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INTRODUCTION

UNTIL TOMORROW—JOURNEYS' ENDING AND BEGINNING

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WHEN Mary Austin wrote her autobiography *Earth Horizon* in the early 1930s, a few years before her death, she recycled an earlier title for the last section, calling it "The Land of Journey's Ending." "The journey I took before writing "The Land of Journeys' Ending," she said, "did more for me than simply to gather up the detailed presentiment of the Southwest. It gathered all the years of my life, all my experience; my intentions; it determined the years that were left."¹ After that enriching excursion through Arizona and New Mexico, she returned to New York, her primary residence since 1910, where she worked on *The Land of Journeys' Ending*. But the work left her frustrated, probably hearing what she described in 1920 in an essay on her friend Willa Cather as "the call of the West, which is never quite silenced in the soul of anyone who had heard it."² She began, as she wrote, "explicitly to put New York behind [her]" (*Earth Horizon* 349). Shortly after publishing *The Land of Journeys' Ending* in 1924, she moved

permanently to Santa Fe, where she spent the years that were left, the last ten years of her life.

This anecdote is no doubt the origin for what seems an odd title, more autobiographical than descriptive of the Southwest. Although *The Land of Journeys' Ending* is about the interrelationships between natural and (multi)cultural history, about what Austin calls "cultural evolution," the title intimates that it is also a deeply personal book, the writing of which allowed her to "gather" up her past and "determine" her future. Her personal journey might end in the Southwest, but in the vision of American culture she developed throughout her life the Southwest was not the end of the journey but its beginning. Austin opens with a chapter on the "journeys' beginning" but closes not with an ending but with a gesture "of prophecy, *hasta mañana* . . . 'until to-morrow!'" (445).

By the time she wrote *The Land of Journeys' Ending*, she was ready to write a "prophecy," a genesis story for the United States. With its indigenous people whose life patterns and art forms reflected long intimacy with the land, its permeable borderlands, its multiple languages and traditions, its long and complicated history of encounters between diverse peoples, and its unique landscape and ecology, the Southwest offered, in Austin's view, a model for the future. *Hasta mañana!*

The Land of Journeys' Ending is her guidebook to the natural and cultural history of the region, offered to those suffering from the ennui and alienation of the "lost gener-

ation." Unlike the spiritless wastelands associated with international modernism, the Southwest, Austin believed, embodied a spiritual life apparently lived closer to nature, an integration between work and everyday life, and a garden without the machines of the industrialized cityscape. The "apostles of a new social order," she wrote in 1925, should not go to "the cafes of Prague or the cellars of Leningrad" but to the Southwest to discover "the most interesting possibility of social evolution that the world scene at present affords."³ Although Austin had spent far less time in Arizona and New Mexico than she had in Southern California, the subject of her early work, she wrote with authority, as if she had lived there for years, perhaps "gathering" up her years of experience yet also depending upon the knowledge of one of her traveling companions, her close friend and probable lover, the naturalist Daniel MacDougal, to whom she dedicated the book.

* * *

The Land of Journeys' Ending initiated the final phase in an adventurous and rebellious life. Born in 1868 in Carlinville, Illinois, Austin felt like an outsider in her family and—because she grew up alienated from traditional women's roles, what she described as "young ladihood"—in society as well. She was an unhappy and frustrated young woman when her family moved to Southern California to homestead in 1888, but soon she, like many before and after her, associated the West with personal and intellectual liberation. "Its treeless spaces," she wrote, "uncramp the soul" and

reveal "the bare core of things."⁴ In *Earth Horizon*, she conveys how the Southwest changed her life in a literal scene rendered symbolic. Malnourished from eating only meat, she went into the foothills and gorged on wild grapes, which created "the beginning of a notion" that "a poor appetite of any sort [could be] 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).

Having made the "revolutionary discovery" that she could reject social expectations and choose her own path, always hungry to know more, Austin thereafter consistently headed out to "hunt for the remedy." (Indeed, the much later expedition that resulted in *Land of Journeys' Ending* was one such excursion in which she sought not only a personal remedy but also one for her culture's malaise, offering a national redemption.) Her wanderings in frontier desert communities on the eastern slope of the Sierras led to encounters with Paiutes, miners, Hispanic shepherds and senoras, stage-coach drivers, liquor salesmen, Chinese immigrants, gamblers, and working women. Although her mother felt she showed an "incurable want of a proper sense of social distinction," Austin relished their company and collected their stories, which she made the basis of her earliest work, published in magazines such as *Land of Sunshine* and *Century*,

and eventually in the two collections whose titles evocatively describe the territory she inhabited, literally and imaginatively: *The Land of Little Rain* (1903) and *Lost Borders* (1909) (*Earth Horizon* 238).

Two desert-dwellers particularly affected Austin's evolving sense of self, helping her develop what she called "the courage to sheer off what is not worth while."⁵ One was Seyavi, a Paiute who nursed Austin and her daughter, Ruth, after a difficult childbirth (which would leave Ruth mentally handicapped) and later brought the silent child "meadowlarks' tongues, which make the speech nimble and quick" (*Earth Horizon* 246). The meadowlark tongues could not help Ruth, but Seyavi, herself a storyteller, led Austin to find her own language to describe the desert and its inhabitants and to learn what would become one of the key themes in her work, fully demonstrated in *Journeys' Ending*: "To understand the fashion of any life, one must know the land it is lived in and the procession of the year."⁶ The other was an unnamed desert wanderer known as the Walking Woman, who inspired 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."⁷ Through encounters with those she called "outliers," who had the "mark of the land" upon them, Austin began to recognize the difference between "society-made values," which she associated with conformity and constrictions and which she herself "walked off," and cultural values, embedded in folk

life, regional cultures, and the interactions between humans and nature.⁸ Searching out these intersections, she developed the ecological perspective that so characterizes *The Land of Journeys' Ending*.

Austin wrote about these women in "The Basket Maker" and "The Walking Woman," which appear in *The Land of Little Rain* and *Lost Borders*, yet despite the titles the subject of both stories is really the interaction between the women and the stories' unnamed narrators, white women whose lives and perspectives are changed by contact with those we now call the "other." As Margaret Jacobs argues in her book on relations between white and Indian women in this period, *Engendered Encounters*, white women turned to Pueblo women and "primitivism" to express "an acute critique of modern industrial life" and to redefine "womanhood, feminism, and women's sexuality."⁹ Austin certainly fits this pattern, and her work is consistently autobiographical because she attempts to open a space where she can recreate her self. In the early works she presents her narrators as in the process of discovery, always on the "track" of some story that comes to them through the oral tradition or through rumor, and dramatizes the storytellers, often the wise, far-seeing women she called "chiseras."

By the time she wrote *The Land of Journeys' Ending*, Austin was ready to represent herself as a chisera, as the authoritative guide to an ecologically and culturally complex and mystical region, even as a prophet, the sources of her knowledge left vague. *The Land of Little Rain* is based

on years of patient close observation as a resident of a region; *The Land of Journeys' Ending* is based on travel in a region and considerable research, in some ways inconsistent with Austin's claims that one must live in a land to understand its rhythms. Abstract statements such as "for no man has ever really entered into the heart of any country until he has adopted or made up myths about its familiar objects" (302) replace dramatized inhabitants of the region who tell its stories; instead of creating Indian characters, Austin claims "I am Indian enough" to recount the myths herself (305). Establishing her role as guide by speaking familiarly to her audience as "you," Austin sometimes obscures her role as sojourner by creating a narrator with the experience to "know where to look" to see what the uninitiated cannot.

After achieving success with *The Land of Little Rain*, Austin found the courage to leave her husband and, on the advice of a doctor, send her daughter to an institution better able to provide for her needs. She moved to Carmel, California, where she wrote productively and lived on the outskirts of a bohemian community dominated by the poet George Sterling and Jack London; there she met Lincoln Steffens, with whom she later had an affair. After a European trip, where she became close friends with Herbert and Lou Hoover, she settled in New York. There she met celebrated writers like Sinclair Lewis, Carl Van Doren, Vachel Lindsay, Robert Frost, and Willa Cather, who were also interested in American regional culture, and wrote one of her best-known books, *A Woman of Genius* (1912), an auto-

biographical feminist novel about the social forces that “re-tard” the woman artist. She became politically active in numerous causes, primarily with feminist friends such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Emma Goldman, Margaret Sanger, Ida Tarbell, and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn. She worked for birth control, for suffrage, and for social programs such as communal kitchens to free women workers during World War I. She explored ideas for social change in an urban environment in analyses such as *The Young Woman Citizen* (1918), in which she argued for the importance of women taking political power; in a series of articles that appeared in periodicals such as *Harper's* and *The Nation*; and in novels such as *No. 26 Jayne Street* (1920).

But Austin eventually began to find city life debilitating. During her time in New York she had spent part of the year in the West, first in Carmel and later, after her friend Mabel Dodge Luhan moved to New Mexico, in her hacienda in Taos. Her trip to the Southwest in 1923 left her even more dissatisfied with the city and those she sometimes mocked as its “Intellectuals.” “New York,” she claimed, “had failed to engage the exigent interests of [her] time. It was not simple or direct enough; bemused by its own complexity, it missed the open order of the country west” (*Earth Horizon* 349). (In a novel written in New Mexico but not published until after her death, *Cactus Thorn*, Austin created a New York reformer “bemused by [his] own complexity” who fails to understand the West’s “simple” messages.) Looking back on what she discovered in writing *The Land of Journeys’*

Ending, she wrote, “I liked the feel of roots, of ordered growth and progression, continuity, all of which I found in the Southwest. . . . I knew that in electing to live there I was releasing myself to a larger scope. I knew that my work, which was essentially of the West, like ‘The Land of Little Rain,’ ‘The Flock,’ and ‘The Land of Journey’s Ending,’ had a permanent hold on the future” (*Earth Horizon* 349).

She was drawn to Santa Fe by the School of American Research, which named her an associate in Native American literature, and by her interest in the “folk plays and folk customs” of the “Spanish-speaking towns” of New Mexico. She planned “to work explicitly in that field” (336). She helped found the Spanish Colonial Arts Society and raised money to prevent dispersion of a famed site of supernatural healing, the Spanish Sanctuario de Chimayo. She published a novel, *Starry Adventure* (1931), about the complicated relationships between Anglo, Hispanic, and Indian cultures in New Mexico. At her death in 1934 she was working on a book on Spanish colonial arts. And she continued her early work defending the rights of American Indians. Named New Mexico’s representative to the Second Colorado River Conference in 1927, she testified before Congress against legislation that threatened Pueblo land and water rights, helping defeat the Bursum bill. Interested since her days as a schoolteacher in Southern California in how children were introduced to the history of the nation, she became involved in curriculum matters in elementary schools, where she supported bilingual education for Hispanic and

Indian children and the study of regional cultural traditions. She bequeathed her "beloved house" in Santa Fe and her estate to the Indian Arts Fund. Now a part of the School of American Research, it has received funds from the copyrights to her writings.

The Land of Journeys' Ending chronicles Austin's rediscovery of what she had learned to value in her early desert years, and in some ways it serves as a bookend to *The Land of Little Rain*. As the "land" of the earlier book is characterized by its geography and ecology, so is the land of the latter book, located, as Austin says in the book's opening lines, "between the Rio Colorado and the upper course of the Rio Grande." Certainly familiar with the ideas of John Wesley Powell (head of the Bureau of Ethnography during the years Austin began her research on American Indians), she defines the region by its drainage, seeing it as a watershed district. Although she is portraying a region relatively new to her, she builds upon her early work as a botanist (her college major) and ecologist, mentioning, for instance, "social shrubs," which she had first defined in notebooks she wrote during the 1890s: "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."¹⁰ Following the "wind's trail," she particularly explores plant migrations. The ecology of the Southwest she describes has a history, but it is also perpetually changing, cross-fertilized.

So, too, is Austin's cultural history of the Southwest char-

acterized by migrations, beginning with those of the people she calls the "ancients," early Indian arrivals to the region whose accomplishments in architecture and irrigation she particularly celebrates, then the Spanish, and finally the Americans. All of these people adapt to the region and, eventually, to each other. As Austin recounts their histories, their rituals, and their stories they remain distinct yet interconnected. As her title *Lost Borders* seems to anticipate the current focus by writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa (*Borderlands/La Frontera*) or filmmakers such as John Sayles (*Lone Star*) on how the southwestern "borderlands" provide metaphors for a multicultural United States, so does *Journeys' Ending* represent the Southwest as the kind of culture current critics have seen as particularly fruitful for understanding the United States. To cite one influential example, Annette Kolodny has argued the importance of redefining American literary history as being characterized by moments when "distinct human cultures first encounter one another's 'otherness.'" They are "circumscribed by a particular physical terrain in the process of change *because* of the forms that contact takes, all of it inscribed by the collisions and interpenetrations of language."¹¹ Austin fully maps this complex description of the *process* of what is often too simply called multiculturalism. Indeed, she even complained that her publishers had mangled the "Spanish part" of the manuscript (341).

Austin sets out, clearly, to tell a tale of the settlement of the continent from a new perspective, anticipating more

recent historical assertions that the West was first settled not from the East but from the North and South. "Not all the fine and moving things in American history were done in English," she comments midway through *Journeys' Ending*, summing up one of the book's key themes (193). She had long argued that American culture (and school curriculum) was dominated by the influence of Europe and New England. She countered this emphasis in three children's books: *The Basket Woman* (1904), a collection of stories, some told by the title character; *The Trail Book* (1918), a history of the continent as narrated by animals and humans represented in a natural history museum; and *The Children Sing in the Far West*, poems from her years as a schoolteacher in the Owens Valley. She also did so in essays. In "Aboriginal American Literature," for example, she observed, "It is still easier to know more of Beowulf than of the Red Score of the Delaware, more of Homer than of the Creation Myth of the Zuni, more of Icelandic sagas than of the hero myths of the Iroquois and Navajo. Here in the United States, [we dismiss] the first-born literature of our native land, such as becomes among all other peoples a proud and universally accepted literary heritage."¹²

Although she had always focused on Spanish influences in California, as she became more interested in and knowledgeable about colonial Spanish history and arts in the last decades of her life she insisted upon their cultural importance to the entire nation. After Austin loaned her house in Santa Fe to Cather, for example, she was "distressed"

to read the book Cather wrote there, *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, which, Austin believed, "sympathized" with the French rather than the Spanish "local culture" (*Earth Horizon* 359).

Austin's belief that the United States needed to look to its regional cultures for the foundation for a national culture, a theme she also developed in *American Rhythm* (1923), was shared by many of her contemporaries. She had discussed these ideas with a variety of writers and artists at Charles Lummis's Pasadena "salon" as early as the 1890s and published some of her earliest regional works in Lummis's magazine, *The Land of Sunshine*. Lois Rudnick has argued that Luhan and her Taos visitors, who included painters such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Maynard Dixon, photographers such as Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, and Laura Gilpin, writers such as Alice Henderson, Jean Toomer, and Robinson Jeffers, social critics such as Elsie Clews Parsons and John Collier, and the dancer Margaret Graham, believed that "non-Anglo, nonwhite cultures had laid the groundwork for a revitalized American civilization" (26).¹³

Such ideas are evident in works such as Henderson's *Red Earth* (1920), Dixon's *Earth Dwellers* (1931), and Austin's *Earth Horizon* (1932). The Southwest would offer a "new world plan" that would regenerate Anglo civilization from its urban-industrialist bias, its individualist and materialist credo, and its Eurocentric vision of culture."¹⁴ Contemporary critics have often, quite rightly, pointed to the ways such authors and artists appropriated what they wanted or

needed from American Indian cultural traditions. Their work often portrays romanticized images of Indians stuck in a perpetual past and depicts the richness of their cultures while overlooking their current economic poverty. Certainly, some of the racial attitudes Austin expresses in *Journeys' Ending*, particularly about African Americans, are indefensible today. But in her representation of the "relation of race to environment," her United States was not all, or even primarily, white (445). Nor would be its future.

* * *

In 1968 Ansel Adams, who had worked with Austin on a book entitled *Taos Pueblo* (1930), offered this tribute: "Seldom have I met and known anyone of such intellectual and spiritual power and discipline. . . . She is a 'future' person—one who will, a century from now, appear as a writer of major stature in the complex matrix of our American culture."¹⁵ Although Austin's work was praised by many of her contemporaries and *The Land of Little Rain* has consistently been in print, admired within the tradition of "nature writing," Adams was right that it would take some time for readers to understand and appreciate her "complex" understanding of American culture. Fortunately, however, he was off by more than seventy years. Beginning in the late 1980s, many Austin books began to come back into print, their publication initially the result of feminist criticism and then increased attention to representations of American Indians, to regional literature, and to what is now called "environmental" or "place-based" writing.

Certainly not strictly "nature writing" as it has been conventionally understood, *The Land of Journeys' Ending* best fits in the category of "place" writing, long dismissed by the often pejorative term *local color writing*, and now one of the fastest-growing fields in American literature. Lawrence Clark Powell effectively defined "place" writing when he praised *Journeys' Ending* in 1982 as "the book that best embodies the essences of the region whose heartland is Arizona and New Mexico. It was written in her prime by a wise and indomitable woman who synthesized history, anthropology, mythology and religion, flora and fauna, the seasons and the weathers, in strong and poetic prose," adding that it was "the ripest and richest book of all the many that she wrote."¹⁶ Piggybacking on one of Austin's earliest and most perceptive critics, Larry Evers has also implied that Austin was doing something that expanded our definitions of the genre. "Austin," he suggests, "increased the scale nature-writing to the measure of the continent. As Henry Smith puts it 'she has taken the unisonal melody of a Muir and scored it for full orchestra.'¹⁷ Austin's recognition that a "place" is characterized by natural and human history, and not always for the worst, marks her as a "future person." As I write this introduction, nine of her works are in print in addition to collections of her essays and stories. There are also two modern biographies and a recent collection of critical essays devoted to her work. Austin is fast achieving that "major stature" Adams envisioned for the future. *Hasta mañana*.

NOTES

1. Mary Austin, *Earth Horizon* (1932, reprint Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 349. Page numbers follow subsequent quotations in text.
2. Mary Austin, "Willa Sibert Cather," *El Palacio* 7 (March-April 1920): 90.
3. Quoted in Lois Rudnick, *Utopian Vistas: The Mabel Dodge Luban House and the American Counterculture* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 20.
4. Mary Austin, *The Land of Little Rain* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), 91.
5. Austin, *The Land of Little Rain*, 78.
6. Mary Austin, "The Basket Maker," in *Western Trails: A Collection of Stories by Mary Austin*, ed. Melody Graulich (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1987), 31.
7. Mary Austin, "The Walking Woman," in *Western Trails*, 97.
8. Mary Austin, "The Land," in *Western Trails*, 44.
9. Margaret Jacobs, *Engendered Encounters: Feminism and Pueblo Cultures, 1879-1934* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 59, 58.
10. Mary Austin, "Tejon Notebooks," Huntington Library Austin Collection, box 24c.
11. Annette Kolodny, "Letting Go Our Grand Obsessions: Notes toward a New Literary History of the American Frontiers," in *Subjects and Citizens*, ed. Michael Moon and Cathy Davidson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 17, 11.
12. Mary Austin. "Aboriginal Indian Literature," no date or page number, Huntington Library Austin Collection, box 25.
13. Rudnick, *Utopian Vistas*, 26.
14. *Ibid.*, 7.
15. Ansel Adams, "Notes on Mary Austin," in *Mary Hunter Austin:*

Centennial 1868-1968, commemorative booklet published by the Mary Austin Home (Independence, Calif., 1969), 7.

16. Lawrence Clark Powell, *Southwest Classics* (1974, reprint Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982), 95.

17. Larry Evers, "Mary Austin and the Spirit of the Land," introduction to *The Land of Journeys' Ending* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1983), xxiii. Evers quotes from Smith's "The Feel of the Purposeful Earth: Mary Austin's Prophecy," *New Mexico Quarterly* 1 (Feb. 1931): 21.