Notes From the Director

Susan Shillinglaw

February 27 would be Steinbeck’s 115th birthday. Since the world’s oldest woman is 117, it’s just possible to imagine Steinbeck among us, maybe cranky, maybe cranky, but undoubtedly convinced—as he was throughout his career—that “literature is the result of the individual mind inspecting and criticizing his world.”

On his 115th birthday, Steinbeck might still be inspecting and criticizing—just to keep America on its toes.

In fact, Steinbeck didn’t much like his own birthday—although he relished others’. Japanese lanterns were for him, “the birthday symbol.” Grand gestures or quirky gifts were essential when honoring friends’ and wives’ birthdays. Once he gave Elaine, his third wife, a forty-one-gun salute for her birthday.

“There’s only one woman in the world that rates a forty-one-gun salute and that’s the Queen of England,” he told a friend. Elaine deserved the same. So on her birthday morning he fired methodically across the Long Island sound. The Coast Guard eventually pulled up to ask what in the hell he was doing, and he responded that his wife deserved the same fanfare as the queen of England. That seemed a good enough explanation for them.

On his own birthday, however, his mood turned reflective, sometimes gloomy. “I remember my sorrow at not being a part of things very early in my childhood,” he wrote in Journal of a Novel, “maybe from my very first birthday party.” That seems early to feel like an outcast, but that emotion certainly shaped his creative vision. During his apprentice years, birthdays were rocky. When he turned 26, he wrote sadly, “I have done nothing to justify my years,” even though he had

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CALENDAR

Call 831.775.4721 or visit steinbeck.org for more information on upcoming events.

February 2, 5:30 PM
“Steinbeck and Empathy” with Director Susan Shillinglaw. A discussion of Steinbeck’s key words: understanding, empathy, participation, chivalry, critique.

February 9, 5:30 PM
Story Slam: “A Personal Story.” Salinas high school students and others read 5 minute stories. Open to all!

February 23, 5:30 PM
Music! TBA

February 25, 10 AM - 3 PM
STEINBECK Birthday Celebration!
Children’s activities: 11AM, local author Jo Jo White reading Top Cat’s Second Chance; 12, art with Hijos del Sol and Squids4kids; 1:00 cake and singing with Steinbeck elementary; 12-3, Wheelie Mobilee. Live Horses!

MIGRATIONS
STEINBECKFESTIVAL
MAY5-7,2017

The Grapes of Wrath traces the 1930s migration of southwest migrants from Oklahoma to California. The theme of the 2017 Festival is “Migrations,” write large: migration of animals, plants, people, diseases. War as migration. Novel to film as migration. May 5 in Monterey. May 6 and 7 at the National Steinbeck Center.
recently completed his first novel, Cup of Gold. At 28 he set lofty goals: “I must have at least one book a year from now on if I can manage it.” And in ’29 he felt similar frustration, noting that he felt like “a grazing elephant, knocking down trees I am too stupid to consider formidable ... I’m twenty-nine today, and I haven’t thought enough things or done enough things to be that old.”

Things were a little better when he turned 38 and was “terribly excited” about going to the Sea of Cortez with Ricketts a week after his birthday. When he turned 40, even though bedridden, he was buoyant, writing to his sister Esther that “I had a bug and stayed in bed and really had a wonderful birthday because there were many callers and cards and presents and a cake with a discrete one candle. It didn’t have to be discrete because I don’t in the least mind my age. In fact—i-given a chance it can be a very good age.”

For its own birthday party, the National Steinbeck Center will base its February 25th celebration on that letter—inviting “callers” and setting up tables for children to make “cards and presents.” We’ll serve cake with one very large and discrete candle.

And we’ll ask all guests to honor the spirit of 115 year old Steinbeck by responding to this prompt: “Discuss literature of today that is the result of the individual mind inspecting and criticizing his world.”

The most thoughtful responses—by email or in person—will be published in the next issue of NEWS.

SAVE the DATE! 2017 Steinbeck Festival
Sneak Peek, More to Come! See updates at www.steinbeck.org

April 5, 12, 19, 26, 2017 — Maya Cinemas, Salinas
Migration on film: Free series on Wednesday evenings, with introductions: TBA.

Friday, May 5, 2017 — On Cannery Row
In the spirit of Ricketts: Species Migrations. In 1942, ’46, ’47, and ’48, Ed Ricketts wrote articles on fluctuating sandpiper populations for the Monterey Herald. To honor his work and friendship with Steinbeck, Friday of the Steinbeck Festival will be held on Cannery Row and co-sponsored by the Cannery Row Foundation.
10 AM and 12 PM: Tours of Ed Rickett’s Lab
2-5 PM: Hopkins Marine Station, Boatworks. A series of short “Ed Talks” and discussions on species migration. Speakers include William Saunders (currently writing a Steinbeck biography) on Rachel Carson’s Under the Sea Wind (1941); Dr. Steve Palumbi, Stanford, on ocean Sawyer Dr. William Gill on squid migrations; Juan Govea, PG Museum of Natural History, “The Journey of the Western Monarch,” Bruce Robison, MBARI.
5:30 PM: Reception at Rickett’s Lab
7:00 PM: Steinbeck Banquet at the Interocontinental The Clement Monterey

MIGRATIONS
STEINBECKFESTIVAL
MAY5-7,2017

Saturday, May 6, 2017 — National Steinbeck Center
In the Spirit of Steinbeck: Human Migrations. Dr. Susan Shillinglaw will introduce the series, centering The Grapes of Wrath, Forgotten Valley, and The Moon is Down as migration texts. Gavin Jones, Stanford University, joins other speakers (TBA) discussing artistic migrations, women and art, war and migration, The Moon is Down.
TOUR: Migration in the Salinas Valley
PLUS the second annual Steinbeck Home Brew Fest!

Sunday, May 7, 2017 — National Steinbeck Center
Teaching/Teaching Steinbeck. Join us as prominent California teachers and their students discuss fresh approaches to integrating Steinbeck into the classroom.
2:00 PM: Concert, “Votive to Carol Robles” and fundraising for the Carol Robles Reading Room. With Dixeland favorites, Big Mama Sue, Goofy Gary, and Fast Eddie trio.

Inspired by Steinbeck: Paintings, A London Restaurant, Racehorses
Gary Giddens-Davies

My love of John Steinbeck began in my early teens, growing up in a working-class environment, the son of a bricklayer in Coventry, England, located in the industrial Midlands. In the 1950’s and 60’s it was the home of the British car industry, a sort of English version of Detroit, attracting working migrants from all over the globe, such was the availability of work. My own family came from Ireland (my Mum’s maiden name was O’Shea) and from Bristol on my Dad’s side. His father had been a master carpenter on wooden ships before the turn of the last century. Coventry is a small city (with 3 Cathedrals, which dictates the title of “City”—in England anyway) with origins in the 7th century. It was the home of Lady Godiva—another, like Steinbeck, aiming to highlight the plight of the impoverished—was painted by JMW Turner, and is mentioned in Shakespeare. With Stratford only a few miles away, Coventry was supposedly visited by Shakespeare, who came to see the famous “Corpus Christi” plays that took place in the 16th and 17th centuries.

John Steinbeck’s California, with its colourful depiction of time, people and place, was a wonderful escape from what seemed to me to be “dreary old England.” California seemed like it is for Steinbeck’s Okies, a garden of Eden, especially the Pacific Coast where I imagined JS in his beachside house, penning many of his works. His portrayal of landscape and character helped to inspire me in much the same way as my Mum’s American pen friends back in the late 40’s. The USA sounded like one big film set! I devoured his novels.

Andy reading, and influenced by, his novels, I painted my first large portrait of Steinbeck in 1970, when I was still at school at the age of 17, and preparing to leave home for what was Oxford Polytechnic (now Oxford Brookes University) to study a B.A. in Sociology & Politics. I’ll be offering an Art School place but saw myself as anything but Steinbeck living in an Oxfordshire village called Forest Hill where the poet John Milton had been married, during my second and third years, 1995. I got a few “commissioned” portraits. One was for another Steinbeck portrait, and that one ended up on the Wirral, near Liverpool. I am going to be reunited with it for the first time in 46 years, having seen it again via WhatsApp, as the gentleman who commissioned it is not in good health and wants it returned to me while he’s still able to.

The first portrait hung in my old school, Cardinal Wiseman Catholic Secondary School in Coventry for decades. After several successful years in business in London (1986-93), my partner and I decided to open a restaurant in the Battersea area of London, calling it “Steinbooks,” as both of us were big fans from a very early age. In fact my business partner had studied American Literature at the University of Kent at Canterbury. I contacted my old Art Master, who was still teaching all those years on, and offered to make a financial contribution to the school in order to claim the first painting back. For four years, it hung in pride of place in the “smug” area, between the bar and conservatory restaurant, alongside a small library of JS first editions that still possess, and that miraculously didn’t go missing! The economic climate in early 90’s London was dire for the pub and restaurant industry, with an average of two closing every day. We were no exception and we closed our doors, since the building has changed hands several times and is now a restaurant called “Powder Keg” —perhaps even more appropriate that JS’s portrait should hang there!

Fast forward to 2010 and the lifelong interest in racehorses I share with my business partner has led us to breed from a successful mare, deciding to call the racing syndicate Mice & Men, and naming her progeny after the great men’s novels: Sea of Cortez, Cup of Gold, and Burning Bright, and in the case of her last foal, after the character Billy Buck. On national hunt rostracks Sea of Cortez had ability, but a massive attitude problem, and now has a new career as a polo pony.

Cup of Gold has had two runs and not really set the world alike, but we’d be trying again with her early in 2017. Burning Bright is a lovely three-year-old colt who is in pre-training and impressive thus far. He could be racing some time in 2017. Billy Buck is a full brother to Burning Bright and is only a two year old, so still a year or two away from a run.
From Kansas to Salinas for the National Endowment for the Arts BIG READ, Sun, Stone and Shadows: 20 Mexican Short Stories

Linda Vidosh Zempel

I’ve wanted to visit The National Steinbeck Center for years. When I read in the July Newsletter that The Big Read would be kicking off with a talk on “Steinbeck’s Mexico,” it was an opportunity I could not miss. Immediately I made plans to visit my sister-in-law in San Jose to be able to spend the day in Salinas, own a Steinbeck’s books, including some first editions. I’ve also traveled extensively in Mexico.

In Salinas for the kick off, we did the walking tour with John Mahoney, gaining personal history and insight into Salinas and East of Eden. We enjoyed the architecture of a beautiful small town as it is today and, through photographs, as it was in Steinbeck’s time. It helped to remind and memorable surprise to be able to have lunch in Steinbeck’s boyhood home. I bought Thomas Steinbeck’s, autographed, Down To A Soundless Sea. The day was made special by the,NCS exhibits, including several short films. Susan’s talk included fabulous paintings and quotes from Steinbeck’s work. I learned that Sea of Cortez was his favorite book. The day was topped-off with a sampling of traditional Mexican foods. I really appreciate John Steinbeck and Susan Shillinglaw for making it a wonderful day for a visitor from Topakea, Kansas!

New Year, New BIG READ Application

Eric Mora, Marketing and Membership Coordinator

Ever since I was a teen, I have made resolutions for the new year. Though I’ve encountered various levels of success in the past—I lost 40 lbs. in 2008 and have kept it off since, but I still haven’t mastered the art of cooking—I remain undeterred on my search for self-improvement.

Over the years, I have had to modify my approach to resolutions as I have grown to accept that drastic, overnight changes never occur. Instead of thinking of resolutions in large and abstract terms (“I want to lose weight”), I try to make resolutions that are small and concrete (“I will take the stairs instead of the elevator”) in order to realize larger goals. I find that I am more likely to stick to them this way.

Part of the reason why I love the National Endowment for the Arts BIG READ program so much is because, at its core, the program applies the same principle: through a small concrete change you can achieve larger results. The goal of the NEAs BIG READ program is simple: to broaden “our understanding of our world, our communities, and ourselves through the joy of sharing a good book.”

For places like Salinas that are plagued with problems like crime, gang violence, and poverty, change can be difficult to fathom. Through programs like the BIG READ, however, we hope to do our part in building a healthier, more vibrant community. For the next BIG READ granting cycle, the NSF will be applying to the NEA with Claudia Rankine’s Citizen: An American Lyric. The book is a powerful and thought-provoking reflection on race. Although the choice of books was a group decision at the NSF, I spoke forcefully for my choice—Rankine—and convinced everyone.

What drew me to the book was its focus on racial tension experienced in quotidian tasks: going to the grocery store, visiting a doctor’s office, watching the TV, watching YouTube videos, keeping up with the news—instances that shouldn’t be racially charged and yet they often are. Collectively, these recollections are a great counter argument for anyone who argues that if we ignore race it will cease to be a problem.

Resolved: in 2017, read!

Major Utility Upgrades

David Butler, Director of Finance and Administration

The New Year brought significant upgrades to two of the NSC’s major utility systems.

One was the upgrade to a Voice-Over-Internet phone system for a substantial 50% savings. This was an upgrade from the traditional AT&T system to an independent Voice-Over-Internet phone company. In addition we continue to use our current phone sets as the upgrade is technology based, which can operate with the older phone sets.

The second upgrade was to bring us into compliance with processing the new chip credit cards. Over 70% of our sale transactions are on credit cards so it was very important to upgrade. This upgrade required a little bit of staff training on the new smart credit card chip readers but allows us to continue processing sales with the current Point of Sale registors and software.

From The Bookstore

Yessenia Guzman
Store Manager/Tour & Volunteer Coordinator

Goodbye 2016, hello 2017! I am so excited for 2017—our Birthday Celebration along with Steinbeck Young Authors and then Steinbeck Festival. I really enjoy these events. It is really nice when the community gets together and celebrates and participates in what we have going on. My goal for 2017 is to increase visitors to the NSC. I hope to double or even triple our numbers from last year. We have had many visitors from Italy and Norway. It amazes me that these people really enjoy Steinbeck and come to our small beautiful city of Salinas. I enjoy telling our museum guests where the Steinbeck House is located and all the information about having lunch there.

Please visit the Steinbeck Museum Gift Shop for all your Steinbeck titles, best selling books, local authors and local handmade goods. Usually our top Steinbeck title seller is Travels with Charley but at the moment we have other titles that are selling frequently; I put in a double order on America and Americans, The Long Valley and also Sweet Thursday.

Our soaps by “Deb’s Creations” here in Town Salinas are also selling well. The top seller has to be California Poppies, wrapped with a Steinbeck quote. It really does smell amazing. I hope we get some new scents this year.

On special we have some left over soap that Deb made especially for Comic Con. Magic Mushroom is my favorite but Snow Queen also smells lovely.

If you missed the Salinas Valley Comic Con, please come to the gift shop, we have an amazing supply of graphic novels and comic books. Our tote bags are pretty awesome and very affordable.

BOOKSTORE

Inspired by Steinbeck, continued from page 3

I'm currently working on a third portrait (very slowly) in my garden shed studio. We live between our flat in London and an eighteenth century barn conversion in the Cotswolds. Soon all three of the Steinbeck paintings will hang there together, a testament to the three major chapters of my life: my school days, my business years, and my very full and exciting semi-retirement. Interestingly the first two are monotone; however the last one is in full glowing technicolour...

Editor’s note: I met Gary Davies after a lecture at the NSC in May, 2016 and was fascinated with his Steinbeck connections. As he notes, “Our tour to California took in May, 2016 and attending your lecture was a wonderful coincidence, especially having just bought your book on Steinbeck’s California. We were staying with friends in Hollister and the visit to Salinas worked in perfectly with your lecture.”
Salinas Valley Comic Con

Lisa Josephs, Archivist

There is a magical moment when months of work culminate to achieve the final goal. For me, that moment was 3:00 pm on Friday, December 16th, as I watched vendors stream into the Hartnell Student Center to set up their booths for the 3rd annual Salinas Valley Comic Con. Even better, that moment stretched all weekend. It lingered into Monday, when I spent all day smiling and basking in the glow of a job well done.

The Hartnell Student Center provided an excellent venue for the Salinas Valley Comic Con, co-sponsored by the NSC, the Salinas Public Library, and Hartnell College. The Student Center’s main hall, usually filled with students, became the vendors’ exhibition area during con. The arrangement and space allowed for us to fit in forty-five vendors, ranging from vintage toy dealers to artists and crafters selling handmade trinkets and art. Steinbeck Hall became the venue for panels, the Faculty Lounge for workshops, and the Student Life room for a multi-purpose activity room, including the Salinas Public Library’s reading nook—stocked with comics, graphic novels, and comfortable seating.

Panels covered diverse topics, including the ways in which comics investigate the world around us. Andrew Farago, Curator of the Cartoon Art Museum in San Francisco, talked with attendees about the mid-Century comics that Steinbeck read—including the popular strip, “Li’l Abner.” In the Introduction to The World of Li’l Abner by Al Capp, Steinbeck writes that Capp’s talent is taking “our customs, our dreams, our habits of thought, our social structure, our economics, and examined them gently like amusing bugs.”

Chunky Gir Comics shared their struggles with body image and the assumptions that society makes, based on body shape and type. Their stories show that “heroic” is not a body type but a mark of character. Why in the World Would You Call Me Fat? questions the impulse to bully others, based on body shape and size. Their art and frank stories critique assumptions about beauty and bodies, as well as the role we all play in reinforcing them in day-to-day interactions.

Ryan Sock and Alex Sheikman’s panel, “Professional Freelancers: An Overview” focused on the necessity of experience and practicing the arts of writing and drawing daily, rather than relying on the force of talent” to carry one forward. They highlighted the aspects of art and writing that can be learned and improved on, rather than inborn talent or creativity.

Both Lalo Alcaraz, keynote speaker for Salinas Valley Comic Con 2016, and Andy Warren tied their presentations to their work in writing and journalism. Lalo Alcaraz’s position as a prolific, insightful Chicano author, artist, and critic gained him a position working on Pixar’s “Coco,” a forthcoming movie about Dia de Muertos. It was foddered with controversy in 2013 when Disney moved to trademark the phrase “Day of the Dead.” Andy Warner discussed his transition from investigative journalist to comic artist and writer, highlighting his latest book, Brief Histories of Everyday Objects. He explained how the skills he learned as a journalist still help him in his new line of work—with the fun of drawing the pictures, rather than using photographs.

“We never got a chance to speak after the Comic Con, but I just wanted to thank you for letting the library have such a presence there. People were really excited about our app for reading digital comics and it was a really positive outreach experience for us.”

— Adrienne H. Gass, Librarian III, Youth and Family Services, Salinas Library

In introducing the annual Comic Con, I spent my time announcing panels and events on a bull horn, kindly loaned to me by the Hartnell Security office, as well as checking in with vendors, guests, and attendees to answer questions and troubleshoot any issues that arose. In talking with vendors, guests, and attendees, I learned many things. They offered suggestions for improving the layout, like turning the Student Life room into an artists’ alley for those who focus on original art and creations. Others praised our inclusion of a food vendor on-site and suggested further catering options. Finally, many told me about the “coin scene” in general and the changes they have seen in recent years, like the move towards corporate control of conventions and the decline of independently run ones. They taught me that the Salinas Valley Comic Con is an increasingly rare kind of show, in the comic con world, and expressed appreciation for our focus on bringing this show to life.

Several girls in costume suggested that the NSC invite celebrated cosplayers to the 2017 Salinas Valley Comic Con. Cosplay is dressing as characters from books, movies, TV shows and comics, especially diving into the fine details of costume accuracy and acting. I am glad that they spoke to me and explained what they wanted to see in future cons: celebrated Cosplayers who would pose for photos, change costumes, meet with fans. To me, it is another sign that there is a dedicated audience in the Salinas area who wants what we provide with con. They want even more.

Why a Comic Con sponsored by the National Steinbeck Center and the Salinas Public Library, held at Hartnell Community College? Cons celebrate popular culture and encourage reading at all levels. Cons engage current events. Cons celebrate creativity. Cons are fun—one might consider the information about “People who are concerned with the eternal verities” would do well to remember that fun is one of them.

The Salinas Valley Comic Con provides a chance for attendees to cut loose and revel in the thrill of comics, heroes, fantasy, and adventure together with others. With the increasing numbers of movies and TV shows bringing comic book characters to the screen, fans are seeking out the material these stories come from and reading the plot lines and details that do not make the editor’s cut. Reading tends to be a solitary activity, but the Salinas Valley Comic Con is a chance to bring people together in celebration of the stories and characters they love so much.

This year’s Salinas Comic Con was my first comic convention ever. I planned my day specifically around the workshops because they looked so interesting, and I was not disappointed! Each workshop I attended was led by a pair of locally based artists with evident passion for the topic at hand. They patiently answered our many (MANY) questions and constantly encouraged us to begin our own projects. I also loved the intimate size of the classes because it allowed us to hold group discussions and chat with other comic con attendees we might not have met otherwise!

-Jenny Gunter, Salinas

Introducing Amy Thomas, Education and Public Programs

Amy Thomas

I grew up under the distinct impression that Salinas was a wealthy community. The rumors of ecstasies and noble trials of Steinbeck’s fiction seem somewhat unbelievable from my nondescript childhood. It was not until I left Salinas that I learned just how deeply Steinbeck’s work cut into the heart of my hometown’s—and the nation’s—literary legacy.

My venture into the world outside Salinas also threw me outside of my own perspective. Elsewhere, Steinbeck’s presence dominated the classroom. Elsewhere, Steinbeck was revered for depicting the treacherous expedition across the U.S. from the Dust Bowl. Elsewhere, Oprah Winfrey felt compelled by the articulate power of Start of Eden to visit the author’s local stomping grounds.

My recent return to Salinas brought me, now an avid reader, back to the National Steinbeck Center, where I’d taken my first peek at local history as an elementary student. Armed with appreciation gleaned from scholars, peers, and even stranger’s elsewhere, I am excited to help cultivate Steinbeck’s longstanding legacy here in the hometown we share.

Perhaps I needed distance from Salinas to see it clearly. As I learned while earning my English degree at Santa Clara University, Steinbeck’s work brought stark insights to his readers, illuminating rural and agricultural life and hardships alongside human truths. I took the same illumination for visitors to the National Steinbeck Center today, beginning with Steinbeck’s life and expanding into the history, culture, and future of the Salinas Valley.

I look forward to embracing my role as the Education and Public Programs Coordinator at the Hartnell Steinbeck Center, helping locals and visitors alike celebrate Salinas.

Feel free to contact me at amy@steinbeck.org—I’d love to make your acquaintance!
ARCHIVES
Linares Papier Maches
Lisa Josephs, Archivist

In the National Steinbeck Center archives, we have a large and fantastic collection of Linares paper maches. The first Director of the National Steinbeck Center, Patrice Leech (now Executive Director of the Whatcom Museum in Bellingham, Washington), recently wanted to borrow several to include in an exhibition at the Whatcom Museum, "Images of Resilience: Chican@ Art and its Mexican Roots," so the NSC staff unwrapped each of our large figures (stored on top of bookcases) and were delighted by each.

January 26, 2017 will mark the 25th anniversary of the passing of Mexican artist, Pedro Linares. When Linares was 30 years old, he fell ill in his home of Mexico City and dreamed of fantastical, fierce creatures—a donkey with butterfly wings, a rooster with bull horns, and a lion with an eagle’s head. Throughout the dream, the creatures shouted “Alebrijes! Alebrijes!” at him.

The images and creatures in his dream fueled his art, papier mache animals that he dubbed “Alebrijes.” The quality and vividness of his art won him national recognition and mimicry. Pedro Linares received the National Arts and Science award in the Popular and Traditional Arts category. This is the highest decoration that the Mexican government can bestow on citizen artists. His death at age 86 did not mark the end of the vivid art of the Linares family. Through his years producing the Alebrijes, Linares left a mark on his family that is carried on to this day.

The National Steinbeck Center is proud to be home to pieces of the Linares family’s paper mache wonders. Themed to Dia de Muertos, the collection consists of a skeleton village in the midst of celebration. Skeletons gather round a table with an in-progress domino game. Each figure’s face, though modeled and painted to look like clay, white bone, seems to express camaraderie in the game. Dancers in fanciful skirts and bright clothing embody the joy of movement and music. Finally, of course, several skeletal figures have cups in hand, seemingly caught in the middle of a toast or sip in honor of the celebration.

John Steinbeck’s East of Eden in Amharic
Getachew Ashaghe

East of Eden is the only book I read more than two times. If I am asked “What motivated you to translate it?” my reply is “that the book deals with different human drives—self-hate, rejection, religious quest, political, security issues, questions of belongingness, etc. These drives are dominant in all human beings, same for everyone, without cultural boundary or barriers. The book contributes a lot on the aspect of breaking geographical boundaries and forming cultural allism. It treats the two extreme human behaviors—evil and good—in a fresh, captivating and original mode of expression, without losing its organic flavor.

Taking all these in mind, I decided that this touching book needed to be translated to an Ethiopian official language—Amharic—so it could be enjoyed by my native people.

Before I embarked on this task of translating the book, I promised myself that I should be loyal to the accomplishment of the author by not disturbing the content, form or expression of the work.

The challenges while working on the book:

In the first chapter of the book, the author portrays ecological views, biological, anthropological descriptions with expressions charged with words fitting this purpose. This was a challenge for me because I had to get similar and equivalent terminology in Amharic language. But by contacting people with helpful experiences, relevant discipline or specialization and also referring to various dictionaries I was finally able to solve the problem.

The other challenge I came across was finding an equivalent or suitable meaning for the very important Hebrew word “tishma”—the core word for the book. It took me more than a week to find people who know the meaning of this Biblical word. I could not go on translating until I got the Biblical meaning of this Hebrew word, but at last I succeeded!

The first draft of my translation was done by my hand writing, which took most of my time. Then, the whole process had to be copied to a computer. Actually, the entire activity all the way to the completion of the manuscript up to the print ready format was all carried out by me, which as you can imagine was a challenging job.

John Steinbeck, the famous American writer, has a very strong ability to express his ideas in a beautiful language. Trying to be loyal to the author, not to distort his ideas and beautiful expressions, I had hard times trying to find similar expressions in Amharic. But, with great effort, I did it. My effort has been appreciated by those people who read both the English and the Amharic translation.

The other challenge was shortage of finances for the book to be published, which contributed a lot to the delay of the publication. This problem was solved by my great effort, then followed the problem of distributing the book for the market. Here in our country, there are no publishing firms. It is the writer or the author who is expected to take higher manuscript to the printing houses and pay the money for the publication. So, if a writer or an author wants to have his book published, he/she must have ready money for the process.

I believe I have described enough (hopefully without being boring) about the challenges and processes I went through while translating the book.

Ira Blowitz and the musical version of Of Mice and Men: Archive now at NSC
Anthony Newfield

In 1968, Ira Blowitz mounted a musical adaptation of Steinbeck’s Of Mice and Men that had won the Nobel Laureate’s earliest approval and with a stellar cast that included Art Lund, Jo Sullivan, and Leo Penn. The New York Times called it “a work of substance and power.” The script and papers pertaining to Blowitz’s version of Of Mice and Men have recently been acquired by the National Steinbeck Center. Blowitz wanted the material to be at the Center, and Tony Newfield, a friend of his, helped facilitate bringing the material to the NSC.

Ira Blowitz, lifelong New Yorker renowned for his passionate dedication to the theater, passed away on July 22, 2018, at the age of 90. An arts journalist for six decades, Ira was a theater critic and editor at Show Business, contributing editor for Backstage, and editorial publisher of his own New York Theatre Review. The Review published many of Ira’s insightful interviews with such well-known personalities as Tennessee Williams, Eugene Ionesco, David Mamet, Martin Chrenin, Howard Kreitler, Marsha Norman, Lanford Wilson, Hal Prince, Uta Hagen, Ian McKellen, Estelle Parsons, Joan Plowright, Alfred Drake, and Rex Harrison. Ira was also an active member of the American Theatre Critics Association, starting in 1976; former vice president of the New York Drama Desk, a member of The Dramatists Guild and the International Association of Theatre Critics.

I first met Ira in 2002 after talking with my acting coach Alice Salve and telling her about Steinbeck and the Land, a piece I had created to help celebrate the Steinbeck Centennial that was to take place that year. Ira knew my ex-husband did a musical version of Of Mice and Men?” she asked me. She then told me a bit about the production, and I asked if I could meet him.

We met over a Chinese dinner, and Ira told me how the production came about, In Alice’s words, “Ira became inspired to make a musical out of Of Mice and Men when he introduced me, his young, soon-to-be-wife, to an evening of Steinbeck as part of the Poets and Poetry Series at the 92nd Street YMIHA. Two actors, Robert Strauss and Harvey Lernbeck, presented the last scene of the play (and book), and it brought me to tears. Ira’s words were so moving by that because it aroused him that John Steinbeck’s classic was one of his favorite books. We had just recently seen The Threepenny Opera and we felt that this kind of folk opera with all its darkness would be the right genre.”

Continued on page 10
interfere with their work. He told them he did not want the story to be an old museum piece but wanted it to live on. He was pleased with the changes that Bilowitz et al made in the script, especially building up the relationship between George and Curly's wife. He liked the idea that there was a spark there, that there could have been a relationship.

The musical was presented at the venerable Provincetown Playhouse in Greenwich Village, the theatre made famous by Eugene O'Neill, where many of his plays were first performed. Steinbeck attended a performance of the musical and was pleased with the production. He never attended any performances of the original 1937 Broadway production that starred Wallace Ford and Broderick Crawford and that was directed by George S Kauffmann.

Unfortunately, the day after the musical opened at the Provincetown Playhouse there was a newspaper strike in New York that closed down all the city's newspapers. Television news did not cover the theatre scene at the time, and it was difficult for the team to get word out about their show, which received for the most part good reviews. It struggled to find an audience, and Bilowitz felt that he had to close the show after 6 weeks.

After meeting Ira and reading his script, I decided it was important to mount if not a full production at least a reading of the musical. I contacted Jim Morgan, a friend who is the artistic director of the York Theatre Company in New York. The York's mission is to foster new musicals and to present forgotten musicals in a series of staged readings. Jim was eager to see the piece and scheduled a time for us to present our staged reading.

Some audience members told me they liked the music, others didn't. Some questioned why a musical. But for me, knowing that Steinbeck was pleased with the music and the changes, pleased that the story was getting new life, was enough.

I still believe the piece is worthy of a production and hope to mount it someday. Perhaps now that the original materials have found a home at the National Steinbeck Center, we can mount it here. What greater tribute to John Steinbeck, Bilowitz, and company, than to see the work here in his hometown.

In addition to Ira, I wish to thank Ira Bilowitz and his son, who made this archive available to the NSC, and to John Gregg, who helped make the purchase possible.
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