teeth : Facts.

Many who have seen or read Thornton Wilder's play; **The Skin of Our Teeth** (1942), have no doubt puzzled over what exactly the play means. It is a play that relishes in staging the seemingly absurd and impossible, leaving audience members to simply shrug their shoulders and go along for a ride that explores the adventures of an outwardly normal New Jersey suburban family. However, as soon becomes apparent, the world of Antrobus family is anything but normal. The lives of Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus are, in fact, an allegory of all humanity.<sup>6</sup>

**The Skin of Our Teeth** opened on Broadway to a generally favorable critical response. With its allegorical mixture of contemporary and biblical events, the play confused some of the critics, but proved delightful to the audience and ran for 355 performances.<sup>7</sup> However, Barnes called the play a "vital and wonderful piece of theater."<sup>8</sup> The anonymous reviewer for *Newsweek* wrote; "call it comedy, fantasy, allegory, or cosmic vaudeville show, Wilder has contrived something provocative and stimulating."<sup>9</sup>

When the disruptive tensions of World War II enfeebled the entire world making it vulnerable to doubt, fear and agony, Wilder's play came as a ray of hope. The play sketches the history of civilization from the beginning to the present day. Its main theme is that man with his courage, optimism and determination, shall always be victorious in the battle for survival. He shall somehow manage to overcome chaos to start a fresh.<sup>10</sup>

The play was entitled as "**The End of The World**,"<sup>11</sup> but it was changed into "**The Skin of Our Teeth**". Malcolm Goldstein comments:

**The title itself announces the theme, which is that no matter how hard pressed or frightened, the human race has power to survive its great adventure in a world where physical nature and its own internal conflicts pose endless threat.**<sup>1</sup>

It is the story of George and Maggie Antrobus who live a seemingly perfect life in suburban Excelsior, New Jersey, along with their children, Henry and Gladys, and their maid, Sabrina. Little do they know that the Ice Age is upon them, the Floods are coming, and War is on the horizon. The story of the Antrobus' journey through time is the story of mankind surviving disaster by the skin of their teeth.

The appeal of the play lies in the fact that its theme is relevant even today.<sup>13</sup> Wilder himself called it "the most ambitious project I have ever approached."<sup>14</sup>

### 3-1-Allegory.

**An allegory is a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense "literal", or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to communicate a sound, correlated order of signification.<sup>15</sup>**

In another words an allegory is a narrative in which the characters and events can be read both literary and figuratively.

### 3-2-The Function of Allegory:

Writers use allegory to add different layers of meanings to their works. Allegory makes their stories and characters multidimensional, so that they stand for something layer in meaning than what they literally stand for. Allegory allows writers to put forward their moral and political point of views. A careful study of an allegorical piece of writing can give us an insight into its writer's mind as how he views the world and how he wishes the world to be.<sup>16</sup>

### 3-3-The Allegory of Thornton Wilder:

Thornton Wilder has written some form of allegory, and he rejects the tradition of modern realism, perhaps because "little remains to be done with direct reflections of contemporary life."<sup>17</sup> He seeks to use the theater in the service of his consciously worked-out moral or philosophical ideas. He does not, however, write thesis plays, in which some scheme of social reform is openly debated and proved on the stage. His aim is not discussion in any sense, but teaching; he uses the stage, the characters, and the story to demonstrate an idea which he takes to be the un discussible truth. He writes allegory according to the literal definition in the Oxford Dictionary: "Speaking otherwise than one seems to speake."<sup>18</sup>

Wilder's "Note on Playwriting" shows that: " his art of allegory is completely knowing. He stresses the conventional, make-believe-quality of the stage-in opposition to the realists' "illusion"- for the purpose of allegory".<sup>19</sup> He maintains, in his

"Notes", that; "all drama is essentially allegory, a succession of events illustrating a general idea."<sup>20</sup>

### 3-4-The Allegory in *The Skin of Our Teeth*:

**The Skin of Our Teeth** is a three-part allegory about the life of mankind, centering around the Antrobus family who lives in Excelsior, New Jersey. The main characters of the play are George and Maggie Antrobus, their two children, Henry and Gladys, and Sabina who appears as the family's maid in the first and the third acts, and as a beauty queen temptress in the second act.

The play's action takes place in modern setting, but is full of anachronisms reaching back to prehistoric times. The characters' roles as archetypes are emphasized by their identification with biblical and classical personalities.<sup>21</sup> The Antrobuses have survived a thousand calamities by the skin of their teeth. They managed to pass the catastrophes of Ice Age, the Flood and the War. The writer's aim, of course, is to present a universal family with universal human dilemmas to reveal; "the human adventure is much the same in all times and all places."<sup>22</sup> Living through the three catastrophes, the Antrobus household bravely and ingeniously encounters moments of crisis and emerges triumphant each time, though battered somewhat. A Dinosaur and a Mammoth, the family's pets, in act one indicate the prehistoric times of man. The fortuneteller in act two stands for destiny. In spite of the differences of the setting of the acts, when the events unfold, it becomes clear that the actual location is "anywhere" and "everywhere".<sup>23</sup> Malcolm Goldstien says:

**Wilder designed a presentational method which would permit the audience to be drawn toward the characters as individuals with private problems while recognizing that they also function in a broader sphere as the representatives of the entire race.**<sup>24</sup>

The Antrobuses can be read as ordinary people (a middle-class American couple) and as allegorical figures (Adam and Eve, the progenitors of humankind ) The action of the play can be viewed literally, as the experiences of a particular family, and

allegorically, as the story of human history. The emphasis in Wilder's depiction is not so much on events themselves as on their inner significance. "Its apparent simplicity contains deep layers of complexity."<sup>25</sup> Antrobus' children symbolize man's quest for perfection. Gladys, the daughter, represents the life force whereas Henry, the son, represent evil. They may also be interpreted as the concepts of sex and violence.<sup>26</sup>

Wilder underestimates his achievements; he says: "The keenest members of the audience will see not merely two sorts of personality in each character, but three, four, or even five as the play unfolds."<sup>27</sup> So with both characters' names and explicit comments, Wilder emphasizes the allegorical nature of his play.<sup>28</sup>

### 3-5-The allegorical significance of the characters 'names:

Wilder's characters in **The Skin of Our Teeth** are all allegorical figures and exist on three planes: American, biblical, and universal. Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus are simultaneous embodiment of Adam and Eve, Everyman and Everywoman, and an average American couple.

#### 3-5-A-The allegorical significance of Antrobus' name:

The main characters of the play are the Antrobuses, whose name is reminiscent of the Greek word "Antropos" meaning man, is portrayed as the first family of the human race struggling to survive disaster after disaster.<sup>29</sup> Wilder shows George and Maggie Antrobus as Adam and Eve by indicating some events in the play, for instance, Henry Antrobus' name was changed from "Cain", following his murders of his brother Abel. This is a story from the Bible, in which Cain, the son of Adam, murders his brother Abel after God favors Abel over Cain regarding gifts. This implies that George Antrobus is Adam, and Maggie Antrobus is Eve, further supported by an event at the beginning of the play, when Mr. Antrobus composes a song for his wife in honor of their anniversary, in which the lyrics: "Happy w'dding ann'versary dear Eva." (1,p.108) Mr. George Antrobus represents Adam, the father of all mankind. He is a hardworking man; inventor of the wheel,



lever, and the alphabet. Malcolm Goldstein describes him as: "a figure representing the intellectual side of man's nature."<sup>30</sup> While Mrs. Maggie Antrobus is an ideal suburban wife. She is Eve, the eternal mother of the human race

### **3-5-B-The Allegorical significance of Sabina's name:**

Lilly Sabina is linked with Mr. Antrobus as Eve's temptress side as well as Lilith, Adam's first, evil wife, according to Talmudic tradition.<sup>31</sup>

Wilder's archetypal characters, however, are not solely defined by what they represent. The name Lilly Sabina is a reference to the myth of Lilith and the historical rape of Sabine women,<sup>32</sup> identifications made relatively explicit in the play's text. Mrs. Antrobus reminds Sabina of her past affair with Mr. Antrobus and yet she keeps her in their house:

**Mrs.Antrobus: Oh, Sabina, I know you.when Mr.Antrobus raped you home from your Sabine hills, he did it to insult me. He did it for your pretty face, and to insult me. You were the new wife, weren't you? For a year or two you lay on your bed all day and polished the nails on your hands and feet. (1,p.104).**

Sabina's plight is doubly humiliating because her career in the Antrobus house began when Mr. Antrobus brought her back from the Sabine rape.<sup>33</sup> The sensual quality in mankind is presented by the servant Sabina who looks after man's desires, as opposed to Maggie, who looks after his need.<sup>34</sup>

In the second act, Mr. Antrobus is lured by the charms of Miss Fairweather, who is now not the maid Sabina, but a beauty contest winner. As a beautiful temptress, Sabina allegorically stands for the break-up of the Antrobus family, by stealing Mr. Antrobus away from his wife.

### **3-5-C-The allegorical significance of Antrobus son's name:**

During Mrs. Antrobus' interaction with her children, Henry and Gladys, the audience learns that Henry is, in fact, Cain who, according to scripture and *The Skin of Our Teeth's* allusions,

killed his brother Abel. Henry's name was Cain until an unfortunate accident occurred in which he hit his brother with a stone and killed him. At the beginning of the play, Sabina says that Henry is a strong boy who can hit anything perfectly, if he has a stone in his hand.

**Sabina:....Henry, when he has a stone in his hand, has perfect aim he can hit anything from a bird to an older brother—oh! I didn't Mean to say that!—but it was an unfortunate accident, and it was very hard getting the police out of the house. (1,p.100)**

From the biblical perspective, Henry is linked with Cain, the murderer of his own brother, his violent nature is demonstrated throughout the play. David Krasner believes that:

**Wilder replays the Cain and Abel story using the first murder to represent the presence of evil in the world, the anarchic force that misuses freedom while refusing to exercise responsibility.<sup>35</sup>**

As a result of that thoughtless action, his name was changed to Henry, and Mrs. Antrobus goes to some pains to keep his past history secret.

**Henry: Mama, today at school two teachers forgot and called me by my old name. They forgot mama. You'd better write another letter to the principal, so that he'll tell them I've changed my name. Right out in class they called me: Cain. (1,p.111)**

In this allegorical name, Wilder reminds the audience that man has the tendency to kill since the beginning of the history of mankind. So that, he uses this name as a symbol of the violence in the world.

### **3-6-The Skin of Our Teeth is an allegory of life and Mankind's survival:**

**The Skin of Our Teeth** is about Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus who married five thousand years, their children and their maid. This family managed to survive the Ice Age, the Flood, and war. Thus, Wilder compresses long expanses of time to establish his universal

theme of survival and continuity of life. What Wilder dramatizes in this play is the struggle of human beings to survive, a subject much appreciated by war-time audience. Travis Bogard states that:

**The Antrobus family is several specific families; it is the family unite of the cave-dwellers; is suburban commuter. Its many specific identifications, however, combine to make it all significance.<sup>36</sup>**

The play opens with the announcer's voice who tells the "News events of the world." (1,p.97) The voice reveals that a great wall of ice is moving from Canada into America threatening to destroy the entire world. Then, the curtain rises to show the American family of the Antrobus who lives in the New Jersey during the Ice Age. As the audience soon discovers, the Ice Age is only the first of three disasters through which the family must struggle to survive in order to rebuild their community. As the family's servant, Sabina says:

**We've managed to survive for some time now, catch as catch can, the fat and the lean, and if the dinosaurs don't trample us to death,..We'll all live to see better days, knock on wood. Each new child that's born to the Antrobuses seems to be sufficient reason for the whole universe's being set in motion, and each new child that die seems to them to have spared the whole world of sorrow, and what the end of it will be is still very much an open question. (1,p.100)**

Wilder prepares the audience, through the voice of Sabina for cosmic allegory that serves as the framework of the play, which suggests the idea that life goes on and after each crisis, people start to rebuild the world again.

Allegory helps Wilder to express his themes clearly. When the ice threatens to destroy everything, Mr. Antrobus, who is busy in his inventions, is held up outside his house. He sends home a telegram via smoke signals, instructing Mrs. Antrobus to fight the cold by burning everything except the plays of Shakespeare. Meanwhile, Mrs. Antrobus tries to protect her family from cold weather and death by burning everything including Shakespeare's plays. According to Wilder's allegorical view; Shakespeare's plays

stand for and represent knowledge; they are timeless sources of knowledge. The message is: people will remain alive and survive with knowledge and education. Malcolm Cowley thinks that:

**After each disaster man will start over again-helped by his books; if he has saved them- and will struggle upward until he is halted by another, or perhaps by the same disaster repeated in a different form.**<sup>37</sup>

At the end of act one, when the Antrobus household is getting ready to survive the Ice Age, Mr. Antrobus insists on saving Moses, Homer and nine Muses (who are bums on street of New York) "to keep up our spirits."<sup>38</sup> The refugees are invited by Mr. Antrobus to warm themselves by the fire or allegorically, to save the human race. To Mr. Antrobus, merely physical survival is not enough to prevent mankind from extinction. The refugees including, the blind poet Homer, the Judge Moses, the nine Muses, a doctor and a professor, are allegorical figures who stand for knowledge, art, literature, science and religion. Therefore Antrobuses and those members of human race will light human mind's fire; "in the face of ignorance, catastrophe, and folly."<sup>39</sup>

When Mr. Antrobus arrives home, he tells his family that most of the outside world is freezing and that there is probably nothing they can do to escape the same fate. Mrs. Antrobus blames Sabina for letting the fire go out. Wilder uses the symbol of fire to create a deeper meaning in the play. Allegorically, fire stands for hope, light, warmth and life. However, when Mr. Antrobus is informed by Sabina that his son, Henry has possibly killed a boy, he violently declares that he wants to give up his attempt to save his family and the entire race:

**Antrobus: put out the fire; put out all the fires.(violently)  
No wonder the sun grows cold.( he starts stamping on the fire place)**

**Mrs. Antrobus: Doctor! Judge! Help me! –George have you lost your mind?**

**Antrobus: There is no mind, we'll not try to live (To the guests) Give it up. Give up trying. (1,p.123)**

Mrs. Antrobus notices that the fire of hope, civilization, and the warmth that keeps her family alive is fading away, she tells her children to break up the chairs and beds to keep the fire going. Mr. Antrobus believes that people could survive again:

**Antrobus: (with decision, suddenly): Build up the fire. It's cold. Build up the fire. We'll do what we can. Sabina, get some more wood. Come around the fire everybody. (1,p.125).**

The end of the world approaches a second time. In the second act, Wilder uses biblical allegory by depending on biblical story of Noah's Ark. The family manages to escape death again, directing pairs of animals to safety on a large boat where they survive the end of the world by the skin of their teeth.

The third act takes place in the ruins of the Antrobus' former house in New Jersey. Wilder frequently changes the setting of the play to make the audience understand the different times in history.<sup>40</sup> Sabina says that the seven years long war is over. Mr. Antrobus declares that people have to live life happily. He admits that he does not have the strength or desire to rebuild society again. Yet, upon discovering that his books have been saved, his will to begin again is revived. "All I ask is the chance to build new world, and God has always given us that." (3,p.176).

The spirit of survival and of goodness is stronger than the spirit of the destruction and evil. If Wilder's play is to be taken as a statement on human history, it shows very little progress or improvement. Life will go on unchanged, as it was for thousands of years, and man will survive.<sup>41</sup>

### **3-7-Biblical and Religious Allegory in *The Skin of Our Teeth***

#### **3-7-A-Biblical Allegory:**

The material of the bible is of special interest to the American playwrights whose forefathers, when they set foot on American soil, thought they were the first inhabitants of a new Eden. Several American playwrights have thus made use of the episodes of the bible either as allegories of modern life or as archetypal situations having a direct bearing on contemporary life.

In the play **The Skin of Our Teeth**, Wilder makes use of several easily recognizable episodes from the bible. And like the action of the bible, the action of **The Skin of Our Teeth** is cyclical as each of the three acts is independent but similar to the other two. The first act introduces the Antrobus family whose members are ageless. By a complex manipulation of mixing the present with past, Wilder has succeeded in immortalizing time in this play. The purposes, is to stress the similarity of the present with the key events of the bible. The manipulation of time confirms the impression that the contemporary situation in (1942) is no different from the day of the Fall, or the Flood.<sup>42</sup>

Wilder, however, continues to draw parallels from the bible. There are many unsettling parallels between the members of the Antrobus family and various characters from the bible, for example; Adam, Eve, Lilith, Noah, Moses, and Cain who is Antrobus' son Henry once killed his older brother with a stone and is still violent at times.

The title itself is a phrase from the bible; in Job 19:20, the king James version of the bible says " My bone cleaveth to my skin and my flesh, and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth." In modern times, "by the skin of my teeth" is used to describe a situation one barely managed to escape from.<sup>43</sup>

In the second act, the fortune-teller, persuades Mr. Antrobus to take a boat with his family and two of a kind of all animals and birds to save them from the flood. Mr. Antrobus, the Adam of the first act, becomes Noah in the second. Consequently, the play unfolds the biblical story of the great Flood.

**Fortune-teller: ...Rain. Rain. Rain in Floods,...**

**Again there'll be the narrow escape.**

**The survival of a handful. From destruction.**

**Even of the animals, a few will be saved;**

**Two of a kind, male and female, two of a kind.(2,p.135)**

Marc Connelly likens Wilder's play as a "fable of modern life, created out of the rich material of the Genesis."<sup>44</sup>

The moral lesson of this allegory is; if the human race survived the calamities of the Genesis, it would pull through the modern disasters.

### **3-7-B-Religious Allegory:**

Since mankind is effected by the original sin, his nature is characterized by essential evil. Wilder sets himself in a difficult problem, when he presents his religious Platonism in an urban context, and at a time of the beginning of the world war II. But with the help of various symbols, he could present the allegory of man's fallen state, the state of sin and punishment. In act two, when Mr. Antrobus succumbs to the charms of Miss Fairweather, he sets himself in horrifying situation of punishment. Mr. Antrobus' sin is lust, he has been seduced by Sabina in a beach cabana. His unchecked lust boomeranges on him when his daughter Gladys, finding attraction in sin, appears wearing red stockings symbolizing the fall. This whiplash leaves Mr. Antrobus numb with horror. His moral transgression also provokes divine punishment, and humanity finds itself once again on the razor edge of danger. This time the great Flood threatens to destroy everything.<sup>45</sup> In fact, this Flood is apparently it is a form of retributive justice handed down by God. Wilder

Makes it clear that human being is about to be punished for his sinfulness. All the family are sinners. We see Henry in uncontrolled wrath fighting with a negro and thus, it would seem, initiating race hatred. Mrs. Antrobus fills with pride that her husband becomes the president, insulting the man who runs against him for the position.<sup>46</sup>

**Mrs.Antrobus: who was that you spoke to, George?**

**Mr.Antrobus: Nobody, Maggie. Just the candidate who ran against**

**Me in the election.**

**Mrs.Antrobus: The man who ran against you in the election!!**

**[she turns and waves her umbrella after the disappearing convener.]**

**My husband didn't speak to you and he never will  
Speak to you. (2,p.137)**

By creating this form of allegory, Wilder seeks to teach certain ideas derived from the central religious-humanistic tradition.

**3-8-political Allegory in The Skin of Our Our Teeth:**

Act three propounds the concept of evil very clearly. Henry who has a red mark on his forehead is the representative figure of evil. He may be interpreted as Cain of the Bible, but he also can be viewed as a figure who represents the forces of anarchy that were rampaging across the world causing destruction and disintegration. His intentions come close to those of the Nazis and the Facists, when he exclaims bitterly, " the first thing to do is to burn up those old books; it's the ideas he gets out of those old books that....makes the whole world so you can't live in it." (3,p.165) Henry confuses the concept of freedom with that of selfish desires thereby upsetting the order of the world. He succeeds in creating forces which bring about nothing but destruction.<sup>47</sup>



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Vrinda Mathur, **The plays and Novels of Thornton Wilder: A Critical Study** (New Delhi: prestige books, 1996), p.p.7,8.

<sup>2</sup> Rex Burbank, **Thornton Wilder** ( New York: Twayne, 1961), p.87.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Blank, ed., **Critical Essays on Thornton Wilder** (New York: G.K. hall&Co., 1996), p.2.

<sup>4</sup> Craig Turner, "**Wilder Thornton**", [Database on-line ]; accessed on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2015 ; available from

<http://www.georgiastandards.org/resources/lexile-in-Action/ELA99RL3-134-pdf;internet>.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce Bawer, "**An Impersonal Passion**": Thornton Wilder, The Hudson review, Inc., Lxi, no.3 (2008), [Database on-line]; accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2015; available from

<http://www.hudsonreview.com/auo8/auo8bawerWEB.pdf;internet>.

<sup>6</sup> Joanna Friedman, **Nothing Harder: Telling the Past in The Skin of Our Teeth**, Lethbridge undergraduate Research Journal 2, no.1 (2007), under "setting", [http://www.uleth.co/dspace/handle\\_by\\_J.Friedman-2007](http://www.uleth.co/dspace/handle_by_J.Friedman-2007).

<sup>7</sup> "**The Skin of Our Teeth**", [Database on-line]; accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2015, available from [www.enotes.com/topics/skin-our](http://www.enotes.com/topics/skin-our)....

<sup>8</sup> Martin Blank, p.8.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Vrinda Mathur, p.51.

<sup>11</sup> Thornton Wilder, **The Journals of Thornton Wilder, 1939-1961**, ed. Donald Gallup. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p.21.

<sup>12</sup> Malcolm Goldstein, **The Art of Thornton Wilder** (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p.117.

<sup>13</sup> Vrinda Mathur, p.8.

<sup>14</sup> Kara-Lynn Vaeni, and Mark Blankenship, "**The Skin of Our Teeth: A play For the New Millenium**", [Database on-line]; accessed on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2015; available from <http://www.twildersociety.org/works/the-skin-of-our-teeth/>

<sup>15</sup> M. H. Abrams, **A Glossary of Literary Terms**, 9<sup>th</sup> ed. (Fort worth: Harcourt Brace College publishers, 2009), p.7.

<sup>16</sup> " **Allegory**",[Database on-line]; accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> July. 2015; available from Allegory-Example and Definition of Allegory Literary devices.net/allegory/.

<sup>17</sup> Francis Fergusson, " **Three Allegorists: Brecht, Wilder, and Eliot**", Critical Essays on Thornton Wilder, ed., Martin Blank (New York: G.K.hall & Co., 1996),p.61.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.p.64.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> " **The Skin of Our Teeth**", [Database on-line]; accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> August 2015; available from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia <http://books.google.com/booksp9258>.

<sup>22</sup> Donald Haberman, **The Plays of Thornton Wilder: A Critical Study** (Middle town, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1967),p.54.

<sup>23</sup> Vrinda Mathur, p.52.

<sup>24</sup> Malcolm Goldstein, p.p. 118-119.

<sup>25</sup> Vrinda Mathur, p.51.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.,p.52.

<sup>27</sup> Malcolm Goldstein,p.120.

<sup>28</sup> " **The Skin of Our Teeth**", [Database on-line]; accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> Jun 2015; available from [www.bookrages.com/studyguid-skinourteeth/style.htm](http://www.bookrages.com/studyguid-skinourteeth/style.htm)..

<sup>29</sup> Kara-Lynn Voeni and Mark Blankenship.

<sup>30</sup> Malcolm Goldstein,p.120.

<sup>31</sup> **Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia**; Lilith is a Hebrew name for a figure is generally thought to be in part derived from a historically far earlier class of female demons in Mesopotamian religion, found in cuneiform text of Sumer, Akkad, Assyria and Babylonia.

<sup>32</sup> **Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia**; the Rape of Sabine women is an episode in the legendary history of Rome, traditionally dated to 750 BC, in which the first generation of Roman men acquired wives for themselves from the neighboring Sabine families. The Sabine refused to allow their women to marry the Romans, consequently, the Romans planned to abduct Sabine women.

<sup>33</sup> " **The Skin of Our Teeth**", e-note.

<sup>34</sup> Malcolm Goldstein, p.p.120-121.

<sup>35</sup> David Krasner, **A Companion to Twentieth Century American Drama** (London: Blackwell publishing Ltd, 2005), p.161.

<sup>36</sup> Travis Bogard and William I. Oliver, ed., **Modern Drama: Essays in Criticism** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 367.

<sup>37</sup> Malcolm Cowley, "The Man Who Abolished Time", **Critical Essays on Thornton Wilder**, ed., Martin Blank ( New York: K.G. Hall&Co., 1996), p.36.

<sup>38</sup> Francis Fergusson, p.67.

<sup>39</sup> Alan S.Downer, **Fifty Years of American Drama 1900-1950** ( Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1951), p.102.

<sup>40</sup> David Krasner, **American Drama 1945-2000: An Introduction** (London: Blackwell publishing Ltd, 2006), p.22.

<sup>41</sup> N.S. Pradhan, **Modern American Drama: A Study of Myth and Tradition** (New Delhi: Arnold Heimann, 1978), p.80.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p.p.77-78.

<sup>43</sup> "The Skin of Our Teeth", Wikipedia.

<sup>44</sup> N.S. Pradhan, p.80.

<sup>45</sup> Vrinda Mathur, p.54.

<sup>46</sup> Malcolm Goldstein, p.p.125-126.

<sup>47</sup> Vrinda Mathur, p. 56.

## Conclusion

Thornton Wilder is one of the most well-known American writers of the twentieth century. His literary product lasted more than fifty years, in which he represented many facets of the intellectual and artistic life. Wilder's thoughts and ideas are not new; they appear in classical literature and philosophy of all ages.

As an allegorist, Wilder aims to make an allegorical form for the modern theater in order to teach people indirectly, since he does not want to be suchlike the writers who try to impose their ideas and opinions on the audience. In adopting this form of writing, Wilder wants to establish his belief that "all drama is essentially allegory"<sup>1</sup>

Wilder's masterpiece, **The Skin of Our Teeth**, is a vast allegorical play about all humanity, when it presents its allegorical parents of human race as a conventional American couple. Wilder compresses long expanses of time to establish his universal theme of survival and continuity of life. However, what he tries to dramatize in this play is the struggle of human being to survive, a subject much appreciated by wartime audience. In his reference to war, Wilder provided hope to those Americans who troubled about World War II at the time of the play's premiere.

By using allegory Wilder tries to represent in the same characters the whole of creation and the history of mankind from the beginning till the present day, as they survive every disaster of Ice Age, Flood, and War. He does not focus on the events themselves but on their inner and allegorical significance. Thus, his style and technique of allegory help him to give a wider perspective of his themes. In this play, Wilder aims to depict his faith in life, hope, education and humanity. He allegorically emphasizes that learning is the basic purpose of the experience of living; when in the first act, all valuables except Shakespeare's volume are thrown into the fire to keep it burning against severe cold. Religion is also allegorized in this play, according to Wilder, religion is not a cult or dogma, but it is knowledge, realization and experience; the power that teaches human being about his relation with the existence.

Note: <sup>1</sup> **Francis Fergusson, p.64.**

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