CONTENTS

2002 NEWSLETTER .......... INTERVIEW WITH TAPPIAN WILDER PART 1
2004 NEWSLETTER .......... INTERVIEW WITH PAT CARROLL
2006 NEWSLETTER .......... BRINGING OUR TOWN TO THE OPERA
2007 NEWSLETTER .......... WILDER AND HITCHCOCK
2007 NEWSLETTER .......... THE YEAR IN REVIEW
2010 NEWSLETTER .......... MACNEIL AWARDED WILDER PRIZE
2010 NEWSLETTER .......... 2010 ALA PANEL
2011 NEWSLETTER .......... OUR TOWN AS BALLET
2011 NEWSLETTER .......... WILDER AT AMERICAN DRAMA CONFERENCE
WORK IN PROGRESS
Penelope Niven on the progress of her Wilder biography

FEATURED WORK
Our Town: Rare letters, reviews, photographs and flyers about the play’s opening night

WILDER REVEALED
Photographs, journal entries and a play from the youthful Wilder, Flamingo Red

COMMENTARY
J. D. McClatchy on Wilder’s fiction

PUBLICATIONS
Edward Burns on Wilder’s correspondence

INTERVIEW
TAPPAN WILDER TALKS WITH JOHN McINTYRE
PART I: AN OLD-FASHIONED STORYTELLER

JPM: I’d like to start by asking you to comment on your uncle’s legacy.

ATW: I see Thornton’s chief legacy as his capacity to identify questions about life and living, then to write stories about them, stories that still speak to us today. If this sounds terribly simplistic, well, there you are. At a very deep level, the entertainer and the fabulist meet in Wilder, and they still work for readers and audiences in many parts of the world. For this reason, I enjoy describing him as an old-fashioned storyteller.

JPM: Since your uncle had such a complete life, do we stop there?

ATW: No, no. Behind the storyteller, I’d like to emphasize two additional elements of “legacy.” The first concerns the diversity of his achievement, which works across a wide spectrum of the written language; the second involves the “craftsmanship” that he brought to his calling. I agree with those who speak of Thornton as a “Man of Letters” instead of as a “novelist and playwright.” My point is always to get away from viewing him narrowly, as associated with this or that artistic expression. Indeed, the more I live with Thornton, the more aware I have become of the depth of his drive to understand language, what he recognized as the sinews of the creative enterprise practiced with a pen. It’s no surprise that he was always consumed with “basic questions”: what makes a novel a novel, a play a play, an essay an essay, a letter a great letter and so forth. And not only does he yammer about it, he actually goes out and does it. He really makes things: plays, novels, essays, lectures, librettos, film work, translations, letters, great conversation (intangible but important).

JPM: From what I see, you’re describing a moving target.

ATW: That he was. And so he was to the end of his life. You know, he was always marvelously exhausting to be around. He wasn’t alone, by the way. His brother Amos, the poet and biblical scholar, while vastly different in his habits and personal style, was the same way. As was their sister Charlotte, the poet whose creative life ended with a nervous breakdown in 1941. All of them worshiped at the high table of language, morning, noon and night.

JPM: May I inject a comment about what is to me a striking piece of his legacy? I refer to his handling of the classical tradition—beginning with The Cabala, moving through The Woman of Andros and immortalized in The Ides of March. Old-fashioned critics easily refer to his style as “chaste.” Presumably, they mean he combined precision with economy, elegance and discipline, a

1997 postage stamp honoring Thornton Wilder on the centennial of his birth. The stamp was designed by Michael Deas, who also designed stamps honoring Marilyn Monroe and James Dean, and is based on a photograph by renowned photographer Gisele Freund. The background landscape in the stamp depicts an idealized Our Town.
Actress Pat Carroll on Thornton Wilder and *Our Town*

Pat Carroll made her professional theater debut in 1947 in a summer stock production of *A Goose for the Gander*, starring Gloria Swanson. She played more than 200 roles before making her Broadway debut in 1955 in the musical revue *Catch a Star*, for which she received a Tony nomination. Her one-woman show, *Gertrude Stein, Gertrude Stein, Gertrude Stein*, ran for eighteen months in New York in 1979. She has done classical theater with Washington DC's Shakespeare Theater, including a much-acclaimed portrayal of Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In film, among many roles, she played Ursula, the wicked witch, in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*. Her television career began in 1955 and has included guest appearances on such shows as *Caesar's Hour* (Emmy Award), The Carol Burnett Show, The Red Skelton Show, and The Danny Kaye Show, as well as continuing roles on *The Danny Thomas Show*, *Busting Loose*, The Ted Knight Show, *Trapper John M.D.*, and *Crazy Like a Fox*. From May 29 to June 23, 2002, she played the Stage Manager in the Round House Theatre's inaugural production of its new facility in Bethesda, MD.

PAT CARROLL: I don't remember a bloody thing except climbing up on the ladder as Rebecca and feeling very much at home. I knew this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life; so I guess I just thought was the most extraordinary book.

BRYER: What can you remember of that production of *Our Town*?

PAT CARROLL: I don't remember a bloody thing except climbing up on the ladder as Rebecca and feeling very much at home. I knew this was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life; so I guess I have Thornton Wilder to thank for fifty-five years of working in the theater.

BRYER: Do you remember anything about the play itself?

PAT CARROLL: I remember as a youngster thinking the third act was very sad, but it didn't depress me—which I find as true today as then. I think that third act gives people hope, because the discussion of eternity doesn't go on at cocktail parties. That just doesn't happen, but when you're sitting in a theater chair that you've paid an admission for, and you are bombarded in the last act of a play with everything but a discussion of death, you're forced to think about it. The way Wilder wrote it, it washes over you like a sea wave. And it's not astringent; he doesn't shock you into any kind of confrontation. He uses the people sitting in those chairs, the people who have gone before. What are they doing sitting there if they're dead? Don't they disappear? No, they're waiting. If we sat around in a circle and spewed out what we really thought about an afterlife—if one believes in an afterlife—everybody's concept of what that afterlife is, or could possibly be, would be different.

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Music was an essential part of Thornton Wilder’s life. He played it, he studied it, he wrote about it. But when it came to composers who wrote to him for permission to make his major plays into operas, it was a different story. He famously turned down requests from both Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein. (As a matter of fact, back in 1961, Ned Rorem had written to Wilder about setting one of his short plays — a request that led nowhere.) Wilder’s reasoning seems to have been that his plays were conceived in a specific genre, and to adapt them into another would compromise their integrity. That didn’t stop him, however, from fashioning librettos out of two of his own plays, The Long Christmas Dinner for Paul Hindemith, and The Alcestiad for Louise Talma. But during his lifetime, and for long afterwards, and despite the enormous success of Broadway and television adaptations, his important plays were off limits to operatic composers.

In 2001, I brought the matter up again with Wilder’s nephew, my friend Tappan Wilder, the thoughtful and energetic literary executor of the Wilder Estate. Though there was pressure on him at the time to approve a Broadway musical version of Our Town, he could see that opera was indeed an appropriate medium to preserve the play’s dramatic intimacy and emotional force, and thereby extend the play’s reach across time. Once he agreed to my proposal, it was obvious that Ned Rorem had to be convinced to undertake the music. As a master of vocal writing, with a passion for classic American texts, he was a natural fit. And indeed his music, while giving the orchestra the melodic lead and spontaneity that “translate” the original play’s nuances and pathos.

My task, as librettist, was to condense the play’s length while preserving its shape and tone. Because musical time is so much longer than dramatic time, many of the play’s scenes had to be shortened and characters eliminated. In the play, both Emily and George have a sibling, but not in the opera. Many of the play’s minor characters — the townsfolk of Grover’s Corners — have been combined into one, Mrs. Soames, who functions as both busybody and chorus. The play’s most intriguing innovation, of course, was the Stage Manager and the way he comments on the action, bringing forward various “experts” to fill us in on the town’s history. Again, this would have slowed down our opera intolerably. This is why I thought to make use of another theatrical innovation — at least in the opera house. Supertitles are used as captions to enhance the audience’s understanding of what’s transpiring on stage. But what if the device were also used as a character in the opera itself? . . . I have, in a sense, split the Stage Manager into a singer and a screen. I should note too that the play and the opera open differently. For the sake of dramatic continuity, I wanted the opera to open with a funeral, just as it closes with one — in this case, the very same funeral. And I thought it best to open with a hymn, one beloved and familiar. Once the composer agreed to this idea, he wanted to make his own setting of the hymn, but I insisted that the traditional one would be best, that the sound of the familiar, communal hymn would set the right tone for what follows. Indeed, that hymn’s words go right to the heart of the story:

(continued on page 8)
FEATURED WORK

Wilder & Hitchcock: Writing and Re-writing Shadow of a Doubt

Max Alvarez

“I might add that the reason I wanted Wilder is that he had written a wonderful play called Our Town.” – Alfred Hitchcock to François Truffaut

Alfred Hitchcock was delighted when Thornton Wilder agreed in 1942 to adapt a screenplay from a seven-page film treatment by Gordon McDonnell entitled “Uncle Charlie.” Although the collaboration lasted a mere six weeks (up until the time Wilder commenced his World War II service), the resulting screenplay was to become one of the director’s finest cinematic achievements, Shadow of a Doubt (1943).

The Shadow of a Doubt narrative is by now familiar to many cinephiles: charismatic, iconoclastic Uncle Charlie (played in the film by Joseph Cotton) evades detectives by reuniting with his sister’s family in the small town of Santa Rosa, California. His worshipful niece, Young Charlie (Teresa Wright), with whom he has a seemingly unbreakable and telepathic bond, begins to sense that her uncle is harboring a secret. As it turns out, this suave, irresistibly charming and charismatic, iconoclastic Uncle Charlie (played in the film by Joseph Cotton) turns out to be a killer of wealthy widows. The oblivious Emmy has invited her brother to address a local women’s club. Wilder wrote the following exchange:

MRS. NEWTON: Oh, we’re middle-aged women, mostly. Pretty busy with our homes, most of us.

UNCLE CHARLIE: That’s right. You’re doing something. In the cities it’s a different matter. Thousands of middle-aged women... their husbands spent forty and fifty years building up a fortune... work, work, work. They die and leave their money to their wives. And what do they do? You can see them in the hotels, by the thousands... eating great meals... playing bridge all afternoon and all night... diamonds sparkling all over their big chests. Vapid, useless wives. Thousands of them....

Apparently this was also too subtle for Hitchcock. The sequence as filmed expanded Uncle Charlie’s speech: “Women keep busy in towns like this. In the cities it’s different. The cities are full of women: middle-aged widows, husbands dead....” Joseph Cotton’s voice then makes an abrupt transition to a monotone: “...husbands who’ve spent their lives making fortunes, working and working. Then they die and leave their money to their wives: their silly wives. What do their wives do, these useless women? You see them in the hotels—the best hotels—everyday by the thousands. Drinking their money, eating their money. Losing their money at bridge, playing all day and all night. Smelling of money. Proud of their jewelry but of nothing else. Horrible, faded, fat, greedy women.”

Young Charlie’s horrified response survived from Wilder’s original draft: “But they’re alive! They’re human beings!” Uncle Charlie’s retort was intended by Wilder to have been: “Are they? Barely... and there are some other things best not talked about. Gigolos and...”

Wilder cringe, was transformed into:

YOUNG CHARLIE: Uncle Charlie, you were beautiful!

EMMY: Wasn’t he though? And such a quiet boy. Always reading. I always said Papa should never have bought you that bicycle—you never did know how to handle it, Charlie. (To Young Charlie) He took it right out on the icy road and skidded into a streetcar. We thought he was going to die.

YOUNG CHARLIE: I’m glad he didn’t.

EMMY: Well, he almost did. He fractured his skull. And he was laid up so long. And then when he was getting well there was no holding him. It was just as though all the rest was too much for him and he had to get into mischief to blow off steam.

An important dinner table scene in Act Three occurs after Young Charlie realizes her uncle may be a killer of wealthy widows. The oblivious Emmy has invited her brother to address a local women’s club. Wilder wrote the following exchange:

MRS. NEWTON: Oh, how nice to see you again, Charlie. How are you? I was so sorry when you were ill.

YOUNG CHARLIE: Uncle Charlie, you were beautiful!

EMMY: Young Charlie, I’m afraid you’re about to put me into a corner.

YOUNG CHARLIE: No, Mama. I—...We’re going to have a new house built on the hill above Newton.

EMMY: Oh—oh! Whose is that? Ain’t that the house?... I don’t know. I can’t tell... How much is it? It is—? Anyway, it’s just as beautiful as if it were. I’m sure that way—I love jewelry.

In the film, Louise gets straight to the point: “Whose is it? Ain’t it beautiful? I’d just die for a ring like that. Yes, sir, for a ring like that I’d just about die. I love jewelry. It’s real jewelry. Notice I didn’t even have to ask if it was real. I can tell. I can.”

After Louise departs, Uncle Charlie attempts to set his devastated niece straight about the cruelties of life. Wilder’s script has him saying, “What do you (continued on page 5)
PERFORMING WILDER
The Year in Review

The 2006-2007 theater season was one of the most exciting in recent memory for fans of Thornton Wilder. It began in the fall with the New York premiere of Matthew Burnett’s adaptation of Wilder’s last novel, *Theophilus North*, directed by Carl Forsman at the Keen Company, the Off-Broadway production received enthusiastic reviews. Next up was the world premiere of the Ken Ludwig/Thornton Wilder adaptation of George Farquhar’s 1707 comedy, *The Beaux’ Stratagem*. Directed by Michael Kahn at the Shakespeare Theater Company in Washington, DC, the production was nominated for five Helen Hayes Awards. In January, Trinity Rep in Providence, RI, staged a production of *Our Town* that tried to recapture the shock of Wilder’s “deconstructed theatrical style” by not just showing the rear wall of the theater but removing the wall altogether to reveal the actors’ dressing rooms and other backstage areas. Director Brian McEleney explained, “We won’t just see the daily life of people in Grover’s Corners but the two-story set will reveal much of the theater’s daily life as well.” Winter also saw what we believe to be the second-ever production of Wilder’s acting version of *A Doll’s House* by Henrik Ibsen (see article “WORK IN PROGRESS: A Wilder Doll’s House” elsewhere in the Newsletter). April showers not only brought May flowers but also the Westport Country Playhouse’s production of *All About Us*, a musical adaptation of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. One of the last works by celebrated theatrical duo John Kander and the late Fred Ebb (joined by Joseph Stein), the production starred recent Tony winners Shuler Hensley as George Antrobus and Cady Huffman as Sabina, as well as legendary Eartha Kitt as the Fortune Teller. Late spring saw the Intiman Theater of Seattle celebrate its 35th anniversary with a unique production of *The Skin of Our Teeth* directed by Bartlett Sher and starring deaf actor Howard Seago in the role of George Antrobus; Seago’s signing was supplemented by actors saying his lines. Finally, the Festival Opera’s (Walnut Creek, CA) production of Ned Rorem and J. D. McClatchy’s *Our Town* opera in August brought this spectacular theater season to a smashing close. All we can say is, “Encore! Encore!”

Top left: Giorgio Litt and Regan Thompson in the Keen Company production of *Theophilus North*; scenic design by Beowulf Boritt. Top right: Christopher Innvar, Ian Bedford, and Veanne Cox in the Shakespeare Theater Company’s production of *The Beaux’ Stratagem*. Middle left: Fred Sullivan Jr. and Phyllis Kay in the Trinity Rep production of *Our Town*; scenic design by Michael McGarty. Middle right: Eartha Kitt in the Westport Country Playhouse production of *All About Us*. Lower left: Laurence Ballard, Howie Seago, Anne Scurria, J.D. Tracy, Kelly Balch, and Lucia Sher in Intiman Theater’s production of *The Skin of Our Teeth*. Lower right: Darla Wigginton, Kirk Eichelberger, and Richard Byrne in Festival Opera’s production of *Our Town*; scenic design by Matthew Antaky.
In 1966, when I was searching for a dissertation topic, I considered studying the novels of Thornton Wilder. I wrote Mr. Wilder but to my disappointment, I received a rather brief typed note that said, “Because of the hundreds of letters Mr. Thornton Wilder receives each year from interested readers, he regrets he is not able to answer each one personally.” But someone had written at the bottom of the note the information I sought about Wilder’s new novel, The Eighth Day.

Less than a month after my attempt to correspond with Wilder, I received the first letter in what would develop into a meaningful correspondence with the author’s sister, Isabel Wilder. She provided further information on the new novel, telling me it would be the Book-of-the-Month club selection for April 1967. To my delight she agreed to answer any questions she could and shared the following: “My brother would want me to send good wishes for the success of your project. When asked before a student has started the long, hard work toward a Ph.D. degree, he does his best to discourage the young scholar. He advises, take a DEAD author.”

Throughout the next several months, I wrote her rather regularly seeking biographical information; she repeatedly let me know about the many inaccuracies in the books and articles dealing with her brother. Because she was a stickler for exactness, I boldly asked if she would read my biographical chapter. The chapter came back marked up and with attached pages in which she detailed where I had blundered. Miss Wilder granted me permission to use our correspondence as support-

(continued on page 2)
Wilder's heroines.

to Bennett the tragic consequences of social limitations especially evident in Mrs. Gibbs in Our Town, and Lucia with Genevieve in The Long Christmas Dinner that results in the loss of access to one's personal identity. Comparing Emily with Woolcott's close friendship with Wilder but also the profound emotional impact the play had on its contemporary audiences. Jenkins argued that, beyond the religious significance found in the play, Our Town conjures the predawn of modern America before the ravages of the early twentieth century: war, disease, and economic calamity. He proposed that the 1938 audience, largely comprised of persons who remembered well the "simpler" times before the great war, may have led Wilder away from his initial dramatic intentions and toward a gauzy nostalgia.

Continuing the tradition of strong ALA Wilder panels, this year's panelists' thought-provoking presentations aptly revealed the rich potential of intertextuality in Wilder's writing that awaits further scholarly attention.

An article in the March 30, 1916, Yale Daily News furnishes valuable information about the Ivy Ode four years before Wilder's graduation. It states that all seniors who have taken Latin are urged to submit an Ivy Ode by the end of May to be selected from the contributions of the class for use on Class Day; it notes that Professor Morris "will assist in instruction and advice in the art of writing Latin verse." I would like to thank Judith Schiff, the Chief Research Archivist in the Yale University Library's Manuscripts and Archives, for providing me with this information. According to Schiff, moreover, "The Ivy Ode tradition grew out of the custom of the planting of the class ivy that began in 1852. By the 1860s the students added an ode, usually in Latin, sung to a traditional air. The ode was published in the senior class book for the first time in 1927. Beginning in the 1970s the ode was read in English and then in the odiest original language. The odes continue to be delivered in a variety of classical and contemporary languages."

Wilder studied Latin with Dr. Clarence W. Mendell at Yale. Professor Edward Parmelee Morris (1853-1938) who assisted in instructing and advising Yale seniors in Latin verse composition in 1916, taught at Yale from 1891 to 1919, serving as Dunham Professor of Latin Language and Literature from 1909-1919. Since Morris retired the year before Wilder wrote the Ivy Ode, it is not clear if he worked with Wilder on its composition.

Judith P. Hallett is a Professor of Classics at the University of Maryland, College Park. She specializes in Latin language and literature, ancient Roman and Greek civilization, and the classical tradition in America. She is the author of Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family (Princeton 1984), and a contributor of chapters to books, several collections of essays, articles, reviews and translations into both English and classical Latin. She studied at the American Academy in Rome and the Institute of Classical Studies at the University of London. She is a recipient of Mellon teaching fellowships and NEH research fellowship. Most recently she presented at "Wait Til I'm Dead": A Colloquium on the Fiction of Thornton Wilder, where her students from Latin 351, Catullus and Horace, also read their translations of Wilder's Ivy Ode.

Check out our website at www.thorntonwildersociety.org
PERFORMING WILDER

Our Town as Ballet

Michael Robertson

If translation is at best an echo, as the British translator George Borrow claimed, adaptation is a new utterance. Successfully adapting a work to a different medium means creating it anew. The 1940 film version of Our Town provides a negative confirmation of that truth. The production team’s failure in re-conceiving Our Town for the film medium led to a work that is occasionally bizarre—as when the Stage Manager turns to the camera and asks for questions from the audience—and more often treacly, as in the shots of a kitten lapping up milk spilled by Howie Newsome or, most notoriously, in the climactic scene of Emily’s resurrection following her death. A few paces into his journey, the dramatic opening chords of Aaron Copland’s “Fanfare for the Common Man” erupt into the theater, ennobling this as-yet-nameless character, turning his journey into a royal progress: he is simultaneously a dancer wearing a dark suit, a stagehand carrying a prop, and the hero of a modern odyssey.

Choreographer Philip Jerry’s ballet version of Our Town, revived by American Repertory Ballet for its Spring 2011 season, is a more successful example of adaptation, all the more striking because of the difficulties Jerry faced. It is tough enough to transform any story into wordless dance, and Our Town is an exceptionally talky drama, its originality and power centered in the figure of the Stage Manager. What is his balletic equivalent? A magus figure akin to Drosselmeyer in The Nutcracker, producing George and Emily from underneath his swirling cloak? An eccentric inventor like Dr. Coppelius, creator of the automaton title-character of Coppelia? Jerry, wisely, did not even try to reproduce the Stage Manager in his ballet. Instead, his one-act, forty-minute version brilliantly captures the aesthetic and thematic concerns at the heart of Wilder’s drama: its meta-theatricality, its linking of the particular and universal, its archeological layerings of time, its mythic attention to the human life cycle, and its obsession with death.

Jerry’s Our Town begins in silence. From stage left, a man enters, moving slowly and stiffly, carrying on his back a tall wooden stepladder. His back is bent as if the ladder were preternaturally weighted, as heavy as the rock of Sisyphus. A few paces into his journey, the hero of a modern odyssey unfolds the ladder downstage right and soon is joined by other dancers, one of whom carry another ladder, which they set up on the opposite side of the stage. By the conclusion of the “Fanfare,” the stage is filled with dancers: another man in a suit, women in long dresses, young men in knickers, and young women in skirtwaists. All move in straight lines across the stage, as if limited to two dimensions; the effect is frieze-like, Egyptian tomb paintings come to life.

In this prologue, Jerry employs the deliberately archaic, high-modernist balletic technique of Vaslav Nijinsky’s 1912 Afternoon of a Faun; the ballet’s subsequent sections, set to excerpts from Copland’s The Red Pony and his score for the Our Town film, use radically different balletic styles. The ballet simultaneously tells the story of the Webb and Gibbs families and surveys the history of twentieth-century dance, a perfect translation of Wilder’s meta-theatrical preoccupations into dance terms.

The next and longest section of the ballet covers Act I of Wilder’s drama. Copland’s music here is light, quick, skimming, and Jerry uses the graceful theater-dance style that Agnes de Mille employed in mid-twentieth-century works such as her choreography for the musical Oklahoma! The growing attraction (continued on page 5)
CONFERENCE REPORTS

Wilder at American Drama Conference

Michael Krahel

Roundtable discussion “Getting Out of Our Town”. (left) Yvonne Shafer and Cheryl Black, (right) Don Marlette, and Jackson Bryer;

ON THE BRISK MORNINGS OF OCTOBER 28TH AND 29TH, 2010, SCHOLARS GATHERED at Kean University in Union, New Jersey, to discuss American drama. Six panels were devoted to Thornton Wilder’s most famous and lesser-known plays, and a production of Our Town by Kean University’s drama department was performed on both nights. The conference made clear Wilder’s vitality as a playwright.

The first discussion of Wilder took place at a plenary session devoted to the holdings of the Yale University Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library. In “Using an Archive in the 21st Century: The American Collection,” Louise Bernard, the Curator, focused on the Thornton Wilder collection, a veritable treasure trove of Wilder’s writings and memorabilia, from handwritten drafts of his major works to tickets of productions he saw.

The next panel, “Thornton Wilder’s Major Plays,” was begun by Jonathan Shandell of Arcadia University with “Fitting Practice Into Theory: Using Aristotle, Brecht and Artaud to Read Our Town.” Shandell framed his discussion of Our Town by his experiences in teaching it using Aristotelian, Brechtian, and Artaudian theory to counteract students’ “hyperfamiliarity” with the play. Shandell sees Our Town’s Stage Manager as a vehicle for Brechtian alienation, eliminating the possibility of any suspension of disbelief, thus forcing the audience to contemplate what it sees every moment. In Aristotelian terms, Emily is the play’s tragic hero, moving “from prosperity to affliction” and experiencing the suffering upon her ultimate realization of life’s beauty. Artaud’s concept of theater as an art form “for madmen and idiots,” may be entirely incompatible with Our Town, but according to Shandell, the opposite is true. Artaud’s view of theatre is of a medium for changing the “unknown to the known,” and what is Our Town, especially in Act III, if not Wilder’s own attempt to do just that?

Katherine Bacon of Broome Community College next presented “Wilder Women: Transforming and Reflecting the Female Archetype.” Wilder’s female characters, Bacon says, may tend to fulfill certain archetypes, notably the mother, but unlike many of his contemporaries, he never portrays them as victims. In her chronological discussion of Wilder’s plays, Bacon claims that Wilder’s commitment to a “dynamic, positive female archetype” is a tribute to the women in his life, but because Wilder’s characters are both individuals and archetypes, they have a significance that is both personal and universal.

The next Wilder panel was a roundtable discussion called “Approaches to Our Town,” and it included Bill Bower, director of the Kean University production; Terryl Hallquist of Vanderbilt University, who had directed the play there; and Sean Dineen, delivering the presentation originally scheduled for the morning panel, “Meditations on Mortality and Disability in Our Town” that was cancelled. Dineen suggested that Our Town is “the embodiment of the disability struggle” inasmuch as it depicts characters who come to have a “love for life that some other people might not have.” The defining characteristic of individuals with disabilities, Dineen says, is the same as Emily’s: their ability to see every moment of life as precious. Wilder’s larger goal in Our Town, according to Dineen, is to say that “There is more to life than ordinary experience, but we can glimpse, in that ordinary experience, a bit of eternity.”

An internationally known actor and mime, Bill Bower worked exhaustively with his cast at Kean University to get them to perform imaginary actions realistically. The strength of Our Town, Bower says, is its potential to show “the space between characters”; when presented with this space in such a literal fashion, we cannot look away. Terryl Hallquist agreed that the connections between the characters are the most important aspect of any production of the play, and that the traditional method of staging Our Town, sans props and scenery, is the most direct way of communicating them.

Next morning, the discussion of Wilder’s dramatic works continued with a panel entitled “Lesser-Known Plays by Thornton Wilder.” Kenneth Sanders of Kean University began with “Sojourners in Time: Revisiting Thornton Wilder’s The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden,” Wilder’s is a unique New Jersey, it is as if he brought Pilgrim’s Progress to the Garden State. In Happy Journey, Sanders says, is a pilgrimage of her own, but unlike Bunyan’s Christian, she “seeks not deliverance, but completion.” As neither a comedy nor a tragedy, the play foresees much future misery but is not all pessimistic. Rather, like so much of Wilder’s work, it makes its audience stop and reflect on the beauty we can find in a transitory world.

Kristin Bennett of The College of New Jersey followed with “Deconstructing Generational Divisions: An Analysis (continued on page 8)
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