

## CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

### *Papers on Slovene Topics*

Joint Convention of the Popular Culture Association and the American Culture Association, Wichita, KA, April 26, 1983. Film and Fantasy Session.

*Henry A. Christian* (Newark Campus of Rutgers University), "Louis Adamič's 'Woman with Lamp' and King Vidor's 'An American Romance': a study in script, star and immigrant stereotype."

In January of 1942, M-G-M film director King Vidor sought Louis Adamic's aid for a "war effort" picture with which Vidor had been struggling for some months. The film was to tell the story of an immigrant in America who works hard and becomes a successful manufacturer, and Vidor also intended to detail the story of iron ore from its raw stage to the various products for which steel is employed. As Adamic's friend, M-G-M script reader Ross Wills, suggested, Vidor hoped to deliver another "The Big Parade," this time for American industry. At first reluctant to abandon his activities concerning his recently published *Two-Way Passage*, Adamic finally agreed to take a job with Vidor; and the two men labored on a script in Ohio, Arizona, and California during February and March. Adamic wrote with determination, but had difficulty with both Vidor's vague story concept and his preliminary vision of the main character. When Vidor suggested the immigrant should be a rough, raw man who is civilized by his American experience—to parallel the iron ore progress—Adamic balked because he felt that had too often been the typical negative immigrant stereotype. Adamic quit the film project, but left behind a story outline—first titled "Woman with Lamp"—that Vidor then followed for his film, which was eventually titled "An American Romance."

Vidor's production schedule was delayed several times, especially because he lacked a star. He sought and waited for Spencer Tracy to be free; and when Tracy refused the part, Vidor had to settle for Brian Donlevy, whose performance he later believed was barely adequate. Indeed, Steve Dango, the immigrant protagonist of "An American Romance," becomes for the moviegoer a person who is first too subject to slapstick, hackneyed "greenhorn" situations and then too sternly an American laissez-faire capitalist. Very clearly because of Adamic's protestations to Vidor, the immigrant is never a beast; but thanks to Donlevy's uneven performance and a plot that attempts too much in personal, technical, and chronological scope, the immigrant is hardly a real person either.

Preview screenings indicated "An American Romance" was too long for general theatre play. The film was cut, but not in the technical, "steel" and factory scenes as Vidor wished but in the personal story line, thus further damaging the immigrant portrait. Shortly thereafter, Vidor severed his relationship with M-G-M. "An American Romance" finally opened in New York City in November of 1944; for a post-D-Day public it was hardly pertinent to the extant "war effort." The film had national theatre play and was distributed widely to military camps. If Adamic ever saw the film, he left no record of his opinion. In subsequent decades "An American Romance" found its way to late night television screens, but neither the wartime audience of the 1940's nor the early morning viewers later on ever linked the film to Adamic. The credits for

"An American Romance" stated Vidor was the originator of the story and Herbert Dalmas and Richard Ludwig were the writers. But in 1953, within the shadow of the Hollywood Ten and amid the dangers of HUAC investigations, King Vidor in the appendix to his *A Tree Is a Tree* had included in the list of screenwriters for "An American Romance" the late Louis Adamic.

American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, October 14-17, 1982. Slovene Studies session.

*Irene Portis Winner* (Brown University), "Ethnicity and Communication."

The concept of semiotics of culture, as initially developed by the Moscow-Tartu School of semiotics and evolved further by groups in East and West Europe and the Western Hemisphere, views culture as a mechanism for the storage and transmission of information through a multitude of sign systems of which language is only one, albeit the privileged one. These sign systems are organized by underlying psychological and related cultural perceptions of time and space as well as by central metaphors (or fundamental symbols) and values, all of which participate in the construction of world views. Semiotics of culture conceives a fundamental perspectival opposition: the inner and the outer points of view of culture. The inner view situates the culture bearers in the center of the culture and allows them to see themselves as "we" and those located outside of the culture as "they".

In this paper, I understand ethnic culture as a subset of culture in general. Just as members of one culture see themselves as distinct from those of other cultures, members of an ethnic subculture distinguish themselves as "we" as opposed to others representing other subcultural units. Such distinctions and self-identifications are based upon changeable significant differences that define the boundaries of ethnic groups. The material of this paper is based on fieldwork among a group of Slovene-Americans in Cleveland and Minnesota, some of whom are relatives of the inhabitants of the village of Žerovnica in Notranjsko which I have described in an earlier study (*A Slovenian Village: Žerovnica*, Brown University Press, 1970).

### *Future Conference*

February 26-28, 1986. FOURTEENTH ANNUAL TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE CONFERENCE, University of Louisville. Submissions and correspondence to: Elizabeth B. Clay, Conference Chair, Department of Classical and Modern Languages, University of Louisville.