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Newsletter—Literary Issue

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Edited by Bernice Slote

Twice a year literary issues of the Newsletter will present new Willa Cather material: reprints of some of Cather's early, hard-to-find, and still uncollected journalistic writings; early reviews, interviews, and notes about Cather's work; bibliographical information; and — from Cather readers — original brief notes, observations, explanations, or short critical articles. (Submit manuscripts to CATHER NEWSLETTER, 201 Andrews Hall, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska 68588.

. . . In This Issue . . .

- ☆ The Willa Cather Bibliography
- ☆ Early Pittsburgh Reviews
- ☆ Notes and Queries

The Willa Cather Bibliography

Perhaps the most important news of the year in the world of Cather scholarship is that a definitive descriptive and analytical bibliography of Willa Cather's work has been commissioned. The work is being undertaken by Joan St. Clair Crane, Curator of American Literature Collections, Rare Book Department, University of Virginia Library, and is tentatively scheduled for publication in 1981 by the University of Nebraska Press.

Such a work has long been inherent in Nebraska's program of publishing books by and about Willa Cather, a program which now comprises sixteen titles. A bibliography originally had been scheduled for 1966, but, as the publishers explained in the Foreword to **The World and the Parish** (1970), "The discovery, in 1964, of an extraordinarily rich body of writing, dating from 1895-1896—the 'lost year' when it had been supposed Willa Cather was inactive as a journalist—coupled with important biographical findings brought about a radical revision in our plans. It was apparent that the research into the early years, which we had assumed was virtually complete, was only beginning." A discussion of some of the bibliographical problems and an account of the ongoing research will be found in the Introduction to **Willa Cather: A Checklist of Her Published Writing**, compiled by JoAnna Lathrop and published by the UNP in 1975.

The Willa Cather bibliography now in preparation by Joan Crane will include full bibliographical descriptions of the major titles with detailed notes on the publication history of each book (date of publication, number of copies in the first printing and subsequent

printings, variants by which the first printing may be differentiated from later printings, etc.). It will further include modified bibliographical listings of works edited or having contributions by the author, reprints, foreign editions and translations, piracies, anonymous and pseudonymous newspaper and periodical contributions, and some comparison of variant texts. Non-book materials containing original work (such as recordings and sheet music) also will be listed. Other features will be quasi-facsimile title-page transcriptions, full collational formulae, discussion of bibliographical idiosyncrasies, notes on paper, watermarks, bindings, and dust jackets.

Joan St. Clair Crane is superbly qualified to undertake the Willa Cather bibliography. Her experience in the rare book trade and institutional special collections work extends over more than twenty years. To mention only some of the positions she held before joining the University of Virginia staff in 1969, she served as Rare Book Bibliographer at the Stanford University Library, as Cataloguer and Bibliographer of the Private Collection of Paul Mellon, and as Rare Book Cataloguer of the Parke-Bernet Galleries. Among her recent publications are **Man Collecting: manuscripts and printed works of William Faulkner in the University of Virginia Library**; **Carl Sandburg, Philip Green Wright and the Asgard Press, 1900-1910**; and **Robert Frost: a descriptive catalogue of books and manuscripts in the Clifton Waller Barrett Library, University of Virginia**, as well as numerous periodical publications. Recently she has been cataloging the Willa Cather holdings in the Barrett Collection at the University of Virginia; it is one of the two or three most extensive in the world, including more than one hundred letters.

In the spring of 1977 Miss Crane made her first trip to Lincoln and Red Cloud, consulting Professor Bernice Slote, Board Chairman Mildred R. Bennett, and the WCPM's former director, JoAnna Lathrop. During her stay in Red Cloud, as well as looking through the holdings at the Museum, she toured the length and breadth of Catherland and was most appreciative of all that the WCPM has accomplished.

"Aside from professional considerations, I have a personal commitment to Willa Cather's work and believe that her importance in American literature is not even yet fully recognized," Miss Crane said when she accepted the invitation to compile the bibliography. "If I can add to Cather scholarship, it will be for me a great satisfaction." After her April visit to Red Cloud, she wrote that "if further inspiration were needed for the task in hand, it came in fullest measure."
—V.L.F.

Early Pittsburgh Reviews

The play reviews reprinted here for the first time are from Willa Cather's beginning season (1896-97) as a drama critic on the Pittsburgh **Leader**. Titles are those used in the **Leader**. "The Hollands at the Grand" has special interest, for it is the first and only publication of hers signed as "Willa." Subsequent reviews appeared over her chosen pseudonym of "Sibert."

THE HOLLANDS AT THE GRAND

The Hollands opened their week's engagement at the New Grand last night with Fitch and Dietrichstein's new comedy, "A Superfluous Husband," preceded by a one-act piece done from Hopkinson Smith's "Colonel Carter, of Cartersville." One-act pieces are generally futile, and this one, in spite of its wonderful bit of characterization in the person of "Colonel Carter," is no exception to the rule. It has no plot whatever, and scarcely a situation. Absolutely nothing happens. The railroad scheme brings nothing to pass, not even a failure: the duel does not come off, the groceryman disappears into that undiscovered country behind the wings from whose bourne he does not return. All these things are of course introduced to characterize "Colonel Carter," and indeed that characterization is masterly enough to excuse almost any number of irrelevant happenings and non-happenings. The only question is, should a play be ever solely for the characterization, and is one perfect characterization enough to justify the piece? Mr. E. M. Holland's "Colonel Carter" is a noble piece of work. Of overacting there is not a whit. The unconscious vanquishing of the irate groceryman and his bill is a strong effect in itself and it is perfectly done. The affection of the old man is exquisite and done in a manner peculiarly characteristic of a country where indeed "hearts do not grow old." Mr. Holland's role was throughout as simple and noble and tender as that noblest of American products, a Virginia gentleman. Nevertheless, we will be surprised if the piece lasts through the season.

As a play "A Superfluous Husband" is scarcely more promising than "Colonel Carter." It is the role of a clever man who always treats his subject well, but in this case the subject matter is scarcely weighty enough. The chief conditions of the play are too exceptional. The whole situation seems somehow to lack human interest. If a play takes a strong hold upon the public it must do it through stronger elements than the curious and the clever. A book may succeed in touching a passing fad of the hour, but a play must deal with the eternal foundation of things, with the experiences all men can divine, with the emotions all men can experience, however dimly. The fact that a woman's ambition can sometimes come between herself and her husband is not of sufficient general interest. The most genuinely human element in this play is the baby, and it brings about the only really moving situation. If the play survives, that baby will save it. The first act is decidedly the best and the climax of the first act, where the superfluous husband sits cor-

recting his proof sheets with the baby in his arms after his wife has gone out to dinner, is the best thing in the play. At least it was the thing everyone felt most, and after all, in the matter of play-making, that is about the only guide. After the first act the play weakens perceptibly and that alone is a serious flaw in technical construction. The principal characters are entirely too foolish and their action is not plausible. "Dr. Wood's" remark that they are acting like a pair of children very nearly measures the whole play. It is rather a childish affair.

Mr. Joseph Holland makes all that he possibly can of a superficial part. He has no opportunity for that adroit character role and virile emotion which are always at his command. But all that can be done with "Lauson" he does. Miss Oliver, too, is hampered by her part. She has all the intensity that she had when she played "Mrs. Erlynne" in "Lady Windermere's Fan," but there is no place for it here. When she is serious it is made mock-seriousness by the fact that the light plot gives no pretext for it. "Mrs. Lauson" suffers, but there is absolutely nothing to suffer about. It is just as in "A Mid-summer Night's Dream," where the anguish of "Helena" and "Hermia," which was serious enough to them, is made burlesque by the condition of the play. This play is almost an emotional burlesque.

Willa

November 24, 1896

IT LACKS CONTINUITY

Racing plays have been done in the past better than they will be done again. Interest in them has been for some years on the wane. Mr. Ralph Lumley's play, "Thoroughbred," is a mildly humorous racing play, not conspicuously good of its kind. The company who present the piece do good work, but the play itself has little sustained interest. Lacking a clearly defined central aim, it is full of irrelevant incident and dialogue that is clearly introduced to fill up the time. The first act gets nowhere at all and has a rather weak ending. The acts which follow unfortunately resemble the first. The love episode between "Decker" and "Miss Carlingham," which should take place in the second act, is deferred to give an excuse for there being a third act at all. Either it should or should not come about, it should not be simply put off. "Rimple" empties his pockets to gain time and "Decker" makes a cocktail to gain time. "Miss Carlingham" indulges in a sort of balcony soliloquy to gain time. The comedy element is furnished by a young man who lisps and a young lady who stammers.

Mr. Dixey plays "Rimple" well enough, but his make-up quite divests him of that personal attraction which was ever his chief charm and has made him popular ever since the old days of "Adonis." Mr. Davenport does more with "Decker" than the part deserves, and Miss Isabel Evesson is very charming as "Miss Carlingham." Probably the best work done in the play is Mr. Pitt's impersonation of the racing lord. He looks the part perfectly and plays it well and without exaggeration. For that matter, though, the en-

tire company is round enough, and it was not their fault that there were no curtain calls last night. It doth not yet appear why that "blacking up" episode was introduced in the last act, but possibly Mr. Lumley had some reason for it. A poor actor can sometimes ruin an excellent play, but it is seldom that a good actor can save a play that is deficient.

Sibert

December 8, 1896

BEAUTIFUL ANNA HELD

It takes a pretty woman and a French woman, to draw out the sort of an audience that assembled at the New Grand Opera house last night. The theater was packed from orchestra to galleries. That Anna Held was the chief object of interest was evident from the fact that a large part of the audience left when the second act (of **Parlor Match**) was over. As for Mlle. Held, she of the Lacteal Bath, to judge her at all fairly, you must constantly keep her nationality in view—and indeed there is small danger of her letting you forget it. She is undoubtedly a beautiful woman, but more beautiful, perhaps, when judged by French standards than by ours. Last night her beauty was rather disguised than enhanced by her elaborate "make up." It was decidedly of the French sort, rather overdone. Her eyes were blackened overmuch. Her cheeks and lips were glowing with vermilion. Her beautiful neck and arms were heavily powdered, even the tips of her fingers were rouged after the Bernhardt manner. Now the truth is that Mlle. Held needs very little "make-up," but she applies it according to the traditions of the French stage regardless of personal fitness. She wore her hair hanging like that "golden hair" of sacred memories. Mlle. Held's songs are, of course, not exactly of the Sunday school variety, and would not win Mr. Moody's approval. They are the slangy street songs of Paris and you must take them for what they are worth. But her singing of them is quite imitable. Whether it is exactly to your taste or not you must acknowledge that. Her vocalization, to be sure, is the least important part of her performance. We half a hundred soubrettes who can sing quite as well. But have we one who could sing that song to the bass violinist just as she sang it? That by the way, is her best song; it is quite perfect in its way and is a small drama all in itself. Mlle. Held has apparently "worked up" that song more thoroughly than any other in her repertoire. It is an admirably finished piece of work. She does a hundred clever things in it, like when in teasing the poor enamoured violinist she presses her heart on the right side instead of on the left, then discovering her mistake runs laughingly away. O, she has a charm of her own, this giddy little Frenchwoman who wears her locks dishevelled a la Cora Potter, and looks at you entreatingly through her half-shut eyes. Her two English songs, "Won't You Come and Play With Me" and "I Wants Yo' Ma Honey," are certainly less spirited than her regular French repertoire, but, of course, it is merely good nature on her part to sing in English at all. Her pronunciation, by the way, is ex-

cellent, considering her brief acquaintance with the language. Almost inevitably one compares Mlle. Held with Mlle. Yvette Guilbert. Beyond the fact that they both sing very risqué French songs and both on occasions can be sufficiently *basse*, they have absolutely nothing in common. Mlle. Guilbert is plain, Mlle. Held is beautiful; Mlle. Guilbert is subtle, Mlle. Held frankly definite; Mlle. Guilbert has tremendous intelligence, Mlle. Held has tremendous physical vivacity; Mlle. Guilbert analyses life, Mlle. Held enjoys it.

As to the "Parlor Match," it is the same old match. Evans and Hoey were rapturously greeted by their old admirers. There are several good voices in the company, particularly William Armstrong's. The "innocent kid" was as frisky and as obviously mature as usual.

Sibert

December 22, 1896

OTIS SKINNER AT THE GRAND

Mr. Otis Skinner is always a welcome player. He is one of the few young men on the stage who are blessed with intelligence and ideals. His play "A Soldier of Fortune," with which he last night opened his engagement at the New Grand Opera house, is not a particularly fortunate one. It lacks coherence and movement. Of course the dramas of the elder Dumas are the accepted models of romantic drama and their saving quality is their dash and velocity, qualities in which "A Soldier of Fortune" is sadly deficient. The first act is decidedly the best; after that the interest lags. The remaining three acts would be positively dreary were it not for a few stirring incidents such as the duel in which "Daubigny" loses his letter and that very clever climax at the end of the third act. The latter is the best stroke of the play by all odds. When "Torelli" throws off the jester's mask there is a stir in the house; it is totally unexpected and is telling in its effect. Mr. Skinner himself was laboring under a heavy cold, but played "Torelli" with strength and spirit. He is blessed with a magnificent physique that admirably fits him for romantic roles, and if he is a bit heavy in the lighter phases of his role he atones for it by the ease with which he carries the heavier. By the way, he should cultivate a little of the effervescent buoyancy of the late Alexander Salvini. Mr. Frederick Mosley acquitted himself creditably as "Cesar Borgia" and in his make-up strongly resembled the portraits of that gentleman. The other member of the "Borgia" family, "Lucretia," the lady who mixed the drinks, was admirably played by Sara Truax. Certainly Maude Durbin as "Blanche Daubigny" did some of the best work that was done last night. In the first act her work was strong and moving; after that she had very limited opportunity to show her mettle. The piece is excellently staged and the company is worthy of a better play, one that would not leave with us such a taste of the commonplace.

Sibert

January 12, 1897

Notes and Queries

Columns of the literary issue of the Newsletter are open for Catherian comment—questions, answers, suggestions, solutions. Join us.

1. Sources and "Tom Outland's Story"

At the end of her comments on **The Professor's House in On Writing**, Willa Cather acknowledges her debt to "a very old man, brother of Dick Wetherell (sic)," for the story of the discovery of Mesa Verde. She adds that Dick was "a young boy" when he made the discovery, then continues, "I followed the real story very closely in Tom Outland's narrative." These statements are curious on several counts. Dick Wetherill was thirty when he discovered Cliff Palace ruin, the Cliff City of Outland's narrative. Also, the Wetherill brother who told the story is not identified. Dick was the eldest of five brothers, none of whom would have been a "very old man" in 1915 when Cather got the story. Al (Benjamin Alfred) was next in age and in his early fifties when Cather and Edith Lewis visited Mesa Verde. Lewis indicates that the unidentified brother "was still living in Mancos," the town nearby where the Wetherills owned the Alamo Ranch. Since the ranch had been sold in 1902 and none of the brothers were living in the area after Dick's murder at Chaco Canyon in 1910, this is hardly a clue. Whoever told Cather the story, indications are that she did not follow it very closely.

Al, not Dick, first saw (discovered?) Cliff Palace ruin in 1887 from the floor of Cliff Canyon, the box canyon from which Outland describes his first sight of Cliff City. Dick saw this ruin a year later but, unlike Tom and Al, was not alone; he was accompanied by Charlie Mason, whose role resembled Roddy Blake's. Dick and Charlie saw the ruin at eye level, not from below, although the season (it was 18 December) and the falling snow were the same as in Tom's account. One wonders if Cather had spoken to Al, Gallup postmaster at the time of her Mesa Verde visit. Perhaps some **Newsletter** reader can identify the brother or supply other information about Cather's source.

Detailed knowledge of the facts received by Cather would clarify her shaping of them and tell us much about the artistic process and how the finished story should be read. Several alterations besides the discovery suggest the intention in Tom's narrative: Unlike Blue Mesa, Mesa Verde had been explored years before the Wetherills by several white men. The Wetherills were not met with such indifference as Tom was, nor were they adverse to selling their finds or letting them out of the country; indeed, they helped explorer Nordenskiöld assemble boxes of relics for the Helsinki National Museum. The Blake-Outland falling out could not have been managed if these facts had been followed. Then too, Cather condenses a decade or more of exploration into less than two years, while placing the discovery more than twenty years later. Particularly helpful on background material is **Richard Wetherill: Anasazi** by Frank McNitt (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1966), reprinted in paperback in 1976. Included is a summary of the discovery by Charlie Mason signed by the surviving Wetherill brothers after Dick's death. Mason tells of finding the mummified body of a woman they christened "She," a possible source for Mother Eve.

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2. In doing an annotated edition of William Faulkner's early prose writings, Professor Leland H. Cox, Jr. of the University of South Carolina ran across a reference he hoped to identify: "In his 1925 essay on Sherwood Anderson—reprinted in Carvel Collins, ed., **New Orleans Sketches** (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 132-139—Faulkner criticizes American critics for the way in which they label artists. Anderson, for example, had been referred to as the "'American' Tolstoi." An example given for another writer, surely Willa Cather, is the "'Keats' of Omaha." Do you know of any such published reference to Cather prior to April of 1925?"

(**Complete Tales**, IX, 133)



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