

47. Austin, *Earth Horizon*, 270.
48. *Ibid.*, 271.
49. Emerson, "Young American," 384; Austin, *Ford*, 200.
50. Cather *O Pioneers*, 308.
51. Austin, *Earth Horizon*, 270-71.
52. *Ibid.*, 284-85; emphasis added.
53. *Ibid.*, 205.
54. Cather, *O Pioneers*, 213.
55. Emerson, "Experience" (1844), in *The Oxford Authors: Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Richard Poirier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 222, 225.
56. *Ibid.*, 222.
57. Austin, *Earth Horizon*, 205; Austin, "American Form of the Novel," 85, 86 (emphasis added).
58. Austin, *Earth Horizon*, 205.
59. Harvey, *Geography of Difference*, 303-4.
60. Austin, *Earth Horizon*, 204.
61. Richard White, *The Organic Machine* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), x.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

*Walking Off an Illness?  
Don't Go West, Young Man*

The Construction of Masculinity in *Cactus Thorn*

MELODY GRAULICH

*Austin's portrayal of strong and independent women has long attracted feminist critics, but more recently critics have begun to explore her efforts to rethink masculinity in such works as The Basket Woman, The Ford, and Starry Adventure. In "Don't Go West, Young Man," Melody Graulich draws on recent work on the construction of American manhood by Anthony Rotundo and Gail Bederman to explore the "strenuous rest cure"—the curative trip west undertaken by men who had experienced some kind of breakdown. In her satiric treatment of the way Grant Arliss uses the West in his "recovery" of his potency and power in Cactus Thorn, Austin suggests the intersections between constructions of virile manhood, racism, and imperialist impulses during the Progressive Era.*

*Graulich's essay, like most of the others in Exploring Lost Borders, presents Austin's work as enmeshed with the politics of her time. Like Tonkovich in her reading of the apparently escapist Isidro, Graulich reads the apparently romantic Cactus Thorn as exploring connections between regional and national politics, between national and international concerns. Like DeZur, she turns to "A Case of Conscience" as a text that particularly reveals Austin's views on nationhood and imperialism, and she too sees Austin as raising crucial questions about property and ownership of land and people. Together with other contributors to this volume, she views Austin as a theorist of "the West," one whose theories grew from the landscapes she inhabited and from ongoing cultural explorations. Creating that theory in a variety of forms, from poetry and drama to nature writing and ecocriticism, from fiction and autobiography to cultural criticism and political allegory, Austin reminds us today of the West's historical diversity and complexity, of the rewards that still beckon in western exploration.*

As part of a tribute to her dead friend Mary Austin, Mabel Dodge Luhan shared the following anecdote:

One day while staying with us at the Big House she emerged from her room at noon and paced up and down the portal looking all in.

"What's the matter, Mary?" I asked her.

"I killed a man this morning," she replied.

It happened to be Lincoln Steffens, who had walked out on her some years previously. She had not minded losing him, what she couldn't take was that it was *he* who withdrew. . . . So of course she had to destroy him.<sup>1</sup>

When I wrote my afterword to the first publication of *Cactus Thorn*, I, like Luhan, read Austin's portrayal and eventual murder of the hypocritical Grant Arliss as a satisfying act of vengeance, although I recognized its larger political significance.<sup>2</sup> Austin felt personally betrayed by Steffens, but she also came to see him as representative of supposedly radical politicians who failed to rethink their relations to and attitudes about women and marriage, men whose "personal expression . . . contradicted and reversed the political expression."<sup>3</sup> Her motives mirrored her message: the personal *is* political.

But while *Cactus Thorn* presents a political critique, it also offers a cultural critique: Austin's satiric response to a recurring image of the West in our literary history as the refuge where easterners broken in body or mind come to regain their psychic health. (Anachronistically, I think of this place as the "Betty Ford West.") Like Progressive Era figures Theodore Roosevelt and Owen Wister, and such fictional characters as Harold Frederic's Theron Ware, Grant Arliss comes west because he has had some kind of "breakdown"; he feels "spiritual insufficiency" and, more suggestively, a kind of uncertainty and "impotence."<sup>4</sup> Unhinged by the competition to assume power and authority in the modern world, by what some historians have called a "masculinity crisis" among middle-class turn-of-the-century men, he seeks regeneration in the West.<sup>5</sup> Although the West has traditionally been an asylum for men, throughout her career Austin staked claim to that healing landscape for women, representing the West as a place where women like the Walking Woman, troubled by an "unsoundness of mind," can be "healed at last by the large soundness of nature." In *Earth Horizon* she suggests that she, like the Walking Woman, "had begun by walking off an illness." Thus the West provides space for a new construc-

tion of womanhood.<sup>6</sup> Yet especially in *Cactus Thorn* she raises questions about whether some male characters in search of a (re)new(ed) manhood are able to make sense of the land's lessons, able to walk "off all sense of [the] society-made values" she often associated with the East and with cities ("Walking Woman," 97). As is often the case with Austin's feminist analyses, she proves prescient in anticipating recent explorations of the cultural construction of "manliness" during the Progressive Era, explorations that suggest intersections between constructions of virile manhood, racism, and imperialist impulses.

Austin was well aware of the cultural politics of disease, particularly attitudes about the causes and treatment of nervous disorders. She suffered a "breakdown" after her first year at college that, she said, "was supposed to have been caused by overwork. . . . It had more to do with something Mary was unable to explain, least of all to a physician of those days . . . [with] the deep-seated conviction that all illnesses of women were 'female' in their origin, and could best be cured by severe doses of housework and child-bearing. 'The *only* work,' said Dr. Hankins, 'a female should do is beside her own fireside'" (*Earth Horizon*, 151-52). That midwestern small-town doctor was not so advanced as S. Weir Mitchell, who treated the woman who was to become Austin's friend, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, at about the same time. Or perhaps he was simply more pragmatic, for the lower-middle-class women he treated could hardly take to their beds for the extended periods Mitchell's "rest cure" prescribed. But both doctors shared similar assumptions about the causes of mental distress—too much mental activity—and the ultimate goal of treatment: return to the domestic roles women were meant to play.

Both Austin and Gilman, of course, came to see their breakdowns as representing their dis-ease with those very roles, and both wrote stories about the mad and frustrated women they would have become had they accepted their doctors' treatment. Both women ultimately saw the West as a place of personal liberation and healing, a place of refuge from constricting expectations, and it was in the West that both began to write seriously about women who hungered for more out of life, women who took charge of their own lives.<sup>7</sup> In her western wanderings, Austin found her own "remedy"; malnourished from eating only meat, she gorged on wild grapes in a scene she later rendered symbolic:

But there was more to the incident than that; there was the beginning of a notion in Mary's mind of a poor appetite of any sort being

cured by its proper food; that there was something you could do about unsatisfactory conditions besides being heroic or a martyr to them, something more satisfactory than enduring or complaining, and that was getting out to hunt for the remedy. This, for young ladies in the eighteen-eighties, was a revolutionary discovery to have made. (*Earth Horizon*, 195)

And so Austin prescribed for herself what we might call the "walking cure," a regimen she kept up for the rest of her life.

The rediscovery of "The Yellow Wallpaper" in the 1970s and its rapid canonization made Weir Mitchell a notorious figure in an epidemic of feminist scholarship about women's health and the medical establishment, and about the rest cure and its role in the lives of such famous turn-of-the-century figures as Gilman, Edith Wharton, and Jane Addams.<sup>8</sup> Historians explored the misogynistic cultural implications in diagnoses of "hysteria" and "neurasthenia." But until recently, little attention has been paid to *male* neurasthenics and the cultural implications of their dis-ease with their gendered roles, although neurasthenia may have been "equally common among males and females."<sup>9</sup>

In 1885, the same year Dr. Hankins suggested to Austin that she do handwork by her fireside, Weir Mitchell treated Owen Wister, who had also suffered the kind of vague breakdown usually associated with neurasthenia. A talented musician, Wister had hoped to become a composer and had studied music in Europe, but his sharply critical father saw his accomplishments there as "stuffed with worthlessness, bad habits, and elements of failure" and insisted that he return to enter a brokerage firm, a job Wister detested. When he failed there, his father suggested law school.<sup>10</sup> Wister responded by completing a novel, *A Wise Man's Son*, not surprisingly "the story of a young man whose father forced him into business."<sup>11</sup> When he sent the book to W. D. Howells, his "mentor," Howells called it a "rebellious" work and recommended against Wister showing it to a publisher.<sup>12</sup> Wister accepted Howells's judgment, but his health collapsed, and he was sent to Mitchell. Mitchell prescribed "rest" to both male and female patients, but his definitions of what that constituted varied widely. He sent Wister west. His prescription: enjoy the stimulation of meeting new people, even "humble" ones, and live an active out-of-doors life; he specifically told Wister to take along riding clothes.<sup>13</sup> In 1886 he recommended the same trip to the artist Thomas Eakins after Eakins had been fired from the

Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts for pulling a loincloth off a male model in front of women students. Refining a famous phrase from Wister's Harvard classmate and longtime friend Theodore Roosevelt, who also went west following an undefined breakdown, we might term this advice "the strenuous rest cure."<sup>14</sup>

In many ways, Wister is a representative male neurasthenic. According to Anthony Rotundo, the disease afflicted "comfortably situated, middle-class men"; its most common symptoms were "insomnia, tension, depression, and (especially) fatigue accompanied by an utter lack of energy"; and it "was especially a disease of youth and early middle age." Neurasthenia was generally believed to be caused by overwork, and the usual recommendation was, logically enough, relaxation, or the "rest cure." In Rotundo's reading of the "cultural meaning" of the disease, "neurasthenia involved men's negative feelings about work."<sup>15</sup> In fact, breakdowns "often happened at times of vocational crisis" when men were trying to fulfill their fathers' or others' expectations about work. Rotundo continues:

Looked at in terms of gender, male neurasthenia amounted to a flight from manhood. It not only meant a withdrawal from the central male activity of work, but it also involved a rejection of fundamental manly virtues—achievement, ambition, dominance, independence. A man who steered away from the middle-class work-world was avoiding a man's proper place. . . . A man who broke down was making a statement, however unconscious, of his negative feelings about middle-class work and the values and pressures surrounding it. In doing so, he made a gesture of serious opposition to manhood in his own time.<sup>16</sup>

As part of his "flight from manhood," the male neurasthenic "was also finding refuge in roles and behaviors marked 'female': vulnerability, dependence, passivity, invalidism. Even a man who traveled to recuperate was pursuing the life of cultivated leisure which was associated with women."<sup>17</sup>

Rotundo names William and Henry James, among others, as examples of men who traveled to recuperate, but his conclusion is based on European travel. Western travel offered men such as Wister a different resolution to their struggles with what was expected of them. Rather than offering a flight from manhood, it offered them what David Leverenz has called

a "crucible for man-making."<sup>18</sup> If their breakdowns were caused by their uncertainty about how to go about achieving the "fundamental manly virtues" rather than by a rejection of them, the West provided new ways to attain them. In the West men could learn the self-assertion that would allow them to return to the civilized world and stake their claims. The West also provided new philosophies ("the strenuous life"); aphorisms or metaphors ("speak softly but carry a big stick"; "smile when you call me that"); and material (*The Virginian*; Francis Parkman's *The Oregon Trail* [1849]; Roosevelt's *Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail* [1888]) men could use to achieve success. And if "lack of energy" was a covert expression for impotence, western travel was associated with vigor, with increased virility and power the traveler could carry home, like Roosevelt's famous "big stick," and put to use as he rejoined society.

Anxious men who could not afford a trip west could become armchair travelers, if we accept Jane Tompkins's analysis of the "cultural work" of the western, as developed around the turn of the century by Wister and Zane Grey, whose *Heritage of the Desert* (1910) is a particularly interesting companion piece to *Cactus Thorn*. Tompkins reads westerns as expressions of anxiety about the power of Victorian women's novels, which often present domesticated, demasculinized figures like the minister or the Christian male, and about "women's invasions of the public sphere between 1880 and 1920." Enacting "the destruction of female authority," the western "is about men's fear of losing their mastery, and hence their identity, both of which the western tirelessly reinvents."<sup>19</sup> Read in this context, *Cactus Thorn* is a satiric response to the western, showing the consequences of that reinvention.<sup>20</sup>

When we meet Austin's Grant Arliss, in "flight" from New York politics, he *has* lost his mastery, and he knows it (*Cactus Thorn*, 23). He has begun "to wonder [about] the mystery of his waning appetite for leadership, his reluctance to accept the opportunity held out to him" (12-13). A progressive reformer who has inspired his followers, Arliss lacks a "program"; although he has advocated "the elimination of private interest from public life," he has no "new system" to "justify" his protest (23, 18). But his immediate crisis is brought on by the necessity of forming a coalition with a powerful political patriarch, the "old war horse, Henry Russel Rittenhouse" (23). Arliss is not ready to play hardball with the big boys. "He had called upon himself to rise to the opportunity which he himself had created, and nothing came. In the face of the staring possibility that nothing

would come from anywhere, Arliss broke into a sudden sweat of panic" (23). Austin's repeated sexual imagery, exaggerated to the point of satire, makes clear that she sees this anxiety attack as gendered. As if she hadn't made her point clear enough, Austin closes her paragraph by suggesting that the breakdown leads directly to feelings of "impotence" and "despair" (23).

As a reformer and a critic of American culture, Arliss has good reason to feel anxious about his masculinity. During the Progressive Era, the manhood of reformers was often challenged, either directly or through metaphors embedded in political language. Rotundo concludes that "the men who guarded the political arena," men like Henry Rittenhouse, "imagined that acting on reform impulses unsexed a person."<sup>21</sup> When Theodore Roosevelt was elected to the state assembly in 1882, newspaper writers referred to him as "Jane-Dandy" and "Punkin-Lily." If Gail Bederman is right that by "the last decades of the nineteenth century, middle-class power and authority were being challenged [by women, ethnic groups, and the working class] in a variety of ways which middle-class men interpreted—plausibly—as a challenge to their manhood," Arliss's political bedfellows raise questions about his virility.<sup>22</sup> Hence the pressure to earn the support of Henry Rittenhouse only reminds Arliss of his "unfruitful state," of the "nature of his present lack" (*Cactus Thorn*, 19, 21). No wonder he is anxious, unable to rise to what he sees as a challenge.

Despite the "years of European travel" that gave him the easy manner and knowledge on which he has built his political career, Arliss decides to "fle[e] westward" (*Cactus Thorn*, 17, 18). Austin connects Europe with the "spiritual lethargy" that would come to characterize modernism (17), and Arliss recognizes that he is in danger of becoming cowed and ineffectual, another Prufrock. As in the formula western of the period, the West offers a new world for another Adam, a place for a man to regenerate his "hope and faith," a setting for personal reinvention, for the liberation and satisfaction of desire (18). Seeking "the freedom he had come so far to find," Arliss sees the West as an agent in his renewal; he hopes to "find himself" and eagerly wonders "what the West might do to him" (7, 20).

Like many westerns, *Cactus Thorn* explores that very question. As we have seen, Austin believed in the West's healing powers, the opportunities it provided for challenging social convention. But she turns Arliss's question around: at what cost, at whose cost, his "recuperating powers" (61)? What might he "do" to the West, what "use" will he put it to? The West might indeed offer Arliss—and, through him, the United States—a regen-

erative social vision. In much of her own work Austin moved from personal to cultural healing and transformation, presenting the West and its regional cultures, its racial diversity, its landscape as offering a compelling alternative to what she saw as the sterile (perhaps even impotent) and empty despair of modernism, cut off from roots in real places.<sup>23</sup> Instead Arliss takes and uses the West, and its resources, to create a masculine image that will enable him to take power and make capital out of a symbolic mining of the West. Ironically, this reformer's achievement of a "healthy" manhood particularly rests on racial, gender, and class superiority.

Austin embodies the West in Dulcie Adelaid Vallodón, who seems to "have assembled herself from the tawny earth," a young woman capable of healing Arliss and guiding him to that redemptive social vision (4). In the most obvious sense, Arliss has a lay with the land, to paraphrase Annette Kolodny, and indeed he brings to the West the set of assumptions Kolodny explores, a yearning for a sexualized paradise available for his use.<sup>24</sup> Austin anticipates Kolodny's critique and allows the West to fight back. Devastating satire is Austin's sharpest weapon, her cactus thorn. Arliss, she suggests, uses Dulcie's body to achieve that "elusive quality of self-inflation called inspiration" (20). In many lines like this and in her image patterns, Austin deflates Arliss's "desire" to create a comic treatment of his "healing" as infatuation. Yet Arliss *does* return east with new vigor and authority as a result of his western experience. Austin is certainly satirizing the idea that sexual experience leads to male empowerment. But Arliss takes more than Dulcie's body. Because Austin makes so clear that Dulcie's "philosophy," her ways of seeing, her relationship to regional peoples, and her identity all represent her western experience and the land itself, Arliss's western "healing" comes at the expense of the West and represents an act of imperialism.

Dulcie has thought deeply on what the desert has to offer, on the sources of its "power," on how to "live sincerely," on how its lessons challenge "made up" social constructions of human behavior (75, 12). She is one of Austin's many far-seeing desert women, and as with the others, Austin connects her wisdom directly to her relationships with the land and with American Indians, in this case Paiutes. Significantly, Dulcie is not trying to become an Indian or to imitate or appropriate; she wants to learn. "When I'm out with the Indian women, . . . gathering roots and materials for basket making, it's not that I expect to make baskets or drink their medicine, it's the things you sort of soak up from the earth while you're

with them, the things that make women wise. I don't know if I can explain—it's not as if they learned about willows and grasses in order to make baskets, but as if they learned to make baskets by knowing willows" (41). Dulcie learns that cultural production should follow from knowing and respecting the natural order of things. So, she believes, should social institutions: "You have to begin with what loving is, and cut your marriage accordingly" (12). She counters the "made-up ideas" of "society and religion and politics [and] the city" with an intense respect for and responsiveness to the desert, which exists in its own right, "goes on by itself, doing things that you don't see either the beginning of, or the end, except that it has very little to do with men" (46, 47). As Betsy Klimasmith has argued, Arliss "uses Dulcie's ideas to further his own career," recognizing "the appeal Dulcie's mysterious wisdom will have to other urbanites afflicted with ennui" (8-9).<sup>25</sup>

By attributing the source of Dulcie's ideas—"that mysterious wisdom which she shared with the Indian women," generated from knowledge of the processes of nature—Austin demonstrates that Arliss's successful new program appropriates others' lives and worldviews (54). (Austin might well be critiqued for romanticizing the "mysterious wisdom" of "others.") In fact, Arliss, who in his "unfruitful state" has been unable to "rise to the opportunity" presented by Henry Rittenhouse's daughter, Alida, repeatedly finds the "fruity brownness of [Dulcie's] skin" sexually exciting (14). Alida, it is apparent to Arliss, is "to be had and used only through marriage"; but he has quite different assumptions about Dulcie, whom Austin repeatedly connects to Indians and to Mexico, suggesting a mestizo heritage (22). Her indeterminate but certainly mixed racial background further embodies the multiracial, multicultural West that Austin so valued. Dulcie takes her last name from her mother, whom she describes as a "southerner," and in the context of this novel the south is Mexico. The prefix "Valla" suggests an opening between two natural elements, a junction, in Spanish. Her first name also underscores the connection. She is named Dulcie after her birthplace, Agua Dulce, or Sweetwater, a ranch with an artesian well. The weapon she will ultimately use against the invader, Arliss, was given to her mother by a Mexican admirer. On her guitar Dulcie plays Spanish melodies, perhaps "part of her mother's repertory" (55). She follows Mexican politics, noting with approval Arliss's assessment of the Mexican Revolution: "not that a bloody and violent revolution has occurred but that the political energy of a people has been set free for constructive activity"

(40).<sup>26</sup> Here as elsewhere, Dulcie is attracted to Arliss's apparently progressive politics because they seem to reflect her own beliefs, developed as a western outlier; her "program" would be based on cultural and racial intersections and blending. Like Gail Bederman, who points out that Roosevelt's phrase "the strenuous life," which became the mantra for progressive manhood, was actually the title to a speech he gave on imperialism, Austin explores the ways manhood, imperialist assumptions, and racism intersect.<sup>27</sup>

In a series of images that expose Arliss's hypocrisy about the use of the West's natural resources, Austin further suggests how his regeneration depends on exploitation. Inspired by Dulcie's ideas and body, Arliss, previously in a state of "dryness," finds that "the fountains of his mind [are] broken up" (19, 53). In further sexual satire, Austin shows how Arliss's mind flows from his body, symbolized by the previously clogged, "disused" fountain that Dulcie manages to "rehabilitate" (39). An artificial water source, the fountain was built at his absurd "Italian" villa by a local pocket miner, who, according to Dulcie, "just about tore the insides out of the hill, getting at the rich streaks" (39). Arliss's efforts to distance himself from this miner are telling. "Arliss found in her description his favorite indignation. That, he protested, was how men went about the earth, snatching and rending, and even as they tore at the hills for a handful of gain, they despoiled and exploited one another. Once he was launched on the social protest he slipped easily into the born politician's facility of denunciation, and quoted freely from himself" (39). Dulcie does not recognize Arliss's fundamental insincerity, although Austin's scathing narrative undermining tears away at his character; ultimately, of course, he will reveal himself as a version of the very men he critiques.

Austin makes these passages even more ironic by identifying Dulcie with the West's natural resources, particularly water and minerals, which lie deep within the earth, and the sun, associated with energy, passion, and desire. (A veritable ecosystem, Dulcie is also linked to plant and animal life.) As a westerner, Dulcie recognizes the inevitable scarcity of natural resources, and her beliefs are also based on a strong preservationist ethic that eventually causes her to question all forms of ownership. Repeated water imagery connects Dulcie to artesian wells, like that for which she was named. The Adelaid was a famous mine in Leadville that generated numerous battles over property rights, and Austin connects the mining of the desert to Dulcie's body in many passages: "From the mouth of the canyon they could see far up the range between the reddish flanks of the canon,

the ruined scar of the mine" (39). (Austin met Georgia O'Keeffe at Luhan's house at about the time she was writing *Cactus Thorn*.) Indeed, Arliss is given directions to Dulcie by a "mining engineer" who explicitly connects sexual desire, manhood, and imperialistic urges: "'S a great country,' he said, letting his eyes wander from the high window to the round-bosomed hills and the cradling dip of the land seawards. 'And a man-size job to conquer her . . . make her bear . . . great civilizations'" (24). Feeling a "returning pulse of power" in response to the primitive, Arliss finds himself heating up in the presence of "this pale brown girl, as if she were, like the land, but the outward sheath of incredible hot forces" (20, 8). As he misreads the "flame-colored" cactus flower to which she is likened, Arliss misunderstands Dulcie's embodiment of the desert: she does open to the desert sun and heat, but her desire is not for self-inflation but for a receptivity to the life forces around her.

Arliss, whose politics have verged on socialism, returns to the East "in that mood of robust individualism which comes to a man satisfied in all his instincts" (59). Empowered by his man-size conquering, he has appropriated the desert's and Dulcie's sources of power and is now ready to inspire others. "Those of his followers who were privileged to hear Grant Arliss on his first platform appearance after his return from the West never forgot it. It was like hearing . . . him burst suddenly into full power. Younger men who had gathered around him chiefly out of their own desperate hope for *something*, some way out of their own political sterility, men who had felt that Arliss *could* produce the materials of fire, and had yet remained doubtful if he *would*, found themselves dazzled into confidence. Dazzled and yet warmed. There was a blaze" (79). Significantly, Arliss's "program" remains vague, lacks substance; it is his persona that has changed. "They found him greatly improved by his Western holiday. Filled out; bodily and, well, personally" (80). As Theodore Roosevelt did, Arliss uses the West to construct a new, virile self, even a new body.<sup>28</sup> With his fountain unplugged, he has learned how to negotiate with Henry Rittenhouse: he will seal their coalition by marrying Rittenhouse's daughter, who will become what he desires in a wife, a "fenced and valued possession" (54). He has learned the ways of capitalism. Alida is the medium of exchange that binds the two men together, and she will serve Arliss as she served her father: "Alida sat close to her father's elbow with that complete acceptance of [Arliss's] own as well as her father's importance and of herself as a suitable background for it" (81).

Her value depleted, her passion consumed, Dulcie is abandoned, "used—exploited," and she knows it (98). Arliss's power and authority have come at her expense. In the all-consuming, "faintly illuminated" city, where earth has turned to pavement and sun to "electric lamps," where the "piled-up plunder of the world . . . glittered from behind the plate glass windows," Dulcie appears to lose her power (84, 98, 97). Noting her "docility," Arliss pities her (96). But Austin's West is hardly docile, and Arliss can save his pity for himself, as is his practice: "The picture of himself as the source of suffering in others filled him with a sincere misery almost as acute as the thought of his own suffering at someone else's hands" (96). When Dulcie realizes the use to which Arliss has put the desert West's crucial lesson—the necessity "to live sincerely"—she enacts the threat that has been in evidence throughout the novella in the descriptions of natural forces (75). Austin manages to extend Arliss's hypocrisy into his grave. As he misreads the West, so does the eastern "public" misread the motives for his death: he is "remembered as martyr to the cause of justice and true democracy to which he had dedicated the life he lost" (98). The description of the murder weapon, a "dagger of foreign workmanship," tells two intertwined stories: it simultaneously reveals the racism of the authorities who associate all violence with "foreigners" and represents Austin's understanding of the very real rage of the colonized (99).

In the discrepancy between the public myth of Arliss's life and the covert truth, we can discover a clue to the cultural critique encoded in *Cactus Thorn*, a clue that takes us back to Tompkins's reading of the cultural work of the western. Throughout her career, in works as diverse as *The Basket Woman*, *The Ford*, and *Starry Adventure*, Austin attempted to deconstruct the social forces defining manhood and then reconstruct what it meant to be a man; many of her male characters develop a self-conscious sense of manhood by listening receptively to the lessons of the land and to ethnic voices. She naturally resisted the "tireless reinventions" of the violent, sexually dominant, and "masterful" masculinity in the western—and resisted even more the symbolic use of the West as embodied in land, women, and ethnic minorities. If male readers, suffering from the vague malaise about their manhood associated with neurasthenia, could go west with popular western heroes and experience a vicarious potency, the violence safely contained, then Austin would sharpen her cactus thorn, her tongue.<sup>29</sup> *Cactus Thorn* satirically undermines the dominance of the popular western's mythology, revealing its appropriations of the West and offering a threatening counternarrative of retaliation.

Of course, Austin too was putting the West to her own use, and she closes the novel with a characteristically romantic image of female escape. As a train carries Dulcie once more into the western landscape in "relief after great shock and pain," we return to the West as healing asylum (99). Austin's West is often a symbolic refuge for women outlaws on the run after expressing their rebellion and anger. Austin offers Dulcie sanctuary there as one who, unlike Arliss, can receive its riches without consuming them.

In a story she wrote some years before *Cactus Thorn*, Austin satirizes another hypocritical, "consumptive" man. I close my discussion with "A Case of Conscience" because in it Austin challenges even more directly the rights of outsiders to use and appropriate a racialized West. Saunders, the narrator tells us immediately, is "an average Englishman with a lung complaint" who comes west to be cured.<sup>30</sup> At Ubehebe, the same Maiden's Breast Arliss heads for to find Dulcie, Saunders meets Turwhasé, a Shoshone, and begins to live with her. They have a child. "Turwhasé," the narrator says, "was as much married as if Church and State had witnessed it; as for Saunders, society, life itself, had cast him off" (48). The narrator sarcastically suggests that Saunders's story hints at "the myth of the renewal of life in a virgin embrace" (48). After a visit to a doctor he suddenly finds himself cured, able to return home. There is no question of taking Turwhasé; Saunders knows he can make a "very good marriage at home" (48). But out of a sense of duty, he decides to take his half-breed child.

Saunders soon regrets his decision: the child pines; strangers look at his "brat" with scorn; he pays a woman to keep the child out of his sight. Then he is confronted by Turwhasé, who has tracked him for four days. "My baby!" she said. "Give it to me! . . . Mine!" she said, fiercely. "Mine, not yours!" (50). He hands her the baby and then takes out all his money and "pour[s] it in her bosom." Turwhasé laughs, scatters the coins on the ground, and walks away "with dignity" (50). Saunders, a "smug" Englishman, returns to his colonial empire. But Turwhasé keeps her baby—and the West holds onto its future.

## NOTES

1. Mabel Dodge Luhan, "Mary Austin: A Woman," in *Mary Austin: A Memorial*, ed. Willard Hoagland (Santa Fe: Laboratory of Anthropology, 1944), 21.

2. Luhan goes on to assume that Austin committed her "destruction" of Steffens in *No. 26 Jayne Street* (1920), which is certainly true. And yet Austin claims in *Earth Horizon* that she wrote *Jayne Street* in New York, and while she savagely ridicules the politician based on Steffens, he is very much alive at the novel's end. It is much more likely she was "done in"



by writing the ending of *Cactus Thorn*, never published during her lifetime but written in New Mexico.

3. Mary Austin, *Earth Horizon* (1932; reprint, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 337. Subsequent parenthetical page numbers refer to this edition.

4. Mary Austin, *Cactus Thorn*, ed. Melody Graulich (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1988), 22, 13, 23. Subsequent parenthetical page numbers refer to this edition.

5. Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Race and Gender in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), II.

6. Mary Austin, "The Walking Woman," in *Western Trails: A Collection of Stories by Mary Austin*, ed. Melody Graulich (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1987), 93. Subsequent parenthetical page numbers refer to this edition.

7. For a fuller treatment of their relationship and their mutual influence, see Melody Graulich, "I Thought at First She Was Talking about Herself: Mary Austin on Charlotte Perkins Gilman," *Jack London Journal* 1.1 (1994): 148-58. I see the encounter between these two women who had so much in common and so much to share as significantly shaping Austin's fiction, particularly such stories as "The Walking Woman" and "Frustrate," in which two women come together in transformative moments. Austin definitely knew "The Yellow Wallpaper"; there was a copy in her library when she died, inscribed "To Mary Austin—with real admiration and interest. Charlotte Perkins Gilman 1910."

Cather's Thea Kronborg of *The Song of the Lark* (1915), a novel surely influenced by Austin's work, is another fictional heroine who recovers in the West and realizes her artistic potential there.

8. For a particularly balanced treatment of Mitchell, see Suzanne Poirier, "The Weir Mitchell Rest Cure: Doctor and Patients," *Women's Studies* 10 (1983): 15-40.

9. E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 189.

10. Darwin Payne, *Owen Wister: Chronicler of the West, Gentleman of the East* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 66.

11. Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 136.

12. Payne, *Owen Wister*, 74.

13. *Ibid.*, 76.

14. In fact, while some critics have focused on the extreme inactivity and isolation of Mitchell's rest cure as portrayed by Gilman, he prescribed widely various treatments. He often sent both men and women to Europe for "vacations," treatment he had recommended for both of Wister's parents.

15. Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 185-86, 190.

16. *Ibid.*, 191-93.

17. *Ibid.*, 191.

18. David Leverenz, "The Last Real Man in America: From Natty Bumppo to Batman," in *The American Literary History Reader*, ed. Gordon Hutner (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 273.

19. Tompkins, *West of Everything*, 9, 44-45.

20. For an excellent discussion of Austin's "The Walking Woman" as a revision of formula westerns in the context of Progressive Era politics, see Faith Jaycox's "Regeneration

through Liberation: Mary Austin's 'The Walking Woman' and Western Narrative Formula," *Legacy* 6.1 (1989): 5-12.

21. Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 272. Rotundo quotes a wonderful passage by Senator John Ingalls of Kansas (from 1886), who said that male reformers were "effeminate without being either masculine or feminine; unable to beget or bear; possessing neither fecundity nor virility; endowed with the contempt of men and the derision of women, and doomed to sterility, isolation and extinction" (272).

22. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 10, 170.

23. For a more extended discussion of how the "radical visionaries" who moved to New Mexico after World War I saw it as a "fertile ground on which to rebuild the world," in sharp contrast to European-based or urban modernism, see Lois Rudnick's *Utopian Vistas: The Mabel Dodge Luhan House and the American Counterculture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 33. Rudnick points out that "[t]he Anglo expatriates' hunger for spiritual and psychic renewal often blinded them to the more unpleasant social, political, and economic realities that surrounded them," particularly the exploitation of racial minorities, both economically and culturally (35). Throughout her career Austin was certainly susceptible to that critique; the portrayal of "Indian George" and Catameneda as servants in *Cactus Thorn* seems unexamined, though perhaps Arliss misunderstands their role in Dulcie's life. But in her portrayal of Arliss, Austin removes the blinders.

24. Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

25. Betsy Klimasmith, "Storytellers, Story-Sellers: Artists, Muses, and Exploitation in the Work of Mary Austin," *Southwestern American Literature* 20.2 (1995): 8-9. Austin is certainly open to charges of romanticizing and appropriating American Indian materials herself, an issue explored by other essays in this volume. In "Storytellers, Story-Sellers," Klimasmith presents a compelling reading of the differences between Austin's narrators and Arliss in their approach to their "subjects."

26. Throughout her life, but especially around the time she was writing *Cactus Thorn*, Austin was intrigued by the cultural influence of Mexico on the southwestern United States. She was much involved in the Spanish colonial arts movement and in supporting and developing programs for bilingual education for Spanish-speaking children. In 1930, she went to Mexico, a trip she found profoundly moving; she described herself as "overflow[ing] with tears" when viewing the murals of Diego Rivera, whom she also met, and as seeing many intersections between his work and hers (*Earth Horizon*, 365).

27. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 184.

28. In *Theodore Roosevelt: A Life* (New York: William Morrow, 1992), Nathan Miller discusses how Roosevelt used his western experience to construct a new image:

Roosevelt had three major liabilities in politics: he was an aristocrat, he was an intellectual, and he was an easterner. Altogether, he spent only about three years in the Bad Lands, a period interrupted by sometimes lengthy stays in the East. Yet he so successfully identified himself with the West that for the remainder of his life, the public thought of him as a rough-riding cowboy rather than a New York dude. This western experience removed the stigma of effeminacy, ineffectuality, and intellectualism that clung to most reformers. (163-64)



In *Earth Horizon*, Austin comments that she and Roosevelt were "rather good friends" during the years she lived in New York (324).

29. Despite one recent U.S. president's personification of the western reader as male, there has been considerable debate about who actually reads westerns. In "Zane Grey's Western Eroticism," for instance, William Bloodworth suggests that Grey, who sometimes published in women's magazines, wrote for women readers (*South Dakota Review* 23.3 [1985]: 5-14). While I, like Tompkins, find Grey's westerns "thrilling," I think Austin would have seen the popular western as appealing primarily to male fantasies about the West.

30. Mary Austin, "A Case of Conscience," in *Western Trails*, 44. Page numbers follow subsequent quotations in the text.

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