

- 21 Harry R. Warfel, "Local Color and Literary Artistry: Mary Noailles Murfree's *In the Tennessee Mountains*," *The Southern Literary Journal* 3 (1970): 154-5; see also Fetterley and Pryse, *American Women Regionalists*, 270.
- 22 Fetterley and Pryse, *American Women Regionalists*, 255.
- 23 Mary Noailles Murfree, *In the Tennessee Mountains* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1885), 122.
- 24 Allison Ensor, "The Geography of Mary Noailles Murfree's *In the Tennessee Mountains*," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 31 (1978): 199; see 191-9.
- 25 Fetterley and Pryse, *American Women Regionalists*, 290.
- 26 Sarah Barnwell Elliott, *Some Data and Other Stories of Southern Life* (Bratenahl, OH: Seaforth Publications, 1981), 37.
- 27 Elliott, *Some Data*, 176-7; *NCAWW*, 374.
- 28 Elliott, *Some Data*, 95, 97, 102.

## 3

## Western Biodiversity: Rereading Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing

MELODY GRAULICH

How much does that expression ["the West"] mean to include? I never have been able to discover its limits.

Caroline Kirkland, *A New Home, Who'll Follow? or, Glimpses of Western Life* (1839)<sup>1</sup>

In 1898, Paul Wilstach designed and published in *The Bookman* "A Map which is a Literary Map" of the United States. Numerous names crowd the land east of the Mississippi River. The western two-thirds of the continent is empty space, barely marked with tiny names: a minuscule "Longfellow" in Minnesota (which the poet never visited), a teeny "Garland" in South Dakota, Wister and Remington delicately criss-crossing each other across Arizona and New Mexico, Bret Harte and Joaquin Miller perched in the Sierras. Larger "Unclaimed's" march across three or four states at a time, land apparently available for the planting of the imperialist pen.<sup>2</sup>

On one level, Wilstach's map, surveying the literary production of the nineteenth century, seems a precursor of the famous *New Yorker* cover of a truncated continental map including only New York and California, which, depending on one's point of view, reveals or mocks Eastern cultural hegemony. As Caroline Kirkland's question suggests, the definition of what we mean by "West" is always problematic, ever retreating westward throughout the nineteenth century. Yet the plains and far West *were* storied lands by the turn of the century. And the literary West was not the "Hisland" Wilstach implies, to borrow a pun from historian Susan Armitage:

There is a region of America that I have come to call Hisland. In a magnificent Western landscape, under perpetually cloudless Western skies, a cast of heroic characters engages in dramatic combat, sometimes with nature,

sometimes with each other. Occupationally, these heroes are diverse: they are mountain men, cowboys, Indians, soldiers, farmers, miners, and desperadoes, but they share one distinguishing characteristic – they are all men. It seems that all rational demography has ended at the Mississippi River: all the land West of it is occupied only by men. This mythical land is America's most enduring contribution to folklore: the legendary Wild West.

When Charlotte Perkins Gilman wrote a utopian novel about an all-female world called Herland, she knew that she was writing a fantasy. The problem with hisland is that many people believe it is history, and some of those people are historians.<sup>3</sup>

Armitage's comment suggests that even in 1987 Wiltstach's map was still guiding Western scholars. So "the legendary Wild West" needs a new survey. In place of Wiltstach's "Unclaimed" across Idaho, Colorado, and California, let's write in Mary Hallock Foote, with her fifteen novels and short story collections. In Texas, we can mark a wandering Mary Austin Holley and poet/journalist Sara Estela Ramirez crossing the Rio Grande. Across the prairies troop Eliza Farnham, Kate McPhelim Cleary, Zitkala-Ša, Mary Catherwood, Eleanor Gates. Crossing the borders of the Pacific Northwest, Ella Higginson and Pauline Johnson write both poetry and stories. Abigail Scott Duniway launches *The New Northwest* in Oregon and writes many of its articles in support of women's rights, as well as an autobiography, *Path Breaking*, and little known novels. Eliza Snow and Josephine Spencer claim Utah for Mormonism, while years in retrospect Annie Clark Tanner will explore turn-of-the-century polygamous marriages in *A Mormon Mother*. Sharlott Hall writes poetry in mining camps in Arizona, where Gwendolen Overton is raised in army forts and sets her story about Apache uprisings in the 1870s volume, *The Heritage of Unrest* (1901). Sarah Winnemucca describes a Nevada girlhood and the dispossession of her people, while Ida Meacham Strobridge chronicles desert ranch life in Nevada in *In the Loom of the Desert* (1907) and *The Land of Purple Shadows* (1909). Shortly after Wiltstach drew his map, in Wyoming Elinore Pruitt Stewart writes *The Letters of a Woman Homesteader* to a friend in Colorado, and in Montana, B.(ertha) M.(uzzy) Bowers begins to write popular formula Westerns with a feminist slant. And California shows the kind of cultural and racial diversity which still characterizes it: María Amparo Ruiz de Burton writes political and Yda Addis gothic stories about the conquered Mexican Californios, a group which also draws the attention of the prolific Gertrude Atherton; Helen Hunt Jackson writes with sympathy if not always full understanding about the native tribes of California, as does Mary Austin, with far more knowledge; Sui Sin Far brings her readers into the various West coast Chinatowns, exposing racial stereotypes; the poet Ina Coolbrith edits the influential *Overland Monthly*; Margaret Collier Graham, Atherton, Austin, and Gilman publish fiction about women who, as Austin says, "want to live lives of their own."

In claiming a place on the Western map, women like Austin claimed for themselves the free will and independence that the legendary West has always seemed to promise to men. In 1893 Frederick Jackson Turner suggested at the Chicago World's Fair that the presence of free undeveloped land determined American history, and his influential "Frontier Thesis" expanded upon the popular nineteenth-century theme that the frontier's freedom from authority and tradition helped to shape the American character. Austin and many other writers certainly believed that the West offered them opportunities to live freer lives than those dictated by social conventions in more settled regions, a persistent theme in their work. (And, in fact, Western states generally passed women's suffrage laws earlier than Eastern states, though there are conflicting readings of the reasons for such votes.) In her autobiographical writings, Austin suggested that the arid spaces of the West gave her "the courage to shear off what is not worthwhile"; there she learned to cast off conventional definitions of what she called "young ladihood," making the "revolutionary discovery" that her life was her own, to live fully and freely:<sup>4</sup> "[T]here 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."<sup>5</sup>

The narrators of the two Austin stories included in Karen Kilcup's *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers*, "The Basket Maker" and "The Walking Woman," "get out" to search actively for the meaning in their lives. As Austin did in her own life, they discover new trails from native women and "outliers" like the Walking Woman, who had "walked off all sense of society-made values, and, knowing the best when the best came to her, was able to take it."<sup>6</sup>

But if the West offered some women opportunities for independence and rebellion, Turner's thesis certainly cannot describe the lives of other Western women. "Society's" very definition of "ladihood" denies some women the choice to reject it by denying them access to it; like Frances Harper and other African American women writers, ethnic Western writers like Ruiz de Burton, Winnemucca, and Sui Sin Far often insist upon their heroines' acceptance of propriety and sexual conformity as a way of countering racial stereotypes about "primitive" others. Their rebellion against the roles assigned them is far different from Austin's or Gilman's. And writers like Abigail Scott Duniway, Kate McPhelim Cleary, Nannie Alderson, and a number of diarists remind us that many women, especially first generation white settlers, saw their Western lives as circumscribed and isolated, cutting them off from the now famous female world of love and ritual, often turning them into victims of abusive husbands.<sup>7</sup> The West turned them into captives of their husbands' dreams, "married," as Foote said, "irretrievably into the West."<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, one way of reading Mary Hallock Foote's "The Fate of a Voice" (1886) is as a captivity narrative; the heroine, Madeline, an opera singer, finds that in the West her "voice was lost," her life story confined within her husband's

version of it. Yet Foote herself is a paradoxical Westerner, claiming when she first went West, "I never felt so *free* in my life"; and the ending of "The Fate of a Voice" yields multiple readings: liberated from the dominance of elitist Eastern and European culture, Madeline develops a democratic voice in the West.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the West gave Foote her subject matter as a writer, as it did Caroline Kirkland, another reluctant pioneer, who said she "little thought of becoming an author before [she] lived in the wilderness. . . ."<sup>10</sup> Austin and others insisted they *found* their voices in the West. As Austin wrote in her third-person autobiography, *Earth Horizon*:

[Mary] was never much taken with the wish of many girls of her acquaintance that they had been boys. She thought there might be a great deal to be got out of being a woman; but she definitely meant neither to chirrup nor twitter. She meant not to remit a single flash of wit, anger or imagination. She had no idea of what, in her time, such a determination would entail. She was but dimly aware of something within herself; competent, self-directive; she meant to trust it.<sup>11</sup>

But let us further complicate the subject of voice.<sup>12</sup> With few models to guide her, Austin turned to American Indian women and found her voice in conversation with them, as her stories reveal. Did she appropriate their stories to her own needs? Assume she could speak for them? How did the Anglo settlement of the West, both Spanish and American, affect the voices of American Indian women? Zitkala-Ša, Sarah Winnemucca, Alice Callahan, and Pauline Johnson wrote in English largely for white audiences and for political purposes; in a narrow sense, their "literacy" is the product of their contact with whites, used to advance their peoples' causes. Yet as the "Native American Myths about Women" section of Kilcup's *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers* shows, and the recent work of Leslie Silko or Paula Gunn Allen attests, the stories from their tribal oral traditions about mythic figures like Thought Woman, or Spider Grandmother, and Changing Woman provide enabling models of female creativity, power, and self-expression, in contrast to the handicapping stereotypical stories they had to struggle against. Indeed, the stories told *about* American Indians throughout American literary history might best (if ironically) be termed "captivity narratives," for American Indian lives and voices were captive within them. As Nez Perce leader Yellow Wolf said, "The Whites told only one side. Told it to please themselves. Told much that is not true. Only his own best deeds, only the worst deeds of the Indians, has the white man told."<sup>13</sup>

Who gets to tell what Western story about whom? Many Western stories, such as Sui Sin Far's "Its Wavering Image" or Cleary's "Feet of Clay" or any of innumerable Austin stories, explore this very question. Wilstach's story of the West, told in his map, leaves women out entirely; more often literary historians have presented women heading West as cultural baggage carted into Hisland, burdening the lives of men, or as repressive agents of civilization. But as I've

suggested by the questions I've raised above about recurring Western themes – liberation, isolation, cultural conventions, race, class, and voice – any story is only part of the story, often leaving out, distorting, or even silencing other stories.

Critics like Annette Kolodny, Vera Norwood, Lois Rudnick, Paula Gunn Allen, Tey Diana Rebolledo, and myself have found recurrent themes in Western women's literature, but we have done so by narrowing our focus to a particular region, a specific period, a single race – that is, by telling only part of the story.<sup>14</sup> However defined, the West is a vast, diverse, rapidly changing region. Even the most commonly accepted geopolitical definition today, that the West is defined by aridity, cannot encompass the whole region; what of the Pacific Northwest and, hence, the seaside stories and poems by Higginson and Johnson? We associate the legendary West with vast, empty spaces, and indeed the strong and abiding relationship between land and human character is a major theme in much Western literature. Yet by the late nineteenth century most Westerners lived in cities, many of them containing Chinatowns like those described by Sui Sin Far. The legendary West is populated by American Indians who live in the tepees of the nomadic Sioux, but the agricultural pueblo peoples of the Southwest lived in cities themselves. Even generalizations about American Indian presence and culture in the West ultimately confront cultural diversity and must recognize tribal differences.

Historical changes further complicate our definition. Are the various "frontiers" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the "West"? Caroline Kirkland, writing about soggy Michigan mudholes, certainly believed she was writing about the West in 1837, as did Alice Cary, as her subtitle to *Clovernook*, a series of Ohio stories, indicates: *Recollections of Our Neighborhood in the West* (1852). As Ruiz de Burton ironically suggests in *The Squatter and the Don* (1885), Western history is commonly told from an Eastern perspective of Manifest Destiny; *her* West was settled not from the East but from the South, from Mexico. Yet while she self-consciously explores historical changes and imperialistic power, contrasting life in California under Mexican and United States rule and exposing racist attitudes in government policies toward "Californios," she grants the "original Spanish" settlers the right to have taken California lands from the real *original* settlers, the Native peoples who came from the North. Her "Mexicans" are really transplanted Europeans, and like the Eastern perspective she critiques, her historical time begins with white settlement.

In exploring American Indian literature, "historical" time often comes to mean the post-contact period. Sarah Winnemucca's *Life Among the Piutes* (1883) begins with a chapter called "First Meeting of Piutes and Whites," as if history, told as a tragedy, begins with that meeting, which yields a very different life story than, for example, Maria Chona's as-told-to autobiography, *The Autobiography of a Papago Woman* (1936), which chronicles tribal life with very little contact with whites. Definitions of historical periods also overdetermine our readings of the literature of American Indians; at 1900, with the Western tribes "conquered" and gathered on reservations, ten years after Wounded Knee, the Dawes Act just

passed, the "Dream was Ended," as Black Elk said. But if we read on into the twentieth century, to Humishima, Ella DeLoria, and more contemporary writers, we are forced to realize that the dream only *seemed* ended, that American Indians cannot be contained in the frames of Western movies, as antagonists or tragic albeit heroic victims, but they have a significant ongoing presence in American culture. Nowhere is their cultural influence clearer than in the Southwest.

Like its historical borders, the West's national and cultural borders are also permeable, despite all political efforts to patrol and control and place "keep out" signs along the Rio Grande and to segregate Asian communities in China- or Korea-towns. Responding to Gloria Anzaldúa's immensely influential *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), recent critics have begun to expand American literature by crossing all kinds of borders, particularly in the West. So we return to Kirkland's question of where "the West" begins and ends.

Twenty years ago, when I wrote my dissertation on nineteenth-century Western writers (all male!), my director, the historian David Levin, pestered me with a recurrent marginal comment, "But what about x, or y, or z," whenever I attempted a generalization. David, it seemed to me, had changed Thoreau's famous "Simplify, simplify, simplify" into "Qualify, qualify, qualify!" and I often felt thwarted. While in the intervening years I have ventured many generalizations about Western women, David's voice has, I hope, helped me present my generalizations as postulations or, as the postmoderns would say, as constructed knowledge, as stories. But as I write today, David's warning voice echoes, and all generalizations about Western literature seem partial, slippery. In fact, writers and then scholars of Western writing have struggled with the prevailing assumptions – some might call them legends – about The West. For the rest of this essay, I'd like to look at some of the inherited dilemmas scholars of Western women's writings have faced in the past fifteen or so years, dilemmas that have informed readings of Western writings and thereby constituted meanings, leading to partial stories. Among them are the pervasive influence of the never-dying Turner's thesis and the ongoing fascination with the frontier's fabled freedom and liberation; the mythic West's stranglehold on the scholarly and popular imagination; the ongoing sense that the West is male territory; and the focus on gender differences in the West. Then I will move into the borderlands to discuss some recent approaches which offer us new possibilities and new metaphors.

In the new wave of feminist recovery in the late 1970s through the 1980s, historians and literary critics ambivalently confronted not only the ongoing influence of Turner's thesis and its echoing hoofbeats in American Studies scholarship, but also their own desires to discover and claim feminist heroines. Turning to private documents of ordinary women – diaries, letters, journals, memoirs – a host of historians began to write about Western women's lives. Like Susan Armitage, who in 1981 described the "central question" in Western women's history as whether or not the frontier liberated women, they initially attempted to evaluate women's experience in relation to male patterns, which often led to

the conclusion that the frontier's fabled freedom was not offered to women, that women went West reluctantly and were often unhappy there.<sup>15</sup> Julie Roy Jeffrey describes her response in *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840–1880*:

During the course of doing the research for this book and writing it, my attitude toward my subject shifted, and I think it is important to explain this shift. My original perspective was feminist; I hoped to find that pioneer women used the frontier as a means of liberating themselves from stereotypes and behaviors which I found constricting and sexist. I discovered that they did not. More importantly, I discovered why they did not.<sup>16</sup>

There is considerable support in primary documents for this view of pioneer women's lives, and fiction like Kate McPhelim Cleary's "Feet of Clay," Hamlin Garland's many stories about Plains women, and Dorothy Scarborough's *The Wind* (1925) stress the sense of isolation, the hardship and struggle, the brutal landscape and weather of rural Western life. Accepting, at least on some level, that the West *had* offered men new opportunities, these historians somewhat reluctantly concluded, as did Armitage, that "there were two Wests: a female and a male one." While earlier critics had challenged fictional portrayals of women as civilizers who fail to respond to the grandeur of the Western landscape and its egalitarian nature, the dialectical view of men's and women's response to the West, initially attacked as stereotyping, gained legitimacy. Ironically, this viewpoint seems to echo one of the progenitors of the legendary West, Owen Wister's Virginian, who says, "There's cert'nly a right smart o' difference between men and women."<sup>17</sup>

The "difference" between how men and women respond to the West and what the West offers them is a recurrent theme in both Western literature and scholarship. For instance, in his influential *Regeneration through Violence*, Richard Slotkin has demonstrated how the male hero of the mythic Western often proves his manhood through acts of violence. In my own work on violence against women in Western literature, I built on the insights of the Western women's historians to explore crucial differences in how Western women focus on violence, writing a series of essays about texts in which daughters write openly and graphically about their mothers' victimization at the hands of fathers. Resisting their mothers' circumscribed lives and their roles as apparently powerless victims, early twentieth-century daughters like Agnes Smedley, Mari Sandoz, and others often identified with their storytelling fathers and sometimes seemed to reject their own womanhood.<sup>18</sup> They became what I think of as "Annie Oakley feminists," declaring "Anything you can do I can do better." Popular Western literature is filled with such heroines. Even the Virginian's fiancée, Molly Wood, recognizes the different opportunities apparently available to men in the West and proclaims, "I've always wanted to be a man."<sup>19</sup>

Like the daughters I discussed in my violence essay, many critics have challenged or rejected the role of the long-suffering pioneer woman, as did Dawn Lander in writing about her Western childhood:

I did not identify myself with houses, churches, and fences. I loved to be outdoors. I loved the space, energy, and passion of the landscape. Repeatedly, however, I could find no place for myself and for my pleasure in the wilderness in the traditionally recorded images of women on the frontier. Tradition gives us the figure of a woman, strong, brave, and often heroic, whose endurance and perseverance are legendary. It may seem strange that I find it difficult to identify with this much praised figure, but I can almost hear her teeth grinding behind her tight-set lips; her stiff spine makes me tired and her clenched fists sad. Victimization and martyrdom are the bone and muscle of every statue, picture, and word portrait of a frontier woman. She is celebrated because she stoically transcended a situation she never would have freely chosen. She submits to the wilderness just as – supposedly – she submits to sex. But she needn't enjoy it, and her whole posture is in rigid opposition to the wilderness experience: to the land, to the Indians. Her glory, we are told, is that she carried the family, religion, fences, the warmth of the hearth and steaming washtubs, inviolate to the West.<sup>20</sup>

Lander's honest exploration of her reaction to her inherited literary tradition is a particularly effective early example of feminist "personal voice" criticism, yet her response points to another problem in early Western studies, a variant of the "Annie Oakley syndrome": tomboy feminism, where the desire to have access to male privilege sometimes leads to a further stereotyping of women's roles. While Lander, unlike Molly Wood, certainly doesn't want to be a man, I find myself unnerved by her phrase "the warmth of the hearth," which inevitably recalls for me the female body, with its capacity for nurturance. In her effort to claim male freedom and power Lander, like Sandoz and Smedley, seems to reject traditional women's roles and values. As early as 1932, Mary Austin suggested that the Western feminist's revolt must be built upon an understanding of the influence and power of the "happenings of the hearth." In her autobiography, she reflected on her pioneer foremothers' influence:

Whatever in Mary makes her worth so much writing about has its roots in the saga of Polly [McAdams] and Hannah and Susanna Saville, in the nurture of which she grew up. . . . It is to the things that the Polly McAdamses discovered in their Westward trek that Mary's generation owed the success of their revolt against the traditional estimate of women. . . . Chief of the discoveries of the Polly McAdamses, as it was told to Mary, was the predominance of the happenings of the hearth, as against what happens on the battlefield and in the market-place, as the determinant of events. What they found out was that the hope of America . . . depended precisely on the capacity of the Polly McAdamses to coordinate society, to establish a civilization, to cause a culture to eventuate out of their own wit and the work of their hands, out of what they could carry with them into the wilderness.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout her career, Austin tried to merge the "space, energy, and passion of the landscape" with the "warmth of the hearth," as did Mary Hallock Foote, Pauline Johnson, and other Western writers. She provides a trail recent scholars have also tracked.

Instead of attempting to appropriate male territory, freedom, and patterns of heroism for women characters – and for themselves – feminist literary critics began in the 1980s to map a female territory and tradition, as did Annette Kolodny in *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630–1860*. Kolodny explores how women writers like Kirkland, Cary, Fuller, and others "escape the psychology of captivity" to envision the West as a feminized Eden, a "potential sanctuary for an idealized domesticity," where "women reveal themselves healed, renewed, revitalized – even psychically reborn."<sup>22</sup> Like the male hero, these women find psychic health in the West, yet they do so not by leaving behind civilization and domesticity but by creating through them. Accepting essential differences between how women and men write about the West, Kolodny seems to follow the trail that Gerda Lerner suggests women's culture often maps: to turn subordination into complementarity and then redefine it in positive ways.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Kolodny's description of the female fantasy of "idealized domesticity" in some ways resembles the role women are assigned in the legendary mythic West, the role Lander rejected, seen from a healing, renewing vantage point.

I made this same move myself in some of my earlier work.<sup>24</sup> Like the historians, I began with a theoretical model based on male writers, exploring the ways in which women writers have responded to the pervasive mythology of the American West, as revealed in literary and cultural traditions. In a satiric line, "O Beautiful for Spacious Guys," Jean Stafford suggests that America's fruited plains and majestic mountains are the domain of "spacious guys" and mocks the most cherished myth in American Studies: the tale of the independent male who escapes civilization and heads West to find freedom. This classic American story offers boys heroism and "space" in return for rebellion and nonconformity, but in canonized American literature and literary criticism, I suggested, the West's legendary freedom is not promised to girls. In fact, the "false" values of society, with its constrictions, obligations, and capitulations, are assigned to white women, the representatives of civilization, the hypocritical Miss Watsons who force Huck to wear shoes and go to school, the Molly Woods who learn in the West to acknowledge their desires for dominant men, or the "Victorian gentlewomen" who are unable to respond to the West's egalitarian grandeur. Adventure, independence, and freedom belong to male characters, while women "endure," as does the long-suffering pioneer helpmate who tries to recreate "home" in the West. Thus, as Nina Baym has suggested in an influential essay, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood," what has come to be the quintessential American plot not only denies women the hero's role but defines them as obstacles to the male hero's freedom, as antagonists to the implicit values of the story.<sup>25</sup>

In this earlier work, I adapted Judith Fetterley's description of the woman reader's response to such plots: disallowed identification with the hero and

presented with repressive facades of womanhood, she becomes a "resisting reader" to avoid being forced to reject herself.<sup>26</sup> Women writers, too, resist this powerful cultural tradition. Seeking ways to write about their own and other women's experiences in the West, they question the dichotomized gender roles and the values associated with them. Often aspiring to rebellion and escape, to non-conformity and adventure, they create women whose imaginations do respond to the West's limitlessness, but they also acknowledge and seek to understand the real restrictions in women's lives, to redefine the ways in which we understand such concepts as "individualism" and "freedom."

Women writers thus try to liberate Western literary traditions for themselves, I argued, by claiming male territory as their own *and* by reclaiming the significance of traditional women's values. In Adrienne Rich's term, they "re-vision" this dominant cultural tradition, with its rigid definitions of masculine and feminine roles: "We need to know the writing of the past," she argues, "and know it differently than we have ever known it, not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us."<sup>27</sup> My theoretical model caused me to turn to texts like Mary Austin's "The Return of Mr. Wills," in which she challenges the assumptions of one of the patriarchs of the rebellious male/civilizing female tradition, for her little known story revises from a woman's point of view that classic story of escape into the wilderness, "Rip Van Winkle."

Austin focuses on how the actions of the wandering male affect his wife's character. Like Rip, Mr. Wills is initially a likeable enough fellow, a dreamer who becomes obsessed with searching for lost mines, but his obsession, the female narrator tells us, becomes "the baldest of excuses to be out and away from everything that savored of definiteness and responsibility." Meanwhile his family, like Rip's, suffers; his actions "struck" at them, and his wife becomes "hopeless." Finally, like Rip, he disappears. The story stays with Mrs. Wills instead of following her husband into the wilderness. Having "lived so long with the tradition that a husband is a natural provider," she at first feels abandoned. But she and the children realize they can support themselves, with "a little over." She realizes that "she not only did not need Mr. Wills, but got on better without him" and finds a "new sense of independence and power." Unfortunately, Mr. Wills does not stay away for twenty years but returns to the home his family has built and settles on them "like a blight," announcing "'There's no place like home' . . . or something to that effect."<sup>28</sup> But the story ends with Mrs. Wills's happy realization that her husband will inevitably wander off again, probably forever, and she and her family will be rid of him.

And yet as Austin's story implies, resist as she might, no writer, no critic, can ultimately be rid of her cultural traditions: in mocking them or challenging them, she reaffirms their centrality to her way of understanding the West and women's experience there. Although many women writers readily make fun of the West's spacious guys, they are less certain about how to claim for women a *sweet* land of liberty, and their writings show a good deal of ambivalence about how to wed the West's liberating spirit and individualism with traditional women's values of connection and care.

My conclusion to this earlier work once again presumed difference, as I argued that the overlap in the two traditions of Western literature, male and female, will suggest that just as the male fantasies of freedom and self-determination are universal human, not exclusively male, dreams, so are the female concerns with human interdependence and obligation universal human needs that have been undervalued or overlooked. At about this same time, as I was struggling to unite, to marry, male and female traditions, Jane Tompkins published *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*, in which she saw popular Westerns as engaged in a power struggle for cultural "hegemony" with the domestic novels written by nineteenth-century women like Susan Warner, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Maria Cummins, particularly in their rejection of evangelical Christianity.<sup>29</sup> In Tompkins's brilliant readings of male writers and Western films, men and women seem perpetually at odds, and no woman has a powerful voice in interpreting the West.

While much writing about Western literature and history has struggled to escape the fascination with the past and the mythic West captured in little Joey Starrett's plaintive cry to the vanishing gunman hero at the end of Jack Shaeff's *Shane* ("Come back, Shane, come back"), recent Western critics have struggled to replace the old clichés of Turnerian free will, imperialistic Manifest Destiny, and headdress-adorned Indian enemies with new metaphors. The finest treatment of Western women's writing, *The Desert Is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art*, challenges the age-old stereotype that women resisted the Western landscape, exploring "how women have come to value the landscapes of the Southwest [and] also how their connections to the place shaped their artistic voices." Focusing on how women created art and artistic traditions out of their responses to the desert landscape, the editors collected essays that convey differences between the evolving traditions of transplanted Anglo writers and "the already well established traditions of Hispanic, Mexican-American, and American Indian women" and that shared feelings of wonder and self-renewal.<sup>30</sup> The collection's success stems partially from its multiple viewpoints; a diversity of critical voices, approaches, and foci allows the volume to represent the diversity of the region.<sup>31</sup> Read in the context of this collection, Mary Hallock Foote's writings and career reveal a woman substantially changed by her relationship to the Western landscape, a woman whose focus on water and water metaphors presents a subtle reading of the West.

More recently, Western historians like Patricia Limerick, Richard White, and William Cronin have been "rethinking America's western past," as a subtitle to an influential book suggests, by looking at processes of change, at how the interactions between peoples and between humans and land modified both. Influenced by these "New" Western historians and postcolonial theory, literary critics have moved in the same direction. In an award-winning essay, "Letting Go Our Grand Obsessions: Notes toward a New Literary History of the American Frontiers," Annette Kolodny offers the trope of borderland studies, where the West, which she sees as a series of frontiers, is defined by encounters with "others":

[The West is] a physical terrain that, for at least one group of participants, is newly encountered and is undergoing change because of that encounter; a currently indigenous population and at least one group of newcomers or "intruders"; and the collisions and negotiations of distinct cultural groups. . . . Thus, the literature of the frontiers may be identified by its encoding of some specifiable first moment in the evolving dialogue between different cultures and languages and their engagement with one another and with the physical terrain.<sup>32</sup>

As well as for other nineteenth-century writings, Kolodny's model works effectively for many of the pieces included in Kilcup's *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers*. Kirkland's "One Class of Settlers" from *A New Home* presents the "negotiations" between an educated middle-class woman and her less privileged working-class neighbors, while Foote's "The Fate of a Voice" implies in its ending that Madeline begins to communicate with ordinary working-class people in the West. Austin's stories explore the conversations and mutual influence between a white newcomer to the West and American Indian women. Other works like Sarah Winnemucca's *Life Among the Piutes*, Ruiz de Burton's *The Squatter and the Don*, and Pauline Johnson's "As It Was in the Beginning" focus on cultural collision between groups, while works by Sui Sin Far and Zitkala-Ša reveal the internalized struggles within women.

As critics turn to regionalism as a way of understanding the complex make-up of our national identity, the study of Western literature will take on greater importance precisely because of the region's cultural complexity. Responding to metaphors and critical paradigms that focus on "cultural resistance" and collisions, Michael Kowaleski has offered a new way of thinking about the fierce cooperation that Patricia Limerick suggests characterized the West: "The most fruitful recognition of cultural diversity in the West will be one that complicates our conception of both mainstream and marginal cultures – questioning along the way the usefulness of thinking about centers and margins in Western writing rather than about interdependence, hybridity, and overlap."<sup>33</sup>

Kowaleski's model of "interdependence, hybridity, and overlap" offers us a sustaining model for the future to think about issues of race and gender in the West. (It may not work so effectively in terms of class.) While our critical models have often been imperialistic, dedicated to destroying what came before, I like to see my work not as individualistic but as cooperative; and to conclude this survey of Western women's literature I offer another metaphor for thinking about Western literature which extends from Kowaleski's. Mary Austin recognized early the importance of interrelationships and mutual interdependence in the landscape of the West, writing, "The sagebrush and other things that grow all of one kind together are called social shrubs. Each one of them has its own kind of herbs growing up in its shade"; and she extended this understanding of the natural world to the interrelationships among various cultures of the West.<sup>34</sup> From Austin, from Aldo Leopold, from contemporary ecocritics, we might borrow

an ecological metaphor. Instead of focusing on a past series of mistakes, a lost Eden and a lost wilderness, we might think about how we can nurture and sustain the biodiversity of the region, replanting and rebuilding in an effort to allow space for everyone in community with each other.

## NOTES

- 1 Caroline Kirkland, *A New Home, Who'll Follow?*, ed. Sandra Zagarell (1839; New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 5.
- 2 Paul Wiltach, "A Map which is a Literary Map of the United States," *The Bookman: An Illustrated Literary Journal* 7 (1898): 469. My thanks to Stephen Tatum for this reference.
- 3 Susan Armitage, "Through Women's Eyes: A New View of the West," in *The Women's West*, ed. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 9.
- 4 Mary Austin, *The Land of Little Rain* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), 91.
- 5 Mary Austin, *Earth Horizon* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 195.
- 6 Mary Austin, *Western Trails: A Collection of Stories by Mary Austin*, ed. Melody Graulich (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1987), 97; Kilcup, *NCAWW*, 552.
- 7 Christiane Fisher points out differences in Western writing between the first generation mothers who left behind relationships and landscapes that defined their identities and their daughters, born and raised in a Western landscape they often loved. Fisher, *Let Them Speak for Themselves: Women in the American West 1849–1900*, (New York: Dutton, 1977), 13, 19–20.
- 8 Quoted in Lee-Ann Johnson, *Mary Hallock Foote* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 152.
- 9 Letter, Foote to Helena De Kay Gilder, July 18, 1876, Mary Hallock Foote collection, Stanford University Library.
- 10 Kirkland, quoted in "Introduction," *A New Home*, ed. Zagarell, xv.
- 11 Austin, *Earth Horizon*, 157–8.
- 12 And yet another complication: in *Articulate Silences* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), King-Kok Cheung explores the work of contemporary Asian American writers Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Joy Kogowa, all writing about the West, and suggests that feminist critics have too readily assumed that having or gaining a voice is a measure of strength, self-awareness, or power, and that Asian women recognize the value of and speak through silence.
- 13 Quoted in Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), 300.
- 14 See Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630–1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Vera Norwood, "Crazy Quilt Lives: Frontier Sources for Southwestern Women's Literature," in *The Desert Is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art*, ed. Vera Norwood and Janice Monk (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Lois Rudnick, "Re-Naming the Land: Anglo Expatriate Women in the Southwest,"

- in *The Desert Is No Lady*, ed. Norwood and Monk; Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987); Tey Diana Rebolledo, *Women Singing in the Snow: A Cultural Analysis of Chicana Literature* (Albuquerque: University of Arizona Press, 1995); Melody Graulich, "O Beautiful for Spacious Guys": An Essay on 'the Legitimate Inclinations of the Sexes,'" in *The Frontier Experience and the American Dream*, ed. David Mogen, Paul Bryant, and Mark Busby (College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1989), 186–201; and "Violence against Women in Literature of the Western Family," *Frontiers* 7 (1984): 14–20 (reprinted in *The Women's West*, ed. Armitage and Jameson).
- 15 Susan Armitage, "Western Women's History: A Review Essay," *Frontiers* 5 (1980): 71–3. Arguing that what she calls the "frontier process" possesses universal appeal but that the "frontier myth" has been shaped by preoccupations with courage, honor, violence, and individualism, Armitage later suggested that attention to women's lives would provide historians with the basis for a major reinterpretation of Western history, an assertion borne out in works by the so-called "new" Western historians.
- 16 Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840–1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), xv–xvi.
- 17 Owen Wister, *The Virginian* (1902; New York: Signet, 1979), 284.
- 18 See Graulich, "Violence against Women in Literature of the Western Family," and "Somebody Must Say These Things," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 13 (1985): 2–8, reprinted in *The Intimate Critique: Autobiographical Literary Criticism*, ed. Olivia Frey, Diane Freedman, and Frances Zuhar (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).
- Readers will notice that all of my texts are by white working-class women. Cross-cultural treatment of an explosive topic like women abuse is indeed a minefield, one I was unwilling to enter. Contemporary American Indian women writers like Louise Erdrich who explore violence against women or Chicana writers who challenge their culture's fascination with "machismo" are often attacked as promoting cultural stereotypes. Some feminist American Indian scholars have suggested that the abuse of women did not exist in the Americas before contact with whites.
- 19 Wister, *The Virginian*, 83.
- 20 Dawn Lander, "Eve among the Indians," in *The Authority of Experience: Essays in Feminist Criticism*, ed. Arlyn Diamond and Lee R. Edwards (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1977), 195–6.
- 21 Austin, *Earth Horizon*, 14–15.
- 22 Kolodny, *The Land Before Her*, 6, xxi, 8.
- 23 See, for instance, Gerda Lerner, "The Challenge of Women's History," in *The Majority Finds Its Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 168–80.
- 24 See, for instance, my essay, "'O Beautiful for Spacious Guys.'"
- 25 Nina Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Writers," *American Quarterly* 33 (1981): 123–9.
- 26 Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).
- 27 Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," in *On Lies, Secrets and Silences* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 35.
- 28 Mary Austin, "The Return of Mr. Wills," in *Western Trails*, 54, 55, 56.
- 29 Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

- 30 Vera Norwood and Janice Monk, "Introduction," in *The Desert Is No Lady*, ed. Norwood and Monk, 2, 8.
- 31 Perhaps the diversity of the West is best captured in collections by multiple authors rather than in thesis-driven books. In a special issue of *Legacy: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers* published in Spring 1989 (Vol. 6, No. 1), I attempted as a guest editor to offer a "new" reading of the West by including essays on American Indian, Chicana, Chinese American, and Anglo women writing at the turn of the century.
- 32 Annette Kolodny, "Letting Go Our Grand Obsessions: Notes toward a New Literary History of the American Frontiers," *American Literature* 64 (1992): 5.
- 33 Michael Kowaleski, ed., *Reading the West: New Essays on the Literature of the American West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11.
- 34 The quotation is from Austin's Tejon notebook, contained in The Huntington Library's Austin collection.