COMMERCE AND CONFLICT
IN MARY AUSTIN'S DESERT

By

Charlyn Liddell

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Auburn University at Montgomery
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Liberal Arts

Montgomery, Alabama
6 December 1995

APPROVED

Professor Alan Gribben
Thesis Director

Professor Nancy Anderson
Second Reader

Dr. Marion Michael
Director of Graduate Studies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Mary Austin (1868-1934) is an author whose work has been both eagerly embraced and lauded, but just as often casually overlooked. "At the time of her death in 1934," points out Karen S. Langlois, "Mary Hunter Austin was nationally recognized as a prominent spokeswoman for the American West and an important figure in regional literature" ("Houghton" 31). Yet, in an article entitled "Mary Austin Rediscovered," Esther Lanigan Stineman remarks that the fact that Austin was not included in a collection such as the *Norton Anthology by Women* (1985) illustrates her routine dismissal from modern readings (546). Likewise fared her popular success: T. M. Pearce, a biographer and critic of Austin, says in his introduction to *Literary America: The Mary Austin Letters* that although she was a prolific author, penning some thirty-four books, and was praised by such contemporaries as Joseph Conrad and H. G. Wells as ranking among the most important American writers, general audiences barely acknowledged her (xi).

Austin placed the blame for her poor book sales squarely at the feet of her publisher, Houghton Mifflin and Company, because its editors continued to market her works to what Langlois calls "intellectually and culturally elite 'hardcore' book buyers in the East" ("Houghton" 35). Austin perceived the potential for a more sympathetic market in those who understood the struggle to exist in an antagonistic Western environment. In tracing the ongoing battle, Langlois details what Austin considered a " 'double handicap' " in her relationship with the company-- "that of being both a woman writer *and* a

westerner"--prompting her to hire a female publicist to clash with " 'their publicity man' " (39).

In 1920 the company finally yielded to Austin's wishes and released a pocket edition of *The Land of Little Rain* (1903) to be marketed exclusively to the West. Even with the addition of this limited regional marketing, however, Austin's sales remained poor. Relentless in her reproach of the publishers, Austin uttered statements such as: " 'The real trouble is that (they) do not understand my work, and cannot be persuaded to take the right sort of interest in it,' " quotes Langlois ("Houghton" 40). Although Austin eventually changed publishing companies (but returned to Houghton in later years), the popular success she sought continued to elude her.

Austin developed an assertiveness that enabled her to contest inequities faced by a woman in the early twentieth-century American literary market; her perseverance may have developed as a result of battling numerous personal and financial anxieties from a series of displacements she encountered. After graduating from college in Illinois, she emigrated to California to homestead with her mother and brother, a move about which she was never consulted. Although she was initially devastated by the move, she decided to accept the new and leave the past behind. What she found was an environment that would inspire her to a develop a unique way of seeing and writing. And after marrying Wallace Austin, she was again uprooted to various small California villages where he pursued sporadic occupations--school superintendent, vineyardist, land and irrigation speculator. By her keen observation of the peculiarity of the landscape, creatures, and people, she created vibrant stories and sketches and thereby turned each upheaval into a

source of greater creativity.

Eudora Welty notes the significance that "feeling" performs in conveying a strong sense of place in fiction (62). Austin's concept of place also centers on her ability to allow the spirit of the setting to penetrate each story; the landscape becomes the true hero in most of her stories. Because she draws on acquaintances and incidents from her experiences in the West, her characters could not have emerged in quite the same form in any other locale. In her autobiography, *Earth Horizon* (1932), Austin acknowledges: "I wrote what I lived, what I had observed and understood" (320). Her characters' distinct ways of speaking, thinking, and reacting to the environment brand them with "the mark of the land" (*LB* 11). Stineman points to the beauty of Austin's nature writing by citing the critic Henry Chester Tracy's comment that hers is " 'realism that does not break our mood' " (*Maverick* 73).

Austin used storytelling to form her own conception of Western reality. She says that she had not originally intended to write in the short story form, however, because of her aversion to the more "sentimental" variety of stories popular at the time. But in an attempt to divert her attention from the disassembled house and the chore of packing belongings to follow an "irrigation scheme" her husband and brother-in-law were "hatching," she sat down and wrote two stories, in the style of "mocking detachment" she admired in Rudyard Kipling (*EH* 229-230). Melody Graulich says that Austin later adopted the "oral storytelling" style, with a rambling story line that is encapsulated by a narrator who is allowed to draw conclusions freely (22).

Graulich says that Austin first began to ponder the components of narrative voice as she became familiar with the storytelling traditions of Native American tribes (22). Her serious preoccupation with mysticism began in the same setting. Austin appreciated the emphasis placed in the culture on the relationship between nature and man's consciousness. With the strangeness of massive geographical space around her, Austin felt a need to develop a clearer awareness of her own place within it. Because she had concentrated on the study of science in college, she brought basic aspects of the objective physical world to her writing. Displaying what Blanche H. Gelfant calls " an anthropologist's application and a poet's sensitivity," she doggedly pondered an enigma called the desert, convinced that it possessed a mystical guide to the eternal that would eventually be divined to her (69). Her transcendental leanings often caused her to be linked with Emerson, Thoreau, and especially with fellow naturist John Muir (Walker 190).

Zwinger connects Muir and Austin by saying that they were the "first truly *western* nature writers," asserting that their devotion to the mountains and deserts of the West energized subsequent wilderness authors (x). Austin reports that in the one meeting between the two, she and Muir exchanged similar ethereal experiences: both writers had experienced the life-saving powers of angels (*EH* 298). Austin would always search out the celestial in experience. Yet she "was no naive mystic," Graulich points out, stressing that, in addition to her desire to ponder the strange beauty of the desert, she possessed an unmistakable social commentary tinged "with a developed sense of irony" (2). Although her mysticism has garnered much critical attention, Austin's most mesmerizing talent may

be her ability to produce crisp description.

Stemming from her precocious childhood in Illinois, Austin was fascinated with natural surroundings. She experienced her first mystical experience at the age of five. As she stood beneath a walnut tree overshadowing her, suddenly " 'earth and sky and tree and wind-blown grass and the child in the midst of them came alive with a pulsing light of consciousness' " (Fink 15). Austin relates in her autobiography that her mother tried to quell her teenaged daughter's improper interest in nature writing, warning her not to discuss her appreciation of "landscapes and flowers and the habits of little animals and birds" with boys, because they would not enjoy such subjects (*EH* 112). Because Austin felt neglected by her mother, and especially estranged after her beloved father and sister died, her time spent alone with nature and the ability to write about the experiences were particular comforts to her.

In California, Austin attempted to heal the bad memories of her mother's rejection and the deaths she had experienced by trying to achieve the unity with nature she had savored as a child. She describes an experience that occurred the spring that her "long spiritual drought" after moving west finally ended. While leading her horse on a nature hike, she walked out onto a clearing and a host of bright orange poppies sprang upon her sight; at the time she experienced "the warm pervasive sweetness of ultimate reality" she had sensed years previously under the walnut tree (*EH* 198).

Her life in writing was an attempt to recapture the feeling of the small child, with her ultimate goal to keep the intensity of the unity with nature within her reach at all times (*EH* 198). She learned to use the West to examine an ancient conflict between humanity

and nature and to protect her vision that man and the wilderness could merge in the region without ravage of the land. "Austin envisioned the desert landscape as a place of retreat from an overindustrialized world," says Vera Norwood (39). But Austin saw her dream for the West begin to fade during her lifetime; she had hoped that the white settlers would possess the same reverence for the land that she observed among those native to the area. She lamented in her later years on the corruption of what had been the pristine setting for *The Land of Little Rain:* "But on the life there . . . modern America has laid a greedy, vulgarizing hand" (*EH* 234). Austin concentrated on the innate grandeur of the region and contrasted it with the devastation brought in from its exterior.

In her insightful introduction to *Stories From the Country of Lost Borders,* Marjorie Pryse describes what she considers to be Austin's priorities in *The Land of Little Rain:* "The land, not the defeat of the land, relationships between human beings--including Indians and Spanish-speaking people--not their victories over each other; and the insights that lead to vision, rather than the organization of a tightly woven plot" (xxi). Pryse has a reason for giving the land preeminence in ranking: Austin considered it above all. In Susan K. Harris's review of *Stories from the Country of Lost Borders,* she remarks that Austin's "major theme is survival, the abilities to take hold, grow, overcome, that characterizes all permanent desert inhabitants" (88). And throughout what Austin calls this "inhospitable" land, human vulnerability is emphasized; survival is contingent upon the desert's indulgence. Austin personifies nature's detached attitude toward humanity: "Of all its inhabitants it has the least concern for man" (*LOLR* 68). Regarding Austin's emphasis on the primacy of the land, Harris says, "What Bret Harte falsified and

Mark Twain often ignored, Austin takes as her primary subject matter" (88).

Much of Austin's irony turns on the idea that man, the most dispensable creature under the desert's blistering sun, ridiculously trudges about the vast expanse of land as if he dominates all he sees. As Austin promises in an essay she wrote about Southwestern regional culture, "In the long run, the land wins" ("Regional" 474). Norwood says that Austin resists the suggestion of the land's submitting to male domination or ownership (40). "Out there," her narrator remarks, "the souls of little men fade out at the edges, leak from them as water from wooden pails warped asunder" (*LB 3*). Austin watches with a knowing smile while man's mental and physical energies are poured into survival schemes that go unnoticed by the desert.

To read Austin's stories is to acknowledge her philosophy of the desert, an expansive system of give and take, only to be understood after spending time in its barren presence, a task to which Austin committed herself. "For all the toll the desert takes of a man it gives compensations, deep breaths, deep sleep, and the communion of the stars" (*LOLR* 21). The desert's asking price is high; however, it pays steep dividends. Carl Van Doren observes about Austin: "She endured hardships, she tasted immense bitterness, she healed herself with thought. The mark of the desert has never quite left her" (22). Her assembly of what Harris calls "the uncommon souls who have dug roots below the arid surfaces of the land and found enough substance to nourish their spirits" bears out her philosophy (88). And in making or refusing compromises, they, as Van Doren observes about Austin, learn the survival techniques that make them unique, bearing "the mark"

just as she does.

Austin remained interested in the diversity of professions throughout her writing career--her own and those of others. Because of the financial strain of caring for a mentally retarded daughter (born in 1892), Austin supplemented her meager book proceeds and husband's inconsistent income by teaching and writing for journals. In her later years, she lectured on her own writings and about current issues. A favorite topic for her was society's misuse of women's instinctive talents. Women were excluded from many occupations in her time, and Austin enjoyed peering into the world of male-dominated professions, especially those out-of-doors, such as mining and sheepherding.

Observing the outward actions of characters striving to make a living often enabled her to capture the human emotion evoked by their reactions to the landscapes. From her portrayal of gold-mad miners, thoughtlessly cheating the land, to that of the Native American basket-maker, celebrating nature in her art, Austin gauges her characters' behavior on a spectrum ranging from calculatedly economic to environmentally ideological priorities. And because Austin's stories so often turn on the theme of betrayal, the protagonists' displays of loyalty and treachery are often intertwined in their daily pursuits of trade.

Pryse observes that "many stories in *Lost Borders* (1909) trace the sources and effects of men's betrayal of women, of the land, of nature, and their own best selves" (xxx). Austin's narrator often comments on the deceit of characters who fall under the spell of what Stineman considers a desert that acts as a siren to men--too aloof to be cruel, but seductive enough to become the most threatening rival a woman could face

(*Maverick* 106-107). The following passage from *Lost Borders* demonstrates Stineman's point: "It is men who go mostly into the desert, who love it past all reasonableness, slack their ambitions, . . . neglect their families because of the pulse and beat of a life laid bare to its thews and sinews " (10). But Austin's betrayed women do not often behave as powerless victims. Pryse adds that while Austin often depicts forsaken women in *Lost Borders*, she also describes women who realize "that relationships to the land and to work or to other human beings" provide their needed sustenance (xxix-xxx).

John Seeyle calls Austin's "a powerful lone female voice in the wilderness"; publishing eight of her works from *Lost Borders* in *Stories of the Old West,* he evaluates her stories in "craftsmanship and style . . . second only to Stephen Crane's" (xxxiii). In attempting to focus on her own style in a literary territory usually associated with men, Austin asserts her individuality and demonstrates that she is capable of crafting a colorful tale in the manner of the storytellers of the West. Austin delineates between her writing style and Bret Harte's more melodramatic Western tales by speaking through her narrator in *The Land of Little Rain.* In announcing her intent to remain an objective storyteller, the narrator characterizes herself as "a mere recorder," insinuating that any moralistic or mystical connotations will be left to the reader to discern. "You shall blow this bubble from your own breath," the teller assures her reader (112-113).

William J. Scheick interprets the narrator's boast as actually belonging to Austin, and thereby disputes this claim, insisting that in *The Land of Little Rain,* "Austin fails as an objective reporter" (44). Scheick is specifically referring to Austin's attempt to communicate a perception of the infinite; he says she falls short because she fails to

concede the obstacle of human impermanence (40). And although Scheick makes his comments about Austin's mystical objectivity, her narrator, in revealing Austin's attempts to construct her own existence through the teller, hardly qualifies as "a mere observer" and relater of objective information.

Instead, the narrator's persona filters through the plot so suggestively that Graulich calls *Lost Borders* "a series of tales about the teller, a woman whose perceptions about human character and relationships--and about herself--convey the state of mind Austin thought of as western" (38). In the storytelling exchange, the narrator tries to convey the experience of living and breathing the unique western lifestyle. Bringing the reader into her intimate confidence, she pulls around them a net of enticing gossip, "splintered bits of information," in Stineman's words, involving characters' lives and actions (*Maverick* 112-113). In one of Austin's earliest stories, the narrator testifies that her best tales come from the various musings and conjecture that she gathers in daily conversation (*WT* 210). Austin uses gossip as a major literary instrument with the intent of moving the story forward, Stineman perceives (*Maverick* 111).

Austin's narrator reveals herself subjectively when she passes judgement and even professes to perceive hidden intents in characters' actions. In "The Return of Mr. Wills" from *Lost Borders*, her conclusion about the title character is implicitly critical: "I do not know if the man was honest with himself; if he knew by this time that the clew of a lost mine was the baldest of excuses merely to be out and away from . . . everything that savored of definiteness and responsibility" (57-58). The accusation is similar to the one Austin herself casts upon her unreliable, then ex-husband, Wallace, in her autobiography.

She reports that he not only lacked a career or trade, but also "any direction which could have marked out such a way of life for him" (*EH* 269). The narrator presents depictions that linger somewhere between reexaminations of Austin's own life and total fabrications. Only within this fusion of reality and imagination do her characters assume the carefully selected contours of her art. "I am persuaded," says Stineman about *Lost Borders*, "that the stories represent Austin's own utterances" (*Maverick* 20). At times, in fact the "mere recorder" reveals that she has done more than observe the occurrences in her stories; she has lived them.

Throughout her stories, the Austin creed becomes clearer: the highest use of the land is that which least alters it. She portrays man at his best when he is at one with the land and at his worst when ravaging it, for investment or greed. Although the settler considers his desecration a necessity for subsistence, Austin contrasts his actions with the indigenous dweller's protection of the land as an enhancement to his survival. In contrast, she presents a portrait of those whose pursuit of commerce may conflict with or adhere to her own vision of harmonious desert life. And she portrays them in their ascending order of Austinian fidelity: miners, ministers, white and Native American hunters, stagecoach drivers, shepherds, and indigenous craftswomen. Although each protagonist is complete with a unique set of circumstances, Austin always keeps the defining hoop of loyalty or betrayal around the character.

In addition to writing novels, journal articles, poems, and plays, Austin remained loyal to the short story genre throughout her career. Especially notable is her continued interest in desert occupations emphasized in a number of her volumes of short stories.

And the subject matter and style of Austin's stories often seem to accompany her current stage of social development. Her first book, *The Land of Little Rain* has a natural flow into *Lost Borders* and represents her time of discovering the uniqueness of the California desert. Harris comments that in *The Land of Little Rain* "Austin foregrounds nature," and that she writes more "of people" in *Lost Borders* (87-88). And as Graulich indicates, the narrative voice is similar in both books; the works "could easily be read as companion pieces" (20).

The Basket Woman (1904) and *The Trail Book* (1918) are collections of children's stories characterized by their unique narrators. The Native American woman for whom the former book is named relates the tales; a variety of indigenous talking animals tell the stories in the latter. Austin lived in New York City while writing *The Trail Book* and became so engrossed in Native American culture that the American Museum of Natural History allowed her to enter the museum at night and remove artifacts from the cases. Austin reports that she wore costumes and gained information by asking questions of the employees (*EH* 331). Graulich's *Western Trails* not only contains selections from both books, but also some uncollected and unpublished stories from Austin's papers at the Henry E. Huntington Library in California. Pearce says that the American Indian and folk narrative tradition of *One Smoke Stories* (1934) "covers philosophy, wit, irony, and broad humor" (*Austin* 128). A product of many years of story collecting on Austin's part, the volume was influenced by an "Indian specialist" who advised her on ways of compiling and presenting Native American experiences (Graulich 175). The book contains a mixture of legend, folk tales, anecdotes, and short stories. Within the restrictions of the short

narrative form, Austin's illumination of people and landscapes is more striking. Although her tales give readers a sense of a characters living in a distinct region, they also provide clear insight into universal human nature.

A combination of events may make Austin's readings more accessible today than they were during her lifetime. Linking the fresh interest in Austin with the consciousness of overlooked writers from America's past, Stineman indicates that several of Austin's reprinted texts have recently been released into a literary climate that is experiencing special interests in the exploration of Western and Southwestern literary efforts ("Rediscovered" 550). In her reviews of the Rutgers reprint of *The Land of Little Rain* and *Lost Borders,* (now called *Stories from the Country of Lost Borders),* and Graulich's collection of Austin stories from various sources entitled *Western Trails: A Collection of Short Stories by Mary Austin,* Stineman notes that the existence of the two books suggests a renewal of attention that has spawned several works on the author's life and writings, as well as reprints of her fiction (550).

By presenting living pictures of her own life and imagination, Austin became the translator of a mysterious realm of existence in the desert. Pearce observes that the reader returns from Austin's books of desert stories and sketches "feeling that he has walked in sunlight, gazed at far horizons, breathed clean air, and met unforgettable people" (*Austin* 135). In terms of the rich images and characterizations she offers, Austin's stories deserve more attention than they have received.

CHAPTER II

Miners

"There are many strange sorts of humans bred in a mining country," comments the narrator of *The Land of Little Rain* (68). She remains steadfast in her opinion that the miners' promise of wealth is merely a mesmerizing but misguided spell of gold because it lacks the true resources of the area--"water and workable conditions" (*LOLR* 17). Austin's representations in three stories concentrate on the miners' affinities and betrayals: she depicts those who forsake their families, their fellow men, the land, and themselves. Her autobiographical narrator casts judgements on characters and their actions in ways that may reveal Austin's own opinions, such as the one she places on the protagonist in *Lost Border*'s "The Return of Mr. Wills": "For a man who had prospected lost mines to that extent is positively not good for anything else" (62). The narrator's tone often reveals Austin's perception on characters' motives, such as her castigation of Mr. Wills's materialistic motives in leaving his family to prospect for gold.

Austin's familiarity with the ways of life of the "mining folk" developed in Lone Pine, California, where she and her husband lived next door to the most frequented saloon of miners who had followed the hope of the inevitable strike; their recollections provided her with a wealth of lively story material (*EH* 248-250). The narrator in *The Land of Little Rain* declares that the miners are destined to "go harmlessly mad in time" because they cling blindly to the firm belief that the next hill will contain their fortune. Manifesting

an indulgent tone towards the "faded old sandy miners," the narrator expresses an empathy for their endless optimism and perseverance (*69*). Pryse likens Austin's own speculative spirit to that of the old miner in "The Pocket Hunter," suggesting that his never-ending quest symbolizes her own literary search for " 'pockets' of gold in the desert " (xxiv-xxvi).

Austin's narrator says in "Jimville: A Bret Harte Town" that while the folks in the mining town of "Jimville" do not understand the geological makeup of the earth's crust, they quickly place their trust in finding gold on a "hunch," because they "understand the language of the hills" (*LOLR* 119-120*)*. In this sense, the harshness of the land is in proportion to its inhabitants' reliance on mystical guidance. Likewise, Austin depended on her intuition to guide the direction of her fiction and, being a confirmed mystic, would never give credit for literary success to any forces other than the ethereal ones she consistently defended.

Austin also parallels the old miners visually with the desert, portraying them in rough-hewn glamour as living links between the mystical and physical aspects of the land. She characterizes them as stark ghosts of the desert, "drifting about the desert edge, time-and-weathered into the semblance of the tawny hills," so much so that they begin to blend with the desert scenery (*LOLR* 19). This integration, however, is not the author's portrayal of their symbolic oneness with the desert. Only Austin's indigenous inhabitants have learned over generations to pluck from the wilderness only what is needed for sustenance, thereby receiving her ultimate tributes.

The narrator illustrates the contrast of priorities in the desert by the old miners' tales of Native Americans who casually use the precious material in abundance to form pottery that glitters with specks of gold (*LOLR* 19). Rather than its association with personal wealth, the value of gold extends for the native inhabitants to its ability to enhance a spiritual adulation to nature. The treasure for which the miner searches a lifetime and never finds would be considered worthless by the indigenous dweller unless it could be used in artifacts as tributes to the land.

In the course of the gold searches, "destinies are worked out in plain sight," as they are in "The Hoodoo of the Minietta" from *Lost Borders* (12). The story illustrates how ignorance of the natural laws of the desert sets into motion a series of disasters that befall a group of greedy and inept mine-owners. In her wry, knowing tone, the narrator comments on the desert's peculiar trait of remaining unswayed by a man's "nobility as we conceive it between the walls," for popular prestige goes unheeded in the wilderness (24). Now the once thriving Minietta Mining and Milling Company is "a crumbling tunnel" and "a ruined smelter"; any association with the mine is avoided by prospectors because of the curse linked with its legend (13). Believing that the circumstances connected with the mine are too unlucky to be random occurrences, the miners quickly assign the blame for its failure to forces outside themselves--namely the Hoodoo, conjured by the desert.

Jake Hogan is the first to acquire the Minietta, by cheating a trusting foreign prospector who innocently rushes into Hogan's cabin with his pockets bulging with silver ore from a strike. Hogan falsifies a report to indicate the claim is practically worthless and promptly offers the foreigner two hundred dollars for his interest. Soon the word has

spread that Jake Hogan made "a good strike" at the mine within a month (14). Hogan, however, proves to be as ignorant at forming a mining stock-company as the foreign prospector had been about the value of ore in the mine. Hogan is relentlessly suspicious of his workers, sure he will lose his company to one of their crafty and unscrupulous plots. To ensure his protection, he relies on the courts, an area in which he is equally ignorant. He files a judgement and collects a portion of his asking, then stubbornly takes the case to a higher court, which reverses the ruling, giving him nothing.

After Hogan's debacle, the company changes hands a number of times, each to a man who connives and wrenches the increasingly worthless company from the last owner. And each man comes to an end that is unfortunate at best and disastrous at worst. Succeeding Hogan in ownership of the mining company is McKenna, who obtains the mine by deferring to cash his paychecks until he becomes the mine's biggest creditor. McKenna's wife, bored and lonely in the desolation of desert life, runs away with his assistant, and after setting out to pursue them, the mine owner never returns. His foreman, Jordan, had successfully advised McKenna before he left to sell the mine for much less than its market value with a tale about the main vein being exhausted, and "in some unexplained way," the Minietta falls into Jordan's hands (21-22).

Described by the narrator as having "all the petty, fiddling ways of a man accustomed to days' wages," Jordan makes risky building decisions which cause the mine to become even more dangerous for the workers, increasing their resentment (21-22). The men finally refuse to go back down into a mine that is both faulty and jinxed. After the men warn him of the danger, Jordan curses them and the Hoodoo and descends into

the mine alone; they later discover him dead and buried under crushing rocks. Opposing sides of Jordan's heirs, whose familiarity with silver mines merely extends to the knowledge that they are coveted, spend most of their time and money in legal wrestles over the mine's ownership. The families pursue their court battle "while the timbers sagged in the tunnel . . . and the boards shrunk from each other and curled at the edges like the lips of men dead and sun-dried in the desert" (24).

Austin structures the text of the story so that equal detail is devoted to the economic and moral aspects of the owners' actions. In doing so, she verifies that she has mentally mastered the art of the mining business by delineating its technical terms, management, and philosophy of employees' well-being in exacting detail. By establishing a sense of the economic aspects of the venture, she stresses the miners' concentration on materialistic facets of the business, thereby emphasizing the total lack of moral consideration that contributes to their undoing. As the narrator details Hogan's cursing of his mine--his own creation--she reveals a keen interest in mining terminology. "Tunnel and shaft and winze, he cursed it," she says, "sheave and cross-cut, pulley and belt and blast and fall rope under the hoist . . ." (16). She succinctly explains the core of Hogan's failure in the venture by saying that since he was ignorant of the workings of a stock-company and feared that his employees were plotting to steal it from him, he had no foundation on which to build a successful business. Shamelessly flaunting his authority and wealth, Jordan displays an arrogance that inspires insubordination by his workers. Because the miners instigate a complete work stoppage, Jordan begrudgingly descends the shaky mine shaft, never to return alive.

In their thoughtless violation of the land, the mine-owners reflect a misunderstanding of the spirit of the desert and of the possible repercussions from sins against it. Austin creates a contrast between components of nature and monetary aspects of mining when the narrator compares sudden rainstorms that burst on the scene with the fluctuating mining business. The storms leave the land as scarred as the unstable industry leaves the local economy that depends on it for survival. Houses brimming with gaudy furniture that may have been inhabited by the representative "beflounced and fluttered women" of a successful camp are now abandoned and warped from exposure to the sun. Rabbits frequent these ruins at their leisure: their presence being indicative of nature's endurance after man's remains have faded (18). The miners' attempts to manage the land have been completely disregarded by the desert.

Austin concluded that settlers in the Southwest suffered a misunderstanding of the desert that could translate into tragedy for the land and its inhabitants. In a 1929 *Southwest Review* article entitled "Regional Culture in the Southwest," she complains that unless dwellers willingly adapt themselves to the land, they will be destroyed by it. Citizens must question whether they are making an attempt to interact with nature or are imposing their idea of the "Good Life" onto the land (475). While the mine owners in the "Hoodoo" are regulated by man's directives, which may easily be broken by lying and cheating, nature's rules remain steadfast: "The only unforgivable offence is incompetence," and scruples are not the sort of "baggage" to transport to the wilderness, which "will not be lived in except upon its own conditions" (*LB* 25).

In "The Return of Mr. Wills," a story from *Lost Borders*, a grocery-clerk-turned-prospector leaves his family for three years in search of a lost mine; the years represent an economic and spiritual revival for his family that can only be curtailed by his return. Austin depicts the economic situation of women at the time by allowing the narrator to act as Mrs. Wills's defender and champion. In foregrounding the betrayed woman's ability to improve her family's financial situation, the story illustrates Graulich's comment that while Austin did not object to the male viewpoint, she also sought to balance it squarely with that of the woman (51). In an ironic tone, the narrator insists that of the seventeen years the couple had been married, the three years in which Mr. Wills's remained absent had proven to be the best ones for Mrs. Wills (52).

After leading a mild-mannered existence in the East as a clerk and "assistant Sunday-school superintendent," Mr. Wills moves west with his wife, his "cabinet organ and four little Willses" (51). The narrator pronounces Mr. Wills the kind of man who needs a "hoop" of respectability, such as social standing, to keep him in a functional shape (53). Her condescending tone illustrates the storyteller's lack of respect for Mr. Wills when she makes the assertion: "Back East, I suppose they breed such men because they need them, but they ought to keep them there" (52). She is repulsed by her idea of a man who seeks to impress others by his ostensible behavior, while the desertion of his family reveals his true character.

Mr. Wills listens to gossip about a lost mining claim only for a short time before he surrenders to the seduction of the desert dream. He betrays his family for the lure of the desert siren. The desert itself functions as a character in the story, appearing to Mr.

Wills as a tempting enchantress, silently waiting to capture her prey. "Out there . . . the long Wilderness lies brooding, imperturbable; she puts out to adventurous minds glittering fragments of fortune or romance, like the lures men use to catch antelopes--clip! Then she has them" (54). The eyes of the forsaken Mrs. Wills's have the sad look "of trail-weary cattle," and her domestic duties go lacking in lieu of her attention to a frequent "cheap novel" (57).

An incident that incites an inescapable realization and shocks Mrs. Wills out of her "bedraggled crawl of life" is the decision by the management of the "Bedrock Emporium," Mr. Wills's former employer, to discontinue credit to her in her husband's name. After no word from him in a year, chances lean toward one of the unidentified "sun-dried corpses" spotted in the dunes as being Mr. Wills himself (58). Austin expands the traditional woman's role as life-giver to that of life-sustainer by allowing Mrs. Wills to shoulder the responsibility for the well-being of her family, although her husband has not been pronounced dead. The narrator gives nature the credit for instilling the instinct and competency in the "child-bearer" as in the "lean coyote mothers, and wild folk of every sort" (59). Mrs. Wills assumes a social license for her actions because of the betrayal, thereby allowing her to garner approval for her actions.

Mrs. Wills accepts the liberties of her new life, all of which contradict traditional ideas of femininity: working hard, asserting her independence from her husband, holding the purse strings of the family. Austin does not specify the nature of her occupation, perhaps to prevent a deviation in the story-line by emphasizing what Stineman calls "society's unfair denial of suitable employment to competent married women"

(*Maverick* 99). The story illustrates, however, Austin's sustained opinion that women should play integral, not inert, roles in American work and society. Augusta Fink notes of the story that Austin "articulated her anger at the subservient role forced upon women" (131). Indeed, Mrs. Wills and her children yield to Mr. Wills until they discover abilities and talents previously buried beneath a sense of paralyzing dependence. When Mrs. Wills realizes that she has money left over each month after paying the bills, she dresses up her residence with new wall-paper and curtains, and the yard with roses. Although her acquired independence produces initial feelings of guilt stemming from her inbred concept of women's social stations, her pride overcomes such feelings, symbolized by the precedent of inviting company home for tea. The woman who now has "a spring in her walk" decides to allow the desert mistress to keep Mr. Wills; she has acquired a more precious commodity--self-sufficiency.

Austin's keen insight into the experience and feelings of Mrs. Wills is telling probably because aspects of Mr. Wills closely represent characteristics of her husband, Wallace Austin. She often speaks through the image of Mrs. Wills about her own experiences as a young wife. Because Wallace left Austin alone with their daughter to follow speculative schemes, she had no choice but to assume responsibility for herself and her retarded child. Austin may be voicing her own position when the narrator advises that Mrs. Wills had accepted the traditional role of husband as provider so long that she must become accustomed to the realization that she is actually more fulfilled in his absence (*LB* 59). Austin also experienced confining feelings within her own marriage. In an example of her ability to integrate diverse elements of nature and the human soul, Austin

merges a natural interpretation with a familiar emotional state when she describes an initial impression of California: "The unwatered palms had a hurt but courageous look, as of young wives when they first suspect that their marriages may be turning out badly" (*EH* 186).

Mary and Wallace Austin occupied opposing poles on the ideological and economic spectrum in their attitudes about humankind's responsibilities to the land. While Mary Austin espoused her philosophy that man should defer to the needs of the land, Wallace Austin, a man who, like Mr. Wills, was "troubled with an imagination," remained infatuated by the financial potential of the land (*LB* 53). As Fink says, he "was mesmerized by its promise: the lure of mining projects, oil prospects, and reclamation schemes" (105). One of his most fervent preoccupations was land speculation, which consisted of a number of fruitless ventures. And like Mrs. Wills, Austin remained disconnected from her husband's business affairs and decisions. Fink writes, "About the business that occupied Wallace from dawn to dusk she knew nothing and asked no questions. It was not considered necessary for a young wife to be informed about her husband's work" (67).

A parallel also exists between Austin and Mrs. Wills in their superior abilities in handling the family's finances. Among the inequalities Austin denounces, according to Stinemen, is the supposition that men must manage monetary responsibilities, even if they demonstrate inferior ability in the matters *(Maverick* 99). In Austin's own marriage, for example, Wallace proved that he could be completely undependable with the family's funds. While she was pregnant, Mary Austin was suddenly evicted from a boarding house

during a period when Wallace was away. Although he knew that the event was to occur, he withheld the knowledge from his stunned wife. "'How would that have helped?' " he later asked her (Fink 67-69).

The narrator insinuates that, given the social standards of the time, such a liberating transformation as Mrs. Wills undergoes cannot be sustained for long when Mr. Wills returns, "like a blight" (*LB* 62). Mrs. Wills displays the most obvious reaction: the familiar "dinginess" returns, "creeping up from her dress to her hair and her face." Austin, however, does not allow the story to end without the possibility of Mrs. Wills's rescue, which materializes in the form of the liberating force of the desert (62). The narrator is confident of her prediction that although Mr. Wills has come home with "the desert . . . on his back," he has also begun to launch inquiries regarding a certain lost claim, and the story's teller is fully confident of the desert's intention to reach out and take Mr. Wills into its possession again (64).

While Austin most often portrays miners as greedy purveyors of destruction, bent on the vain domination of the land, the Pocket Hunter's goal focuses on merely remaining safe in a potentially perilous environment. In *The Land of Little Rain,* "The Pocket Hunter" represents the solitary existence of the only miner in Austin's stories whom the narrator labels her "friend" (66). Austin does not portray the Pocket Hunter's intent as purely materialistic or his actions in environmentally destructive terms. "He claimed to have chipped bits off the very outcrop of the California Rand, without finding it worth while to bring away," the narrator reports matter-of- factly, rather than in the sarcastic tone she maintains for those whose actions she does not sanction (78). In contrast,

Jack London's description of the pocket hunter in "All Gold Canyon" is not nearly so benign; as John Seelye says about the story in his introduction to the section on London's stories in *Stories From the Old West,* the emphasis in the story "is the devastating effects left by the prospector when he abandons his mine" (274).

Austin depicts the small-time miner as docile and harmless. Yet he has perpetrated his own share of destruction; he once made an extravagant ten-thousand-dollar strike in one abandoned mine. London, however, spares no adjectives in his description of the pocket hunter's crude actions: "He attacked the crumbling quartz with the pick, bursting the disintegrating rock asunder with every stroke" (Seelye 286). Perhaps one reason for her subdued portrayal of the miner is the idea of what Norwood calls an "ambivalence which was at the core of America's response to the land," signifying Austin's opinion that within limits, the land could also be expected to meet human needs (39). Rather than London's account of a prospector with a calculating, yet careless destruction, Austin intentionally depicts the Pocket Hunter as nondescriptive, with "a face and manner and speech of no character at all" and a "vacant" demeanor that casts him as an innocuous, somewhat marginal figure (*LOLR* 64). His insignificance coincides with Austin's familiar theme that nature has the least regard for man of all its dwellers (68).

Passively assuming the survival techniques of animals, the Pocket Hunter adopts the shielding pigments of his environment. His burros are his most constant, trusted companions, and once in a snowstorm he "snuggled" between the sheep in a flock for warmth, saving him from freezing to death (76). Likewise, he relies on animals and trees for his "sense of home" and fellowship, trusting that when he needs the comfort of their

companionship, they will be easily located. Because of his utter dependence on wildlife, he seems scarcely their equal, yet the land tolerates him.

Insisting that Austin herself believed that people achieve more fulfillment while in close contact with nature and other human beings, Work says that Austin does not admire the Pocket Hunter's "hermit" existence ("Moral" 44). One particular aspect of the old miner's life that would prove appealing to Austin's whims, however, is the vast supply of time and freedom he commands for himself in which to absorb his surroundings. Austin is, after all, the author who patiently watched from the rim of the desert until she had uncovered the most creative ways to illustrate the seemingly sterile landscape as one brimming with all types of life. Placing her in lofty company, Pearce writes, "Like Henry Thoreau and John Muir, Mary Austin enjoyed solitude" (*Austin* 134). And similar to the old prospector, Austin actually relished the gambles in life, acted on her instinct, and sustained as much drama in her losses as her gains, just as the miner "had as much luck in missing great ledges as finding small ones" (*LOLR* 77-78).

Austin also knew that the life of an opinionated, eccentric writer carries criticism and loneliness, but she could well be speaking about herself when she says that the life the Pocket Hunter chooses is "an excellent way if you had the constitution for it" (70). The old prospector might be included in Graulich's claim that the subject matter of some of her earliest stories "symbolically reflects Austin's feelings about her journey towards becoming an artist" in dealing with characters who seek the path to a precious treasure (10). And like the Pocket Hunter, Austin perceived herself as belonging to the desert in spirit. Upon finally striking the ten-thousand-dollar mine, the prospector decides to go to

London to spend his riches, but the narrator is not surprised to see him resurface in the desert. Stineman says that Austin decided at a point that by moving to New York, she could both effectively argue the importance of the West and negotiate better terms for her books (*Maverick* 119). Yet she returned home to the Southwest, saying that in New York she experienced boredom, missing the desert's "freshness" (*EH* 330 349). Pryse makes a valid point when she suggests that the statement may be referring both to the old miner and Austin when the narrator says, " 'No man can be stronger than his destiny' " (qtd. in xxiv).

Austin paints the Pocket Hunter as a man content to live a Spartan existence: his possessions are carried about with him on his burros. While his undemanding and cheerful countenance grants the Pocket Hunter the narrator's friendship, he lacks the understanding of his proper role in regard to the land that Austin's heroes possess. His relationship to nature is that of an observer, not a participant. Work says that the miner "seems a sort of tragic example of a person with the impulse for the simple life and the ability to live it, but without the awareness of the larger Impulse behind the life of the land" ("Moral" 44). But because he realizes that the desert is "a big mysterious land, a lonely, inhospitable land, beautiful, terrible," and attempts to live within it, on its terms, Austin treats him indifferently, as nature does, "as a gopher or a badger" (*LOLR* 68).

While Austin uses the natural world as a representation for man's choices in *The Land of Little Rain*, she transforms her style into wholly fleshed-out short stories in *Lost Borders* that illustrate how man learns to abide with the land, and with other humans; the miners represent one of her most carefully wrought benchmarks. In the three stories,

Austin displays man's actions on the spectrum of motives stretching from economically motivated endeavors to morally inspired choices. The author's attitudes about man's crude attempts to command the land in dreams of sudden wealth are reflected in a sardonic tone of the narrator toward their actions. She characterizes man as a creature intent on refusing blame for destruction of lives and the land in "The Hoodoo of the Minietta"; as a betrayer who neglects his family to pursue the selfish dream of gold in "The Return of Mr. Wills"; and as a desert dweller who accepts the desert's terms, but never fully comprehends its ethereal power in "The Pocket Hunter." In examining the lives and actions of the miners, Austin reflects nature's dramatic effects on humans, and illustrates how characters' outward actions often bring to the surface their inner fortitude and frailties.

CHAPTER III

Ministers

Mary Austin's spiritual dogma is highly abstract and personalized--and also left her little patience with humanity. Franklin Walker quotes an acquaintance describing her as " 'not very much in love with civilization, preferring the desert with its ever changing beauty, and the grave, thoughtful brown people who inhabit it' " (194). Because her quest for a spiritual union with the land intensified over her lifetime, along with her association with the indigenous cultures of the region, American institutions often did not fit into the rhythms and feelings she defended. And with what Wynn calls her "predisposition toward John Muir's deep sense of God in nature," she tended to avoid man's insistence on circumscribing the moral direction for others to follow (*Critical* 5).

Austin's writings, nevertheless, reveal the early influence of her Protestant teachings, especially because of her mother's undying devotion to its tenets. Austin always hoped in vain to find a common thread in which to lessen the psychological distance between her mother, Susie Hunter, and herself. Hunter decided early that her daughter should choose Divinity students as male companions and, according to Austin, conspicuously made "things pleasant for them" when they came to visit. "Like many good Christian mothers, next to having a preacher for a son, she rated having a preacher for a son-in-law" (*EH* 172). While Austin attended a small Presbyterian college in the 1880s, one of the Divinity students decided that she fulfilled the "requirements of what a preacher's wife should be" and that they would become engaged. Rather than confessing

that "she'd rather be dead than married to him," she vocally expressed her opposition to the doctrine of Infant Damnation and received a letter in a matter of days in which he revoked his offer. She comments in her autobiography that she wondered about his reaction when a few years later the church rescinded the doctrine (*EH* 172-173).

Conversely, Susie Hunter never thought of questioning any doctrine of her church; her life in Illinois centered on the Methodist church and the temperance league of which she was a member. Pearce says that in Midwestern towns like Austin's Carlinville, Illinois, women's capacities were strictly located in household responsibilities, the management of a family, and religious obligations (*Literary America* 113). Hunter was an extrovert who enjoyed activities with people, although Austin did not comprehend the appeal (*EH* 171). In fact, Hunter's existence was so concentrated on her church and the temperance movement that her life lacked a real focus when she moved with her family to Kern County, California. The homesteading law required that settlers live on their claims for five years to receive title to their land (Lee 49), and Hunter decided that she could not allow harsh conditions and loneliness to force her family to lose its claim. But Hunter's dedication to the temperance movement caused her to be willing to destroy "the one item of profit connected with the ranch." When she discovered that the grapes being raised on her land were wine and not raisin grapes, "root and branch, out came the grapevines, and nobody thought of counting the cost" (*EH* 219).

Stineman says that Austin's opposition to Methodism reflected the increasing dissension toward control of any type in America during the late nineteenth-century (*Maverick* 17). Austin reveals her resistance to the authority in organized religion by

depicting men who use predictable approaches in attempts to minister to an unconventional group of people in the West. The narrator stresses the irony of the Westerners' unpredictable reactions to the religious leaders' attempts to dictate their behavior. The ministers appear as betrayers of their Western congregations because of their inappropriate responses to the people's unorthodox living arrangements. Often placing more emphasis on style than substance, they convey a lack of earnestness. The pastors she depicts tend to be unrealistic, dictatorial, and materialistic.

In fact, she portrays ministers as far removed from the locals in details ranging from character to apparel. In "Jimville: A Bret Harte Town," from *The Land of Little Rain*, the narrator links Mr. Fanshaw, "the gentlemanly faro dealer of those parts," with the minister in dress as well as sincerity, as the gambler goes "white-shirted and frock-coated in a community of overalls" (114). She also associates the minister in character with the town gambler, both fawning and bereft of compelling opinion. "By his own account and the evidence of his manners he has been bred for a clergyman," the narrator says about Fanshaw, "and he certainly has gifts for the part. You find him always in possession of your point of view, and with an evident though not obtrusive desire to stand well with you" (114).

In *Earth Horizon*, Austin describes Bill Withrow, Lone Pine's "one professional gambler" in a parallel manner to the narrator's characterization of Mr. Fanshaw by reporting that Withrow describes himself as previously having grown up in Michigan "to the calling of a minister." The author has no trouble believing his claim, testifying, "He had all the traits of one: the need of public approbation; the need of talking" (237).

Jimville's minister, as the narrator describes him, had previously relied on the power of ingratiation for his manipulation of the behavior of Eastern parishioners. The inhabitants of Jimville, however, comments the narrator, "see behavior as history and judge it by facts, untroubled by invention and the dramatic sense" (*LOLR* 115).

Austin describes a community in "Jimville," says Wynn, that "evolved" as "a natural response to a natural situation" and is not scorned because of its rawness (*Critical* 7). In fact, the narrator attests that the frame of mind necessary to understand the town includes the ability to "slough off and swallow your acquired prejudices as a lizard does his skin" (*LOLR* 113). Assuming a witty tone, she describes the transformation of the Silver Dollar saloon into a meeting room in which the community holds dances, town meetings, the church fair, and "the kinetoscope exhibition of the Passion Play" (116). The church fair is fashioned to support the circuit rider who "preached to the few that would hear, and buried us all in turn" (116-117).

The circuit rider is the traveling parson who represents Jimville's respectability. He is also an example of Austin's negligible religious pioneer. But because he is of a denomination that considers dancing among the ultimate sins, the saloon takes no chances on insulting his beliefs, and as soon as he presides over the church fair, collects the receipts, and rides away, the congregation discreetly marches around to the back of the saloon to begin the dance. The narrator describes the humor of the situation with particular savor; Austin's Methodist upbringing had strictly prohibited dancing *(EH* 119-120).

In the *Lost Borders* story, "The Return of Mr. Wills," the narrator speculates on Mr. Wills's reasons for joining the Eastern church in his native part of the country. She says that his main reason for belonging was not to enhance any aspect of his own life, but to attempt to impress his fellow man by his air of "moral impeccability" (54). The tactic is quickly discarded in his new western home, Maverick, where church membership is considered a "weakness," but one that could be overlooked by the residents providing that the subject is simply not discussed (55). The narrator's derisive tone towards Wills's actions symbolizes Austin's censure of the tactic of joining a church merely to convince others of one's high standards. Fink points out Austin's consideration for religion's practical side by stating that she never sanctioned spiritual convictions that did not grant genuine solutions to human obstacles (142).

In *Earth Horizon*, Austin comments on the "mephitic vapors of hypocrisy" by saying that the most intolerable aspect of the "Methodist morality" she had grown up around was that it emphasized "not what the preacher thought, nor what God thought even; the appallingly terrible thing was that you lived your religious life in the judgement of the congregation" (119). Austin portrays Mrs. Wills as a woman who, because of her background in the Eastern church, will eventually acquiesce to her husband and the will of the congregation. She takes back a husband who spent three years of "fruitless trudges among the unmindful ranges," solely because the church condones divorce only if there is an incident with another woman (*LB* 63). The church places a hand of comfort on the shoulder of Mrs. Wills, but only after she concedes to its dictates. Perhaps Austin used her remembrances of her mother's strict devotion to church precepts to characterize Mrs.

Wills. Complaining about the exposed atmosphere of her Protestant background, she describes it by saying that the entire group of people with whom one had grown up, socialized, and conducted business would be "tattling" to each other (*EH* 119). The narrator comments in *The Land of Little Rain*, "We breed in an environment of asphalt pavements a body of people whose creeds are chiefly restrictions against other people's way of life" (279-280).

The minister in "The Return of Mr. Wills" uses his knowledge of Eastern congregations to impose his idea of religious selflessness on women, not men. The narrator insinuates the minister's ineffectualness by stating that his status of being "newly from the East" prevents him from understanding the wilderness's seduction on a man and not realizing that the desert is "to be dealt with as a woman and a wanton; he was thinking of it as a place on the map" (*LB* 63). In a tone suggesting a gesture devoid of any comfort or moral support, the narrator reports the minister's call, and his visit occurs only after Mr. Wills returns from the desert. Austin inserts one of her revealing comments about the church's demand for selflessness and the parson's inflexibility when the narrator stresses that although he fails to help Mrs. Wills in her dilemma, the minister's misunderstanding "did not prevent him from commanding her behavior." The clergyman does not display the sensitivity to notice that since Mr. Wills returned to his family, a familiar sense of dejection has returned and lays "like a wasting sickness on the home" (63).

A similarly unaware clergyman in "The Fakir," from *Lost Borders,* makes a trip from his seminary near Oakland for what appears to be a revival of the townspeople. The

Reverend William Calvin Gains, with the pretense of a proper city minister, also misunderstands the congregation's spiritual interests. "Though the desert has had a reputation in times past for the making of religious leaders," the narrator insists, "it is not field for converts" (133-134). The narrator in several Austin stories contrasts spiritual differences in churches back East with Western congregations, intimating that the desert churches had accepted a mystical creed, as had Austin.

"The Bandit's Prayer," taken from *One Smoke Stories,* is a humorous example of Austin's appraisal of money-distracted religious leaders. The account of how Pedro de Urdemanas outsmarts Padre Elegius proves to be a favorite of the shepherds at Tres Piedras. Pedro is the notorious personality who was "kicked out of Hell and had come to New Mexico," and to satisfy materialistic lady friends, he decides to augment his income by imaginative poaching (*OSS* 138-139). After a carefully crafted attempt at horse-thievery goes shamefully awry at the hands of a canny horse-breeder, Pedro and his band decide to prey on a more reliable victim. Pedro learns that after Padre Elegius's yearly blessing of the shearing, he plans to return to his church with the shepherds' donations; the robber also knows that the wealthy horse-trader will reimburse anyone who has "suffered a felony" on his estates and therefore does not consider himself stealing directly from the church (139-145).

After he hears confessions and accepts offerings, the Padre begins his trip back to his parish on horseback, carrying the black money-pouch filled with three hundred pesos. Pedro and his partners ride up on either side of the priest and question him about the sermon he delivered to the shepherds. Pedro expresses his amazement at the Padre's

comments that "God has all gifts in His hand," and if a man is lacking, he need only ask with faith and he will receive. "Even though it were that filthy necessity money?" Pedro asks (*OSS* 145-146). The bandit expresses confusion that, after he prays for money, he still has the same amount of cash he had before he sent up the prayer and holds out his hand with the two pesos in it to show the Padre his poverty; he then asks the priest how much money he currently possesses. Knowing he is allowed to keep his expense money for the trip, the Padre says that he has five pesos, considering the other two hundred ninety-five in his bag as the church's property.

"Now we know where we stand," said Pedro. "Let us pray, Padre" (147). After the priest leads them in prayer, they arise from their knees and Pedro and his comrades open their palms to see how generous God has been. Upon revealing the same amount as they had before, the bandits become curious to discover how much money the priest has after his fervent prayer. Reluctant to show them all the money in the "precious black bag strapped to his girdle," the priest hesitates and Pedro takes the pouch and beholds the riches inside (145). The bandit exclaims that with the Padre so much in favor with God and because of his ease in praying five pesos into three hundred, he and his band would take the money "for our necessities" (147). The priest's insulation is satirized more than the bandits' crudeness; the anticipation of losing the "property of the church" paralyzes him with fear, indicating his knowledge of its importance and of his fate for failing to return with it in hand (147). The eagerness of the shepherds to laugh at the priest demonstrates their lack of deference to him.

Austin, however, portrays instances of basic, but deep-seated faith in the simple souls of little wealth. In "La Visita," also from *One Smoke Stories*, the narrator relates how the Archangel Michael visits New Mexico. The angel appears to the Archbishop who, cleaning his eyeglasses, declares that he is getting old and vows to get a new pair of spectacles. Michael's only recognition comes from children and a poor shepherd who falls on his knees and asks the angel to bless him. Those professing to be religious leaders exhibit the least faith; their actions cast them as Austin's symbols of organized religion's increasing alienation from spirituality.

In another depiction of the unpretentious faith of the indigenous "folk," the narrator in *The Land of Little Rain* describes the little Spanish California town of El Pueblo de Las Uvas, or Town of the Grape Vines, as a constituency whose reason for going to church is "for pure worship and to entreat their God" (280). Praising her ideal vision of a community, the narrator says: "Sometimes the speech of simple folk hints at truth the understanding does not reach" (279). Her final cautionary words in *The Land of Little Rain* ring with overtones of admonition when she challenges readers who are preoccupied with their own significance in life's great plan to "come away . . . to the kindliness, earthiness, ease of El Pueblo de Las Uvas" (*LOLR* 281).

In "The Secret of the Holy Places," from *The Trail Book*, Austin combines historical fact with frontier myth to depict a religious leader who falters in his understanding of the strong spiritual culture of the indigenous people that he attempts to rescue from sin. In Graulich's introduction to the story, she says that, like the book itself, the story illustrates Austin's attentiveness to the reality that the annals of the West did not

originate with "white mountain men and pioneers" (161). Austin uses the historical setting of the story to expose injustice to the native people of the region by casting Father Letrado as the dictatorial priest who seeks to terminate the Native American Zuni religion in New Mexico.

The priest believes that his religious and moral superiority endows him with authority to compel the Zunis to accept his religion. In making no effort to understand the Zuni beliefs, Letrado presumes that the culture is inferior and must give way to Christian beliefs. The priest constructs the first church in Santa Fe and, in doing so, attempts to convert the strong-minded Zuni tribe to the ways of his religion. The Zunis initially welcome the priest's ways of convincing the gods to side with them, but soon realize that Letrado's intention is to replace their religion with his own.

Father Letrado demands that the Zunis attend his services and demonstrate their devotion to him by bowing and kissing his robe. He also decides that they should cease to engage in their own prayers, customs or spiritual dances. Because they believe their own prayers to be as pure as any, they rebel against the priest's demands. In attempting to force the Zunis to renounce their ways of life, the priest undermines his initial hopes for religious unity in the area.

In an uncommonly shocking demand, and one that illustrates his materialism, the priest insists that the Zunis reveal their closely-held secret of the "sacred places" where "the gold is mixed with the earth" (Graulich 164). Only one of the men knows the secret when Father Letrado builds his chapel in the community: Ho-tai, the "Two-Hearted," so called because he is half-white (164). Torn between his love for his Native American wife

and the teachings of Father Letrado's religion, with which he has previously been familiar, his heart truly is split between two rivals. He is baptized, and the priest soon begins to insist that the young man relinquish the Zuni religion completely.

Father Letrado goes on a strict campaign against the traditional "Rain Dance" in a desperate act designed to frighten the Zunis into relinquishing their faith, calling it "witchcraft and sorcery," accusations that mean death to the Zunis (168). Accompanied by Spanish soldiers, the priest boldly stops the dance and attempts to destroy the holy places, naively believing he could thus eradicate the people's religion. Letrado's attack on the shrines illustrates the irony that the violence is precipitated on the Zunis in the name of the church. When he hears the hushed drumbeats in the village, however, he realizes that he has failed in forcing an end to their practices.

Ho-tai is given the honor of being made keeper of the secret of the "Holy Places of the Sun" by the tribal leaders; they hope that their trust will instill in him a greater sense of loyalty to the Zunis. Still torn between the two religions, Hoi-tai is one of the few loyal worshipers to attend mass the next Sunday, causing the priest to go out into the plaza to rebuke the people for their disobedience. He is met in the square by a group of the "Priests of the Rain" with their bows pointing at him. Realizing that he will be unable to escape their retribution, he kneels with his crucifix over his heart and anticipates their assaults of arrows. Because Hoi-tai has read the religious books of Padre Letrado, he fears that the Zunis will be condemned for the priest's death by his god.

When Spanish soldiers come to the village to administer justice for the Padre's killing, they learn that a half-breed had been one of the leaders of the mob and that he had

also scalped another priest who was traveling in the area. Because Hoi-tai knows that the soldiers require a life for a life, he confesses to the killing, even though he had no part in it. He hopes that his admission will ensure that his people escape the wrath of the Padre's god. The priest's dictatorial treatment of the native people and disrespect for their devotion to their strong spiritual traditions cause resentment that escalates to bitterness and slaughter. In the midst of the turmoil arises a Christ figure, Ho-tai, who loves his people more than himself or any pious rituals and absolves them by giving his life for theirs.

Just as she reveals in "The Secret of the Holy Places," Austin was constantly sensitive to and vocal about the mistreatment of indigenous dwellers in her Southwestern places of residence. Willa Cather traveled to Santa Fe while Austin lived there and noticed a bronze statue of Bishop Jean Lamy in front of St. Francis Cathedral. According to Frederick Turner, Cather became so interested in the face of the priest that he became the inspiration for *Death Comes for the Archbishop,* which she wrote in 1925 (140). Her portrayal of the priest would later become an irritation to Austin who, as Turner reports, was the first to contend that the priest did not deserve the hero-status Cather afforded him in the book because of his negligence of the Indian and Hispanic cultures of the area. Austin further considered the symbol of the insult to be St. Francis Cathedral, which Turner describes as "a French Romanesque structure utterly out of character with its setting," the glorification of which Austin perceived as an intimidating affront to native New Mexicans (152).

In *Earth Horizon,* Austin describes reasons for her resentment of Cather's choice of subject matter in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*: "I was very much distressed to find that she had given her allegiance to the French blood of the Archbishop; she had sympathized with his desire to build a French Cathedral in a Spanish town" (359). Although Cather may have written part of the book in Austin's Santa Fe house, one of Cather's biographers reports that Cather denied writing any part of it there. An autographed copy of the book, however, was among those in Austin's library. The following, states Pearce, was the inscription by Cather:

> " For Mary Austin, in whose lovely study I wrote the last two chapters of this book. She will be my sternest critic--and she has the right to be. I will always take a calling-down from my betters." (qtd. in *Literary* 204-205)

In her autobiography, Austin reveals that eventually she participated in a project connected with the St. Francis Cathedral, although on her own terms. She says: "I have become involved in a plan to build a chapel contiguous to Bishop Lamy's Cathedral, for the housing of . . . some of the . . . historic remainders of the really creative period of Spanish Colonial Art" (*EH* 367). Again, she had discovered a way to blend the indigenous with the contemporary.

Austin says in her autobiography that she hardly accepted the Methodist doctrine of Salvation; she never really considered herself lost--simply out of touch. She joined the church at an early age in an effort to belong. Arthur E. Dubois insists that her intense desire to be accepted by others was the most potent motivating force throughout her life, although her actions often intimated differently (237). Recalling her experiences in the

church, she says that " ' belief ' was always so thin a shell to the spiritual urge" that she had no problem casting it off (*EH* 117). Her tendency to connect God with the spectacle of nature, she says, contrasted with notions she gathered from her grandfather's readings of the Bible and her memorized prayers. She often associated the word "God" with the mystical occurrence under the walnut tree as a child (Church 72).

Austin recalls finding true spiritual liberation when she experienced her first California springtime. She knew that the "spiritual drought," her commitment to organized religion, had been replaced by a dramatic attraction to God-in-nature *(EH* 198). The ethereal reverence for nature would later permeate her writing. Walker says that "as a whole her theme illustrates the old Spanish proverb: 'The lands of the sun expand the soul' " (197). In *Lost Borders*, the narrator's comments on spirituality and institutional religion define Austin's attitude: "Great souls that go into the desert come out mystics--saints and prophets--declaring unutterable things: Buddha, Mahomet, and the Galilean, convinced of the casual nature of human relations, because the desert itself has no use for the formal side of man's affairs" (50).

Austin attempted to see life consistently and became troubled by what she perceived to be the contradictions of religious dogma. Knowing that she always held specific, clear-cut beliefs, she expected others to do likewise. The ministers Austin portrays, while professing to live in the realms of the selfless, ideological world of the spirit, are examples of those who survive by commanding others' behavior to suit their designs. Using the same techniques on their parishioners in the West that had proven successful with Eastern congregations, they are merely treating human souls

interchangeably in order to achieve professional success. They betray the people and themselves, and their presence is out of harmony with the land.

CHAPTER IV

Hunters

Austin embraces the idea of the individual in nature, insisting upon the importance of becoming a dweller to enlarge one's understanding of the region. Speaking about Austin's feelings about the desert, Norwood says, "For her, this place was (for the moment at least) safe from the development which was sweeping the country" (39). But her vision was altered by the reality of oncoming settlement and commercial development. The white man's treatment of Native Americans and of the land assumes the perspective of despair in certain Austin writings about our past and future, with overtones of destruction and shame.

In a subtle style, Austin often links the aspects and interests peculiar to the Southwest region with those of the country as a whole. Her depiction of the abuse that Native Americans suffered leads toward warnings of exploitation of the land in total. Norwood points out that Austin's colleagues sought conservation to grant an external potency and rejuvenation to the industrial sphere, whereas "Austin's concern with the wilderness life was that of one living in it, not visiting" (39).

Therefore, Austin binds the lives of creatures and man in the region in an attempt to illustrate how the homogeneous existence of diverse peoples and nature may be emulated to create a national culture. Austin represents man's response to his inherent duty as steward of the land in assorted characterizations. She uncovers patterns of behavior by observing successful survivors--coyotes, badgers, Paiute American Indians--to

convey lessons in subsisting and in protecting the land. By recording how animals of the region regulate their natural hunting and feeding designs to conform to shifting requirements, she underscores adjustment to the environment. Rather than being simply fact or opinion, the necessary unity of man and nature equated to a personal understanding to Austin, one that the indigenous American had always known. In her examination of the way in which both native man and animals behave in their environment, she drew from the knowledge she accumulated by absorbing the spirit of the life around her.

Ecological principles helped form Austin's concept of art. The depiction of habits of the wild envelops her desert writings, especially *The Land of Little Rain*, with ingenious vitality and a graphic sense of place and order. As she reports on the deportment of "fifty-seven buzzards, one on each of fifty-seven fence posts at the rancho El Tejon," she implies the requisite for calm awareness and patience in observation by stating that "after three hours they had only clapped their wings, or exchanged posts" (*LOLR* 47). Austin believed that the careful observation of animals in their environment helps to consider man's position in his physical surroundings.

She also discusses "the economy of nature" in a chapter entitled "The Scavengers," by noting that "the cunningest hunter is hunted in turn, and what he leaves of his kill is meat for some other" (*LOLR* 60). Therefore, Austin recognizes the crucial necessity of the efficient use of economic resources for survival. And not surprisingly, the only desert creature whose behavior she castigates is that "great blunderer," man. Austin often points to humans as the wasteful creatures in the desert. "There is no scavenger that eats tin cans," she bewails, "and no wild thing leaves a like disfigurement on the forest

floor" (60). Her references to the economic aspects of nature reveal her practical sense about man's predicament regarding survival and waste.

Vernon Young describes Austin's intention to blend her nature lore with the life of man when he says that she "never failed to socialize her emotions" (31). Austin's motives in stressing nature's economy partially exist in her desire to bring a sense of fullness to the story of the wilderness she saw unfolding as she sat out among the mesas, but she also guides the narrative in *The Land of Little Rain* so that her ultimate goal, her delineation of prophesy for a new culture, is supported. Austin clarifies her attitude toward the improvident homesteader who not only seeks to annihilate the last creature of its kind in the area, but also breaks the law to kill a protected animal in "The Last Antelope." The narrator links him as an unrelenting predator with the shepherd's nemesis, the coyote, on which she confers adjectives such as "slinking, sly-footed, and evil-eyed" (*OSS* 274). Motivated by mastery rather than survival, the homesteader rationalizes that the coyotes will eventually kill the antelope, saying: "Better that he falls to me" (279).

A mystique grew up around the white hunter-trapper figure in America; the resulting images influenced American thought and among other things prepared the way for the most lasting of American mythic figures, the cowboy. Austin, however, reverses the image of the American mythological white hunter to symbolize land ravager, and the indigenous American as symbol of heroic communicator with nature. Robert Gish points out that Austin's study in Native Americans' societal and geographic associations reflects the " 'histories of 'place' " to which they vitally contributed (596). And in distinguishing between the white and indigenous hunters' actions, Austin also inverts the historical

frontier myth of the pioneer representing honor and bravery and the American Indian embodying savagery by linking guardianship of the land to attributes of conservation. In this way, Austin creates in the Native American a unique western hero, using his spiritual feelings for nature to justify his economic use of the land's resources. In effect the white hunter becomes Austin's villain, with no real regard for the future of the land.

Greenhow, in "Pan and the Pot-Hunter" from *One Smoke Stories,* is an example of the self-absorbed opportunist: he is "a pot-hunter, . . . out for what he can get, and regards game laws as an interference with the healthful interaction of competition" (250). Indiscriminately killing small deer with a repeating gun, he loads them onto a pack on his mule and carries them into town. And as they flock by the drinking places in the early morning, he shoots "sleek and slaty blue" quail where he can "bag two score at a shot," fouls the waters near his camp with food waste, and because he neglects to douse his fires, burns away whole hillsides where the deer once fed (250-252).

In time, however, because the increasingly strict game laws that were "framed in the interests of city sportsmen" have made pot-hunting unprofitable, Greenhow relinquishes his trade altogether and becomes a settler (252). He discovers, after meeting the other residents, that one family has a daughter to whom he enjoys divulging his dreams of building a home on the land. While he dutifully expands the meadow and prepares ground for a garden, he never considers that his former transgressions against the land might be revisited. But when the tiny shoots on his vines begin to appear and his orchard to grow, "the watchful guardians of the Wild" send a seven-point buck to bite the tips from the sprouts in a spirited romp of the garden (255).

But "this was merely the opening of the game," because if any tender buds remained after the deer made his rounds, the quail would come in flocks and finish eating (*OSS* 255). While Greenhow vengefully spends his days stalking the buck, rabbits burrow under the fence to eat the bark from his newly-planted trees. The local game warden begins to notice suspiciously that Greenhow had killed a great many deer that season; however, the hunter never destroys his antagonist, the seven-point buck. As the battle between man and nature rages on, a peculiar transfiguration befalls Greenhow: "Such a change as marks the point at which a man turns from being hunter to become the hunted" (259-260). As time passes, he acquires the "shifty, sidling gait of the meaner sorts of preying creatures" and subsequently loses interest in the appearance of his home and even in the settler's daughter (261). Thence Austin suggests a reversal of the frontier myth of white man as victor over the wild, making him instead a captive of it. She sends a similar symbolic warning to man on the possibilities that await if he mistreats the land as he has mishandled situations with Native Americans. The narrator takes particular delight in the earth's justice that has been served to Greenhow, verifying that nature proved Austin's theme: "In the long run, the land wins" ("Regional" 474).

Austin makes subtle references in the story to Greek civilization's efforts in forging a land-harmonious civilization and in celebrating nature in art. The sights and sounds of nature in "Pan and the Pot-Hunter"--the delicate flowers and leaves bending in the wind beside the "slow deep chuckle of the water"--introduce comments made by the narrator that Greenhow should have known that the "chuckle" was the laughing of the god Pan "in the woods under Parnassus," although such talk " was Greek to the pot-hunter" (253).

Austin says in *The Land of Journey's Ending* that power centers of the ancient world, such as Greece, assimilated to their natural surrounding from their beginnings (439). As she describes her initial impressions of California in *Earth Horizon,* she recalls her desire to be alone to drink in the experience of nature, "this insistent pang for which the wise Greeks had the clearest name concepts . . . fauns, satyrs, the ultimate Pan" (187).

The pot-hunter, because of his transgressions, is consumed by the immense power of nature. He violates its "natural economy" by his gluttonous desire to possess more of its abundance and therefore faces its limitless resources of wrath, which ruins his dreams and his Western existence. As the narrator wryly perceives, "But if Greenhow had only known a little more about the Greeks, it might have turned out differently" (*OSS* 264). Although the pot-hunter balances the cost to nature against the gain to himself in attempting to control nature's resources, he never includes the factor of nature's army of living soldiers.

The indigenous American's ability to establish an ethereal union with the land captured Austin's imagination; she concluded that his creative reaction to nature made his life both meaningful and creative. Young says that Austin documented what was for her a plan for the realization of man's destiny on earth, or for an aversion of his most appalling mistakes (31). In highlighting traits such as kinship to the land, Austin endows the Native American with previously unlinked qualities such as sensitivity and honor. Lydia Maria Child similarly praises the Native American's "noble" attributes in her essay "An Appeal for the Indians" (1868): "He is the very embodiment of courage . . . . Civilization has driven him away from the home he loved; it has often tortured and killed him; but it could

never make him a slave" (219).

Portraying the native dwellers' adherence to the rhythms of daily life in "Pan and the Pot-Hunter," the narrator speculates on ways that Greenhow could have avoided his fate by using the conditioning power of nature. She notes that the American Indians in the area would have given him wiser advice: "notable hunters who never shot swimming deer, nor does with fawn, nor any game unaware; who prayed permission of the wild before they went into it to hunt" (*OSS* 251). Austin also bristles at the idea of the white man's condescending reaction, both to the practices of the indigenous dweller, and perhaps to her own lifelong focus on lessons to be learned from studying their customs. The narrator uses a sarcastic tone in explaining that Greenhow would not have been expected to heed the advice because he was a businessman and "thought aboriginals improvident" (251). Austin theorized that if modern man harmonized with nature more fully as in the manner of the American Indian, he might become more keenly aware of its creative force.

James Ruppert says that in Austin's view of the revitalizing unity of the land and its inhabitants, she "never excluded such practical and basic levels of interpenetration as food and water, but her main concern was with mystical and spiritual levels" (377). Her inclusion of the "basic levels" encompassed attention to the Native American's care for nature in the quest for subsistence. The indigenous hunter believed that by becoming one with the life force he believed to be pantheistically present, he could influence nature and thus enjoy better hunting. Austin says in *The American Rhythm* that throughout the history of man "hunting was still the perpetual sport, and the earliest agriculture was the occasion for the earliest form of what we now know as psychological drama" (25).

Austin presents "Instruction to the Young," also from *One Smoke Stories*, as a monologue of advice from an American Indian father to his son. His attempt to become united with the spiritual force includes a peculiar parallelism and respect for creatures. "My son, despise not your brothers of the wilderness," the leader advises the young hunter, "for they have power beyond that of men. More mysterious than men, they are nearer to the Great Mystery" (90). The Native American hunter's sense of awe and respect for animals gives him pause before engaging in the kind of heedless butchery in which the pot-hunter partakes.

Austin attempted in her writing to rouse her readers to the realization that man faced the possibility of surrendering the most essential of life's bonds--those linking him to the land. She states that if a culture does not efficiently adapt itself, nature will destroy it and provide for other tribes ("Regional" 475). Austin suggests that an estranged relationship with nature will result in an increasing sense of misunderstanding of man's common response to the environment. Just as the settler's cabin in "The Last Antelope" stands on the remotest edge of settlement, Greenhow's shack is set apart, perhaps suggesting a link between increasing civilization and the neglect of nature. Eventually Greenhow, the embodiment of shameless environmental abuse, relinquishes his pot-hunting profession to join the other settlers who abide "on the cutting age of civilization" (*OSS* 252-253).

Within the Native American's unspoiled world, the interdependence between animal and man is a primary factor in survival. Thus the wise father discloses his insight in coexisting in the wilderness when he commands his son with the following words in

"Instruction to the Young": "When it is necessary to make use of your brothers of the wilderness for food, offer smoke to them and make the proper prayers" (*OSS* 91-92). The examination of the Native Americans' attitudes toward living things is also a character study of the culture as a whole. As he reveals respect and compassion for the animals, the native dweller also renders his own spiritual values to the animals. "Thus the Master of Life has ordained it. He said to the deer, that the children may be fed, assume the form of the deer. Take on life and lay it down again. Let there be peace between our spirit and their spirits" (92). By accentuating their sacrificial traits, the father teaches his son to regard the deer in mystical terms. In contrast with the pot-hunter who casually kills for his own selfish gain, the counsel of the Native American is: "When you pass by a wolf den where there are cubs, make a good sign to it and leave it undisturbed" (91).

In fact, the Native American's characteristic feeling of kinship with animals is illustrated when the leader humanizes the wolf: "The wolf is a person of tribe; he runs in the pack and gives heed to his leader. He is a brother of men and has speech with him . . ." (91). The father suggests an abiding union between man and animal. The idea of endowing animals with human traits--coveted attributes, in fact--causes the native hunter to consider that animals have thoughts, thereby refuting the white man's claim that they are merely creatures of instinct. "Great is the buffalo in wisdom and power; he gives life to the tribes. The bear also is cunning and difficult to kill" (90). Coupled with the animal's virtue is his contribution to his breed, just as each member of the native tribe possesses unique talents that help him strengthen the success of the group. "The wild geese have wisdom; they are led by chiefs, they foretell the weather" (90). By such

convictions, the indigenous dweller maintains his conviction that man and animals are elements on a continuum of consciousness in a boundless system of nature.

As well as imparting a sense of hope that man may yet possess a benevolence that can be extended to the natural world, Austin's writings about Native Americans also extol the childlike way of seeing that Austin also discovered early in herself and vowed never to relinquish. In fact, Austin strove throughout her career to emulate this creative response to nature that she admired in native art. In *The American Rhythm* Austin says that although the white man sees as well as the Indian, what the latter perceives "registers through every sense" and sees "infinitely more" (29). Stineman says that Austin creates an "Edenic mood" in the chapter of *The Land of Little Rain* entitled "Shoshone Land," describing the distant world of the Native American in terms so pristine and refreshing that readers gladly enter into it (*Maverick* 72). One passage particularly illuminates Stineman's point in its vibrant images:

> When the rain is over and gone they are stirred by the
> instinct of those that journeyed eastward from Eden,
> and go up each with his mate and young brood, like birds to
> old nesting places. The beginning of spring in Shoshone Land--
> oh the soft wonder of it!--is a mistiness as of incense
> smoke, a veil of greenness over the whitish stubby shrubs, a web of
> color on the silver sanded soil. (*LOLR* 90)

Austin suggests that because the Native American is adept at seeing with clear eyes the wonder of the beginning of spring, he also possesses that psychological wholeness needed to become truly one with nature. In this way, Austin is able to capture and depict the child's world that mesmerized her under the walnut tree. She is also able to suggest the sphere that belonged to the Shoshones alone, who were free to "live like their

trees, with great spaces between," and in groups of various sizes that they were free to choose (*LOLR* 88). The indigenous dwellers, unlike visitors in the land, had passed the millennia necessary in which to develop a profound perception of place. And unlike Greenhow, wanting to possess and control nature but also to distance himself psychologically from it, the Native American continually strives to integrate with all the natural elements. Austin embraced a social transcendentalism in which she believed that man was not created to be an individualist in the natural world, but a participant. Young says that Austin knew that she would remain neither exclusively in the "lyrical" nor the "practical" literary realms, but always "social," with the intent to enter "'the web of life'" (31).

Austin's attention to the Native American's tribal existence, including his relationship to his surroundings and wildlife, focused on the close relationship between the environment and his own soul. The indigenous hunter abides by the "economy of nature," defying waste as much as animals do, maintaining spiritual respect for the land and its creatures, and blending practical economic values with philosophic spirit to achieve a harmonious human existence.

CHAPTER V

Stagecoach Drivers

Austin wove her tales by keen observation and by drawing on the speech and behavior of those she met. Her characterization of the stagecoach driver captures his function in her life and vocation: the conveyor of information. While the author encountered many colorful characters in her California years, the drivers of the Mohave stage knew infinitely more of them, if only on a passing basis, and willingly recounted the occurrences to a young woman writer who eagerly hoisted herself up to the seat beside them for the duration of a physically brutal trip. It is not surprising, then, that Austin's narrator in "Jimville: A Bret Harte Town," contained in *The Land of Little Rain,* holds the opinion that, after engaging in stagecoach riding for any length of time, the passenger should grasp the fact that the freshest air and most absorbing conversation are found next to the driver (108).

While living in Inyo, California, Austin traveled every summer to visit her mother over "the strip of almost pure desertness which skirts the Sierras, curving west to meet the Coast Range around the southern end of the San Joaquin" (*EH* 257). Although she seized more freedom of mobility than most women of her day, society often glared in the face of some of her choices. But to Austin, like the small-time miner in *The Land of Little Rain,* "all places were equally happy as long as they were out of doors" (70). She spent hours observing the masculine types of occupations that fascinated her or listening to experiences of shepherds, miners, and often her most reliable correspondents, stagecoach

drivers.

Austin interprets her role as reporter of the driver's rough but entertaining stories. She says that she remained eager to hear the stories repeatedly and could retell each tale precisely (*EH* 258). In fact, she relates that she wove many of the sketches told to her by drivers into *Lost Borders* and *One Smoke Stories.* "Among the purveyors of story material," she insists, "stage-coach drivers bear the palm" (258). The tales have often been filtered through various other ears and mouths before the driver hears them and renders his interpretation to Austin, thus illustrating her use of gossip as a mechanism to move stories forward.

In this vein, Stineman taps into the lure of Austin's gossip by detailing a study by Patricia Spacks in which she examines the use of gossip in literary form. Spacks asks the reader to consider the type of gossip " ' that involves two people, leisure, intimate revelation and commentary, ease and confidence' " (*Maverick* 111-112). When seen this way, gossip may be translated as " ' fragments of lives transformed into story.' " Stineman agrees that Austin's stories, especially those in *Lost Borders,* fit into Spacks's delineation precisely. They are a lacework of "gossip, speculation, and concrete detail," says Stineman, involving conspiracy between reader and narrator (112). The difference in the tales the narrator acquires from the stagecoach driver is that there is a collaboration between herself and the driver, acting, in effect, as co-narrators, before the reader becomes involved.

In other words, the gossip that Austin's narrator repeats has been filtered through the attitudes and opinions of her driver, as well as her own. Austin may be commenting

on the reader's inclination to be skeptical about the content of some of her second-hand stories as well as the ethereal mystery of the desert when she declares: "Out there where the borders of conscience break down . . . almost anything might happen; does happen, in fact, though I shall have trouble making you believe it" (*LB 3).*

In Austin's rendering of the give-and-take of the desert travel experience, the discomforts of the stagecoach ride were many, but the advantages of rich story material imparted to her by the driver outweighed the inconveniences. She says in her autobiography that she experienced few modes of travel that produced the benefits for the energy expended as the Mojave stagecoach. Modern methods of transportation that the author encountered in later years, though more convenient and comfortable, did not yield as much in experience as those rocky rides on the stage. "I understand that the road is well furnished now with gas stations and hot-dog stands," she says, " and the trip can be made in a few hours without incident. Which seems on the whole a pity" (*EH* 263).

In point of fact, the inconveniences that Austin and her fellow travelers endured on the coach were sizeable. The journey could indeed be interminable, wearisome, and rugged. The ride into Jimville, the narrator says, which is "about three days from anywhere in particular," consists of a railroad trip, after which is a journey on the stagecoach that she describes being of such endless boredom that it encourages the forgetting of all previous predicaments (*LOLR* 106). Perhaps another reason that the "Jimville" narrator eagerly ascends the stage to share the driver's seat is to escape the unsavory human contents of the coach. In *Earth Horizon,* Austin says that if one did not know in advance about the fundamental choice of seats beside the driver, "the trip was

rather a horror, crowded into the stuffy interior between 'oldtimers,' liquor salesmen, mining experts, an occasional stray 'girl' from the local bawdy-house, or one of those distressed and distressfully pitiable 'lungers' of whom you had the grace only to hope that he wouldn't die on your shoulder" (257-258). The fact that Austin remembers these excursions with such humor and sense of adventure illustrates how her interval with the driver compensates for what the "Jimville" narrator recalls having made many stagecoach trips "at great pains of a poor body" (*LOLR* 106).

However many jolts borne by the passengers, the driver had inevitably experienced an infinitely higher number of these punishments. Part of the reason for the arduously rough ride the driver endures can be explained by the physical shape and the age of the stagecoaches. Because the coaches were merely remnants purchased from outmoded models throughout the West, they naturally live up to the quality of ride that the narrator recounts by adjectives such as "rocking" and "lumbering." She also dates the coaches by saying that express couriers have fired or been fired on from the tops of them (*LOLR* 106-107).

It is, therefore, not surprising to see the driver stopping to look for wires to patch a faulty rivet, and for him to express his theory that not only Jimville, but the entire surrounding countryside are clenched together by wire (*LOLR* 107). The passengers could even be called upon for their assistance on windy days; their ability to shift strategically about in their seats helps hold the swaying coach in the center of the road (107-108). And when a stage built for five passengers is loaded down with seven travelers, "four trunks, several parcels, three sacks of grain, the mail and express," its successful

arrival is a tribute to the skillful man at the helm, who concurrently retains the presence of mind to spin an entertaining story to his passenger.

In *Stagecoach West*, Ralph Moody indicates that the public habitually envisions a glamorous but untrue idea of the Western stagecoach (49). Moody says that novels and stories provide romanticized accounts of coaches reeling down steep mountain roads with horses running wildly; in truth, to say that a stage traveled ten miles an hour would be bragging (50). Therefore, the narrator's recount of the experience in *The Land of Little Rain* corroborates her self-proclaimed title as "mere recorder"; she does not romanticize the physical thrill of the journey, only the intellectual rewards gained from the ride. The gain is also in discovering first-hand the essence of the country, suggests the narrator (108-109). In fact, in later years, Austin would remember the actual view atop the stage as "a magnificent panorama" (*EH* 258). In "Jimville," the narrator uses less zeal in her descriptions; her only inspired revelation occurs when she notices the shepherd, Little Pete, feeding his flock. She informs the reader of the contrast between the inherent pastoral delicacy of the scene with the measure of violence of the area (*LOLR* 108-109).

In his expository account of the rise of the stagecoach, Captain William Banning describes the occupation of stagecoach driver as complete with the benefits and deprivations of desert life. Although there is a certain glamour in the calling of stage driver, the inordinate amount of time and attention he must devote to the employment caused him to seem married to his craft. The job became such an entire way of life for a driver that to resign from such a career produced a surrender of one's own nature, says

Banning (378). Depiction of life on the stagecoach corroborated this idea: Mark Twain's account of the stagecoach driver in *Roughing It* sustains a similarly exalted portrait of the driver as that Banning describes. Twain's description of the ride from St. Joseph, Missouri to Sacramento, California, a nineteen hundred-mile, fifteen-day journey, praises the stage company's effort at having everything under rigid control (Work, *Prose* 147). In fact, to Twain, the hierarchial system of authority in the stagecoach business is a miracle of modern, efficient transportation. He describes the layers of administration necessary to run an effective coach system, the duties required, and the type of personality that each successful employee must possess in order to be equal to the task.

But while Austin uses a narrator to convey her story, one who considers the stagecoach driver a confidante, Twain tells of his own experiences and reports on the driver's performance without interacting with him. Twain regrets that he was seldom able to converse with drivers, who exchanged positions with another man each day. In contrast, Austin's narrator climbs up to the seat beside the driver and enjoys an instant rapport. Although Twain says he became "sociable and friendly" with a few of the drivers, he conjectures that the drivers hold themselves in a loftier social stratum than that of the passengers who trust their lives in these coachmen's hands. "And besides," explains Twain, "they would have been above being familiar with such rubbish as passengers, anyhow, as a general thing" (148).

Twain demonstrates the importance of the stagecoach driver by saying that if a driver suddenly becomes ill it throws the entire system into trouble, "for the coach *must* go on"(149). Austin tells in *Earth Horizon* of an actual experience graphically illustrating

how essential the stage driver was to the transportation process in the rural Southwest. The driver on one of Austin's stagecoach trips complained of becoming sick from the Mojave water and promptly passed out. Since there were no passengers except Austin, her baby, and an English mining expert who avowed no knowledge of horses, she "strapped herself to the boot" and drove the stage to its destination, while the Englishman held her baby (261). Admitting that the stagecoach was late that day and she suffered through several days of stiff muscles, she remembers the incident in a humorous tone.

Austin also introduces the stage driver as an interesting character in his own right, someone with a personal drama to relate. In "Agua Dulce," from *Lost Borders,* Austin vividly reproduces the stagecoach journey, complete with the narrator as listener and driver as storyteller. The difference in hearing a story directly from its protagonist may be contrasted with the filtered way that one hears a story second-hand from various voices in another story from *Lost Borders,* "The Woman at the Eighteen-Mile." The narrator tells of hearing a story discussed by passengers inside a stagecoach while she is dozing; she overhears the conversation "run on and break and eddy around Dead Man's Springs, and back up in turgid pools of comment and speculation" before the trip is over (*LB* 96).

In "Agua Dulce," the narrator relates a driver's account of his experience just as he tells it, with interjections of the narrator's thoughts sporadically added for effect. The narrator sets an early tone of swift confusion, with the "Los Angeles special" almost rushing by her because of its hurry in being extremely late. The driver might not have made the effort to stop had he not recognized her as his former school teacher and spins the horses around in the road, filling the air with dust whirling in blinding clouds.

Although she removes her hat and searches for hairpins, she surrenders the control of her hair to the wind. After she settles in her seat beside the driver and they begin the journey, he confides, while staring at the Paiutes' fires around their tribal huts, an opinion that "there's some that thinks Indians ain't properly folks, but just a kind of cattle" (83). Noticing that the driver is still gazing at the fires, the narrator realizes that a story must be attached to his disheartened tone of voice.

The swiftly jarring introduction to the story contrasts with an image the narrator sustains throughout the remainder of the story: the slow-paced, stark isolation of the drive. The only sound that can break the quietness is that of the human voice. The wind becomes still, and the solitary sounds are the scraping of the wheels and clinking of the harness chains. The narrator describes the sounds of loneliness: "Out in the blackness toward Agua Dolce a coyote howled and night freshened for a sign of morning" (*LB* 92).

The driver begins his story with a confession. While he was working alone in the desert for months at a time for a mine owner, he says, "I . . . took up with an Indian woman" (84). The narrator emphasizes one of the privileges of telling a tale in the driver's seat of the stagecoach--the teller never has to face his listener; as the coach rocks by the little hearth fires of the Paiutes, the driver speaks to the desert, not his passenger. An unusual aspect of the story is the way in which the narrator reproduces the speech pattern of the driver, which is halting and hesitant with emotion. Austin contrasts the slow, stumbling admissions of the driver with the quick mind of the narrator, who is constantly thinking ahead of the teller to predict outcomes.

The entire narrative follows the pattern of the driver's faltering, uneven dialogue mimicking the jolting, irregular stagecoach ride. While living with the young Native American woman, Catameneda, and her desert tribe, the driver comes to the disturbing realization that although their culture is different and foreign to him, the people themselves are not. "But they was friendly . . . sort of . . . when you got to know them . . . and the men talked English considerable," he said. He admits that he actually enjoyed their company, especially when they told jokes around their fires. "And when they sang their songs . . . when the fires were lit and the voices came out of the dark, and you couldn't see the dirt nor the color of their skins, you would sort of forget they wasn't your own folks" (*LB* 86).

The narrator creates and sustains a fire image suggestive of the hearth during the story, perhaps to parallel the Paiute and the white man in similar senses of home. As they look at the Paiutes' fires "all awink among the sage" the "flicker in his voice" suggests an emotional halting of speech "that lit the situation through his scanty speech like the glow of those vanished fires" (86). As the driver continues his tale, the narrator confesses to the reader that as she listens to the man, her own preconceived ending to the story crumbles and she begins to concoct another, all before the man is able to finish one of his erratic sentences. Although the narrator deduces that the man had abandoned the Native American woman, an outcome she has heard many times before, she discerns the endearing tone he uses when speaking about Catameneda and knows that "the story had come to some uncommon end that lifted it beyond the vulgar adventure of satiety and desertion" (87). Because she knows that they will be reaching "Coyote Holes" in just an

hour, the narrator's objective is to hear the end of the story before their arrival.

While the young man is working in the desert assessing mines, a prospector robs him of nearly their whole food supply. He and Catameneda begin walking over the desert to meet the young man's employer, who is due to renew their food supply in five more days. But they do not anticipate a sandstorm and are caught in its fury, staggering on through the wind and sand, attempting to conserve the small amount of water in their canteen. After a while he realizes that she must have been leading him through the storm because he recalls creeping and staggering over vast stretches, often leaning on her body and hearing the sound of her voice, but still unable to see through the blowing sand. His next recollection is the basalt wall at the bottom of "Black Mountain," meaning that they trudged through the storm the two remaining miles to the spring.

As they lie on the sand, he observes that Catameneda refuses water, even after the parching storm. He does not realize that she gave up her share of the water and her last ounce of energy to lead him to safety. "I sat up and laid her on the sand . . . . It was too much for her . . . I reckon she had a hemorrhage or something . . . there was blood on her face and sleeves like she wiped it from her mouth," the man says (*LB* 92). She had sacrificed herself for the man she loved. Though having not successfully predicted the conclusion, the narrator is satisfied that she has heard the story first-hand, from beginning to end.

The stagecoach driver in "Agua Dulce" represents a character who leaves his desert experience having learned an important lesson about the transgressions of stereotyping and about the worth of humankind. His loneliness casts him with people that

he had hitherto thought of as being less than human, only to discover that they maintain something more precious than he or his narrow society possesses. The same was true of Austin: she lived with peripheral desert characters which caused her the censure of her society, yet she praised the experiences for the rest of her life.

The stagecoach driver--another model of a storyteller--reflects the makeup of the environment through which he moves. Austin portrays him as a source of ideas for story material infused with vitality and creativity. While living in the Owens Valley, she considered herself physically and intellectually isolated, although she enjoyed her association with the local folk. She anticipated the coach ride as physical and mental escape from her constricted life. The stagecoach driver became Austin's medium of communication and freedom, providing her with information as well as changing scenery.

CHAPTER VI

Shepherds

The shepherd represents Austin's ideal desert dweller: one who willingly exists on the land's terms, thereby interfering least with the natural order. Austin drew on legends she heard from shepherds at the Tejon Ranch in California and on sights and sounds at roundups and sheepshearings to create stories such as "The Last Antelope" and "The Walking Woman" (Graulich 7-8). In Austin's quest for information, she marks shepherds as fine sources of material, as she notes in *The Flock:* "Of all out-door folk the minders of flocks are the most fruitful talkers" *(61).* Austin's opinion of the occupation contrasts sharply with that of John Muir, who once held a job as a shepherds' supervisor. He later actively supported the strict governmental regulation of sheep grazing, especially when it interfered with the national park areas. His title page of *The Mountains of California* (1894) pictures a herd with the caption "Hoofed Locusts" (Work, *Critical* 9).

But the shepherds' western experience naturally had supporters and detractors. While affording close association with the natural world, the existence of the flock tenders often lacked human contact. In two stories, both shepherds--one male and one female--are escapists of sorts. Although society attempts to punish them by ostracism, they assume the autonomy necessary to evade the constraints of societal values. Little Pete in "The Last Antelope" and the title character in "The Walking Woman" disassociate from society and thereby learn to understand their place in nature as well as important principles of the good life.

In her introduction to "The Last Antelope," Graulich suggests that although the story originally appeared in *Lost Borders,* Austin decided to republish it in *One Smoke Stories* "because she saw it as her best native folk story about the lone male in the wilderness" (202). The passage that reveals the genesis of the story is from Austin's autobiography:

> At Tejon [I] had already picked up a number of animal stories such as men seldom think of telling to women, not because they are untellable, but because they seem perhaps to belong so exclusively to the male life, such tales as 'The Last Antelope,' which could only have happened in America, and in America only in the Southwest. (*EH* 215)

Austin often used a similar setting, Graulich says, as in her early novels *The Flock* and *The Ford,* both of which deal with California sheepherding, as a reference point from which to explore "male experience in the West" (202). "The Last Antelope" also examines the economy of nature, stressing the Austin theme that physical resources, including wild animals, are not necessarily renewable. Austin characterizes the shepherd as an independent loner governed by a code of behavior tied to his own priorities in preserving the life of the wilderness and in resisting encroaching codes of conduct. Little Pete, however, unwittingly becomes nature's betrayer in the story by permitting the last antelope in the region to become friends with him, thereby allowing the animal to lose that mistrust of man that keeps it constantly guarding against predators.

Austin represents the shepherd Little Pete as a man who attempts to cling to the values of the natural world. Norwood observes that a certain type of male encounter in the wilderness especially appealed to Austin's imagination. Characters displaying the

"basic core of indifference" to social restrictions held a special appeal for the author (40). Along with the freedom the herders embrace comes a certain power over one's own destiny--the liberty to command a life unbridled by popular constraints.

In "The Last Antelope," Little Pete is Austin's idea of the true western individualist: a man unafraid to live according to his own contentment. And within the framework of the tolls and compensations of the western experience, the freedom of living a life that affords the most tranquility is hampered by a society constantly attempting to collect its price for that freedom. Austin's theme in the story is that mankind will only successfully coexist with nature on the land's terms. Although his intentions are valiant, in befriending a wild animal Little Pete unwittingly becomes what Austin calls the man who thoughtlessly tries to live within the wild--"the great blunderer" (*LOLR* 60). Capturing the animal's trust, Pete weakens its survival techniques. He trades a precious commodity of nature for the indulgence of his own humanity. Pete's action, causing the antelope to lose its fear of man, is an example of humankind familiarizing itself ignorantly with the wilderness.

The first intimations of what evolved into his devotion to the land and its creatures emerge when Little Pete arrives at Lone Pine. He plunges his axe into the solitary juniper's trunk for firewood but reconsiders his decision when he imagines his flock trudging up the windy expanse of land that contains no trees and realizes that even a solitary tree provides much needed shade. He removes the axe by chipping it out of the tree, beginning the yearly tradition of making a notch in the tree's trunk; he presently has minced seven chips. Austin links the end of the tree's ancestral line with that of the

antelope, the last representative of its breed that a protective law was passed too late to help. Because the wealth that wildlife brings to an area is ignored by the district of Little Antelope (an ironic name for an area that will lose its population of the animals), it will be poorer because of its loss. As he moves the flock toward the juniper tree, Pete notices the antelope's hoof prints in the sand nearby the solitary tree, emblematic of the organic wealth that man will destroy.

Austin's story "Lone Tree" in *One Smoke Stories* also spotlights the waste of resources, comparing the last juniper tree to an abused and neglected woman whose talents have gone ignored. After a would-be prospector completes his job at a mining camp, as a last act of resentment and defiance before he leaves, he strikes his pick into the tree, nearly pulling it from the delicate roots. When he returns to the area two years later with his pockets full of ore, he loses his way in a sandstorm. After searching for the tree in the blinding storm, he drags himself to the area of the tree and the cool spring nearby. He finds that, because he injured the tree's roots so severely with his careless actions, it has withered and died. Three years pass before his bones are found tangled among the tree's branches. Austin emphasizes the same points in both stories--the wasting of natural or human resources will bring retribution.

Austin depicts the strong emotional and physical bonds between man and animal in "The Last Antelope." Pete's strong identification with nature causes him to assume the likeness of his surroundings; in the process, he becomes aligned in spirit with the creatures around him. He humanizes the members of his flock and names them, just as he loves his dogs as he would his brothers. Although he is deeply revered by his animal companions,

society scorns him for his negligence of it. The price for his detachment includes mockery and even contemptuous speculation on his sanity; he endures the "sly laughter and tappings of foreheads" when he enters camps and shearing groups (*OSS* 271). His employer deems him a skilled and faithful worker, however, and increases his salary to display his acclaim of the herder. But on the whole, the treatment he receives from people causes him to prefer the steadfast loyalty and companionship of his animals. "Men had small respect by Little Pete, women he had no time for: the antelope was the noblest thing he had ever loved" (*OSS* 281).

The antelope buck slowly begins to trust Pete, and they develop a silent companionship, understanding each other's actions. Their friendship includes the antelope leading the flock toward the most productive grazing areas and, in turn, the shepherd allowing the buck to drink before the sheep stir up the mud in the spring. In the seven years that Little Pete climbs the hills near the spring, he and the antelope become familiar with one other's ways. The antelope buck finally trusts the flock sufficiently to lie down with it.

Pete and the antelope share a common enemy: the pack of coyotes that relentlessly conspire to hunt the animal. "Never," the narrator says, "was there any love lost between a shepherd and a coyote" (274). In an expository narrative called "Crazy as a Sheepherder" (1943), David Lavender confirms the constant irritation that a shepherd must endure when coyotes are in his area, such as the relentless "yap-yapping," breaking the night's silence; he describes their howling as "a sort of sarcastic laugh" (486). The shepherd need only worry, he adds, when they become silent, for it is then they are

plotting their attack.

Using years of knowledge of the ways of Pete and the antelope, the coyotes plot their attack. Determined to avoid yet another fruitless chase, the coyotes add an extra element of regimentation to this latest campaign. The "howlers" wait for their prey with their shrewdest plan: one coyote keeps watch, two begin the chase, two others rally to relieve their tired brothers, one guards the outlying area, and one keeps the prey in the open spaces. Austin contrasts the coyotes' swift plan of attack with the confident, graceful manner in which the antelope strays out toward the gully "with some sense of home" (*OSS*). When the buck wanders out, Little Pete hears the familiar coyotes' howl and curses them, knowing that they are plotting against the antelope again. The coyotes set out after the buck, "velvet-footed and sly even in full chase, and biding their time" (282). They keep up the chase, staying close to the buck until he hears the shepherd's voice and turns in the direction of the sound. "The friendliness of the antelope for Little Pete betrayed him" (280). The homesteader rises from the brush and fires his gun, killing both a coyote and the last antelope with a single shot.

Contending with Little Pete's castigation over the incident, the homesteader secretly fears that the shepherd might report his violation of the law in killing the protected animal to the authorities. But he also considers the day's hunting a lucky one--he slaughtered the antelope and also attained the much prized ears of the coyote, which the law did allow. Work contends that because of her knowledge of the bounty on the heads of coyotes and wolves at the time, Austin extended a fairminded representation of the animals, although readers often regarded them as repulsive ("Moral" 43). Austin does not

always hold the coyote, the "real lord of the mesa," in low regard (*LOLR* 150). After spending time watching its actions, she concludes that a coyote would rather not be associated with scavengers of the desert. She also reports seeing two buzzards, five ravens, and a coyote feeding on the same carcass, "and only the coyote seemed ashamed of the company" (*LOLR* 55).

Little Pete weeps over the loss of his friend and rationalizes that if he had not stayed in the open so long, the antelope might yet be alive. He searches by the spring for the animal's hoof-prints and dejectedly walks away, never to bring his flock by the juniper tree again. The lone tree itself does not survive much longer, for the homesteader fells it for firewood. Although Little Pete is hurt by the loss of the animal, perhaps even more dramatic is a realization that his friendship betrayed the antelope. He unintentionally plays as large a part in the demise of the buck as do the coyotes and the homesteader. But the shepherd also derives a message about man's involvement in nature: Pete "had been breathed upon by that spirit which goes before cities like an exhalation and dries up the gossamer and the dew" (*OSS* 284). Ultimately, however, he was the unlikely representative of civilization, ignorantly wasting nature's resources.

"The Walking Woman," the final story in *Lost Borders,* introduces a woman, a lone Western drifter, wandering over the great expanse of desert, accepting only sporadic respites in camps along her way. Pryse says that in choosing from the characters in *Lost Borders,* "the Walking Woman best epitomizes the desert's spirit in human flesh" (xxx). The woman, articulating her philosophy of self-awareness, disregards some of her society's tightest restrictions, and resembles Austin in her bold opinions and courage to

state them. Stineman says that the Walking Woman represents the attributes of a woman who faces the boundaries of society, and in turn unveils her most intense sense of self ("Rediscovered" 549). In all these ways, the woman embodies the traits that most appealed to Austin.

Before they meet, the narrator's mental picture of the Walking Woman is ambiguous and elusive; she forms it from the stories told to her by shepherds and cowboys who housed her in their camps. She often refers to the fact that the woman had recently been in the vicinity by using the word "passed," suggesting the elusive, mystical quality attached to her by conflicting descriptions. Piecing together bits of information, the narrator draws the composite of a woman who wanders on foot in a vast, lonely desert, being transported at times by rough teamsters who put her down in the desert, "days distant from anywhere": her choice of life implies a resistance to restrictions (*LB* 197). The mere fact that the woman is mobile implies the bending of society's mores; the narrator is mystified that she would display such independence.

The factor of space serves to underscore the notion of liberation, which is a repeating metaphor in the story. The Walking Woman reports that "the large soundness of nature" healed her of an illness (*LB* 199). Austin suggests that the woman's body and spirit are healed by the mystical influence of her surroundings. She also creates an image of the physical and emotional freedom the woman assumes that allows her to walk over a vast distance of territory. "A Walking Woman is the precise opposite of a confined woman," Faith Jaycox says, and she suggests that the woman's free movement is indicative of opposition to the limits placed on women at a time when they had recently

dressed in clothes intended to insinuate that they did not walk, but " 'glided' " (9).

The array of conflicting reports concerning the mysterious woman's history and characteristics also increases the narrator's desire to meet the woman. On the question of whether she is attractive, some that had seen her answer in the affirmative, while others testify that she is "plain to the point of deformity" (*LB* 198). Rumors fly that she has a twist to her face or a hitch to one of her shoulders, even a limp to her walk. The same type of conflicting reports governs her sanity or lack of it: "On the mere evidence of her way of life she was cracked; not quite broken, but unserviceable" (198-99). Graulich points out the relevance of the fact that Austin was aware that she had also been called "crazy" (91). Yet reports also confirm that the Walking Woman spoke with "wisdom and information," especially about the land, in which her knowledge is "as reliable as an Indian's" (*LB* 199). Descriptions of those who visited with the woman, the "muse of travel," as she walks through an area are that she never spoke about herself, only of things and events she had seen and experienced (196). Jaycox speculates that Austin had a purpose in placing this story as the last in *Lost Borders*: the Walking Woman knows the outcome of events described throughout the earlier chapters (8).

The narrator pursues the Walking Woman to penetrate mysteries concerning what such a woman looks like, whether she is indeed sane, and how she had safely wandered about in a restrictive and violent society. When the two women do finally come together, however, the Walking Woman reveals more to the narrator than the latter expects to discover, including ideas about life's priorities that reveal divergent philosophies between the women. The Walking Woman discloses to the narrator her conviction of the "three

things which if you had known you could cut out all the rest" (*LB* 201): to work equally with a man, to love him freely, and to bear children, ignoring "a proper concurrence of so many decorations" (209).

The Walking Woman is emancipated from the fear of society's rebuke, similar to the new-found freedom that Graulich says Austin connected with the West (25). Austin, like the Walking Woman, entered physical territories that were not considered safe for a woman of her day to frequent. The author depicts the lives of shepherds in detail in her books and stories ; to do so, she spent time observing the surroundings and ways of life of those who tend the flocks. Norwood says that Austin commented that her friends feared for her safety in the " 'wilds.' " Austin's concept of the word " 'safety,' " adds Norwood, implied a suppression of individual freedom (40).

The Walking Woman discovers her course to self-fulfillment when she roams into a shepherd's camp and embarks on a new life as his partner. She describes her feeling of satisfaction as she helps the shepherd save the flock during a sandstorm: "I had not known how strong I was nor how good it is to run when running is worth while" (*LB* 203). Knowing that she worked equally with the man, she relates to the narrator how she perceived a look in the shepherd's eyes that told her they were of one mind (206). Because of the intensity of the sandstorm and its potential for destroying the flock, the woman found the physical and mental stamina to work as vigorously as the man. "There were but two of us to deal with the trouble," she recounts to the narrator (202-203). The recollection of her ability to prevail over the adversity is a source of sustenance for the Walking Woman.

Jaycox says that the Working Woman's rewards of a good life rail against traditional femininity on all counts. Vigorous and equal labor was thought to deplete the physically weak female; casual sensuality without societal restrictions challenged women's presumed moral supremacy; and giving birth to a child without a legal name assaulted fundamental patriarchy (9). The narrator represents the conventional woman in the story: she defends the established societal order by questioning the Walking Woman's choices. "At least one of us is wrong," the narrator acknowledges (*LB* 209). "To work and love and to bear children. *That* sounds easy enough. But the way we live establishes so many things of much more importance," she continues (209). Stating her thoughts in this way, the narrator admits that she is willing to leave the question open for further thought.

The narrator, while expecting to learn the answers to specific questions, receives none of her answers, but receives much deeper food for thought. After meeting a woman who "had walked off all sense of society-made values," the story's teller begins to question the public's priorities (208). Although Austin leaves her fate unclear, the fact that the conventional woman is persuaded to question societal values may be the extent of the author's motive in writing the story.

Characteristic of Austin, "The Walking Woman" presents a heroine much like her creator: strong, complex, with a need for physical and spiritual freedom. According to Pryse, Austin envisioned herself in the Walking Woman (xxxiv). To Austin, self-reliance means that women must look within themselves for endurance to "run when running is worth while" (*LB* 203). Throughout her writing career, Austin grew increasingly resolved to relate the facts pertaining to her life and emotions, according to Graulich (14). By

revealing herself within her characters, Austin records a woman's translation of the American West.

As the narrator watches the Walking Woman wander away, she realizes that she has yet to discern all she wants to know about the enigmatic roamer. Remembering that some referred to her as "lame," the narrator follows the woman to a nearby spring. There she sees the woman's footprints displayed "evenly and white" (*LB* 209). "Not mad," says Pryse, "but sane; not twisted, but filled with feeling; not lame but even footed: the Walking Woman creates her own 'water trail' for Mary Austin to follow, instead, in her storytelling" (xxxiv).

Although sheepherding was an important economic activity in California during Austin's time, she principally portrays shepherds as heroes of the land who set monetary priorities aside in their devotion to the land. The protagonists in both stories possess that respectful response to the land and its creatures that endear them to Austin. By accepting isolation in the wilderness, the shepherds enjoy a quality of life that civilization can hardly equal; however, they also revoke other claims such as physical comfort, safety, and human companionship.

Little Pete and the Walking Woman relinquish ties to society and devote themselves to the wilderness, and in doing so, come to a greater understanding of life. Pete discovers that man cannot blindly interfere with nature's design without expecting to be hurt in the process, and the Walking Woman experiences an exhilarating self-realization and a unique sense of competency. Although cultural stereotypes often exclude women from interacting with the natural world, the Walking Woman breaks these and other rules

to attain her sense of freedom. Both shepherds represent Austin's dream of uniting humanity with the natural world. Little Pete reveals his oneness with nature by his deep love of the earth's resources and creatures, and the Walking Woman displays a competence and sense of liberation by discovering the meaning of self-worth.

CHAPTER VII

Indigenous Craftswomen

Austin reserves her highest honors for those who learn to incorporate the abilities she most admires within a chosen occupation--subsisting with the land on its own terms and celebrating the rewards of nature in art. Since Austin earned her living in creative endeavors, naturally she resented the misuse of women's talents and championed their accomplishments. In three of her stories, craftswomen use the land as inspiration to gain their independence; they do not seek isolation from society, but want to become equal and contributing parts of their culture. Austin deeply wished the same for herself, but because of her uncompromising independence bordering on eccentricity, she often considered herself to be on society's periphery. She comments on her interpretation of society's attitude toward the non-traditional woman in "The Coyote Spirit and the Weaving Woman," creating another representation of herself. The characterizations illustrate what Graulich says are Austin's depictions of women who have freed themselves from societal ties (25).

Because the women gain control of their destinies, as Austin herself learned to do, they command the author's attention and respect. About the dynamic women Austin portrays, Stineman says that Austin surrendered sentimentalism in favor of foregrounding the fortitude of these women who continue to endure against the hurdles they face, specifically those of "environment, gender, race, and class" ("Rediscovered" 548). By

according each of these women her distinctive representation, Austin grants what society had denied them--and perhaps her as well: individuality.

One of Austin's supreme examples of a character who pursues a noble profession is Seyavi, the heroine in *The Land of Little Rain's* "The Basket Maker." She represents Austin's idea of the true merchant, one "who made baskets for love, and sold them for money" (168). Her goods are highly in demand because she weaves within them her practicality along with her feeling for the land. Because she makes her baskets and bowls with organic materials, they inherently contain the raw beauty of the land, and her incentive in making them is to leave behind her own lasting tribute to the region. The mastery of her baskets and bowls involve intricate precision, reflecting her skill and dedication to exactness. Symbolic of Austin's desire for oneness with the land, virtually no line of demarcation exists between Seyavi and the natural materials she uses to make her craft works. "The weaver and the warp lived next to the earth and were saturated with the same elements," the narrator marvels (167).

Yet within the native beauty of the bowls emerges that touch of humanity that is Austin's suggestion of the necessity of human skill mingled with the natural elements. The narrator comments that the elusive allure in Seyavi's work is in the feeling "that warns of humanness" in its design (169). Austin reveals her own talent in much the same way; her outstanding ability lies in extracting admirable aspects of humanity in characters faced with the necessity of survival in their distinct surroundings. Pryse says that "like the basket maker, Austin herself, in becoming immersed in the land" creates works that reflect the region (xxvii). As Church says about Austin's art, "She wove the pattern out of the

materials that were given her and the sense of design that was hers from the beginning" (37). Austin interweaves man and nature into her stories to express a corresponding respect for the land that is observable in indigenous cultures (*EH* 362). Seyavi exchanges the value of her labor for a heightened sense of her creative energies.

Pryse comments that Seyavi "serves as Austin's model and mirror," and the identification seems that complete--the author must have envisioned her own artistic and personal plight revealed in the Native American woman (xxvii). When Seyavi loses her mate, she faces the requirement of making a living for herself and her child and, in turn, reveals the awareness of her surroundings necessary to obtain nourishment from nature's raw components. Seyavi and her son survive mainly on river mussels, roots, and seeds that they scrounge for their subsistence. Austin knew at a certain point in her marriage to an unreliable husband that she would have to provide financially for herself and her daughter. She, like Seyavi, realized her endurance from the responsibility. " 'The experience of being competent to myself has been immensely worth while for me,' " Gelfant quotes Austin (76).

Austin may have envied Seyavi's unquestioning acceptance of her life and art. "Every Indian woman is an artist--sees, feels, creates, but does not philosophize about her processes" (*LOLR* 168-69). Stineman says that in this assertion, "Austin gives away her own intense anxiety about creativity" *(Maverick* 76). In fact, Austin admits that she constantly craves discussing writing in general and her own works in particular, a need that may have prompted her "equally polite and uninterested" husband to ask her, " 'Why talk about it?' " as well as to advise her, while she ponders Kipling's "completely strange

and far away" works, to " 'just enjoy them' " (*EH* 230). She explains her tendency to become immersed in a topic by saying in her autobiography that she "is one of those people plagued with an anxiety to know" (*EH* 195).

Seyavi, whom Austin met in George's Creek, California, exceeded her fame in basket making in her village only by her intense loyalty as Austin's friend. Because Seyavi noticed that Austin's daughter, Ruth, was not speaking well past the time she should have, the woman walked from her village to Austin's new home in another remote dwelling to bring meadowlarks' tongues to Ruth. Seyavi had taken a special interest in Ruth, and the treatment, long believed by her people to make the speech "nimble and quick," was well-intentioned (*EH* 246-247). Austin uses a similar incident in "The Basket Maker" in a scene in which Seyavi feeds meadowlarks' tongues to her son to make his speech more concise and clear (*LOLR* 172). Graulich comments that while the remedy could not help Ruth, Austin's association with the Native American woman inspires the author to develop her own literary style (30).

Charlotte Streifer Rubinstein says that the Native American belief was that a spirit had instilled the tribal woman with the knowledge of how to search for clay and make pots; the clay was thought to be "the 'flesh of a female supernatural' " (1-2). And perhaps Austin's notice of Seyavi's harmonizing of the spirit of her culture with the pulse of the land was a foretaste of a philosophy that captivated the author for the rest of her life. Austin often stressed the theme of the blending of human consciousness with the land as a cultural phenomenon in her writing.

Austin articulates her feelings about society's treatment of the non-traditional woman artist in "The Coyote Spirit and the Weaving Woman." The story is taken from *The Basket Woman (*1904*)*, a collection written with the aim of heightening a child's mind, since Austin had never enjoyed the same luxury as a young reader, speculates Graulich (99). The Weaving Woman is an artist with much to give--both in physical and spiritual offerings--and, like Seyavi, exemplifies her relationship with the earth by making baskets of willow, roots, and grass.

According to Graulich, "the story presents a particularly rich treatment of how the artist expresses herself and her relationship to nature in her art" (113). Because of her regard for the details of her artistry, and of her magical way of looking at life, her baskets are regarded as "wonderful affairs" and she enjoys a lively trade (*BW* 47). Her customers, fellow tribesmen, often observe the craftsmanship of the bowls and imagine how grand their lives might be if they could assume her optimistic vision. Unlike Seyavi, however, who is deeply ingrained in the fabric of her community, The Weaving Woman is considered peculiar by members of the tribe, and they usually bypass her dwelling, unless they wish to barter for her goods.

In "The Coyote Spirit and the Weaving Woman," most of the details of the woman's personal characteristics are overheard by the narrator and rewoven into a tale of her own, eagerly conveying the villagers' gossip concerning the craftswoman's strangeness. "It was reported" repeats the teller, that an "infirmity" of her eyes makes her see the world in a more idealistic way, with "rainbow fringes" (*BW* 46). The narrator relates how every young boy who passes her wickiup (sacred shelter) with his bow and

arrows set for hunting becomes "a painted brave," and as she sits making her baskets she looks down the stony trail and sees "an enchanted mesa covered with misty bloom" (46).

In her close attention to her craft and her unique way of seeing, the Weaving Woman merits comparison to her creator. While Austin lived in the artists' community of Carmel, California, she was the object of much dialogue among the citizenry; according to Stineman, she allowed her waist-length hair to flow as freely as her " 'Grecian robes' " and climbed up to a platform structure in an oak tree she called "her wickiup" to do her writing (*Maverick* 93-95). Stineman quotes a literary historian as saying about her: " 'There was always in her make-up a blend of sincerity and hokum, of spontaneity and playing-for-effect,' " (95). Her dramatic tendency towards clairvoyant proclamations also caused her detractors to chide her as "God's mother-in-law" (Ruppert 380). Thus, the image of the woman artist on society's fringe is an image that had become more than passingly familiar to Austin. Like the Weaving Woman, Austin lived alone most of her life. Her eccentricities made others think, as the tribes members do about the craftswoman, "that she was different from other people" (*BW* 46).

Although Austin's feelings of being unwanted may have stemmed from her mother's neglect, they intensified into a sense of not belonging to society at large. Walker says about Austin, "She could find friends among the outcasts and fringe-livers even though her own social group ostracized her for her friendship with them" (192). Shelley Armitage remarks on a recurring theme of rejection in Austin's female characters' lives that mirrors the author's own experiences; her characters also often substitute the solace of creative reputation in the absence of love. Armitage also states that Austin equated

divergence from society's norms with the creative person (xvii-xix).

When Austin airs her resentment towards society's fixation on outward feminine beauty in her fiction, she touches on a long-held insecurity, because she considered herself physically unattractive. Fink comments on Austin's doubts about her physical appearance by saying that she remained "convinced that she was hopelessly plain and had no notion of how to make the most of her good features" (*BW* 49). In "The Basket Maker," while the narrator praises the survival wit of the Native American woman, she criticizes her own society for its shallow fixation on physical beauty by adding that American Indian women like Seyavi lack "the sleek look of the women the social organization conspires to nourish" (*LOLR* 176). Fink says that before Austin became involved in the circle of Carmel artists she may have initially been rejected from San Francisco's "Bohemian Club," because according to one of its members, Jimmy Hopper, although " 'she was writing beautiful stuff . . . she wasn't pretty.' Unattractive women, however talented, were not welcome" (116-117). Austin's depicted tribe of ostracizers may conceivably be traced, then, to her own experiences.

Graulich says that the Weaving Woman possesses "the power to make others see more in the world and in themselves" (113). She makes a permanent change in the life of the Coyote Spirit, "an Indian whose form has been changed to fit with his evil behavior" (*BW* 45). The Coyote Spirit initially asks the Weaving Woman to accompany him into the woods to dig roots, concealing wolf-like motives of devouring her, for "whoever walks in a Coyote Spirit's range must expect to take the consequences" (49). For Graulich, "his coyote side expresses the violence and possessiveness often associated with the western

male" (113). But when the Coyote Spirit discloses his fiendish intentions towards her, she merely laughs. Her lack of fear of him perplexes and fascinates him.

Because the Coyote Spirit possesses the ability to change back into a man under the influence of people's opinions of him, the Weaving Woman's lack of fear causes him to question his identity and potential for change. Upon the woman's insistence that he look into a pool to see himself objectively, he asks her, "Tell me, now, am I a coyote or a man?" She answers without hesitation, "Oh, a man, and I think you grow handsomer every day" (*BW* 55). As he contemplates the Weaving Woman's frank words, he notices the brute began to leave him and the human to return. As the Coyote Spirit assumes a man's persona, he immediately begins to think of the Goat Girl, who always began her journey home when she noticed the sun dropping, allowing her to seek shelter and safety in the predictable warmth of her home. Austin casts the Goat Girl as symbolic of the traditional woman.

The Coyote Spirit watched her tending her flock in the past and, because of what he considered the impossibility of her interest in him, tried to convince himself of his own indifference towards her. In his altered state, he now declares that she is the proper girl for him and tentatively asks the Goat Girl her opinion of him. When she corroborates the Weaving Woman's opinion that he is "a very handsome man," he immediately asks the Goat Girl to marry him (*BW* 57). After they are married, the man ensures that he and his new wife carefully avoid the trail that leads to the Weaving Woman's domicile; the narrator adds, "I have not heard whether the Weaving Woman noticed it" (58).

Although the narrator wryly questions whether the Weaving Woman is affected by the man's rejection, the artist is no less denied inclusion into the life of the community or the man to whom she generously extends her affections. The situation was paralleled in Austin's relationship with the journalist and author Lincoln Steffens; ironically, the affair occurred after *The Basket Woman* was published. In *I-Mary*, Fink quotes from a letter Steffens wrote to his sister in which he says, " 'I've been seeing Mary Austin . . . . She is an odd but interesting woman.' " He also applauds Austin's prose in the letter as " 'the poetry of life, of life lived today; conscious, beautiful poetry' " (153). Fink repeats another source as saying that Steffens even entertained the idea of marrying Austin before " 'his ardor cooled' " (156).

After making the sacrificial decision to live in New York City because Steffens preferred it, she told him of an apartment that could serve as working and living quarters for the both of them. She was humiliated when she returned to inspect the apartment and found Steffens there, but with another woman; one who, Fink says, "was willing to defer to Steffens," therefore more his idea of the traditional woman than Austin could ever be (159-160). If the Weaving Woman bears any psychological resemblance to her creator, it should be recorded that she *did* indeed notice the Coyote Spirit and his new wife's avoidance. Austin recorded the encounter with Steffens "in her journal as 'a terrible incident, one that promises to bear bitter fruit in my own life,' " Fink reports (159). Identification with those on society's fringe came to her as a natural complement to her existence as a creative artist.

Graulich chose the unpublished "Blue Roses" from the Huntington Library's Austin collection for *Western Trails* because she considers it one of Austin's finest stories. The story dramatically illustrates Austin's hope for the cultures of the Southwest to blend and ultimately produce a uniquely American society, complete with the Native American legacy and Spanish contribution, all emphasizing the land's dramatic impact on man. Portraying two indigenous women folk artists, the story also exemplifies how culture shapes human attitudes and actions.

By telling the story of Dona Josefa De Vargas, who came from a dignified New Mexico line even "before she married her cousin twice removed of her husband's uncle," and Senora Assunta Martinez, proud of "having descended from Sun-priests" from the time when her community was " a Tewa Pueblo," Austin symbolically combines the two cultures with which she had become familiar (Graulich 292). The narrator contrasts the women's personalities by saying that "every Indian is artistic and every Spaniard temperamental." She subdues the display of stereotyping with understated humor about the cultures. "When the two have mixed and mellowed for three hundred years under a New Mexican sun," she says, "the combination is bound to exhibit occasional surprises" (292). The narrator leaves no doubt that the story will turn on cultural differences between the two women.

The story also suggests the stimulating and comforting power of art. Both of the artists design their own tribute to the natural beauty of the rose; the interpretative presentation of that beauty is the primary disparity in their philosophies. While Dona Josefa makes her roses from brightly-colored tissue paper ordered from a mail catalogue,

Assunta's flowers are from feathers, in the tradition of her ancestors. The feathers begin "as white as the wings of angels" until Assunta dyes them "a deep heart red," and she "occasionally" makes feather roses as "blue as the stripes in old Chimayo blankets," an artificial color for roses, and the pigment that represents the grounds for the breach in the women's ideas of artistic purity (293).

Each artist discerns a distasteful lack of naturalness in the other's flowers. Although Dona Josefa's roses are characterized by naturally vibrant colors, as vigorous as her impulsive Mexican personality, they are made from synthetic materials. And while Assunta engages the assistance of villagers in finding feathers and receives donations ranging from "dropped plumes" to "eagle feathers from the mountains," her blue feathers are something of an insult to realism (294). The women spend many years "speaking diplomatically" of the other's efforts, their critiques and defenses being "well within the bounds of legitimate art criticism" (295). While Dona Josefa makes comments such as: "If there were blue roses--if!--they would be as Assunta has made them," the latter proclaims that it was never her intention to embark on a competition with God, and asks " 'It's pretty, but is it Art?' " about Dona Josefa's's roses (295-296).

The community's protracted debate over the artists' works leans more in the direction of the aesthetic versus utilitarian merits of the one over the other. Occasional newcomers, hardly true connoisseurs, do not appreciate the nature of the debate, declaring that "if tissue paper was brighter, feathers were more lasting"; however, the native inhabitants remain earnestly in one camp or the other (293). The only time that the factions become unified is in their feeling of distinction when Padre Simon, who comes to

the churchless community to celebrate mass on the Day of San Isidro, takes a wreath from each artisan back to his church in San Juan. But as the two widows' acclaim grows, they increasingly look to their art as their most steadfast companions, causing them to develop an even stronger defense of their crafts that further "sharpened the artists' tongues" (295).

Finally the rivalry between the cliques grows to a point where in frustration the Padre rejects the "wreaths woven in rivalry" and from a neighborhood engaged in "envy and backbiting" (297). Upon the Padre's rejection, that distinct spirit of exhilaration and pride disappears from the village, and the priest shows signs of becoming another of Austin's Southwest religious leaders who does not understand his community. The spirit of lively debate and discussion over the merit of the artworks had become the village's life-blood as well as its source of pride, which he abruptly ends when he rejects the gifts.

With the enforced waning of the rivalry comes the news to the tiny community of the first Great War, and Josefa's only grandson, Don Aurelio, enlists in the Army. The somber word arrives, after the celebration of Armistice Day, that the young man had been killed during the last days of the war. Padre Simon regains his prestige when he writes letters and travels to Santa Fe to ensure that Don Aurelio's corpse would return safely to the community for burial. By the day that the young man's body returns, days of heavy summer rains cause the river to swell over the road--even the old wooden bridge collapses into the river under the stress.

Dona Josefa, along with all the villagers with various musical instruments, waits at the ford for Don Aurelio as if he were to come marching home. As the casket procession comes into sight, Dona Josefa is overcome with emotion and begins to wade

towards it in the murky flood water of the river. As she is restrained by some of the men, she hears Assunta tell her, "From my roof you can see everything much plainer, Josefa" (302). While the townspeople look to Saint San Isidro to calm the flood, the narrator says that the saint "had other things at heart,"including the end of the artists' conflict (302). From the flat roof the two women watch the procession, and Assunta shows Dona Josefa the memorial wreath in red, white, and blue feathers that she made for Don Aurelio. She asks Dona Josefa to help her finish it, making the artwork a tribute from both of them.

The two plan to work together on their flowers in the future, with Dona Josefa asking for Assunta's help in ordering her papers, insisting that some of the flowers be blue. The former reassures Assunta that "from this time forth there will be red, white *and* blue roses in Paradise" (304). The hotly contested rivalry is over, replaced by the consolation that only human companionship can afford. Art has offered another type of satisfaction--the appreciation of a friend's talent. "The heart is greatly comforted by it [art]--especially when one works in a medium which ties one to all the familiar, homely things," the narrator articulates (304).

In "Blue Roses" Austin depicts artists of divergent races who blend traditions even while opposing one another. As she resided among women much like Dona Josefa and Assunta during her years in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Austin noticed their individualities and traits, linking them to their culture. Ultimately they symbolize her dream for the Southwest: that the cultures be able to retain their uniqueness and individuality, yet live together in harmony. Throughout her years in Santa Fe, Austin enjoyed prominence and devoted much of her attention to regional affairs, particularly efforts to restore Native

American and Spanish cultures (Graulich 17-18).

She also used her own locally acknowledged notoriety to support those she admired. In 1927, the Daughters of the American Revolution planned to place statues to mark national old trails, with one being the Santa Fe Trail. Bearing a theme of "Madonna of the Trail, the statues would honor pioneer women. Austin spoke at one of the D. A. R. meetings to protest the proposed statue by saying that the genuine pioneers of the region were of Spanish descent and that they were never given a voice in the trail-marking project; the committee thereupon voted to give the statue to Albuquerque instead (La Farge 303-304).

DuBois praised Austin's priorities in foregrounding "personality" and "self-realization" in her characters (231). As the indigenous artists in the stories recreate their environment in their crafts, they symbolize Austin's hope for humankind's successful interaction with the land. Whether the artist is ostracized by the community, as is the Weaving Woman, or celebrated by it, like Dona Josefa and Assunta, she is steadfast in her pursuit of authentic self-realization. Austin wrote extensively on the manner in which the American Indian recreated the environment in music, dance, drama, and poetry. Austin's vision for America included the hope that the center of an artistic and cultural rebirth would be in the American Southwest, where the environment seemed to exert the greatest influence over man.

In her dream, man would see nature differently and thus become, like the Native American, more sensitive to the spirit of unified existence. In *The Land of Journey's Ending*, Austin says, "Where two or three racial strains are run together, as cooperative

adventurers in the new scene, or as conqueror grafting himself upon an earlier arrival, the land is the determining factor in the new design" (438). The indigenous women artists found a new way of seeing and could perceive wonder in the commonplace, or as Austin says, in "the familiar."

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion

Critical convention has not yet decided how to categorize Mary Austin. As Jaycox says, she has been placed into various groups: "a nature writer, a 'local color' regionalist or (more recently) a feminist" (5). Austin, who spurned all types of enclosures, if forced to define herself in any way, would insist on all three, perhaps in the order that Jaycox presents. One of the most enthralling aspects of her writing is her ability to merge the three categories. She injects a feminist image as a nature passage from *The Land of Journey's Ending* that reveals the tragedy of wasted resources in nature and humanity: "I knew a mountain once, over toward Lost Borders, which could both glow and pale, pale after the burning, like a lovely neglected woman who burned to no purpose, a dark mountain, whose bareness was like a pain" (386).

Although Austin assumed that the land ultimately remains impervious to the condition of man, she constantly endeavored to locate man in his natural surroundings. In nature she visualized a system that would continue to maintain and nourish existence as long as living creatures conformed to its rhythms. And she firmly believed that when lived in under its accords, nothing in life could compare to its powers of natural rejuvenation: "There is the divinest, cleanest air to be breathed anywhere in God's world. Some day the world will understand that, and the little oases on the windy tops of hills will harbor for healing its ailing, house-weary broods" (*LOLR* 16-17).

While believing that the land is primarily to be lived in, Austin above all desired to preserve its unblemished virtues. In this respect she may have held an overly optimistic conviction of the land's capability to remain superior to and outside of man's trivial development interests, Norwood suggests (40). But Austin vigorously joined in campaigns for the supremacy of the land and persistently crusaded for policies safeguarding the landscape from over-development. Her never-ending vision for America was that man seek to become united with the land, as she says of humankind in *The Land of Journey's Ending:* "He is the land, the lift of its mountain lines, the reach of its valleys; his is the rhythm of its seasonal processions, the involution and variation of its vegetal patterns" (437).

Austin came to a Western world she considered exquisite. In the desert country of California lying between the slopes of the Sierra Nevadas and the Mojave she put down roots and absorbed the legacy of the Paiutes and Shoshones and the lore of shepherds and miners; she gave expression to the spirit of an unsung land. The native regions that Austin found in the West had been the natural result of a process that was carried on for centuries in communities. She was appalled by settlers' ignorance of the native communities they replaced. With unyielding intensity, she insisted that indigenous America take its legitimate place in the literary world.

Clarifying her concept of the formation of a culture in the United States, she states in a 1927 essay that the quality of spiritual understanding between a land and its people is more "public" than any economic achievement ("Colorado" 112). Ruppert says that Austin proposed that a "creative welding of the arts, culture, and the environment" could

emerge, creating "a true ancient spirit of America" (376). *The American Rhythm* suggests that natural "rhythms" of the land ultimately translate into cultural art--specifically a dramatic poetic presence. Thomas W. Ford insists that Austin was a "pioneer" in affording the public a chance to ponder correlations between "Indian and American poetry" (14). In this way, she sparked provocative thought on the interconnectedness of the American writer and his territorial heritage.

Often denied the liberty to create unique identities for themselves, women of Austin's day were even excluded from knowledge of their husbands' business affairs. Austin was always determined to explore her own interests and also addressed the problems of women who were banished to roles in which their abilities were often wasted. In the introduction to *The Arrow-Maker*, her play about a Chisera, a Native American woman considered by her tribe as possessing the power of genius from "direct communication with the gods," Austin expresses her regret that modern American society inflicted on the women of her time "the enormous and stupid waste" of women's natural gifts (x-xii). Austin constantly disparaged women's divestiture of power by men. She personifies this message with biting precision in *Lost Borders*; the stories often integrate her own experiences with those of women she met in the desert. In her writings and private conversations, Austin insisted that men had too long commanded intellectual spheres and that, on the whole, women were not allowed to prepare themselves to produce notable literature (Stineman, *Maverick* 130).

Austin refused to allow the patriarchal disposition of society to interfere with her writing career; she penned novels, poems, plays, and essays. Pearce even states that she

"was in 1908 the first truly prominent woman writer from the American West" (*Austin* 39). Several critics maintain that her first book, *The Land of Little Rain*, is her most outstanding treatment of the desert. And the consensus is generally that her books of stories shine above her other works. Van Doren says that Austin "nowhere else quite equals the success she reaches in those lovely luminous documents on the Southwest" (23). Austin lamented the loss of her awestruck edge in her later writings. While planning a trip to Santa Fe, she told a friend the goal of her trip: "I'm going after a mood." More than twenty years after its publication, she confessed, " 'I want to find the old mood of *The Land of Little Rain* . . . . I want to lose my sophistication' " (Fink 212).

Austin used regional uniqueness to stress universal implications. And in doing so, she focused on portrayals of the details of our cultural heritage. She refers in *The American Rhythm* to "the irregular tug and release of the four-horse Mojave stage and of the eighteen-mule borax team" and the "heave of constructive labor" to illustrate the cadences that she regarded as life-rhythms (14-15). The pulsations she regarded as the rudimentary rhythms of existence were the sounds of the most isolated endeavors to earn a living. Austin scrutinized the steady increase of the role of the West as the dream of America's expansion to the Pacific progressed. Although she realized that settlers' motives and goals differed, she worried that excessive population in the area might also bring overdevelopment.

Austin also had more personal concerns: she knew the strain of making a living in the West. Demanding much of herself, yet expecting just as great an effort of those around her, she was crushed by many disappointments during her early years of writing.

She spent much of her life in frustration over her lack of large-scale popularity. Although she gained renown in her time for the eloquent quality of her nature works, her books never earned much money. She freed herself from economic anxiety to a point by turning to journalism, yet her financial woes continued to plague her. As Scheick says, however, "Although *The Land of Little Rain* was created to earn money, Austin also had higher motives" (37). While Austin wrote in order to improve her financial status, she also wanted to fulfill a spiritual impulse. In efforts to ease her monetary restrictions, she simultaneously uncovered truths about her own life and emotions.

Because her writing difficulties never lay in a lack of enthusiasm nor perseverance, she pursued her craft whenever possible. Austin experienced two distinct tendencies in her writing that reflected the same divergence in spirit. She held a "singular power of description" exhibited in the exacting detail of her realism (Stineman *Maverick,* 71). Yet, her portrayal of the ethereal quality of the desert represented her equally strong desire to depict the eternal force at the center of the land. Therefore, her tireless mind was always in conflict between the practical writer, in love with the reality of life, and the visionary, living in the realms of her imaginative vision. Life consisted for Austin in the fusion of religious mysticism and the invigorating motivation that comes with a participation in earthly affairs. Her characters are likewise spread between the two poles: those existing in a philosophically ideological sphere, and those attempting to survive in a purely practical, economically rugged environment. Only a mind subtly and mysteriously bestowed with the ability to fuse the beauties of body and soul could ever hope completely to blend the two.

That the harmonization of the elements was never quite complete in Austin's life is reflected in her writing as well as her existence. She attempted to combine religious mysticism and the expansive physical give and take of desert life: these components, however, were not easily merged. And, in turn, her characters' destinies often turn on the extent of either their spirituality or their calculating power of reason. Pryse says, "Many of Austin's human characters come close to providing her with a model to serve as her guide in her artistic and visionary quest, but her relationship to the land remains primary" (xxx). Indeed, while providing humanly concrete detail, the narrator senses protagonists' motives and champions those who have searched inside themselves for inner strength as well as embodying the vitality to live successfully within the land.

Austin identifies most dramatically with the one constant character in all of her stories, the desert itself. At times she personalizes the desert, causing it to assume her own physical characteristics, and perhaps her own personality traits as well. Austin transforms femininity and nature to produce an original means of portraying the metaphor of the land as woman. She describes the desert as a reminder of herself in what may yet be her deepest mirror-image, symbolizing her survival and creativity:

> If the desert were a woman, I know well what she would be like: deep-breasted, broad in the hips, tawny, with tawny hair, great masses of it lying smooth along her perfect curves, full lipped like a sphinx, but not heavy lidded like one, . . . such a countenance as should make men serve without desiring her, such a largeness to her mind as should make their sins of no account, passionate, but not necessitous, patient--and you could not move her, no, not if you had all the earth to give, so much as one tawny hair's-breath beyond her own desires. (*LB* 10-11)

Pryse cites the word " 'tawny' " as one that Austin frequently used in her autobiography to picture the tones of her own skin and hair, just as she chose the word in various works to specify the desert's hues (xxix). The similarities between the image of the desert Austin presents in the above passage and her own appearance are striking to Pryse (xxix). Scheick says that Austin's tendency "to inscribe herself on and read herself in" the image of the desert is another indication of her inadequacy as a objective recorder. Because Austin lived an unhappy life, the critic says, she identifies emotionally with the stark, thirsty desert terrain, causing her to lose her status of detached observer (42). But the identification was actually logical, since Austin used the image of the desert as an inspiration to gain her independence. As Pryse says, Austin knew the meaning of psychological as well as physical aridity, yet storytelling symbolized her "path to an oasis of emotional and spiritual nourishment" (xxxv). Austin's female landscape is accordingly never passively observant, but rather an active participant in desert life.

Austin was prone to reflect violent extremes: she often experienced either complete absorption in religious mysticism or the realistic dejection of an often lonely existence. Her cast of characters mirrors this spectrum of life's responses from the eternal states of unity between body and spirit and the pulsation and emotion that are truly human. Austin's models of fidelity are those who have assimilated the traits that she most admires within chosen professions, surviving beneath the land's rules and concurrently honoring the rewards of nature in art. Not surprisingly, her heroes are most likely to rely on their true spirituality in relation to the treatment of the land, its creatures, or one another; her anti-heroes seek the principal means of gain, but characteristically without the earthly

fulfillment of anticipated compensation.

If Austin serves as her own mirror for the desert, Norwood says that Seyavi, the basket maker, is the "human incarnation of the spirit of the feminine Southwest land" (41). Because the indigenous craftswoman exemplifies the most resourceful human pattern for living on the land, she possesses the spiritual strength necessary to assume the "mark of the land." She is a personification of what Scheick calls "the timeless eternal within nature," all-seeing by instinct as well as knowledge (41).

The shepherds that Austin depicts also symbolize an imitative relationship with the land. Serving as a models of freedom for Austin, they represent imaginative vision in the choice of a way of life that includes a devotion to the land and its creatures. A herder like Little Pete reveals something about the relationship between the wilderness and humanity when he communicates with his sheep perfectly, without the assistance of language. Pryse says that out of the various humans pictured in *Lost Borders*, the Walking Woman best represents the personification of the desert (xxx). Breaking into the man's world of the desert, she has mastered the habits of the wilderness. Her boldness and mobility enable her to function as one of Austin's portrayals of herself.

The Native American hunter realizes his inherent duty as guardian of the land, using his spiritual leanings to make his life purposeful. As he declares veneration for animals, he renders spiritual worth to the wilderness. Because of her mystical identification with the American Indian vision of man and nature, Austin even invented for herself an indigeneous forerunner. She became convinced that she must possess " 'a single isolated gene of that far-off and slightly mythical Indian ancestor' " (Walker 193).

The Native American's view of nature as an entity to be venerated and emulated caused Austin to regard him or her as a model for living.

Austin transformed the image of a barren West into a populated land where the spirit of survival is cherished. Her stories rise above the definition of narratives; they become animated illustrations of her life in the desert. Although the desert represents a detached region fostered by its vast spaces, her stories stress the requirement of human bonds. Austin's portrayal of the stagecoach driver is a reflection of herself since, like her, the driver possesses the ability to perceive unique characteristics in occurrences and retell them to an appreciative listener. Being an avid collector of folk tales, the author used the stagecoach driver's tales as raw material and inspiration.

Images of Austin's betrayers are painted similarly by the author; the differences are in the characters' visions of themselves and their own motives. Austin portrays the minister as physically and spiritually set apart from others, and in this way, he lives in the realm of his own imagination. Intent on controlling the behavior of those whom he professes to serve, he has forgotten the things of the spirit. He still insists, however, that spiritual power instills him with the knowledge of the best directives for his congregation. The white hunter's disregard for the land stems from his power to rationalize that if he does not ravage the land, someone else will quickly come along to do so. Although he is the personification of the abuse of nature, he uses his powers of logic to assure himself that the resources will replenish themselves. The miner, who makes no excuses for his values, is the most honest about his motives. Although he carelessly desecrates the land in

his economic pursuits, he professes to do so for no other reason than greed. "It takes man," insists the narrator in *The Land of Little Rain*, "to leave unsightly scars on the face of the earth" (153).

Mary Austin was quick to say that she did not choose the type of writing for which she would develop a lasting talent. She did, however, develop a deep devotion to her natural surroundings, and the patience to invest hours of time observing nature and cultivating what Charles G. Wiley calls a "keenly observant eye and the ability to remember what she saw with scientifically accurate precision" (237). She did not choose to move from Illinois to the harsh Tejon region of California; the decision was made for her. While some pioneer women considered that the treeless landscape "symbolized emptiness, loss, sacrifice, and loneliness" (Langlois, "Prairie" 433), Austin celebrated her austere setting in her writing.

Believing that circumstances converged to bring her to the area as part of her destiny, Austin considered the region as representing a new creativity and way of thinking for her. She said that she always knew that she "would write imaginatively, not only of people, but of the scene, the totality which is called Nature" (*EH* vii). The landscape and people she discovered in the West so captured her imagination that she spent the rest of her life creatively representing and championing their spirits. She had no choice: the desire and determination to capture the harmony of life were always present in her heart.

APPENDIX A

ABBREVIATIONS

AR	*The American Rhythm*
BW	*The Basket Woman*
EH	*Earth Horizon*
TF	*The Flock*
LOJE	*The Land of Journey's Ending*
LOLR	*The Land of Little Rain*
LB	*Lost Borders*
OSS	*One Smoke Stories*

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Austin, Mary H. *The American Rhythm.* Boston: Houghton, 1930.

---. *The Arrow-Maker: A Drama in Three Acts.* New York: AMS, 1969.

---. *The Basket Woman.* New York: AMS, 1969.

---. "The Colorado River Project and the Culture of the Southwest." *Southwest Review* 13 (1927): 110-115.

---. *Earth Horizon.* Cambridge: Riverside, 1932.

---. *The Flock.* Boston: Houghton, 1906.

---. *The Land of Journey's Ending.* New York: AMS, 1969.

---. *The Land of Little Rain.* Boston: Houghton, 1904.

---. *Lost Borders.* New York: Harper, 1909.

---. *One Smoke Stories.* Boston: Houghton, 1934.

---. "Regional Culture in the Southwest." *Southwest Review* 14 (1929): 474-477.

Secondary Sources

Armitage, Shelley. Introduction. *Wind's Trail: The Early Life of Mary Austin.* Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico P, 1990.

Banning, Captain William and George Hugh Banning, "Stage-Coach." *The American West: A Treasury of Stories, Legends, Narrative, Songs and Ballads of Western America.* Ed. William Targ. Cleveland: World, 1946.

Child, Lydia Maria. *Hobomok and other Writings on Indians.* Ed. Carolyn L Karcher. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1986.

Church, Peggy Pond. *Wind's Trail: The Early Life of Mary Austin.* Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico P, 1990.

DuBois, Arthur E. "Mary Hunter Austin 1869-1934." *Southwest Review* 20 (1935): 233-264.

Fink, Augusta. *I-Mary: A Biography of Mary Austin.* Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1983.

Ford, Thomas W. "*The American Rhythm*: Mary Austin's Poetic Principle." *Western American Literature 5* (1970): 3-14.

Gelfant, Blanche H. " 'Lives' of Women Writers: Cather, Austin, Porter and Willa, Mary, Katherine Anne." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 18 (1984): 64-80.

Gish, Robert. Rev. of *The Land of Journey's Ending,* by Mary Austin, and *Mary Austin: Song of a Maverick,* by Esther Lanigan Stineman. *American Indian Quarterly* 16 (1992): 596-600.

Graulich, Melody, ed. *Western Trails" A Collection of Short Stories by Mary Austin.* Las Vegas: U of Nevada P, 1987.

Harris, Susan K. Rev. of *Stories From the Country of Lost Borders,* by Mary Austin. Ed. Marjorie Pryse. *American Literary Realism* 21 (1989): 87-88.

Jaycox, Faith. "Regeneration Through Liberation: Mary Austin's 'The Walking Woman' and Western Narrative Formula." *Legacy* 6 (1989): 5-12.

La Farge, Oliver. *Santa Fe: The Autobiography of a Southwestern Town.* Norman: The U of Oklahoma P, 1959.

Langlois, Karen. "Mary Austin and Houghton Mifflin Company: A Case Study in the Marketing of a Western Writer." *Western American Literature* 23 (1988): 31-42.

---. Rev. of *Prairie Women: Images in American and Canadian Fiction,* by Carol Fairbanks. *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 52 (1989): 433-437.

Lavender, David. "Crazy as a Sheepherder." *The American West: A Treasury of Stories, Legends, Narratives, Songs and Ballads of Western American.* Ed. William Targ. Cleveland: World, 1946.

Lee, L. L., and Merill Lewis. *Women, Women Writers, and the West.* Troy, NY: Whitston, 1980.

Moody, Ralph. *Stagecoach West.* NY: Crowell, 1967.

Norwood, Vera. "The Photographer and the Naturalist: Laura Gilpin and Mary Austin in Southwest." *Journal of American Culture* 5 (1982): 1-28. Rpt. in *Twentieth Century Literary Critcism*. Ed. Dennis Poupard. Detroit: Gale, 1988. 39-41.

Pearce, T. M., ed. *Literary America 1903-1934: The Mary Austin Letters.* Westport, CN: Greenwood, 1979.

---. *Mary Hunter Austin.* New York: Twayne, 1965.

Pryse, Marjorie, ed. *Stories from the Country of Lost Borders.* New Brunswick, CN: Rutgers UP, 1987.

Rubinstein, Charlotte Streifer. *American Women Artists from Early Indian Times to the Present.* Boston: Hall, 1982.

Ruppert, James. "Mary Austin's Landscape Line in Native American Literature." *Southwest Review* 68 (1983): 376-390.

Scheick, William J. "Mary Austin's Disfigurement of the Southwest in *The Land of Little Rain.*" *Western American Literature* 27 (1992): 37-46.

Seelye, John, ed. *Stories of the Old West.* New York: Penguin, 1994.

Stineman, Esther Lanigan. "Mary Austin Rediscovered." *Journal of the Southwest* 30 (1988): 545-551.

---. *Mary Austin: Song of a Maverick.* New York: Yale UP, 1989.

Turner, Frederick. *Spirit of Place: The Making of an American Literary Landscape.* San Francisco: Sierra, 1989.

Van Doren, Carl. "Mary Austin: Discoverer and Prophet," *The Century* 107 (1923): 151-56. Rpt. in *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism.* Ed. Dennis Poupard. Detroit: Gale, 1988. 22-24.

Walker, Franklin. *A Literary History of Southern California.* Los Angeles: U of California P, 1950.

Welty, Eudora. "Place in Fiction." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 1 (1956): 57-72.

Work, James C. "The Moral in Austin's The Land of Little Rain." *Women and Western American Literature*. Ed. Helen Winter Stauffer and Susan J. Rosowski. NY: Whitston, 1982. 297-310. Rpt. In *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism.* Ed. Dennis Poupard. Detroit: Gale, 1988. 41-44.

---. *Prose and Poetry of the American West.* Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 1990.

Wynn, Dudley T. *The Critical Study of the Writings of Mary Hunter Austin (1868-1934).* New York: NYUP, 1941.

---. Rev. of *Mary Hunter Austin,* by T. M. Pearce. *Western American Literature* 1 (1966): 130-133..

Young, Vernon. "Mary Austin and the Earth Performance," *Southwest Review* 35 (1950): 153-63. Rpt. In *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism.* Ed. Dennis Poupard. Detroit: Gale, 1988. 29-32.

Zwinger, Ann H. *Mary Austin and John Muir: Writing the Western Landscape.* Boston: Beacon, 1994.