

IFKOVIC, E. 2004. *The Life and Works of Writer Annie Trumbull Slosson - a Connecticut Local Colorist*. Studies in American Literature Vol. 68. Edwin Mellen Press; Lewiston, NY. viii + 481 pp. ISBN 0-7734-6396-8. Hardback. \$139.95

Female entomologists were a rarity in the nineteenth century. In his biography of Annie Trumbull Slosson, Edward Ifkovic describes the times and circumstances that led to the entomological pursuits of one of the greatest. Born in 1838 to a wealthy New England family that encouraged writing, women's education, and the study of science, she became a keen naturalist with the means to follow good weather and collect from New Hampshire to southern Florida, often accompanied by fellow botanists and entomologists. Her accomplishments as an "amateur" entomologist are astonishing, made more so by her entry into the field at the advanced age of 48. Despite continual donations of insect specimens to collectors and taxonomists, she amassed a collection of 35,000 specimens, which she donated to the American Museum of Natural History. She described several species, and over a hundred species were named for her. She was a founding member and financial supporter of the New York Entomological Society, and was instrumental in launching its journal. Her many publications contributed to insect taxonomy and systematics, life histories, faunistic surveys, and philosophy. Her extensive collection of entomological correspondence was catalogued. A year before her death in 1926, the Brooklyn Entomological Society elected her an Honorary Member.

Using a wealth of correspondence, personal journals, published works, and archival material, Ifkovic provides a richly detailed account of Slosson's life and accomplishments. He deftly resurrects the character of an eccentric woman who, at middle age, was poised on the brink of greatness as a local color writer but fell instead under the spell of entomology, severely curtailing her output of fiction. In the introductory chapters he describes the literary style called local color that thrived in the United States after the Civil War and lingered through the turn of the century. The term "local color" certainly applies to Slosson's work. The style centered on rural life and closeness to nature, capturing the rough dialects of village folk and details of the fauna and flora of the story setting. In stark contrast to the romantic sentimentalist style that it was supplanting, local color, especially from New England, often celebrated single older women whose lives revolved not around men but on their own strengths. Not surprisingly, the best of the local colorists were single women, including the widowed Slosson. And not unexpectedly, the style became popular during the second half of the nineteenth century, when women were allowed to pursue higher education and the suffrage movement was in full force.

Within the introductory chapters, Ifkovic describes the social, economic, literary and religious matrix of Hartford, Connecticut, during the 1800s, and the activities of the influential Trumbulls and their extended family. Together they form a backdrop for Slosson's development as a writer and scientist. Annie's parents were progressive Calvinists who advocated women's education and sent her to the Hartford Female Seminary, which had a strong curriculum in science, unusual in a girls' school at that time. She remained religious all her life, but promulgated in her fiction and spiritual essays a shift toward more liberal and sensible Calvinism, reflecting the currents of the day.

In subsequent chapters, Ifkovic analyzes Slosson's major works of fiction in chronological context. Many of her popular stories first appeared in 'The Atlantic Monthly' and 'Harper's Bazaar', and were later collected and published in book form. Some were written as novels. They ranged, for instance, from a loose conglomeration of essays and stories on a club of women who collect china, to the story of a woman who decides to forgo her place in heaven because her beloved animals are unfairly excluded from it. Ifkovic points out that the seemingly sentimental stories were satires and parables, reflecting mainstream changes in spirituality and Slosson's belief in the redeeming influence of woman's sensibility. After an evaluation of one of Slosson's later works, a story titled *Dumb Foxglove*, Ifkovic offers an eloquent summary that can serve for most of her local color writing: "Slosson shows that nature—this time the flower called *Dumb Foxglove*—is symbolic metaphor for human experience. The story exhibits what Slosson does best, meshing her naturalistic vision with the eccentricities of the isolated New England village, seen through a glass darkly illuminated by the peculiarities of religious zeal".

Slosson's interest in insects began around the time of her first successful fiction publications, and probably stemmed from her well-established passion for plant collecting and floral surveys. In the manner of the day, she called herself an "amateur botanizer", but was well versed in methods of identification and curation, and regularly corresponded with eminent botanists such as Asa Gray. She was actually an accomplished botanist who published floral surveys and species descriptions. Ifkovic suggests that Slosson was coaxed to study insects by her brother-in-law and companion, William C. Prime, a well-known writer, editor, trout fisherman, and lepidopterist. After the deaths of their spouses, the two established a routine of travel and collecting, summering in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, and winter-

ing in the rich collecting grounds of Florida, with interludes in New York and Hartford. Slosson's interest in insects was encouraged also by another close friend, the actor and entomologist Henry Edwards, who fueled her growing passion by naming a moth for her, a species she collected in Florida. She was hooked. "You know what an insidious, enthralling, captivating habit it is. . . What are drugs to bugs!" She established correspondence and friendships with a veritable Who's Who of early entomology, among them W. A. Ashmead, Philip P. Calvert, D. W. Coquillett, Edward P. van Duzee, Harrison G. Dyar, A. S. Packard, and Henry Skinner. Her passion for what she informally called "bugology" was so intense that she apparently carried a cyanide jar even to church, and admitted to using it to collect a small moth from the pew in front of her one Sunday while on her knees in prayer. This was recounted in a lighthearted essay published by Bradford Torrey, an ornithologist and another close friend. Ifkovic provides several humorous excerpts by and about Slosson that highlight her thrill with the eccentricity of being an entomologist, and a female one at that!

Slosson's literary contributions to entomology include philosophical essays on a variety of topics, such as the use of common versus scientific names, and the meshing of entomology and literature. Her descriptive articles were written in a more literary style, to, in her words, "relieve the

heaviness of the masculine articles." The lively pieces, says Ifkovic, were "filled with engaging anecdote and wry observation", and were well received by her colleagues. He sums up her articles as ". . . always filled with human-instinct vignette, her fusion of the drama of literature with the circumstances of entomology".

Beside the introduction and eleven chapters of Slosson's biography, Ifkovic presents notes, an extensive bibliography of Slosson's publications and other sources, an index, and a selection of photographs and illustrations. Ronna Coffey Privett, an authority on British and American literature, ably wrote the preface. The book offers a thorough and engaging account of one of America's most colorful early entomologists, a woman who was once listed as a tourist attraction because of her habit of flailing a butterfly net in public places, whose wit and knowledge entertained many, and who contributed generously to the field and to the advancement of the careers of both young and established entomologists. Combined with a well-textured description of the times and places in which Slosson lived, wrote, and collected, the book has an offering for a wide range of readers, from biologists to sociologists and historians of literature.

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