

Norwood and Janice Monk, eds., *The Desert Is No Lady* and Georgi-Findlay, *The Frontiers of Women's Writing*. See also Kolodny, "Letting Go Our Grand Obsessions" 1-18.

7. Many readers have noted the fact that Molly is a flat, unsympathetic character. Frances W. Kaye, for example, describes her as "squeamish" and "worth fleeing from," an embodiment of the "feminization of American culture" bemoaned by Ann Douglas in her book by the same name (Kaye 167-68); while Madelon E. Heatherington remarks that Molly represents all of the "trivialities" of civilization that Western plots reject ("Romance Without Women" 653).

8. For more discussion of the West Cure and its relevance to Wister, and of the West Cure's portrayal in *The Virginian*, see Tuttle, "Rewriting the West Cure" and Will, "The Nervous Origins of the American Western."

9. Deborah Evans has analyzed in more detail this last scene, in which Vivian swims in the mountain lake, arguing convincingly that it resembles a similar scene in *The Virginian*.

10. See my introduction to *The Crux* 73-74 n.151 for more discussion of this issue in the novel.

11. As Judith Allen has argued, "The eugenic and feminist projects interlink on Gilman's Western frontier" ("Reconfiguring Vice" 190).

12. See Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny* 219-21.

13. Along with Horsman, G. Edward White discusses the Anglo-Saxonism in eastern ideals of the frontier in *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience*, 197.

14. The full citation for this article is: *Woman's Journal* (June 4, 1904): 178.

9

Creating Great Women

Mary Austin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Melody Graulich

Mary Austin enjoyed lecturing male writers about their failures in creating women characters. After her move to New York in 1910, she wrote to her friend Jack London, "Yes I have a grouch against you. . . . Not against you so much as against all men writers" for failing to capture "the note of feminine power which is quite as powerful in its way as the power of men. . . . I notice in your work—thank heaven that you haven't pretended at any time to know much about women,—but I notice that though they show an increasing naturalness, your women are never really great women" (qtd. in Stineman 46-47; emphasis added). Apparently Austin believed London capable of creating an independent, powerful woman, for she offered him models for future heroines. Her first example was Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Austin's suggestion was astute. Gilman could easily have held center stage in one of London's novels, for he filled his fiction with narrative digressions about social theory and philosophy, the kind of work she was best known for, having published the influential *Women and Economics* in 1898.

In 1911, shortly after Austin's letter to London, Gilman published *The Man-Made World*, where she, too, explored the shortcomings of male authors in a chapter titled "Masculine Literature." With its "preferred subject matter . . . the Story of Adventure and the Love Story," reflecting the "two essential features of masculinity—Desire and Combat—Love and War" (94-95), "fiction, under our androcentric culture, has not given any true picture of woman's life, very little of human life, and a disproportioned section of man's life" (102). Yet because of the "human-

izing of women," she suggests, "life is [being] discovered to be longer, wider, deeper, richer than those monotonous players of one tune would have us believe," leading to "fresh fields of fiction" (104-05). Among the new plots Gilman listed were: "First, the position of the young woman who is called upon to give up her 'career'—her humanness—for marriage and who objects to it. Second, the middle-aged woman who at last discovers that her discontent is social starvation—that it is not more love that she wants, but more business in life: Third, the inter-relation of women with women—a thing we could never write about before because we never had it before, except in harems and convents" (105).

In 1911 Gilman was living on Riverside Drive in New York City, not far from the apartment of her friend Mary Austin. "I saw a good deal of her," Austin later wrote in her autobiography (*Earth Horizon* 326). While Gilman was writing *The Man-Made World*, Austin was writing a novel, *A Woman of Genius*, published in 1912. "If only I could have [my husband] and my work," declares Austin's heroine, Olivia Lattimore, "I should ask no more of destiny; I do not now see why I couldn't" (191). Calling Austin a "great artist," Gilman expressed her admiration for *A Woman of Genius*, in which Austin attempted to write about the struggles of "great women" (Gilman, review of *A Woman of Genius* 279). Having gone through those struggles herself, Gilman could respond with insight to the novel's treatment of the social forces that retard the development of genius in women, with personal understanding of the difficulties of uniting work and marriage, and with generosity to a heroine she realized most readers would find "unwomanly."

A Woman of Genius is about an exceptional woman, but unlike Cather's *The Song of the Lark*, written a few years later, it explores the importance of support from other women. Olivia's sister tells her that the risks she has taken in her life will help other women to have "the courage to live lives of their own," while her best friend says that her honesty will "help other women to speak out what they think, unashamed" (*A Woman of Genius* 261, 290). In both Austin's and Gilman's fiction and feminist thought, women repeatedly come to the aid of other women, just as for a number of years the two authors offered each other support and admiration. With remarkably similar backgrounds, the two developed parallel feminist analyses that they expressed in social critiques, fiction, and other genres, with considerable bravery and defiance. Believing that, as Austin said, "what women have to stand on squarely [is] not their ability to see

the world in the way men see it, but the importance and validity of seeing it in some other way," they helped each other speak unashamed of taboo subjects. In their own middle years, they repeatedly exposed the "social starvation" of the unhappy middle-aged woman and offered her alternative life choices (*The Young Woman Citizen* 19). While their artistic goals differed and they grew apart in the last decades of their lives, the autobiographies they wrote in the early 1930s shortly before their deaths confirm their shared struggles.

Austin might be speaking for both women when she describes in *Earth Horizon* the childhood "determination" that led eventually to her writing. Writing about herself in the third person, Austin notes that she "was never much taken with the wish of many girls of her acquaintance that they had been boys. She thought there might be a good 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" (157-58).¹ Unwilling to appropriate a male point of view to achieve "greatness" or speak in the chirrups and twitters expected of the woman writer, unaware of what Austin later called "their prophets," both Austin and Gilman found ways to liberate their wit, anger, and imagination ("Greatness in Women" 197). Their mutual influence deserves exploration because more than any other women at the turn of the twentieth century, they demonstrated in their lives and works new ways of understanding what could "be got out of being a woman" (*Earth Horizon* 157-58).

When Austin died in 1934, two of Gilman's books were in her library, *Women and Economics* and an edition of "The Yellow Wall-Paper," inscribed: "To Mary Austin—with real admiration and interest. Charlotte Perkins Gilman 1910."² But their relationship began some thirty-five years earlier.

Both Austin and Gilman moved to California in 1888, following severe episodes of depression. When they met in Pasadena in 1899, Austin was immediately attracted to and identified with Gilman, who had been publicly vilified as an "unnatural mother" for sending her daughter to live with her former husband: "I had been invited to meet her, and been struck by her beauty, the fine lines of her head and the clear look of her eyes, the carriage of her shoulders so erect and precise. I was for her, and

the freedom from convention that left her the right to care for her child in what seemed the best way to her" (*Earth Horizon* 293). No doubt their conversations helped them to see how their depressions and struggles with motherhood were the result of constrictive gender roles and expectations.

Both women felt abandoned by fathers they associated with intellectual achievement. Both grew up with repressive, rejecting, and dissatisfied mothers who expressed clear preference for their brothers. They emphasize particularly their mothers' lack of physical affection and describe themselves as starved for love and support. Each presents herself as an isolated lonely child who turns to her imagination, to making believe, for solace; each re-creates with considerable bitterness more than fifty years later a scene where her mother sought to silence her creativity. Austin's mother told her "storying was wicked" and "she'd have to punish you or you would grow up a story-teller" (*Earth Horizon* 42-43), while Gilman's mother ordered her to "shut the door on [imagination, on the inner life], on happiness, and hold it shut" (*Living* 23-24). Each describes her mother as making her feel unlovable, and, in Austin's words, as "falling short . . . as a young lady" (*Earth Horizon* 169).

Yet each woman ultimately struggled to see the forces that inhibited her mother's life. "Mother's life was one of the most painfully thwarted I have ever known," wrote Gilman (*Living* 8); Austin realized that much of her mother's anger stemmed from having "always wanted another sort of life for herself. . . . It was what most women wanted; time and adventure of their own" (*Earth Horizon* 177). One can see the beginnings of their feminist understanding in their attempts to understand their mothers' unhappy lives.

Struggling with expectations of "true womanliness" (as Austin called it) and their own thwarted ambitions, both women also suffered severe breakdowns in young adulthood. Gilman had published "The Yellow Wall-Paper" in 1892—based on her experience in undergoing the rest cure for neurasthenia—and Austin had her own experience with a nervous breakdown from overwork at school. The doctor's diagnosis was that "it might have something to do with the natural incapacity of the female mind for intellectual achievement." According to Austin, he held "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* 152).

Both women felt liberated by the move west, seeing the West as a healing landscape and portraying it as such in their writing. Like other unconventional women who moved west during this period and later, both associated it with what we might now call alternative lifestyles and with autonomy.³ In many of Gilman's stories and novels, women find adventure and achieve economic independence in the West, perhaps most notably in *The Crux* (1910), in which a Colorado woman doctor, who has made her own escape from a constricting New England town, returns to inspire an oddly disparate group of women to follow her lead. In one of Austin's finest stories, "The Walking Woman" from *Lost Borders* (1909), the main character is an unnamed desert wanderer who had "begun by walking off an illness" and was "healed at last by the large soundness of nature" (97). The western backcountry offers her multiple trails toward self-definition and spiritual wholeness. Assessing her life, the narrator concludes in one of Austin's most memorable lines, "She was the Walking Woman. That was it. She had walked off all sense of society-made values, and, knowing the best when the best came to her, was able to take it" (*Western Trails* 97).

As suggested more fully at the end of this essay, "The Walking Woman" can serve as a parable for the life stories of Austin and Gilman. In their autobiographies, they suggest in parallel metaphors that the West offered something they hungered for. Pasadena's natural landscape and climate "were meat and drink to me," says Gilman (*Living* 107). Suffering literally from malnutrition but "plagued with an anxiety to know . . . the things of the wild," Austin describes her discovery of the leaves of the wild grape far up one of the Tejon canyons and how she got "well on something grubbed out of the woods." "But there was more to the incident than that; that was the beginning of the 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 beside 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). Revolutionary indeed. One remedy was stimulating company who would support her writing, which led Austin to Pasadena in 1899.

Rustic and rural, its character influenced by its Indian and Spanish history, Pasadena was known for its bohemianism, artists, and social critics. Gilman had spent two crucial years there from 1888 to 1890, dur-

ing which time she established herself as an economically independent writer. As part of her lecture tour after publishing *Women and Economics* in 1898, she returned to Pasadena to visit her daughter, Katharine, who was living there with her father and Gilman's close friend, Katharine's stepmother, Grace Channing Stetson. Gilman was a member of the congenial "Arroyo Seco" group that Austin met at Charles Lummis's adobe hacienda, El Alisal: writers Gwendolyn Overton, Margaret Collier Graham, Sharlott Hall, Edwin Markham; scientists and anthropologists David Starr Jordan and Frederick Webb Dodge; artists Maynard Dixon and William Keith. This avant-garde group, all focusing as early as 1899 on representing the multicultural West as offering the United States both a rich history and a model for a healthier future, anticipates in many ways later more famous groups in Santa Fe and Taos, of which Austin was also a member. Although she is seldom thought of as a Western writer, Gilman insisted humorously upon claiming that role in a letter to Lummis dated, perhaps significantly, April 1, 1898. Her "feelings are hurt," she says, at not being included in his "galaxy of [Western] authors": "Don't I still sign 'Pasadena' in hotel registers! Am I not introduced on platforms as Mrs. Stetson of California! Don't I write everything I can think of for that blessed country. . . ." In fact, Gilman did publish frequently in Lummis's magazine, *The Land of Sunshine*, as did Austin.

Perhaps Austin saw Gilman as a model, for when the two women met, Gilman had confronted and made decisions with which Austin was still struggling. Unhappy and frustrated in her marriage, with its "pattern of male dominance and feminine subservience," Austin would summon her courage and leave her husband a few years later (*Earth Horizon* 271).⁵ She was eager to commit herself to her writing, as Gilman had, and Gilman probably echoed the encouragement Austin had already received from Eve Lummis and Ina Coolbrith, Gilman's neighbor in Oakland, to submit her stories for publication.

Most poignant, Austin had also gone through a difficult childbirth and postpartum depression, with poor medical care, and when she met Gilman had begun to acknowledge that her daughter Ruth was severely retarded. When she defended Gilman against charges of unnatural motherhood, she also defended herself, for almost everyone, including Austin's own mother, blamed her for her child's problems. After their meeting, with the aid of a young woman doctor who began to practice

in the region, and perhaps thinking of Gilman's right to care for her child in the best way, Austin made the difficult decision to institutionalize Ruth. In the autobiographies the two women wrote many years after their friendship began, their pain at "losing" their children still remains fresh. Describing the painful decision to send her child to live with her former husband, Gilman concludes that "this seemed the right thing to do":

No one suffered from it but myself. This, however, was entirely overlooked in the furious condemnation which followed. I had "given up my child."

To hear what was said and read what was printed one would think I had handed over a baby in a basket. In the years that followed she divided her time fairly equally between us, but in companionship with her beloved father she grew up to be the artist that she is, with advantages I could never have given her. I lived without her, temporarily, but why did they think I liked it? She was all I had. (*Living* 163)

After describing her attempts to smile cheerfully as her daughter departs on the train, she says:

That was thirty years ago. I have to stop typing and cry as I tell about it. There were years, years, when I could never see a mother and child together without crying, or even a picture of them. . . .

What were those pious condemners thinking of? (*Living* 163-64)

Austin also focuses on misunderstanding, on pain and loss suffered alone:

It was not long after that she put Ruth in a private institution in Santa Clara where the difference between herself and other children, which was beginning to trouble her, would not be felt, where it would not be known. Here the inability of other people to bear her cross would not be taxed; where one could say if questioned, "We have lost her"; . . . where the pain could be borne alone, as it was for another twenty years. It is a relief to speak of it now, of the cruelty, the weight, the oppression of its reality, the loss of

tenderness, of consideration, the needless blight and pain. (*Earth Horizon* 295)

Both women describe wounds that never healed; they remained fresh years later. Their mutual support for each other's decisions must have greatly comforted them.

Only late in their lives, in their autobiographies, could Gilman and Austin speak out about this subject, and even then both passages suggest unresolved conflicts. But the theme emerged, deflected, in much of their writing. Austin wrote several stories about women who lost children, including *A Woman of Genius*, "The Walking Woman," and "The Castro Baby" (1899), about the sympathetic response of a group of white Protestant women to a poor Mexican woman whose child is dying. Though she never argued that having a baby completes a woman's life, women in her stories often long for children. Gilman wrote many works attempting to redefine motherhood, including *Herland* (1915), where she explores shared childrearing, and the highly ironic "An Unnatural Mother" (1894), where a woman must choose between devotion to her child and to the needs of her community.

These shared life experiences informed their fiction, as did their struggles to depart from unhappy marriages. Both wrote their way out of these marriages. In "The Yellow Wall-Paper," Gilman, like many other women writers, sheds the self that might have been, the self that she had to let go in order to achieve. She could then go on to offer her readers affirmative resolutions, to write her many, many positive stories where women manage to overcome obstacles and find meaningful work, stories like "Making a Change," "An Honest Woman," and "The Widow's Might." (It is ironic that most contemporary readers find the tragic story of entrapment more powerful than the upbeat stories of liberation.)

Austin also wrote a haunting story about her marriage and its effect upon her, a story that owes a debt to "The Yellow Wall-Paper" and to her relationship with Gilman. Like "The Yellow Wall-Paper," "Frustrate" is narrated by an unnamed, restless, baffled woman whose marriage left her feeling "just kind of hungry . . . always" (*Western Trails* 229). With naive faith in the Sleeping Beauty myth, she believes only a man can awaken her imagination, thinking that if she "could get to know a man who was big enough so [she] couldn't walk all around him, so to speak—somebody that [she] could reach and not find the end of,—[she]

shouldn't feel so—so frustrated" (233). Her repressed and inexpressible yearnings, so well conveyed by her wandering uncertain tone, make her seem a bit "crazy," rather like Gilman's narrator in the early part of "The Yellow Wall-Paper." Neither narrator has an outlet for her imagination, a way to make sense of what she intuits about her life. Both stories are autobiographical, narrated by the women their authors might have become had they not escaped their marriages. While Gilman abandons her heroine to madness instead of allowing her to escape into health and creativity, as she herself did, Austin suggests there is a way out by creating a double for her frustrated heroine, a woman writer who has achieved an ironic viewpoint on her own frustrations.

Written during the years Austin and Gilman were closest and published in 1912, shortly after Gilman's gift of a copy of "The Yellow Wall-Paper," "Frustrate" is one of Austin's best stories, but she decided never to reprint it in a collection, perhaps because it is too autobiographical, for the narrator expresses Austin's own insecurities. Possibly she was scarred by her experience with her editor, who, she claimed, attempted "to determine what should and should not be written" about "the experiences of women, as women," an argument Gilman also frequently made. "I wrote a story for 'The Century,'" Austin commented in *Earth Horizon*, almost certainly "Frustrate," "in which a woman tells what she suffered in finding that she was not attractive looking. The paragraph in which she described herself was deleted. 'I couldn't bear,' said the editor, 'to have a woman with such beautiful thoughts, looking like that'" (320).⁶

In "Frustrate," Austin creates sympathy for this consciousness struggling to grow and implies the waste of her narrator's imagination, yet at the same time suggests that while she is not to blame for her resignation, it is not the only response to her situation. In *Earth Horizon*, Austin describes herself as never having "surrendered" to "resignation," as seeing life as "essentially remediable, undefeatable" (268). As both she and Gilman often do, Austin uses paired heroines in "Frustrate," in this case to explore the close relationship between the woman she might have been and the woman she became, the great writer with her own game.

Read this way, "Frustrate" appears a thinly veiled comment on Austin's years in Carmel, where she was the "plain" woman writer among a group of sexually promiscuous male comrades, including London, poet George Sterling (with whom biographers contend that Austin may have had an affair), and others. The narrator lives in Castroville, California,

not far from Carmel-by-the-Sea, fictionalized as the artist colony "Fair-shore." Austin was simultaneously attracted to the sexual liberation at Carmel and suspicious of it; she certainly felt pain and bitterness at the "bohemians'" rejection of her for her "thick waist" and "plain looks." In the fantasy utopian novel she wrote about the years in Carmel, *Outland* (1910), she ignores that pain and imagines for her main character a satisfying personal relationship. One wonders if her title influenced Gilman's choice of *Herland* (1915), in which she imagines a world where mothers don't have to experience the pain she had undergone when she could not care for her daughter.

Yet "Frustrate," like much of Austin's other fiction, focuses on a moment of recognition between two women, and in considering the importance of Gilman to Austin it becomes possible to read it in quite another way. While "Frustrate" can be read as having been influenced by "The Yellow Wall-Paper," and even as a revision of it, where Austin uses her paired heroines to explore the constrictions of marriage *and* to offer readers a way out, perhaps the paired heroines are two women who met at another artist colony, Lummis's adobe in Pasadena. Perhaps the woman writer the narrator meets is Charlotte Stetson (Gilman) rather than an older and wiser version of Austin herself. Gilman, who also never surrendered to resignation, offered Austin a game plan for becoming a great writer. Austin grants her fictional "woman writer" the ability to see "how it was with me." She also grants her generosity, as the narrator believes that the woman writer talks of herself only to help the narrator look at her own longings and dilemmas from another angle. But perhaps the woman writer really *was* talking about herself. The passage then obliquely insists upon one of the most profound—and transformative—feminist truths: we learn to identify and articulate our feelings, and our selves, in moments of identification with others.

Austin and Gilman remained friends throughout the first two decades of the century, when both lived off and on in New York. Both were active in feminist causes and crusades, and, as illustrated in this essay, their theoretical feminist writings present similar critiques of the culture they both described as "androcentric." In *The Man-Made World*, Gilman makes an argument very similar to the one Austin later made in *The Young Woman Citizen* (1918), succinctly voiced in this line: "Civilization as we now have it is one-eyed and one-handed. It is kept going by man's way of seeing things and man's way of dealing with the things he sees"

(17). Both women wanted society to have the benefit of both hands, believing, in Austin's words, that "[w]omen, in their hundred thousand years of managing the family have developed a genius for personal relations," a genius for cooperation and affiliation that should be put to use for the public good ("Woman Looks at Her World" 69). "This is the mother's century," Gilman wrote, "the first chance for the mother of the world to rise to her full place, her transcendent power to remake humanity, to rebuild the suffering world—and the world waits while she powders her nose" (*Living* 331).

Yet as these last sentences imply, their view of "women" was often fundamentally essentialist, focusing on difference. Although Gilman opens and closes *The Man-Made World* with chapters on humanity, arguing that the "common humanity" between women and men "has largely escaped notice" (13), her work supports Austin's later assertion: "I have always believed that there is a distinctly feminine approach to intellectual problems and its recognition is indispensable to intellectual wholeness. All that I have ever, as a feminist, protected against is the prevailing notion that the feminine is necessarily an inferior approach" (Austin, response to review by Lewis Mumford).

The women eventually moved in different directions when, after World War I, Austin soured on socialist politics and the "Young Intellectuals" and moved to New Mexico to focus on how the regional ethnic cultures of the United States offered a regenerative vision to a world seemingly entrapped in modernist despair. Although describing Gilman in *Earth Horizon* as one of the friends she kept "pace" with most "faithfully" and *Women and Economics* as a "notable book," she added a critical comment on Gilman's politics and writing:

About 1908 she began to publish a magazine on the subject [women and socialism], called "The Forerunner." The worst of it was that she wrote it all herself—articles, stories, reviews, poems—and she couldn't write. . . . Everything she wrote was in the same key. She lectured interestingly, but invariably. She talked well, but without illumination. We all liked her; she was friendly and cheerful and hospitable. . . . But we could not keep together; we did not read alike, and we could not write alike. I had to drop her magazine with its terrible sameness, its narrow scope. I could not get her interested in writing. After a time I lost touch with her; so did her other

friends. Time went on and left her standing at the old corner, crying the same wares. She had become a Socialist of the narrowest mould. (*Earth Horizon* 325–26)

Gilman was aware of Austin's criticism many years earlier. In January 1922 she wrote a note to "AW," her friend Amy Wellington, suggesting that she read Austin's *The Land of Little Rain*. With her note she enclosed a "Pretty good parody" that she had apparently written based "on Mary Austin who said [to Gilman] 'I do think, however, that if you gave your mind to it you could write.'" Titled "Without Bo[a]rders," the parody is an allusion to a collection Gilman had earlier praised, *Lost Borders*, and, as those who have read Austin will recognize, it effectively mocks her sometimes strained and earnest diction. I quote the final paragraphs:

Then, when your eyes open with new-born fiction, all swims in the blue glory, blue with the comfortingness of summer skies and the short-necked nestling nemophilia, warmed with the gold glow of heaven.

Orange blazes with it, the orange pool in the marshes, the orange door-slab, the curdled orange and crimson with the peacock in the midst of it.

Only to those who live there is the knowledge of inner delighting beyond the eye, of the calm bed-places, even one for the stranger, and the glad necessities for time of eating.

All in all you shall not find better, no, not on Belgrave Square nor all 5th Avenue, so think we who are indwellers.

Joke, for a Husband, 8 Jan. 1922

(Gilman Papers, Schlesinger Library)⁸

Austin was certainly an "indweller," while, as Ann J. Lane points out in *To Herland and Beyond*, Gilman was not particularly introspective. Austin was obsessed with style and originality; as early as the 1890s she told a friend, "I worked four hours today . . . trying to get the right word to describe the hills to the east. But I got the word—puckery—and it is right!" (qtd. in H. Doyle 211). As Gary Scharnhorst has observed, Gilman "wasted little patience on works whose authors tinker with point of

view or turn well many a felicitous phrase"; she wrote as clearly and directly as possible for didactic purposes (*Charlotte Perkins Gilman* 12). Austin saw herself as an artist; Gilman saw herself as a reformer.

Gilman recognized a certain prickly arrogance in her friend, for in her 1912 review of *A Woman of Genius* she wrote of the novel's heroine: "Olivia is not a loveable person—as is often the case with geniuses. In the pursuit of her work, or perhaps we should say, in her works' pursuit of her, she is forced to sacrifice not only much that was dear to her, but the dearest wishes of others. This also is frequently the case with geniuses. We are quite used to its expression in men" (280). Yet Gilman also believed that Olivia is "far from happy personally" because she has never achieved a "mingling" of "affection" and "passion" (280). While she attributed that unhappiness to social forces, there is an undertone in the review that suggests Olivia has contributed to her own isolation.

Certainly one key difference between the two authors was Gilman's long and apparently happy marriage. Austin had a few significant affairs but writes in *Earth Horizon* that she never remarried because it was clear in each case that any sacrifices would have to be hers. She left an unpublished manuscript when she died titled "Love Is Not Enough," and she, like Olivia, was unwilling to sacrifice work or autonomy for love. Yet in *Earth Horizon* Austin expresses regret that her generation of feminists' belief that it would be possible to reshape marriage to fit their needs "was by no means as easy as it promised" (144); the tone of regret sometimes, perhaps often, turns into bitterness in her work.

Despite their differences and occasional irritation with each other, for many years Gilman and Austin had a mutually beneficial and influential friendship. In her review Gilman also praised Austin's earlier book, *Lost Borders* (1909), which ends with "The Walking Woman," the story that can be read as a parable for Austin's relationship to Gilman. The unnamed narrator, herself a desert wanderer, has heard stories of the mysterious Walking Woman, and she seeks her out, hoping for answers to the undefined things she "wished to know" (*Western Trails* 93). Despite the rumors that the Walking Woman is "cracked," the narrator finds that "in her talk there was both wisdom and information," and she admires her independence, captured in the crucial line quoted before: "She was the Walking Woman. That was all. She had walked off all sense of society-made values and, knowing the best when the best came to her,

was able to take it" (93, 97). The story's final image suggests that the narrator believes the Walking Woman is a pathfinder: she remembers the rumors that the Walking Woman is "twisted," but she discovers that "the track of her feet bore evenly and white" (98). Throughout her long career Austin created many women like the Walking Woman, artistic, searching women who went their own way, who defied social convention, who offered her wisdom and information. Charlotte Perkins Gilman surely helped her find this path.

One wonders if Austin recalled her comment to Jack London that Charlotte Perkins Gilman was the best model of a "great woman" when she wrote "Greatness in Women" in 1923, with its key line: "Not to know their own prophets is rather a serious predicament for women" (197). Writing in *Earth Horizon* nearly thirty-five years after her initial meeting with Gilman, Austin recalls an encounter with a society woman which imagistically implies her admiration for Gilman. "When I had asked her what she thought about Charlotte Perkins Stetson, she had replied by telling me that Mrs. Perkins, Charlotte's mother, had started the fashion of using English ivy as an indoor decoration in American houses, which she somehow charged up against Charlotte. I never lost the association, but continued to see Charlotte with a decoration of ivy leaves, a flat wreath of them about her head and over her breast" (293). Although she comically replaces laurel with ivy leaves, in this passage Austin places a crown on a great woman.

NOTES

An earlier version of this essay appeared in *Jack London Journal* (1994), 148-58. Reprinted by permission.

1. Gilman did write a story, "If I Were a Man" (1914), in which she imagined a woman who wished she was a man, but significantly the main character is "a beautiful instance of what is reverentially called 'a true woman'" who learns what men really think of women like her (*Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader* 32).

2. A record of Austin's books, including inscriptions, is contained in the Austin collection at the Huntington Library.

3. For more information on such women of Austin's and Gilman's generation, see Bernadin et al., *Trading Gazes: Euro-American Women Photographers and Native North American Indians*. For women who moved West around World War I, see Lois Rudnick, *Utopian Vistas*.

4. Here is an excerpt from the letter:

Here's "Tomorrow" again—you needn't apologize, I'm all the better pleased to have it come out in the fine June number. But my feelings are hurt at not being asked to participate in your Western Writers League! Don't I still sign "Pasadena" in hotel registers! Am I not introduced on platforms as Mrs. Stetson of California! Don't I write everything I can think of for that blessed country and delight to put things in your magazine because it is California's—even if it doesn't "pay" much! People [illegible] me for sending "Their Grass" to you—said I could have done better. I told 'em I couldn't—that it was Californian and belonged there, and that was all that mattered. And here I'm not even mentioned in your galaxy of famous authors!

O hear my cries! Behold my tears! . . .

This is a condition of pardon for forgetting that I am Californian as much as Grace Channing—to say nothing of the ten minutes time I've sacrificed to copying this poem again!

Sincerely—and with suspended hostilities—

Charlotte Perkins Stetson

I would like to thank Joe Staples, University of Arizona, for permitting me to reprint this letter, from his research at the Marion Parks collection at the Braun Research Library, Southwest Museum, Pasadena, California.

5. In *Mary Austin: The Song of a Maverick*, Esther Lanigan Stineman has suggested, "In many ways Charlotte's divorce provided a blueprint for Mary's" (63). In her afterword to *A Woman of Genius*, Nancy Porter also suggests that Austin met Gilman in a "formative stage" of her life and was "deeply drawn" to her (300).

6. Although Gilman frankly commented on her difficulties getting her work published, she did not press this analysis nearly as fully as Austin, who wondered "what obligates us most to impeach the validity of a woman's experience at the points where it is most supported by experience" and described herself as "suspicious of the social estimate of women [because of] the general social conspiracy against her telling the truth about herself" (*Woman of Genius* 4). She also described women as having been silenced by a "wall of men, a filtered, almost sound-proof wall of male intelligence, male reports, critics, managers, advertisers . . . men editors, men publishers, men reviewers" (*No. 26 Jayne Street* 6).

7. Apparently Austin was often mocked by the male bohemians and dismissed as a possible sexual partner. See, for instance, Franklin Walker, *The Sea-*

coast of Bohemia, who summarizes what he sees as Austin's role at Carmel by describing her variously as "dumpy," "flat-chested," "too homely and assertive," and "almost purring at being included in the inner circle" (26, 27).

8. I would like to thank Denise D. Knight for directing me to this letter to me from her work on the Gilman Papers at the Schlesinger Library.

10

From Near-Dystopia to Utopia

A Source for *Herland* in Inez Haynes Gillmore's *Angel Island*

Charlotte Rich

Several sources are thought to have influenced the writing of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopian novel *Herland*, from Jonathan Swift's satirical adventure tale of 1726, *Gulliver's Travels*, to Edward Bellamy's Nationalist utopia published in 1888, *Looking Backward*.¹ However, a previously unconsidered inspiration for *Herland* may lie in Inez Haynes Gillmore's 1914 novel *Angel Island*. Gillmore was a Greenwich Village author and editor who became friends with Gilman through the Heterodoxy Club, and her novel *Angel Island* was serialized in *American* illustrated magazine and brought out in book form in 1914, the year during which Gilman began writing her utopian novel. Gillmore's text reveals many resemblances to Gilman's, from premise to characterization to themes, which suggest the probability of its influence on the writing of *Herland*. However, *Angel Island*, while considered a "feminist fantasy adventure" by the publishers who reprinted it in 1988, also contains sharp distinctions from Gilman's novel that nearly render it a masculinist dystopia, allowing for the possibility that Gilman read the novel and was inspired to write a more truly feminist work based on similar speculative premises.

Current evidence makes it difficult to verify that Gilman read *Angel Island*, though we do know that she read magazines that offered serialized fiction, such as *Harper's* and the *Atlantic Monthly*, and that in her hurried, prolific composition she sometimes appropriated ideas without correctly acknowledging her sources.² Furthermore, Gary Scharnhorst and Denise D. Knight have observed in discussing Gilman's library that she was fond of popular fiction, fantasy novels, and utopian romances.³ The many striking similarities between the two texts, as well as the