Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 249

Volume 249

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers Who Lived between 1900 and 1999, from the First Published Critical Appraisals to Current Evaluations

Lawrence J. Trudeau
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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (*TCLC*) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. *TCLC* has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *TCLC*. In the words of one reviewer, "there is nothing comparable available." *TCLC* "is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own."

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TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, *TCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *TCLC* presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *TCLC* is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism,* (*CLC*) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC*.

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A *TCLC* entry consists of the following elements:

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style,* 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.

- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC.* Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." In *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations,* edited by Reginald M. Nischik, pp. 163-74. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism.* Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 227-32. Detroit: Gale, 2008. The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th ed. (New York: MLA, 2009. Print); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

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Contents

Mary Austin
1868-1934

(Full name Mary Hunter Austin; also wrote under pseudonym Gordon Stairs) American nature writer, novelist, short story writer, autobiographer, playwright, essayist, critic, poet, and translator.

The following entry provides an overview of Austin's life and works. For additional information on her career, see *TCLC,* Volume 25.

INTRODUCTION

Mary Austin is an early twentieth-century American author, remembered for her portrayal of the landscape and culture of the American southwest. A nature writer in the tradition of Henry David Thoreau, Austin is best known for her first book, *The Land of Little Rain* (1903), a collection of sketches depicting the southern California desert. In this and other works, the author eschewed the longstanding tradition of romanticizing the land, particularly the desert, instead evoking the grandeur, vitality, and indifference of the southwest landscape in elaborate detail. While the influence of the environment on the character and fate of humankind is a predominant theme in her writings, Austin explored a variety of subjects, including the artist's struggle to express reality, the confines of prescribed gender roles, and folkloric and religious traditions, as well as differences between Native American and Euro-American cultures. A well respected and popular figure of her era, Austin suffered significant critical neglect for several decades after her death. Among her admirers, she is appreciated for her innovations in numerous genres, as well as her contributions to feminism, modernism, regionalism, and Native American studies. Writing in 1983, James Ruppert asserted that Austin was "foremost among the writers concerned" with "a revitalization of the arts through a return to American materials," noting that during her forty years as an author and scholar, "she was continuously involved with American Indian culture and literature, the southwestern environment, and the insights to be garnered from cultural and environmental interface."

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Austin was born September 9, 1868, in Carlinville, Illinois, to Susanna Savilla and Captain George Hunter, a lawyer and town magistrate, who had served with distinction in the American Civil War. In her youth, she was an avid reader and began composing poetry at a young age. When Austin was ten, her father and younger sister both died, and she was left in the care of her mother, with whom she had a strained relationship. Several years later, the author attended Blackburn College, where she studied mathematics and science, and graduated in 1888. After completing her studies, Austin moved to California, where her brother had relocated in search of better opportunities. She and her mother set up a homestead near Fort Tejon, and although the venture failed financially, it provided Austin with her first introduction to the western landscape and culture that would dominate her later writings. In California, Austin began teaching and met Wallace Stafford Austin, whom she married in 1891. The couple settled in Owens Valley but suffered numerous financial setbacks and incurred significant debt, which Austin struggled to pay off through various teaching appointments. In 1899, the author taught at the Normal School, later known as the University of California at Los Angeles, and returned to Owens Valley after a year. During this time, Austin also began to gather material and hone her writing skills. She sold several stories to *Overland Monthly* and joined a circle of writers around Charles Lummis and his magazine, *Land of Sunshine.* In 1900, the *Atlantic Monthly* began publishing her western-inspired material, and in 1903 her first book, *The Land of Little Rain,* was published.

The first decade of the 1900s was a productive and happy period for Austin. While researching material for her first novel, *Isidro* (1905), the author became involved with a colony of writers in the village of Carmel, which included novelist Jack London and poet George Sterling. During this time, she composed another collection of sketches, *The Flock* (1906), as well as a second novel, *Santa Lucia* (1908). After being diagnosed with terminal cancer, Austin left Carmel for Italy but made a remarkable recovery, which she attributed to prayer. In 1909, she traveled to England and met several important writers, including H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, and Joseph Conrad. In 1910, Austin traveled back to the United States for the New York production of her play *The Arrow-Maker* (1911). Over the next thirteen years, the author divided her time between New York and Carmel and produced several more novels, including *A Woman of Genius* (1912), *The Lovely Lady* (1913), and *The Ford* (1917). She also

worked for feminist causes and various war projects, and even returned to England to lecture before the Fabian Society. Her marriage to Wallace Austin, which had suffered for several years, was dissolved in 1914. After a visit to New Mexico in 1918, Austin was drawn to the southwest, and during the 1920s she settled permanently in Santa Fe, where she lived for the rest of her life. This region inspired several later works, including a book of sketches, *The Land of Journeys' Ending* (1924), and another novel, *Starry Adventure* (1931). In 1932, the author produced her last major work, an autobiography, titled *Earth Horizon.* That same year, she was diagnosed with coronary disease. Austin died on August 13, 1934, in Santa Fe, after suffering a brain hemorrhage.

MAJOR WORKS

Among Austin's most recognized writings are her autobiography and her stories and sketches depicting California and the American southwest. Her first major work, *The Land of Little Rain,* is now considered a classic text in the field of American nature writing. The work is comprised of fourteen sketches, which detail the author's observations as she journeys through the Tejon and Bakersfield region, Owens Valley, and the Mojave Desert. In these pieces, Austin highlights the various cultures that populate the land, including European, Hispanic, and Native American communities, but the primary focus of the work is the effect of the land on the people, flora, and fauna that populate it, particularly the ways in which it draws out qualities of hardiness, frugality, and adaptability. One of the best-known chapters from the work, "The Basket Maker," features a Paiute Indian woman named Seyavi, an independent female artist who struggles to maintain her values and aesthetic integrity as she interacts with people of disparate cultures. Austin's later work, *The Land of Journeys' Ending,* was inspired by the western landscape of New Mexico and Arizona. Similar in structure to *The Land of Little Rain,* the volume relates the author's observations of the natural and cultural life of the southwest, and more fully explores the relationship between humanity and the land. The cactus is an important image in the collection, providing the ultimate example of adaptation and survival in the arid desert environment. In addition to ruminations on the natural world, Austin also explores differences between Native American and European cultures. Utilizing imagery from the Tewa rainmaking ceremony, the author describes the individualistic orientation of European Americans, in contrast to the communal consciousness that distinguishes Native American society. The power of the land is another important theme in the work, particularly in relation to the individual, whose patterns of thought and actions are effected by nature's rhythms, topography, and seasons. In her last major work, *Earth Horizon,* Austin defies traditional conventions of the autobiographical form to recount her life. Focusing on her youth and early years as a writer, the author creates three distinct voices to depict different aspects of her identity: Mary Austin the author; "I-Mary," a mystical and independent self; and "Mary-by-herself," a vulnerable personality that seeks the approval of others. As the work progresses, the voices converge and interact with figures from Austin's past, including writers, intellectuals, artists, Native Americans, and Hispanic settlers, as well as voices that originate from the land itself. In *Earth Horizon,* the author identifies several primary forces in her life, most notably writing, mysticism, an awareness of the natural world, and appreciation for folk experience and patterns of life.

Although not as well known as her other writings, Austin also produced significant works of fiction. Her first novel, *Isidro,* is a romantic tale depicting the mission days of California. The novel centers on several characters, including a *haciendado*'s son on a quest to join the Franciscans at Carmel and a missing heiress, who poses as a boy, as well as a villainous character who ultimately redeems himself by sacrificing his life for others. Although noted for its formal construction, the novel has been particularly praised for its evocation of the pristine California landscape and insightful portrayal of the tension between the ordered structure of the mission and the freedoms of Native American life. In *Lost Borders* (1909), a collection of short fiction, Austin returns to the themes of *The Land of Little Rain,* particularly focusing on the ways in which the land shapes the character and destiny of its human inhabitants. In this collection, she also explores themes related to relationships, such as motherhood and marriage, and portrays the desert as a powerful, primal, and mysterious maternal presence. Considered one of Austin's best novels, *A Woman of Genius* borrows themes and circumstances from the author's life in its exploration of protagonist Olivia Lattimore's struggle to become an actress. Throughout her life, Olivia is faced with restrictive gender expectations, which conflict with her desire to pursue an artistic career. Despite the disapproval of her mother, friends, and romantic interests, however, Olivia chooses to follow her own path. Published posthumously in 1988, *Cactus Thorn* is a novella that explores themes similar to those presented in *A Woman of Genius,* including restrictive gender roles and the difficulties of heterosexual relationships. In this work, protagonist Dulcie Adelaid is a young vibrant woman from California, whose emotional honesty and passion are directly linked to the mystic power of the desert. Dulcie is betrayed by her lover, Grant Arliss, a politician from New York, who ultimately succumbs to his own hypocrisy and cowardice.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Austin first began to win recognition in the 1890s and early 1900s, when popular magazines such as *Overland Monthly* and the *Atlantic Monthly* began publishing her stories and sketches inspired by the California desert. Her first major work, *The Land of Little Rain,* was enthusiastically received after its 1903 publication, establishing Austin as a significant new voice of American western literature. Over the next two decades, Austin wrote prolifically in several genres, gained notice with the publication of several novels, and forged connections with prominent literary figures in the United States and abroad. During this time, she also became increasingly involved with feminist causes and promoted herself as an authority on Native American culture. In 1932, Austin finally achieved the stature and acclaim she had sought throughout her career, with the publication of her autobiography, *Earth Horizon,* which was chosen as a Literary Guild selection. But after her death in 1934, her works gradually fell out of favor, and the author was largely forgotten except among scholars of western literature. For several decades, Austin was relegated to the margins of American literature and pejoratively labeled a regionalist writer.

After decades of neglect, Austin's writings once again garnered critical attention following the 1985 reissue of *A Woman of Genius.* With the rise of feminist scholarship during the 1980s and 1990s, the author gained a new following, particularly among critics interested in her treatment of gender issues and cultural themes. Commentators such as Faith Jaycox, Karen S. Langlois, Linda K. Karell, and Beverly A. Hume emphasized the feminist themes in Austin's writings, particularly "The Walking Woman," *A Woman of Genius,* and *Lost Borders.* While Jaycox focused on Austin's use of "Western conventions" in her effort to "give voice, deliberately and positively, to feminist issues," Hume described the author as an "ecofeminist" pioneer and noted the ways in which she exposed patriarchal power systems and explored the fundamental connection between nature and womanhood. Janis P. Stout, however, questioned the view that Austin was an unwavering feminist. Stout, writing in 1998, argued that the author's fiction reveals "uncertainties and tensions" regarding woman's role in society and show both "undeniable feminist strains" and "traces of ideas that might even be called counter-feminist." Other scholars, such as Langlois and Noreen Grover Lape, began reevaluating Austin's reputation as an authority on Native American cultures. In her 1995 essay, Langlois suggested that the author was more concerned with self-promotion than cultural scholarship, and that her understanding was "intuitive" rather than scientifically based. Lape also identified problematic aspects of Austin's portrayal of Native American society, claiming that while her efforts to reclaim these cultures threatened "their free agency," her work was nevertheless important to "the resurgence of Native American art and culture" in the United States. In more recent scholarship, critics have also emphasized the importance of environment in Austin's writings. Anne Raine, Carol E. Dickson, Betsy Klimasmith, Heike Schaefer, and Corey Lee Lewis, among others, have addressed several issues related to the author's representation of the American southwest, including the relationship between the land and its inhabitants, the challenges associated with using language to portray the natural landscape, and Austin's theories of regionalism. As a result of these and other studies, Austin is increasingly appreciated as an important and relevant figure in American literature, whose achievements as a naturalist and social commentator deserve further recognition. Heike Schaefer, writing in 2004, argued that "Austin went beyond the romantic conceptions of her predecessors," and that her "environmentalist awareness and sensitivity to social imbalances of power" enabled her "to contribute an innovative regionalist vision to American literary history."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

The Land of Little Rain (sketches) 1903
The Basket Woman (juvenilia) 1904
Isidro (novel) 1905
The Flock (sketches) 1906
Santa Lucia (novel) 1908
Lost Borders (short stories and sketches) 1909
Outland [as Gordon Stairs] (novel) 1910
The Arrow-Maker (play) 1911
Christ in Italy (essays) 1912
A Woman of Genius (novel) 1912
The Lovely Lady (novel) 1913
California: The Land of the Sun (sketches) 1914; also published as *The Lands of the Sun,* 1927
Love and the Soul Maker (novel) 1914
The Man Jesus (nonfiction) 1915; also published as *A Small Town Man,* 1925
The Man Who Didn't Believe in Christmas (play) 1916
The Ford (novel) 1917
No. 26 Jayne Street (novel) 1920
The American Rhythm (criticism and translations) 1923
The Land of Journeys' Ending (sketches) 1924
The Children Sing in the Far West (poetry) 1928
Experiences Facing Death (essays) 1931
Starry Adventure (novel) 1931
Earth Horizon (autobiography) 1932
Can Prayer Be Answered? (essays) 1934
One-Smoke Stories (short stories) 1934
Mother of Felipe, and Other Early Stories (short stories) 1950

Cactus Thorn (novella) 1988
Beyond Borders (essays) 1996

CRITICISM

Dudley Wynn (essay date spring 1937)

SOURCE: Wynn, Dudley. "Mary Austin, Woman Alone." *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 13, no. 2 (spring 1937): 243-56.

[*In the following essay, Wynn emphasizes Austin's "Folk" philosophy and her mystical orientation to life, noting that despite the inconsistencies in her thought and writings, she remains an important cultural figure in America "for extending the range of our consciousness of our environment and our social possibilities."*]

"It was clear that I would write imaginatively, not only of people, but of the scene, the totality which is called Nature, and that I would give myself intransigently to the quality of experience called Folk, and to the frame of behavior known as Mystical." Thus Mary Austin wrote in the introduction to ***Earth Horizon,*** her autobiography, published two years before her death in 1934. The pattern of her life, she wrote, had been distinctly clear in her consciousness before she had lived the first third of a normally long life. From the moment she communicated with God under a walnut tree in the orchard in Carlinville, Illinois, when she was between five and six years old, there were intimations that she was to have an important destiny. The details were yet to be filled in, but the pattern was there. That destiny led to lonesome, rebellious, but profitable years in a California desert, to association with Pacific Coast radicals and poets such as Jack London and George Sterling, to some years of activity in the suffragist movement, to association with the Fabians, to a study of prayer-techniques in Italy, to a championing of the American Indian against "the folly of the officials," to years of studying and writing about the cultural resources of the Southwest, to a career as writer of novels, plays, poems, stories, and articles of great variety of subject and worth. If, throughout such amazing activity as the cyclopedic account indicates, she went unhurriedly and reflectively, it was perhaps because of the pattern. Knowing so clearly what she had to do, and wanting to do so little else, she achieved unity in her life. This is not to say that her ideas were always consistent. The unity is in the method of approach more than in the results reached.

Throughout the thirty or more books and fifty or more articles in periodicals, there runs an intense moralizing and an eager search. She was a born pragmatist and radical, she said, never believing anything that was told her but always wishing to bring belief into line with innate moral sense. She rebelled against the Methodist Church, and spent the rest of her life seeking, out of experience, an answer to the religious problem. She rebelled against the status of woman in the 'eighties and 'nineties, and never rested until she had worked out her own naturalistic and empirical defense of women's rights. She rebelled against the bleakness of life in America, and was never content until she found roots for a more expressive American life. Her approach to every problem was a double one. First there was plain introspection to discover what seemed most right and most life-giving. Then there was a testing of all in the light of what primitive, well-adapted peoples had to show. "The frame of behavior known as Mystical" and "the quality of experience called Folk" are nearly always inextricable; they work together to some fruitful conclusions. They also account for whatever is called Rousseauistic, primitive, absurdly mystical, and inaccurate in Mary Austin's thought. Despite all her learning in some fields, she was always an amateur, the pioneer who believes nothing, hardly knows where to go to find out, and finally has to discover everything unaided, by looking deeply within and observantly around. That is why all her ideas seemed, to her, so original, and still seem, to her devoted readers, so powerful.

A radical in an Illinois town in the 'eighties was a lonesome person. ***Earth Horizon*** and ***A Woman of Genius*** are evidence of it. Her own family was frightened by her disrupting insights. In the small settlements of the California desert and mining regions, a woman who wanted independence, who wanted to be judged by her intrinsic worth and not by what she could make some man feel, and who wished that life might give outlet for play and for impulses to self-expression—such a woman was strange and misunderstood. There was no one for her to talk to but herself. Some stories clearly autobiographical, such as **"Frustrate,"** other stories in ***Lost Borders,*** the novel ***Santa Lucia,*** and ***Earth Horizon*** all attest this. In the eastern metropolis, a woman who stood up and told the critical cliques that they were woefully ignorant of America, who told economic radicals that their radicalism and most of their morality were "topsy-turvy," was tolerated but misunderstood. When she said that New York re-discovered her about every seven years, she should have said that New York was only made aware of her every seven years. She saw to that herself. She was never at home there, except possibly in one brief period when she was a problem-solver and could enjoy the stir that New York was making in introducing a little realism into the discussion of American life. Even in Santa Fe, she was suspect, because she was often erratic, irascible, and egotistical. "Woman Alone" she called herself.

One does not need any fancy psychology to see that her aloneness was a great impulsion toward the Folk. She wanted to belong, to be one of a race, to have a home, to express herself and be understood. But she was not at home in the America which emphasized a repressive morality, worshiped bigness, and divorced its living from its way of getting a living. She could find her cultural home among the Folk, who were still immune to the evils of the dominant American culture and whose qualities pointed a way for the whole American future. Sometimes, indeed, she could not wait upon that future; her aloneness drove her to see the dominant American way itself as a folk way. For example, she once saw in the 1926-1929 era a fine cultural movement led by "SatEvePost" and men with a good "medicine for Things." Usually, however, she saw that she would have to wait, and she spurned the dominant American way and looked to the Folk for a future. Mary Austin's ideas about the Folk and their possibilities are very complex, but they will reveal a very representative Mary Austin. "Folkness" was central in her method of thinking, and led to all her regional activities and whatever regional philosophy she had.

From the time of some of her earliest works, **"The Land of Little Rain"** and ***The Flock,*** a great part of Mary Austin's power lay in a sense of what people gain from a complete adjustment to the land they live upon. The desert Indians and sheepherders in the high pastures of the Sierras had taken a fresh start in the land, had integrated morality, religion, and economics into a pattern that was wise because it was naturally adapted to the physical environment. Before the California days, as a girl of fourteen, Mary Austin felt that the American community, as she knew it in the Middle West, lacked this wise adjustment. She tells of first going to the house which her mother had built, shining and new, and of being "struck with a cold blast of what she [Mary Austin] was to recognize long after as the wind before the dawn of the dreary discontent with the American scene, which has since been made familiar to us all by the present generation of writers in the Middle West." When she turns from primitives to a representative Anglo community on the California frontier, she has her heroine, Serena Lindley of ***Santa Lucia,*** feel the lack of coordination in her life, the gap between the means to life and the living, which lets in boredom and the sense of frustration and rootlessness. By contrast, Dr. Caldwell, who has been in this land thirty-five years, finds contentment in the ramshackle old house where living has gone on. Dr. Caldwell exacts a promise from his prospective son-in-law that the old place will be kept and children brought up there. "'. . . it is my belief that here in the West, perhaps in all America, we do not take enough account of the power of our inanimate surroundings to take on the spiritual quality of the life that is lived in them, and give it off again like an exhalation, and not pains enough when we have made such a place, to preserve it for those who come after from generation to generation. . . .'" It is no wonder that when, some ten or more years later, such members of the eastern "radical-intellectual" group as Waldo Frank and Van Wyck Brooks rode through the Middle West and reported that America was a land of shacks which appeared never to have been lived in, Mrs. Austin's scorn was derisive. She had beaten them to the observation, made it from the inside, with pity and tolerance, and with something to offer besides more and more rootlessness.

Criticism of American rootlessness is implied in almost everything Mary Austin wrote. A folk-like adaptation to the new land is the cure that is offered. A philosophy of Folk-ness develops by the time she is settled into the life at Santa Fe, but it does not appear explicitly in her books so much as in periodical writings. Originally, she says, the term "Folk" included all of us; recently it has come to mean "those minority groups whose social expression is the measure of their rootage in a given environment . . . people whose culture is wholly derived from their reactions to the scene that encloses, taking nothing from extra-tribal sources except as these forcibly constitute themselves factors of that scene." "To be shaped in mind and social reaction, and to some extent in character, and so finally in expression, by one given environment, that is to be Folk." The Folk have a sounder, better-rounded view of their group destiny than world-aware sophisticates have. Indeed, she continues, the lack of receptivity to the multiple influences that flow through the world is the mark of Folk-ness. Both the founders of the Republic, following the egalitarian ideal, and their successors, with their public schools and newspapers, failed to take proper account of this quality. Isolation from the main stream of world thought and world influences, an impenetrability and obtuseness, and a natural adaptation to the physical environment, are the requisites of Folk-ness. Two groups in America, she says, have had these conditions in perfection, the Anglos of the Appalachian highlands, and the Spanish-speaking peoples of the Southwest. The former have given us a poetic style in balladry and dialogue which reveals "touches of splayed Elizabethan rugosity," its imagery displaying "an immortal freshness." The latter, having taken over the Indian foodcrop, the architecture, and the whole economic complex of Indian life, developed in their folk-product "an objective superiority" based on pictorial and plastic elements.

Naturally, one who insisted so constantly and so volubly upon the worth of the indigenous and well-established folk groups in the Southwest had to meet the charge of escapism, even of sheer mystical nonsense. Out of desperation and disgust with the obtuseness of many critics, Mary Austin's final plea was on a basis of utility. The poetry of the Indian is not for our

imitation; it is simply an indigenous object lesson, an example of how a true poetry reflects the landscape line and the native rhythms, and how its suggestive power is greater when it grows out of the integrated experience of a people. It should be collected, translated, explained, studied, and the way of life that produced it kept as nearly intact as possible. On this last point, Mrs. Austin was a fighter. Stupid officials, officious missionaries, and an indifferent public were targets of her wrath; loud progressivists who assumed that the dominant Anglo culture was superior in every way to the Amerind were victims of her most ironic thrusts. Of all folk groups in America, the Indian was the one which most needed to be encouraged in keeping its integrity, for the simple reason that the Indian would suffer most and profit least from being dissolved into the huge current of the usual American life. She could admit, however, that the Indian's tribal life was breaking up, his arts of dance and decoration dying (at least until resurrected by sympathetic groups of artists in the Southwest), his ceremonies and religion becoming meaningless conventions and formalities even to many Indians. This is the point at which her common sense came in. She bowed to nobody in respect for Indian culture and in comprehension of the wholeness and beauty of the Indian way of life, but she could nevertheless see that the concrete pattern of Indian life would ultimately be broken, the religious and esoteric meanings of the poetry, decorative design, and dance-drama lost. That was why, she felt, the Indian must be encouraged in his arts before all was lost. Let the forms continue, since they still existed, so that Indian life might make the contribution to an indigenous American culture that it was, to her notion, destined to make.

Despite the fact that Mrs. Austin's later years were greatly devoted to the arts and the folk-lore of the Spanish-speaking people of the Southwest, the Indian was central in her thoughts. She hailed the political changes in Mexico, beginning in 1921, as evidence that Mexico was awakening to her fundamental Indian heritage, one of intense communal and artistic instincts, overlaid too long with the Conquerors' culture. As long as her attention was directed specifically toward Mexico, she saw the Indian as the basis of a new Western culture, taking in both North and South America. The "wantlessness," the innate community sense and artistic sense, the incorrigible Folk-ness (both in the sense of "environmental rootage" and "limited range of social perception") of Spanish-Americans in New Mexico, she attributed chiefly to their Indian heritage. She recorded with glee the way in which the villagers in Mexico, as soon as the revolution had given them opportunity, seized again the *ejidos,* originally communally-owned strips of land. This was evidence, she thought, of their clinging to a pattern of social life older than the Spanish conquest. It was a folk manifestation, the resurgence of a loyalty that had lived, submerged, through generation after generation. To Mexico and south she looked for the re-establishment on the American continent of the basic patterns of American life—not a state socialism, but an informal, spontaneous, small-scale communism enhancing Folk-ness. At one time, the best plea she could make for the revival and encouragement of Indian arts in the Southwestern United States was that the Indian pueblos and the villages of New Mexico could help Mexicans to find their way more directly to the old Indian patterns which, strangely, had been more broken up in Mexico than in New Mexico.

A rejuvenated Mexico was, for a time at least, the symbol which co-ordinated Mary Austin's enthusiasms. But she never let enthusiasm for exotic Folk-ness carry her away from considerations of how Folk-ness was to operate among her own kind. True, after talking with Diego Rivera in Mexico, she came away feeling that his painting "came forth with charm such as is missed by Nordics." "It was a relief to me," she wrote, "to discover that there was no Nordic taint in Diego Rivera." This may mean, in its full context, that she was glad to find her intuitions about the American rhythm and pattern corroborated by one of a different race. More likely, it means that she was sick of Nordic progressiveness, maladjustment, and assertiveness. Nevertheless, Mary Austin was a pioneer American, of Anglo and Nordic stock. Folk-ness was not an exotic means of entertainment to her; it was a way of looking at and interpreting the life of the United States. If Mexico as a symbol most completely co-ordinated her enthusiasms and seemed to be the completest fulfillment of her prophecies, the next best symbol was the aridity of the Southwestern United States and the need there for irrigation. The Colorado River controversy focused her attention upon this physical fact and its implications.

The controversy was long and involved, as battles over water rights always have been. It began when Boulder Dam was projected, and it involved the seven states that had territory in the watershed of the Colorado River and its tributaries. It resulted in a fight between California and Arizona. California wanted half the water, although she could supply little to the drainage into the proposed reservoir, and wanted it because she could prove she needed it *now,* to supply electric power to Los Angeles and water to valleys lying hundreds of miles from the dam. Arizona wanted a good proportion of the water held for the other less populous states, with a view to their future development. For Mary Austin, it became a fight hazarding everything she held dear. It was the California cult of bigness, based on a short-sighted cultural and economic view, against her own idea of regional autonomy. She envisaged hundreds of small communities in valleys along the whole Colorado course. Isolated, well-integrated, having the fundamental Southwestern communal pattern enforced by the

sharing of water-rights, these communities would be the focal points of the new American social pattern: industrialism on a small scale, community-mindedness, integration of the economic pattern with the physical background, a spontaneous, folk-like development of the capacities necessary to the functioning of such communities. For one of the greatest evils in American life, as she saw it, was that such hordes of people "benefit by, without understanding, the mechanistic basis of modern society." "The proportion of any community which has only a button-pushing, spigot-turning acquaintance with its material advantages, is the measure of that community's cultural inertia." Small communities scattered throughout the Colorado basin would keep the population "on the stretch," would call out "invention and foresight, *among the people.*"

Mary Austin took an active part in the struggle, wrote articles, attended the seven-states conference as representative of New Mexico. She was aware that her views seemed poetic and impractical to economists, legislators, and business men; that California was not practising any economic atrocity, but a good economics, widely approved. What she was fighting for was the cultural future; her opponents, for the economic present. Mrs. Austin's point was lost sight of in the final settlement. But the fight co-ordinated her views. All her writing at the time of the controversy and immediately afterwards reveals that the following implications of her regionalism, heretofore somewhat diffused, were brought together: her definition of culture; her belief that the Southwest was to be, or had the proper conditions for being, the seat of the world's next great culture; the belief that the dominant Anglo culture, progressive and mechanistic, would be great only by the infusion of traits from a more poetic, leisure-loving, artistic, and religious-minded people; her advocacy of an essentially rural, spontaneous communism over against an urban-industrial state socialism. And one might hazard the speculation that the set-back her ideas received in this affair, their first practical test, was a great impetus towards her enthusiasm later for Mexico, where she was able to see in Diego Rivera and certain social movements in Mexico the village Folk-ness and communalism she admired. A practical set-back, of course, was for her only a delay, not a defeat. She turned, in the last years of her life, from an all-inclusive speculation about regionalism to finding out all she could about Indian and Spanish-American Folk-ness; from prophecy, to put it roughly, to collecting. And, of course, to "the frame of behavior known as Mystical," explicitly.

Mrs. Austin's views, however, are not often so well co-ordinated as when she was thinking about the future of the Southwest in relation to the development of water resources, or about Mexico. There are contradictions and confusions in her thinking. Folk-ness happens to lead on occasion to a regional philosophy, but Folk-ness, as a method of approach, a way of prophesying through intuition, often leads to concepts that do not readily fit together. The native communism of the Mexican village which she once discovered as the very pattern of the indigenous American life and the hope of the future, is in another place thought to bring in the "menace of cultural arrest through the perfection of economic adjustment." Aboriginal communalism, whether in Mexico or in the pueblos of New Mexico, is traced from security to complacency to inertia to desuetude. The economic pattern forced a like rigidity on the whole cultural complex, which made the Indian incapable of coping with more individualistic peoples. Of course, Mrs. Austin was dealing in well-known anthropological fact; nevertheless, there is inconsistency between this view and the later enthusiasm for the Mexican pattern; also between this and the usual implication that the beauty of the folk way of life is in stability and resistance to change.

The greatest paradox of all perhaps lies in her wavering attitude towards "Big Business"—what other regionalists call finance-capitalism. Mary Austin usually found the dominant mores of American society, built around ideas of progress and rapid expansion and supported by the finance-capitalist régime, the enemy of all she had fought for. And yet we find her in 1920 writing that Mr. Herbert Hoover was a man "in travail with an idea," feeling his way toward a deeper, more intuitive prepossession of the American people, the idea that "self-government means the release of the personal drive: liberty to perfect the technique of action. . . . Law-making and policing are relatively futile in the presence of working power." And late in 1928 she wrote that she had found "the thing worth waiting for." Eighteen years among Indians, and more years of study tracing social institutions from the Stone Age to the present, had revealed that all radicalism was wrong. She had discovered the "inescapable tendency of Things to accumulate about certain types of personality." The discovery was contemporaneous with her finding The Saturday Evening Post America's great folk voice; it helped her "return to the high-priesthood of man's economic conquest of the earth," to see "the spiritualization of business." Spirituality for business men was a "specialized type of energy, working from within," a subconscious mastery of business, a good "medicine for Things." Accordingly, the solution for economic maladjustment was to take all the chains off and let Mr. Ford, Mr. Hoover, and their type exercise their medicine. Not to divide the heap but to increase it, everybody getting a larger share and admitting the rights of the leaders, the "good medicine" men, to inordinately large shares. It was, to her, a new spiritual insight for America. Today it sounds like Mr. Walter Lippmann's "benevolent capitalism," and one suspects that Mrs. Austin only gave anthropological and mystical support to a none-too-original idea. Folk-ness as a method, that is, exercise of the prophetess's