MARY AUSTIN'S FOLKLORE

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NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS

The titles of books by Mary Austin (though not those of her essays and contributions to periodicals) have been abbreviated and references inserted in the text. The abbreviations are as follows:

AR: *The American Rythm* (Boston and New York, 1930)
CII: *Christ in Italy* (New York, 1912)
EH: *Earth Horizon* (Boston and New York, 1932)
FI: *The Flock* (Boston and New York, 1906)
LLR: *The Land of Little Rain* (Boston, 1950)
LB: *Lost Borders* (New York, 1909)
OSS: *One Smoke Stories* (Boston and New York, 1934)
STM: *A Small Town Man* (New York, 1925)

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INTRODUCTION

Mary Austin (1868-1934) was a minor luminary on the American literary scene in the first three decades of this century. For most of her life she was a professional writer and her output, prolific and variegated, included novels, plays, books of spiritual autobiography, poems, travel books, short stories, and essays on many social and literary topics. At various times she identified herself with, or was indentified with, various movements in literature and society: feminism, Fabianism, regionalism, the New Mexico literary movement, the appreciation of Amerindian art, and other worthy causes. Since her death she has been largely forgotten both by the reading public and by academic commentators, and probably this is deserved; probably her place is only in the history of the various contexts into which parts of her work tend to fall. Even so, one of the most interesting of these contexts, the one I have labelled 'folklore', has been altogether neglected by her commentators.

The qualities and experience of 'the folk' were dominant interests throughout Mary Austin's career. In 1934, for instance, a note claims "All of her twenty-seven books

but three deal in some manner with folkness".[1] But "folkness" is not folklore, and a consideration of her looser and more general use of 'folk' ideas has had to be excluded from the scope of my thesis. I deal with a particular group of Mary Austin's works, two books of non-fiction and two collections of short stories, three out of these four belonging to the very earliest years of her career. These works objectify "folkness" by their attention to the composition of the folk group, those to whom the experience of "folkness" truly belongs, and to the forms by which this experience organizes itself into art, the lore of the folk. So, in The Land of Little Rain, The Flock, Lost Borders and One Smoke Stories, folklore makes itself felt in the fabric of the work itself as well as in its general ideological orientation. I intend to show how the folklore arises from a combination of ideological bias, literary convention, and Mary Austin's own experience of a land, a people and a culture, how various literary conventions are adapted so as to give maximum scope to this folklore interest, and how Mary Austin's folklore measures up to some more orthodox standards of the nature of folklore.

My use of the term 'folklore' is bound to raise questions of propriety and definition, some of which will

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[1] "Contributors to this Issue", South Atlantic Quarterly, XXXIII (1934), v.

be covered in the first chapter and others in the actual discussion of Mary Austin's work. But even then some leeway must be allowed; the conception I use is loose and broad, and takes advantage of many of the equivocations and ambiguities of conventional folklore theory. Just as Mary Austin's folklore comes from her own experience of her subject-matter rather than from formal preconceptions, so my use of the term is tentative rather than dogmatic, and (though I hope I avoid the more obvious indulgences) inclusive rather than exclusive. I feel that my concept can support on its periphery such heterogeneous material as I deal with - the techniques of naturism and local color; the theory of the short story; Mary Austin's biography; specifically literary influences - yet establish at its centre the dominant concerns and distinct texture of Mary Austin's work.

As my first chapter demonstrates, Mary Austin's folklore exists within a large and forbidding body of theory and practise concerned with the relationships of folk literature and formal literature, the folk artist and the formal artist, the collector of folklore and the formal artist. I believe that a study of Mary Austin's work can substantiate some of the abstract points brought up by this debate, although, inevitably, this must remain at the level of conjecture. The chief value of Mary Austin's work with folklore is not as a testing ground for folklore theory but as

a vital amalgamation of disparate elements into a cohesive yet flexible body of material that can straddle distinctions of subjective and objective, fiction and non-fiction, formal and non-formal, so as to form a unique and iridescent image of formal literature as a response to, and servant of, a larger, non-formal, environment and culture.

CHAPTER I

AMERICAN FOLKLORE AND AMERICAN LITERATURE

> For the student of culture and words the mystery and misunderstanding surrounding the terms "folk" and "folklore" constitute a species of folklore in itself.[1]

Mary Austin's claim to recognition as a folklorist rests largely on her own account. In Earth Horizon she writes of her early awareness of her destiny: "I would give myself intransigently to the quality of experience called Folk" (EH, vii) and claims folklore to be "the one scholarly subject" in which she "can claim a creditable proficiency", linking her interest in folklore with a prior interest in myth and the early history of mankind (EH, 168) In the preface to her biography of Christ, A Small Town Man, Mary Austin professes "the method of the folklorist, a discipline with which I have acquaintance" (STM, iii). But, although she claims this acquaintance with the material of folklore and the discipline of its study, using it as the basis for her theoretical essays "American Folk",[2]

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[1] B. A. Botkin, "The Folkness of the Folk", in Horace P. Beck, ed., Folklore in Action (Philadelphia, 1962), p. 44.

[2] "American Folk", in B. A. Botkin, ed., Folk-Say (Norman, Okla., 1930), pp. 297-300.

"Folk Literature",[3] "The Folk Story in America"[4] and "Amerindian Folklore";[5] her claim is undermined by the neglect of her work by professional folklorists and folklore theorists. The only time she is mentioned in any of the standard textbooks is when Richard Dorson acknowledges her as a popularizer who brought the attention of "real" folklorists to the Spanish folk-drama of New Mexico with its interesting problems of classification and analysis.[6]

The purpose of this chapter is to lay a tentative framework for considering the way in which Mary Austin uses the materials and techniques of folklore, in combination with other materials and techniques, in her early non-fiction and short stories, but the lack of any corroborative recognition of her awareness of folklore presents an obvious problem. Behind this problem, however, lies one larger and more difficult, and one that affects the study of much American literature: what is folklore and what, if

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[3] "Folk Literature", Saturday Review of Literature, V (1928), 33-35.

[4] "The Folk Story in America", South Atlantic Quarterly, XXXIII (1934), 10-19.

[5] "Amerindian Folklore", Bookman, LVI, (1922), 343-345.

[6] American Folklore (Chicago, 1959), p. 107.

any, is its exact relationship to literature?

We are dealing here with what folklorists, while admitting that they might have something in common, insist are two distinct and independent disciplines. The study of folklore is a cultural science, analogous to social anthropology; literature is a humanistic study concerned with evaluative, moralistic and aesthetic aspects that occupy only the merest periphery of the folklorists' concern. Nevertheless, there has been much confusion, both popular and academic, and this has been particularly true of the study of American culture. There is a colloquial identification of folklore and that which is inaccurate and outmoded - 'Marxist folklore', 'the folklore dear to tired minds' - and this has spilled over into academic circles. Descriptions of literature as "folksy", "in the spirit of folklore" and "full of folk flavour" point to a generalized equation of folklore with literature that is quaint and picturesque in content, that uses traditional motifs and story elements (the supernatural, for instance) or that is archaically stylized in its structural elements. Furthermore, loose talk about "frontier humor" and "Folk Humor" has not made for clarification.[7] We can see the

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[7] A further difficulty arise because there is no semantic distinction between the materials of folklore and the discipline that studies them. To avoid barbarity I

results of this confusion in any of the seemingly respectable university-edited anthologies devoted to the presence of folklore in American literature, and including extracts from Faulkner's The Hamlet and from Leaves of Grass, stories like "The Gold Bug" and "The Devil and Daniel Webster" and poems such as "Barbara Freitchie", Joaquin Miller's "Kit Carson's Ride" and Vachel Lindsay's " Bryan".[8] That literary critics can place this type of material within the province of folklore and that most professional folklorists would exclude it from their area of concern is indication enough that there is a large area of controversy and confusion on the borderline of the two disciplines.

Before looking more closely into this area of confusion it would be as well to have a folklorist's defintion of folklore, its limits and liaisons. Different theorists, of course, have different theories, and Francis Lee Utley attempts a semantic analysis of the twenty-one definitions brought together in the Standard Dictionary of Folklore and Mythology;[9] in order to present a composite view of the

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have not made this distinction in the text and hope that particular contexts will indicate particular uses.

[8] My example is John Flanagan and Arthur Palmer Hudson, eds., Folklore in American Literature (Evanston, Ill., 1958).

[9] Maria Leach, ed., Standard Dictionary of Folklore and Mythology (New York, 1949).

American folklorist's attitude to his material:

> Thus the statistical weight of authority is for . . . the inclusion of oral (verbal, unwritten) tradition (transmission), primitive culture, and the subcultures of civilized society, both rural and urban.[10]

Utley's commentary on his analysis indicates the way in which folklore has been pulled between the demands of scientific and humanistic study, and, while regretting that folklore is associating itself increasingly with cultural anthropology, he does nothing to stay this course when he adopts the traditional and all-important criterion of oral transmission in reaching his operational definition of folk literature: "literature orally transmitted".[11] Ideally, he implies, the story, proverb or ballad (there seems to be a tacit agreement among folklorists to disregard the large area of oral history) should not be contaminated by print until it is published in a report of field work.

This composite and Utley's commentary on it provides a fair image of the folklorist's attitude to the limits of his area of concern. Without an unimpeachable history of oral transmission nothing can be regarded as folklore. It

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[10]"Folk Literature: an Operational Definition", in Alan Dundee, ed., The Study of folklore (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1965), p. 10. [Emphasis in the original].

[11]Ibid., p. 24.

is basically a "hard line" approach and the best way of seeing what happens when this hard line comes into contact with the softer and more indulgent interests vested in the sturdy of literature is to refer to a symposuim, "Folklore in Literature", published in the Journal of American Folklore in 1957.[12] The symposium purports to attempt a détente between "folklore scholarship and literary criticism" and to suggest "possibilities of fruitful collaboration, but the argument is weighted heavily on the side of the non-collaborating hard-line folklorists. On the literary side the examples used by John W. Ashton to indicate the golden age of folklore-literary relations are, at best, tenuous: the fairies in A Midsummer Night's Dream, the ghost in Hamlet, the traditional form of Ben Jonson's comedies, and the allegories of state of the Elizabethan prose writers. To Ashton all these are pieces of genuine folklore successfully incorporated into literature without loss of integrity or vitality. Concerned largely with American literature, the counterarguments by Richard Dorson and Daniel Hoffman deride this sort of claim. They distinguish folklore from myth, from archetypal motifs, and, less

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[12] Daniel Hoffman et. al., "Folklore in Literature: a Symposium", Journal of American Folklore, LXXX (1957),

convincingly, from legendry,[13] as well as from the merely quaint and stylized. The folklorists' arguments are the more convincing just because they have a tighter and more coherent body of theory at their disposal, but this body makes them constrictive, limiting discussion to material which stands up to the oral transmission criterion. Richard Dorson's main point, for instance, is that you must first prove that the material is genuine and valid as folklore. In his summary Hoffman makes the important concomitant point that the concepts "folk", "folk-culture" and "folklore" are positions in a dialectic. They are opposed to and negatively defined by, the cultural values of the "non-folk", the inhabitants of the urban-industrial society. Folk literature - "literature orally transmitted" - can only flourish in a sub-culture isolated by geography or by ethnic or occupational composition from the institutionalized mass-culture typical of western society. Folklore belongs to the community-centred, intra-personal culture typified by the rural community or the ethnic minority. Formal literature belongs to the cities and to the standardized and supra-personal arrangements of education and

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[13] A legend is "a narrative supposedly based on fact with an intermixture of traditional materials" (Leach, Standard Dictionary, II, 612). Legendry is a category which raises many questions important to this discussion. It will be returned to in this and later chapters.

and culture.[14]

In this symposium we see a hard and a soft position in conflict, with the hard position winning out merely by virtue of its hardness and never being forced to justify itself. The somewhat pedantic nature of the discussion is epitomized by the running squabble over T. B. Thorpe's "The Big Bear of Arkansas". Is this story a genuine folk-creation almost accidentally elevated into literature or is it a conscious literary invention masquerading as folklore? This sort of argument, I suggest, does not attempt to solve the problems raised by the popular confusion of folklore and certain types of literature. Any further approach must come through a questioning of the basic oral-transmission criterion.[15] This is a historical as well as a theoretical stumbling-block, and one way to approach it is to look at the sources of the popular folklore-literature confusion.

It is interesting that it is only in relation to American material that "folklore" appears as a problem in

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[14] Hoffman, p. 18.

[15] I have not been entirely fair to this symposium. The arguments are not as unsophisticated as I have presented them although their main contours have been faithfully rendered. There is a good deal of interesting material covered incidentally, including a survey of the ways in which various American authors have faced or ignored the problems presented by the assimilation of folklore into their work. Mary Austin is not mentioned.

the study of literature. I would suggest two reasons: the existence of a flourishing "local color" school of writing during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and a somewhat unique combination of circumstances surrounding the development of literary culture in the trans-Mississippi west. Both these are important in indicating the necessity of taking a liberal view of the folklorists' oral-transmission criterion, in establishing a rapport between folklore, literature, and the study of folklore and, thus, in defining Mary Austin's material and its handling.

Local color writing is by no means peculiar to America, but it is only in the United States that it becomes a flourishing tradition of popular literature.[16] The movement - it is useful and not too misleading to consider it as such - consolidated itself in the years following the civil war and by 1892 a commentator could write "There are scarcely a dozen conspicuous states now which have not their own local novelists".[17] Most of these local authors have been justifiably forgotten, but for some, the identi-

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[16]The British writers identified with a particular locality - Hardy is the obvious example - have been consistsistently mined for "folklore", like their American counterparts, and a similar, though less well-marked confusion of terms has resulted. For one example, see Donald Davidson, "The Traditional Basis of Hardy's Fiction", in Still Yankees, Still Rebels (Louisiana, 1957), pp. 43-51.

[17]H. H. Boyesen quoted in Warner Berthoff, The Ferment of Realism (New York, 1965), p. 90.

fication with a particular region or locality during all or part of a career, was the source of imaginative energy and real literary achievement. Twain's Mississippi shoreland, Cable's New Orleans, the "Middle Border" of Hamlin Garland and Joseph Kirkland, the New England of the Misses Jewett and Feeman, even Bret Harte's California and (I suggest) the California-Nevada border of Mary Austin's best work: all these deserve a place in the literary history of America as well as in its sentimental geography.

At his (or, just as frequently, her) most basic the local color writer sets out to extract the essence of a distinctive locale and of the unique characters in the lower strata of its society - the disadvantaged farmers of Wisconsin, the creoles and 'cajuns of Louisiana, the negro sharecroppers and servants of the Carolinas, the miners of Placer and Calaveras Counties. Great pains were taken to make the locality and its inhabitants truly distinctive, and local color writing developed certain tricks to achieve this end: dialect humor, much play on peculiar turns of phrase, sayings, proverbs, the description of strange customs and social activities, the characteristic "frame device" (Twain's story of Jim Smiley's story of the celebrated jumping frog, Joel Chandler Harris' stories of Uncle Remus' stories) to len authenticity and to establish a distinctly "local" cultural milieu. Local color writing was literature about the "folk', about those who live

close to the soil, and there seems to have been an identification on the part of the writers and their audience, of this material, imaginative description of the folk and their ways and folklore.

We have a concrete connection between local-color writers and the new interest in folklore in the Chicago Folklore Society of the eighteen-nineties.

> The files of the society contain letters from Hamlin Garland, George Washington Cable, Joel Chandler Harris, Mary Hartwell Catherwood, Joseph Kirkland, Harriet Monroe, Harry Stillwell Edwards, Will N. Harben, and Will Allen Dromgoole. Harris writes he is too shy to speak publicly, Cable knows no negro folklore, Whittier refers to the specter ship of Salem, Catherwood states her use of oral legends from Mackinack Island, Kirkland and Edwards promise to give papers, Garland says he has spoken on the Indian Acoma dance. This correspondence proves that some late nineteenth century authors understood the concept of folklore and its usefulness to their craft.[18]

Nevertheless, Dorson insists that local color writers are not folklorists, that their collection of oral material is insufficiently rigorous (enthusiasm taking the place of the proper scientific scepticism) and that their artistic assimilation of this material bears no organic relationship to real folklore. The Chicago Folklore society can be remembered only as evidence of a widespread colloquial identi-

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[18] Richard Dorson in Hoffman, p. 6. Dorson does not explore Cable's surprising denial. Cable is the only one of the writers mentioned who has any claim to be a genuine folklorist; he collected creole, 'cajun and negro lore for its own sake as well as for assimilation into his stories

fication of folklore and local color, with the consequent confusion responsible for the wideranging and haphazard character of the folklore in American literature anthologies.

The folklorists' denial of relevance to local color rests largely on the denial of authenticity to the folklore presented. While Dorson admits some genuine folklore, verified by independent research in the field, does find its way into local color material, even this is usually worthless to the folklorist since its collection is made in the name of art rather than of science and that it is unrecognizeable as folklore after it has been dressed and refined for purposes other than those of exact reproduction. This seems to be the weak point in the argument. Dorson uses it to justify folklorists giving local color as wide a berth as possible, but it could just as well be used as an indication that they should explore the subject rather more carefully, and with fewer pre-conceived impressions about the sole validity of the oral-transmission criterion, than they have hitherto done. It <u>is</u> difficult, almost hopelessly difficult, to separate local color folklore from its

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and novels. He published some of his collection, and his essay, "The Dance in Place Congo" (1886) seems a forerunner of the imaginative field-collection called for by MacEdward Leach and described later in this chapter. "The Dance in Place Congo" can be found in Cable, <u>Creoles and Cajuns</u> (New York, 1959), pp. 266-299.

literary formulation, and, in view of this, perhaps the stress should be on understanding the forces that bind the two together rather than those that drive them apart. The folklorist would benefit from this as much as the literary critic, for it would throw some much-needed light on the troublesome areas of legendry and oral history, neglected by folklorists but much used by the local colorists, as well as on the dynamics of folklore itself. Later in this chapter I will discuss two theories of folklore which indicate the usefulness of this approach, but here I wish to make use of a concrete example, Cable's "Salome Müller, the White Slave",[19] in which the author neither mentions nor implies the use of folklore. The story demonstrates not only the difficulties of taking local color seriously as a source or treatment of folklore, but also the wastage of suggestive and important material implied in not doing so.

Salome arrives in New Orleans, three years old, with her father, an Alsatian immigrant who is immediately contracted into service to redeem his passage. All trace of the family is lost, until, twenty-five years later, Salome is discovered as a light-skinned slave, recently sold to an Italian tavern-keeper. The main part of the story is concerned with the struggle of her friends and

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[19] George Washington Cable, Strange True Stories of Louisiana (New York, 1889), pp. 145-171.

and relatives to establish her identity, her race and her freedom. Cable uses the story as an ironic comment on slavery and the attendant complexities of light-skin and mixed blood. He insists that he is constructing his story from the actual documents of the case (" . . .holding the court's official copy of judgement in hand, as I do at the moment . . ."[20]) and the factual reminiscences of participants. Cable demanded historical veracity from his "strange true stories", but he also demanded that they should have "artistic" merit. At the beginning of the volume he comments on the difficulties involved:

> True stories are not often good art. The relations and experiences of real men and women rarely fall in such symmetrical order as to make an artistic whole . . . yet I have learnt to believe that good stories happen oftener than once I thought they did.[21]

Cable is searching for form in history and real life, and in the story of Salome Müller he believes he has found it. Now the reason that the story is effective as art, that it possesses the necessary "symmetrical order", is its unconscious reworking of a widespread and completely authentic motif of folk literature - the rescue of the lost child.[22]

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[20] Ibid., p. 189.

[21] Ibid., p. 1.

[22] Stith Thompson, Motif Index of Folk Literature (Bloomington, Ind., 1958), III, 500ff.

It is not, of course, told as a folktale but as a piece of history; yet the coincidence of the two is obvious and striking. At first glance, however, it is a mere coincidence; the nature-imitating-art factor certainly suits Cable's purposes very well. A closer consideration, though, reveals the possibiltiy of a somewhat deeper relationship than one of coincidence or artistic expediency.

Some abstraction and speculation is necessary here. Three creative factors, interdependent but still available to categorization, can be abstracted from Cable's story: the historicity of the content, the form lent to it by folk literature, and the author, the literary artist who works these into a viable piece of local color. There is also a fourth factor, an integrative force working not within but behind the story - the immense body of oral lore concerned with the hazards of European immigration, redemptioners, mixed blood, light-skinned slaves, free men of color and other aspects of New Orleans life touched on in "Salome Müller". All this is only vaguely indicated in the particular story ("you might have heard . . .", " . . . tales abound . . .") and its importance can only be fully realized when "Salome Müller" is returned to its original context of Cable's New Orleans. Throughout his career of writing about the locality Cable makes consistent use of this large and inchoate body of material, scraps of oral history, local legendry, anecdotes and reminiscences, all of which

can be grouped under the general heading of "folk history". He uses it for local color atmosphere, for motifs, and, in Strange True Stories of Louisiana he uses it for the stories themselves. "Salome Müller", for all its historicity and its consummate literary form, has a close relationship to this formless material, for it was here that the story belonged, in scraps and fragments, before Cable verified them, pieced them together and put the whole story into print. Before Cable made them into a whole, then, the parts of the story existed in a local, oral, near "folk" culture, and an awareness of this context lends a certain cultural relevance to the moral and historical significance of the story's content and to the aesthetic significance of its form. And the local culture to which the story belongs has as much, perhaps more, relevance to the study of folklore than to the study of history or literature, for this body of folk history is the stuff of which folk literature is made. Indeed, it would be hard to place a rigid distinction between the two categories. Richard Dorson does suggest, albeit unenthusiastically, that oral history and and local legendry might have a valid place in the identification and study of folklore.[23] But the difficulties of making a formal recognition of this validity would be amor-

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[23] Hoffman, p. 8.

mous. The amorphous nature of the material defies the processes of collection, corroboration and classification with which the folklorist works. With his exclusively rigorous methodology the scientific folklorist cannot handle this material, and if he wishes to use it he must rely on the imaginative discretion of the literary artists who have usually been the only ones concerned with its collection and assimilation. It is not surprising, therefore, that when a piece of folk history shows the signs of developing into a work of folk literature, as it does in the case of "Salome Müller", it should do so in print rather than within a strictly oral context.

This discussion of one story proves nothing but, quite independently from any theory, it does indicate certain things which interfere with the folklorist's conventional separation of folklore from literature, particularly American folklore from American local color literature. First, folklore exists not only as a finished product ready for scholarly collection but in a protean relationship with its sources, with the cultural environment from which it springs, and, indeed, with its collector. A meaningful study of folklore should consider these relationships, and in many cases this can be done through the formal literature which takes the culture of a particular locality for its subject-matter. Second, folklore makes itself felt in various ways and in unexpected places, in formal litera-

ture and even in historical narrative. This would suggest that the categories themselves - folklore, literature, history - are less than definitive. The presence of all can be noticed in much local color literature but they are often fused together by the author's assimilation and use of the legendry and oral history of a particular locality. While this process falsifies and disguises much "pure" folklore, the admission of impurities does throw much incidental light on the localized dynamics of folk culture and its characteristic expressions. In Cable's story of Salome Müller, after all, folklore is revealed as something vibrant and vigorous, breaking free of the confines of oral transmission and motif corroboration to which it has been consigned by most of its students.

There is a further general point to be made about the relationship of folklore and local color writing. Folklorists would determine the relationship by subjecting individual pieces to tests of authenticity to decide, on an individual basis, which are useful to the folklorist. If, on the other hand, folklore and local color are seen as collective phenomena of the American cultural experience, they appear to exist in very much the same area of cultural concern. They share the same cultural/geographical bias in expressing resistance to the formal, standardized urban-industrial culture of the burgeoning American nation. The success of a piece of local color writing depends largely

on the success with which the locality can be credibly isolated from these standardizing forces. The local colorists were often specifically concerned with making a record of the picturesque folkways of their localities before they disappeared, because they recognized in them cultural, moral and aesthetic values higher than those of the surrounding gilded age.[24] At this stage, this general similarity should not be overstressed, for, although folklore and local color might be animated by this same impulse to resistance, the expressions take different forms: one, unconsciously, through oral media, and the other in the consciously formal literature. All the same, there are too many similarities in the dynamics of the two and too much overlap in their material to place a rigid line through their mutual area, dividing folkloristic sheep from goats on the sole basis of the oral-transmission criterion.

My claim that it is possible and worthwhile to consider folklore and local color in a similar manner rests, admittedly, on a somewhat theoretical and speculative basis However, local color is only one of the sources of the confusion of American folklore and American literature. The other is the interesting cultural dynamics of America west of the Mississippi, Mary Austin's west. I have indicated

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[24] For this aspect of local color, see Berthoff, pp. 90-91.

the importance to conventional folklore theory of the model of society that rests on a rigid distinction between the concepts of folk society/folk culture/ oral transmission and 'mass' society/'mass' culture/non-oral transmission. This model, however, is only really useful in considering areas with established histories of settlement and development. It does not apply to the pioneer west. In the pioneer settlements we have a case of close conformity to the criteria of folk society: communities isolated by geography and frequently by occupational composition (mining and sheepherding in much of Mary Austin's material) and with a community-based culture, oral and intra-personal.[25] At the same time they were only one very short remove from the devices that were to become characteristic of mass society and mass culture - railroads, mail-order, mass-circulation newspapers, public education - the enemies of all that can be called 'folk'. With the juxtaposition of these two orders of life, rather than the gradual assimilation of one into the other, came a similar juxtaposition of the appropriate media of expression, particularly a significant interplay of those involving oral and non-oral participation. The institution of newspaper free-space is an example of

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[25] I am thinking of communities of predominantly British stock. The ethnic enclaves of the prairies and the Spanish south-west are more conventionally acceptable as folk-communities and, thus, as sources of folklore.

this. The newspapers of the pioneer communities, perhaps because of the paucity of regular copy or to compensate for an excessive reliance on boiler-plate material, would open its pages to anyone with a grievance to air or a story to tell. Even when free-space was de-emphasized, its spirit was continued by the country newspaper's notorious lack of distinction between fact and fiction, humor and reportage. Consequently the newspaper files of the west are recognized as a valid, if minor, source of hard-line folklore: tall tales, animal and weather lore, proverbs and jests. But the files also possess a greater wealth of what I have called 'folk history' - local legendry, folk etymology, character sketches and personal reminiscences, all this being the raw material of folklore and the tinting of local color.[26] Again, there is no way of effectively separating the different elements and potentials from each other, and no way of fixing the exact importance of oral transmission

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[26] I know of no comprehensive account or study of the folklore and quasi-folklore to be found in newspapers, in spite of the fact that popular works like the folklore sections of the Federal Writers Project state guides, groundbreaking anthologies such as Franklin J. Meine's Tall Tales of the Southwest (New York, 1930), and even the regional folklore periodicals rely heavily on free-space and similar material.

Mark Twain began his career as a professional journalist only after a spell as a free-space contributor of parodies and humorous sketches to the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise, and there is a useful body of material on the conditions of western journalism centering around this. Better than the standard biographies are Ivan Benson,

in the fusing process. In this pioneer culture we see print rather than speech as a natural, almost inevitable, medium of folk literature and folk history. The student working in this area must find it difficult to maintain objective integrity while insisting on the applicability of the culture/folk culture model and on the validity of the oral-transmission criterion.

Living in the mining and subsistence-ranching country on the borders of California, these were very much the sort of cultural conditions under which Mary Austin wrote her early work. Her early stories, particularly those collected in Lost Borders (1909), provide an invaluable record of the lives and ways of its settlers and of the culture in which they expressed themselves. In her introduction to Lost Borders, for instance, she has an anecdote indicating the futlity of using the oral-transmission criterion as an instrument of analysis and clarification. A prospector tells her of an Indian pot he found embedded with flecks of

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Mark Twain's Western Years (Stanford, 1938); Paul Fatout, Mark Twain in Virginia City (Bloomington, 1964), and Mark Twain of the Enterprise (Berkeley, 1957), a collection of his identifiable contributions edited by Henry Nash Smith and Frederick Anderson.

There is a useful account of how folklore material found its way into print in the rural newspapers of another section of the country in Thomas D. Clark, The Southern Country Editor (Gloucester, Mass., 1964), pp. 110-147. For more evidence that printed matter, particularly newspaper material, cannot be positively ruled out as a source of genuine folklore, see Botkin, [illegible], pp. 49-57.

pure gold:

> "You ought to find a story about that somewhere." I was sore then about not getting myself believed in some elementary matters, such as that horned toads are not poisonous and that Indians really have the bowels of compassion. Said I: "I will do better than that, I will make a story." (LB, 6-7).

Quite consciously, she concocts a story of romance and adventure, and publishes it in "one of those magazines that commonly circulate in miners' boarding houses", only to learn from a reader "the thing was well known in his country", and to have prospectors coming down from paseas "at great pains to tell me where my version differed from the accepted one in the hills" (LB, 7). While Cable sets out to write the true story of Salome Müller, which turned out to have strong folk undertones, Mary Austin set out to fabricate a story which turned out to be true, or true enough to appear as a record of common lore. This might be another case of nature imitating art in advance or of art imitating nature without the slightest intention of doing so. Either way it points towards a weakening of categories and criteria, with formal literature becoming, in spite of itself, transcriptive as well as creative. Mary Austin's story would be ignored by folklorists as a conscious literary invention, and would be of little interest to students of literature because of its purely local interest and its proven proximity to the non-art forms of gossip and campfire yarning. It exists neither as pure folklore nor as pure literature, but as a product of the particular con-

ditions of pioneer culture.

With their creative assimilation of the forms and material of folk literature and folk history, then, local color and the pioneer culture deal with much that is interesting to, but ignored by, most folklorists. Nevertheless, there have been a few attempts to liberalize the concept of folklore so as to remove the discepancy between the diffuseness and instability of the material and the rigid exclusiveness of conventional folklore theory. The best known and historically the most important of these attempts is the work of a group active in the early thirties and loosely connected with the names of Carl Sanburg, J. Frank Dobie, and particularly with the folklorist B. A. Botkin and his annual Folk-Say, which he published from Norman, Oklahoma between 1929 and 1932. Mary Austin was associated with this group, and Folk-Say published not only her poems and stories, but also several essays about the folk and folklore.

The Folk-Say group, it is fair to say at the outset, was really a proselitizing group rather than one concerned with a detached analysis of the problems of folklore theory. The reformulations it collectively postulated were the results of a conscious effort to make folklore, in its widest sense, available and relevant to the academic world and the general public, and there are many reasons why we should take their recommendations with a pinch of salt.

The loose formulation of the group made it something of a catch-all for romantic Marxists, conservative antiquarians and lady poets from West Texas. But it did include some genuine and serious folklorists, and out of the mixture come two ideas that are relevant to a discussion of folklore-literature in America. They are the reaffirmation of the cultural strength of distinctive regions and localities, and the idea that folk history and similar floating material is organically connected with pure folklore, and that separation of the two is artificial.

At its most coherent Folk-Say's regionalism evolved an impressionistic theory of the regions of America (particularly its home region of the "New" Southwest) as the repositories of the cultural health of the nation:

> The folk of the Southwest are those people who have some of the soil of the region still clinging to their feet, who have not become so standardized that they are as unlocalized as the people of Alexandria, Indiana, or Winesburg, Ohio . . . . A plant that does not put down roots must feed on the air. Such a plant is called an epiphyte. Epiphytes lack fiber, sap, juice.[27]

This is an explicit statement of the regional bias that provided an impetus for the local color movement. In the same way, the Folk-Say regionalism is a gesture of resistance to the standardizing forces of mass-society and mass-culture. Literature, folklore collection and folklore itself become

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[27]J. Frank Dobie, "Provincialism", Folk-Say (1930), p. 321.

equally valid expressions of this resistance, and of the stubborn strength of the regionally distinct, the culturally autonomous. The gloriously indiscriminate attitude toward folklore shown by the contents of Folk-Say is a direct result of this regionalism. Short stories, poems and cracker-barrel philosophy are include together with much folk history material. The region and the expression of the region become the sole criteria of all literature, whether conventionally "folk" or conventionally formal. The criteria of oral transmission, corroboration and compliance to the idea of folk culture are dispensed with absolutely.

Obviously the inclusion of Folk-Say's heterogeneous material within the bounds of folklore necessitates a theoretical broadening of these bounds. Botkin, the group's theorist, gives this with his explanation of the periodical's title. "Folksay" is "a word which I coined in 1928 to designate unwritten history and literature in particular and oral, linguistic and floating material in general".[28] This is a very open-ended concept, and in various places Botkin has allowed it to cover material from the mass media ("new folk creations such as Mickey Mouse and

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[28] Botkin quoted in Bruce Jackson, ed., Folklore in Society (Hatboro, Pa., 1966) p. ix.

Donald Duck"),[29] literature "about the folk"[30] and literary pieces in which the individual artist can "lose his self-consciousness in order to merge his individuality with that of the group".[31] While Botkin insists that the concept of folksay is an extension of, not a substitute for, folklore, he clearly regards the two as organically connected and only slightly different aspects of the same phenomenon. His well-known Treasury of American Folklore, for instance, contains very little that is folklore in the strict sense. It includes old-time reminiscences, literary ghost stories with an emphasized regional or ethnic setting, collections of Knock Knock and Little Moron jokes, boiler-plate accounts of Paul Bunyan and Roy Bean, and the program of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. Dorson's tirade against the "massive treasuries cramming together anecdotal slabs of local color, jocularity, sentiment and nostalgia in the name of folklore"[32] seems justified, for, in spite of his protestations, Botkin seems to have felt himself justified in in-

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[29] B. A. Botkin, ed., A Treasury of American Folklore (New York, 1944), p. xxiii.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Folk-Say (1930), p. 18.

[32] Dorson, American Folklore, p. 3.

cluding all this within the province of 'folklore'.

Botkin has since recanted a good deal of the liberal theorizing that surrounded the publication of Folk-Say and the Treasury of American Folklore. Historically, though, it is still important, and particularly in relation to Mary Austin. Mary Austin appears to have entered wholeheartedly into the movement, and her essay "American Folk" is an elegant summary of the movement's ideas and their implications for literature. She emphasizes the ironic tension between the idea of the "folk" and the American ideals of equality and mobility, and, rather unoriginally, cites the culture of the American negro and American Indian as examples of the stubbborn strength and artistic value of folk traditions. She does not, however, limit the source of folklore to such recognized and clearly-defined groups. Instead she stresses a folkness common or accessible to all. Her central thesis is this:

> 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. It does not mean that one actually refuses the multiple influences that flow from the world as a whole, taken as environment, but it does mean that after long exposure to profound saturation with a limited environment, particular groups do become indurated to other influences so that their response is slow and unwilling.[33]

This "profound saturation with a limited environ-

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[33]Mary Austin, "American Folk", p. 287.

ment"' is the keynote of Mary Austin's theory of folklore, and it is behind the ideas in "Folk Literature" and "The Folk Story in America". As a tool of analysis the concept is of little value, and Mary Austin's attempts to press it into service to explain the greatness of Washington Square and The House of the Seven Gables, or the intended greatness of her own novel of New Mexico, Starry Adventure, are not impressive.[34] But as a commentary on her early work it is invaluable. "Folk" she describes as a "quality of experience', and this quality can be achieved by any artist, whether working in oral or non-oral media, who is prepared to experience "profound saturation with a limited environment". There is a clear and close connection here with Botkin's ideal of the conscious folk artist who must be prepared to "merge his individuality with that of the group".

Mary Austin's theorizing is an unmistakeable product of her connection with the Folk-Say group. Her own work before she became identified with the group could have provided a testing ground for their theories and even perhaps an impetus for them. The articulation of these theories provides a basis for considering Mary Austin's work as folk literature. But the fact remains that for most

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[34] Mary Austin, "Regionalism in American Fiction" English Journal, XXI (1932), 97-107.

serious folklorists the importance of the Folk-Say group is only as one of the eccentricities with which their discipline abounds. I gather that Botkin is still regarded as something of a maverick and his liberal theories are not given too much attention. Support for the Folk-Say line of approach, however, comes from an unexpected source, from MacEdward Leach, a field collector and theorist respected by the most rigorous and scientific of folklorists. Leach's theories[35] arrive at almost the same conclusions as Folk-Say's, admitting the possibilities of conscious individual creation of folklore and stressing 'saturation' both in the creation and the collection process, although they have travelled different routes, with Leach working outward from the internal dynamics of folklore rather than from folklore's literary potential.

First, Leach dismisses the idea of anonymous or collective transmission of folklore, pointing out that in an isolated community it is usually one person, and one person alone, who acts as the repository of the community's lore and the agent of transmission and modification. Though Leach does still insist on the oral-transmission criterion for folklore, his recognition of the possibility

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[35] MacEdward Leach, "Problems of Collecting Oral Literature", in Kenneth and Mary Clarke, eds., A Folklore Reader (New York, 1965), pp. 48-61.

of conscious individual participation in the transmission process places folk literature in a much closer relationship to formal literature than is usually admitted.

Second, Leach is a functional folklorist. He is concerned not only with individual pieces of lore but also with the role these play in their cultural context and their relationship to the "folk matrix" from which they originate. It is impossible to classify or even meaningfully to collect without a deep and sympathetic understanding of the environment to which the collectanea belong:

> The collector must not be content with merely collecting the song or the story; he must collect the matrix as well.[36]

As an example he contrasts two experiences of a genuine folk-song, the Jamaican "Banana Boat Song": hearing it sung in Carnegie Hall and hearing it in its original context, sung by the dawn gang loading the boats on the Kingston dockside. Cut away from its setting and abstracted to the concert hall, the song loses not only its strength and vitality but also its meaning, value and relevance. The same applies to folk literature as to folk music, and Leach implies that conventional methods of folklore collection are just as destructive as popularization, reduc-

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[36] Ibid., p. 51.

ing folklore to arbitrary and generalized series of classes and categories. To restore the aesthetic and cultural value of a piece of folklore it must be restored to its unique context, and collected and studied in relation to that context.

This comes very near to the heart of the folklore-literature squabble. Richard Dorson dismisses as serious collection the attempts of one writer to assimilate pieces of local lore into his work:

> Some were recognizeable folktales . . . but Green made no distinction between the "travelling" fiction and the actual or embroidered incident; he listened to his townsmen with the ears of the artist, not of the classifier.[37]

Leach's point (although, admittedly, this is not explicit) is that the collector must be something of an artist; classification is just not enough. The collector must submerge himself in the life and expression of the community he is studying. He must listen not only to "recognizeable folktales" but to gossip, to casual conversation, to accounts of work and of ordinary or peculiar incidents, and he must then reduce these inchoate impressions to a form and order, using the imaginative discretion of the artist rather than the rigorous scientific method of the conventional field collector. He must saturate himself with a limited envi-

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[37] Hoffman, p. 6.

ronment, and from this saturation will come a meaningful record of folklore and its cultural relations. There has been a certain amount of lip-service paid to the concept of a folklore that is both functional and aesthetic, but few attempts to establish Leach's method as standard field collection practise. For anything like this sympathetic approach to folklore in its own environment we must go not to folklore shcolarship but to literature, and almost to where we started, to the more conscientious gatheres of local color; Cable, say, or Mary Austin. Furthermore, the ways in which local color is driven to associate itself with legendry and oral history make it almost a species of folklore in itself, consistently inseparable from the environment which produces it. Warner Berthoff writes:

> At its most compelling American local color realism points towards an imaginative sociology that is at once objective and visionary. The images it yields up compose the fragments of a book of the people, an essential history of their lives' common conditioning.[38]

At its best (it must be repeated) local color writing comes close to Leach's ideal of field collection. The conscious artist, the collector of folklore, both have as their subject this "common conditioning" of the lives and expressions of a limited environment. And their methods of achieving it are not without affinity.

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[38] Berthoff, p. 100.

The configuration of ideas about the relationship of folklore to American literature provides the necessary background to any study of Mary Austin. The close relationship evident in the local color movement and in the dynamics of pioneer culture indicates the historical and literary context in which Mary Austin uses folklore. The theories of MacEdward Leach offer the possibility that she is not only using folklore but defining and evaluating as she does so, and those of the Folk-Say group suggest that she is actually creating material that would pass as folklore by their own definitions. All these intertwining connections and relationships indicate the various ways by which the creative imagination can travel between pure folklore and pure literature. The ambiguous character of non-oral transmission, the relevance of 'folk history' and the stress on locality and limited environment mark some of these routes, and the area they cover is also the area covered by Mary Austin's work to be discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER II

EARLY NON-FICTION: NATURISM AND LOCAL COLOR

Mary Austin was twenty when, in 1888, she moved with her family from Illinois to a homestead in Kern County, California. Drawn west by the hope of good, cheap land, the family soon experienced most of the hardships and privations of life on one of the last American frontiers. In 1891 Mary Austin married, and for ten years lived in various towns in the Owens Valley (the Inyo of her books), while her husband failed in successive agriculutural, mining and commercial enterprises. Mary Austin's California was a high dry country, cut off by desert and mountain from the main routes and centres of progress, and settled, sparsely but stubbornly, by people of various occupations and racial stocks: wandering bands of Piaute and Shoshone Indians; Mexican farmers, Anglo-Saxon and Celtic miners and prospectors; French and Basque sheepherders, and consumptives from the East taking advantage of the dry mountain air. Scenes of great natural beauty were counterpointed by the human poignancy of lonely graves, dilapidated farms and derelict mining camps. This country is recalled in the third person of Mary Austin's autobiography:

> When Mary was first there, life stood at the breathing pause between the old ways and the new. In Death Valley wheel tracks lay undisturbed in the sand where unhappy

> Jayhawkers had passed in '49, and marks of tent-pegs where Booth had played 'Julius Caesar' in the great days of the Comstock, faintly traced on the ground. There were people who remembered these things. Others recalled when the Piautes in their last stand were driven into the bitter waters of the lake, and dying, sunk there(EH, 234).

This is the land Mary Austin set out to capture in her first two books. The Land of Little Rain (1903) is a collection of deliquescent and highly personal sketches of the Owens Valley and Death Valley region. The Flock (1906), though similar in form, is a more resilient and more clearly unified book, centred on the California sheep trade at the turn of the century.

The two books are Mary Austin's first attempt to use folklore creatively. The attempt is not casual and not merely atmospheric. Instead it seems almost demanded by the character of her material and the intention of the books, indicating a method whereby she can establish the basic patterns of the human and natural life of the country. In Mary Austin's own accounts of her developing experience of the country we come across fragments of a distinct rationale for her use of folklore. I wish to sketch the reconstructed outlines of this rationale in this chapter.

At first all aspects of the country were equally and completely strange to her.

> Her trouble was that the country failed to explain itself. If it had a history, nobody could recount it. Its creatures had no known life except such as she could dicover by unremitting vigilance of observation; its

> plants had no names that her Midwestern botany could supply (EH, 194-195).

In her first attempts to come to grips with this strange land Mary Austin used this "unremitting vigilance of observation" in the interests of natural history. She had already received her Bachelor of Science degree in botany from Blackburn College, Illinois, and there is much of the half-trained botanist in The Land of Little Rain. She did, in fact, add to the information about Death Valley flora gathered by the Colville Expedition of 1893, and she reports her collection and classification of over three hundred hitherto unrecorded species of mountain herb in Kearsage Canyon (LLR, 79). In this way, by the sheer accumulation of factual data, Mary Austin managed to overcome some of the land's inscrutability. But The Land of Little Rain and The Flock are imaginative rather than scientific records, and to Mary Austin, the creative writer, the land did not present the utter incomprehensibility that it showed to Mary Austin the scientist. As a scientist she had only her actual material of study; as a creative writer she also had at her disposal any relevant imaginative and literary conventions. The assumptions of this chapter are at basic variance with Carl Van Doren's idea that Mary Austin approached the desert country and the Indians with a kind of intellectual tabula rasa and that "[T]he first philosophers she knew were silent men innocent of sophist-

ication; the first poets she knew were Indians whose songs had in them none of the divided art of white America".[1] There is overwhelming evidence, internal and external, that, even before she went to California, Mary Austin was fully aware of the conventions of popular philosophy and literature of "white America". There are two sets of conventions of particular importance here, those of local color and those of "naturism". Both represented flourishing, if minor, traditions of popular literature at the time of Mary Austin's first publications; both had strongly marked associations with California, and both presented distinct literary formulae for dealing with Mary Austin's type of material. Some basic principles of local color have been briefly discussed in the previous chapter and will be returned to in this, but the lesser-known concept of "naturism" is so important in establishing the immediate context of Mary Austin's early work that it demands immediate attention.

Henry Chester Tracy's encomium, American Naturists, provides a useful survey of the naturist "movement"[2]. The book contains appreciations of Thoreau, John Muir, John

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[1]Van Doren, Many Minds (New York, 1926), p. 6.

[2]There is a shorter, more selective and detachedly level-headed account in Hans Huth, Nature and the American (Berkeley, 1957), pp. 87-104 and pp. 129-147.

Burroughs, Ernest Thompson Seton and many less familiar figures including Mary Austin. Though he attempts to give naturism a more coherent framework, Tracy reveals that the term is as loosely defined as its subject-matter , covering a range of orientation from Emersonian transcendentalism to conservation propaganda, and, following this diffuseness of intention, naturist literature takes many varied forms, including sentimental animal stories and popular science, spiritual manifesto and essays in the tradition of belles-lettres. Nevertheless, Tracy's conspectus does isolate two factors that he feels bind together different works of naturism and make them something more than mere 'naturalism'. In the first place a distinction is made between the naturists of the late nineteenth century and an earlier, imperfect group: for Alexander Wilson, the Bertrams and Audubon "Nature was either more or less a convention or remained unverbalized".[3] Secondly, true naturism is subjective as well as literary. It is an "original mode of perception"[4] and stresses not the hard facts of the scientist but the individual commentator's rare and private perception of the facts of the natural world. All the naturists were concerned with establishing the proper

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[3]Tracy, American Naturists (New York, 1930), p. 73.

[4]Tracy, p. 2.

relationship, in the theory and practice of nature literature, between art, science and spiritual discovery.

Within this general framework there is one type of naturism that is of particular importance to a discussion of Mary Austin's work and that is the body of nature writing that drew its inspiration from the mountains and cañyons of the west, particuarly from the California Sierras, and which came to be associated with the name of John Muir. This was a distinct departure in subject matter, in the kind of nature considered, from the more accessible hills and woodlands of New England and New York State, already familiar as a source of inspiration to the East Coast naturism centred around John Burroughs and the Atlantic Monthly. The difference in subject matter seems to have prompted a different emphasis and a different attitude toward nature in the writing coming from the west: the stress is put not on nature as such but on "wilderness", "Wild Nature". "Pure Nature". Muir had what seems a symptomatic quarrel with Burroughs over the necessity of appreciating specifically "wild" nature.[5] The terms of the quarrel are sketched in Muir's parable-essay "Wild Wool"(1874) which concludes "pure wildness is the one great want, both of men and

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[5] Ruth, pp.103-104.

sheep".[6] The conservation movement, in which Muir took a large part, struck for the preservation of land completely untainted by humanity. Nature was to be preserved as a spiritual, aesthetic and scientific resource untouched by human hand. This, the experience of California naturism made clear, was nature at its most valuable, and it crystallizes a coherent system of attitudes towards nature in California which Mary Austin, after some acquaintance, was to reject.

Both the general intellectual framework of naturism and the particular form it took in California are expressed most elegantly and concisely not by Muir but by Clarence King, a professional geologist and man of letters, in his Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevadas (1872). This was an early popular account of the California mountains and one which Mary Austn, with her early interest in geology (EH, 104-105) and her interest in the natural history of California, almost certainly knew. While King always regards Nature as a viable and capitalized entity, he is torn between regarding its study as a precise scientific endeavour and as part of the Emersonian pattern of using the devices of aesthetic sensibility for spiritual ends. The following extracts present some relevant variants on

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[6]John Muir, Steep Trails (New York, 1918), p. 18.

the debate:

> I was delighted to ride thus alone, and expose myself, as one uncovers a sensitized photographic plate, to be influenced; for this is a respite from scientific work, when through months you hold yourself accountable for seeing everything, for analyzing, for instituting perpetual comparisons, and as it were sharing in the administration of the physical world. No tongue can tell the relief to simply withdraw scientific observation, and let Nature impress you in the dear old way with all her mystery and glory, with those vague indescribable emotions which tremble between wonder and sympathy.[7]
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> The paleontologist of our survey, my senior in rank and experience, had just said of me, rather in sorrow than in unkindness, yet with unwonted severity, "I believe that fellow had rather sit on a peak all day, and stare at those snows, than find a fossil in the metamorphic Sierra", and, in spite of me, all that weary ride his judgement rang in my ear.
>
> Can it be? I asked myself; has a student of geology so far forgotten his devotion to science? Am I really fallen to the level of a mere nature-lover? Later when evening approached and our wheels began to rumble over upturned edges of Sierra slate, every jolt seemed aimed at me, every thin sharp outcrop appeared risen up to preach a sermon on my friends's text.
>
> I re-dedicated myself to geology, and was framing a resolution to delve for that greatly important but missing link of evidence, the fossil which should clear up an unsolved riddle of upheaval age, when over to eastward a fervid crimson light smote the vapor-bank and cleared a bright pathway through to the peaks, and on to a pale sea-green sky. Through this gateway of rolling gold and red cloud the summits seemed infinitely high and far, their stone and snow hung in the sky with lucent delicacy of hue, brilliant as gems yet soft as air,- a mosaic of amethyst and opal transfigured with passionate light, as gloriously above words as beyond art.[8]

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[7] King, Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevadas (New York, 1935), p. 142.

[8] King, p. 193.

On another occasion King ruminates on the great bulk of Mount Whitney:

> For a moment I was back in the Aryan myth days, when they saw afar that snowy peak, and called it Dhavalagari (white elephant), and invested it with mythic powers.
>
> These peculiar moments, rare enough in the life of a scientific man, when one trembles on the edge of myth-making, are of interest, as unfolding the origin and manner of savage beliefs, and as awakening the unperishing germ of primitive manhood which is buried within us all under so much culture and science.

This leads him to lament the tone of the majority of books about mountains "which once lifted above the fatiguing repetition of gymnastics, is almost invariably scientific" and to wish for more awareness of the mythic qualities of mountains and of Nature. His reverie is interrupted by an old Indian who tells him the mountain is an old man who watches over the valley to protect the Indians while punishing the whites.

> I looked at his whitened hair and keen, black eye. I watched the spare, bronze face, upon which was written the burden of a hundred dark and gloomy superstitions; and as he trudged away across the sands, I could but feel the liberating power of modern culture which unfetters us from the more than iron bonds of self-made myths.[9]

In these passages and throughout Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevadas King specifically sets up and deals with various intellectual dichotomies: science and aesthetic appreciation; culture and myth; art and Nature; Nature and

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[9] King, pp. 305-306.

man; scientific observation and Nature's "mystery and glory". While King, as author, is concerned with the tensions thus established within his own experience, he is not interested in using his experience of nature to resolve his dichotomies. He regards "culture" (presumably rational and scientific culture, Spengler's "civilization") and myth, for instance, as absolute and mutually defined concepts. The mountain can be either the mythic guardian of the valley or a magnificent spectacle of glaciated granite; it cannot be both, and science shows which one it is. Nature, for King, is not a catalyst but a formal entity, complete in itself, and which demands a correspondingly formal absolution in its interpretation.

This formal, almost abstract conception of nature is a characteristic of California naturism. In The Mountains of California (1891), John Muir demonstrates its aesthetic implications:

> Pursuing my lonely way down the valley, I turned again and again to gaze on the glorious picture, throwing up my arms to enclose it as in a frame. After long ages of growth in the darkness beneath the glacier, through sunshine and storms, it seemed now to be ready and waiting for the elected artist, like yellow wheat for the reaper; and I could not help wishing that I might carry colors and brushes with me on my travels and learn to paint.[10]

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[10] Muir, The Mountains of California (New York, 1911), p. 50.

The aesthetic of King and Muir demands that man stand before Nature as before a painting, natural wonders "harmoniously correlated and fashioned like works of art".[11] To all intents Nature is finished, complete, and man experiences a moment of absolute truth before it. An isolated ("lonely") individual is confronted by Nature with no intervening qualifications or distractions. His tools, the painter's brushes, the writer's pen, the geologist's field instruments or the transcendentalist's techniques of contemplation, can only hope to establish a temporary and quasi-mystical relationship between the source and its individual recipient. But this precarious relationship, like Nature itself, is formally and exclusively complete: it forbids all distractions; it excludes all other relationships. In particular , it excludes other people. Whenever King and Muir describe the inhabitants of the Sierras, whether Indian or white, their comments are invariably disparaging and unsympathetic. The obvious example is King's famous sketch "The Newtys of Pike",[12] but there are many others. Men are always nasty, brutish and short when the scale is provided by Mount Whitney, Mount Kern and the high peaks of the Yosemite. Man is the greatest contaminator of

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[11] John Muir, The Mountains of Californa, p. 69.

[12] King, pp. 110-128.

Nature's purity and should be dismissed by naturists.[13]

Mary Austin's The Land of Little Rain must certainly have owed its original publication to the vogue for the subjective literary naturalism typified by the work of King and Muir, and the book's reputation is built on its naturist relation. In 1950, for instance, Houghton Mifflin reissued it in a uniform edition with John Muir's Yosemite and the Sierra Nevada. Criticism of The Land of Little Rain is also limited to this aspect. Dudley Wynn relegates his comments to an appendix on "Nature Writing";[14] and T.M. Pearce sees the book as the first manifestation of Mary Austin's characteristic "teleological naturism".[15] Mary Austin herself tended to encourage this approach. In Earth Horizon she makes many references to her "early career as a naturist" and her sympathy for the aims of the movement is evident. She defends John Muir, for instance, against accusations of "poeticizing" by reporting on his own reactions to nature as well as on "the appearance, the habits,

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[13] There is a suggestive analogy here between the Nature-in-literature argument and the conventional argument about folklore-in-literature: man stands in the same contaminating relationship to Nature as print to folklore.

[14] Dudley Wynn, A Critical Study of the Writings of Mary Hunter Austin, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (New York University, 1941), pp. 316-349.

[15] T.M. Pearce, Mary Hunter Austin (New York, 1965), pp. 122-123.

the incidents of the wild" (EH, 188). There is, in fact, much that The Land of Little Rain has in common with Californian naturism:

> The first effect of cloud study is a sense of presence and intention in storm processes. It is the visible manifestation of the Spirit moving itself in the void. It gathers itself together under the heavens; rains, snows, yearns mightily in the wind, smiles; and the Weather Bureau, situated advantageously for that very business, taps the record on his instruments and going out on the street denies his God, not having gathered t the sense of what he has seen. Hardly anybody takes account of the fact that John Muir, who knows more of mountain storms than any other, is a devout man (LLR, 90).

Here is the typical largeness of scope of the California naturists, their familiar debate about scientific and spiritual discovery, and even a direct reference to the leading naturist of the time. There are many passages like this one in The Land of Little Rain.

But, although The Land of Little Rain does owe much to the conventions of naturism, Mary Austin implicitly rejects certain important naturist demands: the demand for formal appreciation of nature and the demand for the material of "Wild Nature", that is, Nature completely separate from the world of man. There are quite concrete reasons why Mary Austin should reject this anti-human aspect of naturism. Although Mary Austin's California and the California of Muir and King are geographically close they are not coterminous, and this difference in geography is the sign of a larger difference in the literary potential of

the two countries. Although the Land of Little Rain might have been "wild" enough for Houghton Mifflin's readers it could not provide the material expected of naturism. Mary Austin's country is lower, more varied and less immediately spectacular than the High Sierras; not primarily a land to admire, it is one on which people try to work and live. Certainly this land is not conducive to the naturist appreciation of pure Nature, even if such a thing exists within its borders. To ignore the human element would be to falsify the character of the land. In Mary Austin's California - and this is one of her recurrent themes - the natural and the human are interdependent and often inseparable.

If the compulsion of Mary Austin's work to take people as well as nature into account separates it from California naturism, more orthodox forms of local color would seem to offer compensatory conventions and analogous material. Local color, after all, is very basically concerned with the people, "the folk", in their presumed day-to-day activity. Mary Austin must have been aware of the cultural partiality of local color, which offered the same kind of protest as Muir's naturism against false, American, materialistic society. She certainly knew of local color as a source of materials and conventions specific to California. Before going West "she knew nothing except what she

had read in Bret Harte and Helen Hunt Jackson [author of Ramona]", even though "that was all of time past" (EH, 177). We should not be surprised that her early work shows a strong local color influence.

While a consideration of The Land of Little Rain must begin with the assumptions and conventions of naturalism, the book itself ends, quite literally, within the conventions and ideology of local color. The last sketch in the book, "The Little Town of the Grape Vines", is about a Mexican community in Owens Valley. It begins:

> There are still some places in the West where the quails cry "cuidado"; where all the speech is soft, all the manners gentle; where all the dishes have chile in them, and they make more of the Sixteenth of September than they do of the Fourth of July (LLR,97).

In The Flock Mary Austin acknowledges use of the same preservative palette she ascribes to Bret Harte.

> When Mr. Harte found himself with a fresh palette and his particular local color fading from the West, he did what he considered the only safe thing, and carried his young impression away to be worked out untroubled by any newer fact (LLR, 39).

> This year at Button Willow they sheared the flocks by machinery, which is to say that the most likeable features of the old California sheep ranches are departing. That is why I am at the pains of setting down here a little of what went on at the Ranchos Tejon before the clang of machinery overlays its leisurely picturesqueness (Fl, 216).

These passages suggest that Mary Austin understands the local color conventions, realizes their potential to express her own feelings about her material and also realizes the

dangers of over-reliance on them.

Bret Harte is the local colorist most relevant to her own material and locale, and her comments on Harte mark the way, once again, in which she moves from literary conventions to forms more suited to her own experience and purposes. Her criticism of Harte is not the usual and expected one, that his world is "a world insufficiently rooted in fact to have realistic validity".[16] Indeed Mary Austin's own experience in the mining camps of California and Nevada gives a certain amount of realistic weight to Harte's creations:

> Dodge was an old timer whose every word was interlarded with the quaintest blasphemies, between priceless idioms of the camp. By this time Mary had come to realize that blasphemies were a sort of poeticizing (EH, 235).
>
> Bill Withrow, a Bret Harte type, broad-hatted, frock-coated, and the only man, besides Mary's husband, who habitually wore a boiled shirt (EH, 237).
>
> ...Mr. Fanshawe, the gentlemanly faro dealer of those parts, built for the role of Oakhurst, going white-shirted and frock-coated in a community of overalls... By his own account and the evidence of his manners he had been bred for a clergyman, and he certainly has gifts for the part...For an account of his killings, for his way with women and the way of women for him, I refer you to Brown of Calaveras and others of that stripe (LLR, 42-43).

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[16] Wallace Stegner, "Foreword", The Outcasts of Poker Flat and Other Tales, by Bret Harte (New York, 1961), p. xv.

This commendation of Harte as a realist, however, extends only to his characters; Mary Austin can use them to define and evaluate (and perhaps even to shape) the characters of her own books and her own experience. She takes issue with Harte over matters of form, feeling that the highly colored melodrama of his treatment of event and experience is an essential falsification of the life of the mining camps. The discrepancy between Hatre's vivid unsubtle sense of the dramatic and the actuality of Mary Austin's mining camps provides the motif for her sketch of "Jimville, a Bret Harte Town". Jimville is an "old tortoise" of a Gold Rush survival way out in the Nevada desert, with "an atmosphere favorable to the type of a half-century back" (LLR, 39), the sort of camp to whose fading color Harte applied his fresh palette:

> At Jimville they see behaviour as history and judge it by the facts, untroubled by invention and dramatic sense (LLR, 43).

It is this absence of drama, this non-conformity to fictional prototypes, that provides one of Mary Austin's most successful themes:

> Along with killing and drunkenness, coveting of women, charity, simplicity, there is a certain indifference, blankness, emptiness, if you will of all vaporings, no bubbling of the pot -it wants the German to coin a word for that - no bread-envy, no brother-fervor. Western writers have not sensed it yet; they smack the savor of lawlessness too much upon their tongues, but you have these to witness that it is not mean-spiritedness. It is pure Greek in that it represents the courage to shear off what is not worthwhile (LLR, 42).

Thus it is this casual, understated, almost inarticulate dramatic form inherent in the country and in the lives of its people that take over from the preconceptions of local color.[17] After her comment on Harte's preservative palette Mary Austin adds:

> He should have gone to Jimville. There he would have found cast up on the ore-ribbed hills the bleached timbers of more tales and better ones (LLR, 39).

She cites the story of the naming of Squaw Gulch. A prospector abandons his pregnant squaw and Jim Calkins, out prospecting, finds her dying in a ravine by the side of her newly-born child. He buries the mother and brings the child child back to town. Afterward he accidentally strikes a lode in the same ravine, regarding this piece of luck as his reward.

> If it had been in medieval times you would have had a legend or a ballad. Bret Harte would have given you a tale. You see in me a mere recorder (LLR,42).

Here we have Mary Austin's reactions to the two sets of conventions that helped shape her first books.

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[17] Again, in The Flock, Mary Austin plays with the discrepancy between the consciously dramatic form imposed by local color conventions and that which, truer and more relevant, arises from the natural environment: "Here grew up Eleanor and Virginia Calhoun, nourished in dramatic possibilities on the drama of life. I remember well how Virginia, during the rehearsals of Ramona, when we milled over between us the possibilities of what an Indian would or would not do, broke off suddenly to say how clearly the peaks would swim above the middle haze of noon, or how she had waked mornings to find the deer had ravaged the garden,

Although they are both important and worthy of consideration naturism and local color leave her essentially unsatisfied. Both are characteristically formal, preserving their material in pre-conceived forms and, in effect, fossilizing it; both neglect, or cannot cope with, the element of human realism.[18] But Mary Austin does not make a detached evaluation of the conventions; she is more concerned with adjusting these mechanisms of expression to her particular experience and her particular material. And Mary Austin's experience of California was not the sudden exposure of a sophisticated mind to a vast, lonely and inarticulate grandeaur. Neither did it take the form of a conscious search for the romantic, picturesque or exotic materials expected of local color. Mary Austin's experience was gained from fifteen years of living and working on the land; it was an experience far closer to the soil than that of King or Muir or Harte. It is her awareness of the difference between her own experience and the experience of these previous commentators on the region that leads

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or a bear in her playhouse under the oaks" (F1, 223).

[18] There is a relevant and peculiarly Austinesque account of the negative correlation of naturistic mountain-worship in the west and the literature of human realism in Thomas Hornsby Ferril, "Rocky Mountain Metaphysics", Folk-Say (1930), pp. 305-316.

to her rejection of their forms and attitudes and to her own stress on the necessity of 'saturation' in the life of the land, the saturation which, as we have seen, she was later to formulate as the criterion of the folk artist.

CHAPTER III

EARLY NON-FICTION: FOLKLORE

In her own preface to The Land of Little Rain, Mary Austin stresses the importance of living on the land for anyone writing in depth about it - "the real heart and core of the country are not to be come at in a month's vacation" - and emphasizes her own qualifications, as a dweller in "the brown house under the willow tree at the end of the village street" that "lies in a hill dimple at the foot of Kearsage" (LLR, xviii). Near the beginning of The Flock she makes two more concrete acknowledgements to her own saturation in the land:

> By two years of homesteading on the borders of Tejon, by fifteen beside the Long Trail where it spindles out through Inyo, by all the errands of necessity and desire that made me know its moods and the calendar of its shrubs and skies, by the chances of Sierra holidays where there were always bells jangling behind us in the pines or flocks blethering before us in the meadows, by the riot of shearings, by the faint winy smell in the streets of certain of the towns of the San Joaquin that appraises of the yearly inturning of the wandering of the shepherds, I grew aware of all that you need here and of much beside (Fl, 12).

> I suppose of all the people who are concerned with the making of a true book, the one who puts it to the pen has the least to do with it. This is the book of Jimmy Rosemeyre andJose Jesus Lopez, of Little Pete who loved an antelope in the Ceriso,- the book of Noriega, of Sanger and the Manxman and Narcisse Duplin, and many others who, wittingly or unwittingly, have contributed to the performances set down in it (Fl, 11).

Mary Austin's 'saturation' - her profound and continued

awareness of the land in all its aspects - is, directly and tangibly, at the root of her use of folklore in establishing the patterns of human and natural experience. The first of these extracts from The Flock is concerned with the land as a human environment as well as a series of natural phenomena, and the second deals explicitly with people, their experience and the records of their experience. The author must saturate himself with this human experience of the land as well as with its natural forms. It was by this contact with human experience that Mary Austin first began to make sense of the seemingly inscrutable land, to realize that it possessed certain patterns and forms and to realize its potential as literature.

In Earth Horizon Mary Austin recalls the importance of her acqaintanceship with General Edward Beale, an important figure in California history and, when she knew him, a rancher in Kern County. He had been with Fremont at the conquest, parlayed with the last Mexican governor, taken the news of Sutter's Mill to Washington, had been California's first Indian commissioner, had charge of Jefferson Davis' first camel herd, and, picturesquely, had given U. S. Government sanction to a Piaute rainmaking ceremony:[1]

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[1]This incident is described in The Flock, pp. 231-233.

> He put her in the way of getting Government documents, old reports of military explorations, agricultural reports. He secured for her geological and botanical surveys. There was at that time very little available in print of the early history of California, and there was nothing of which General Beale had not some personal knowledge, of which Mary, through that contact, was made free.
>
> Immediately Mary was made sib to the Tejon region through explicit knowledge of it, she was able to relax her strained fixity of attention, to take it enjoyingly (EH, 197).

There is an important difference between Mary Austin's newfound ability to take her subject "enjoyingly" and Clarence King's "relief simply to withdraw scientific observation". King, as we have seen, feels guilty about his surrender to Nature because he regards enjoyment and study as completely antithetical. Mary Austin, on the other hand, feels no such distinction, for by relaxing her "strained fixity of attention" she advances her understanding of a land that, as she has found out, is not available to purely scientific study. Her meetings with Beale, the information he makes available and the experience he shares allow her to integrate her scientifically collected data and her own random impressions into working patterns of human relationship with the land, the "specific knowledge" she sought.

Beale supplies Mary Austin with two sorts of information: access to channels of formal information - reports, documents and surveys - but also, and more important, he provides her with knowledge that only he could give, his

own informal account of his unique and iridiscent relationship with Southern California. In The Flock Beale appears to be valued not so much for the avenues he opens for the gathering of secondary material as for his own recollections, unrecorded, casual, imagistic pieces of oral history. Mary Austin's acquaintanceship with Beale thus makes her aware of the inchoate body of oral material floating between folklore, history and literature and easily falling within the area of folklore discussed in Chapter I. This is the type of material that Mary Austin uses consistently in her first books, recognizing in it both the material of a purely phenomenal account and the material of literary art.

> More he told of how he went up the canon, full of little dark bays of shadow, with his father to bury old Nations, of how the dead mountaineer looked to him through the chinks of the cabin, large in death, and how being no nearer than sixty miles to a Bible, the General - he was Surveyor-General at one time - contrived a ceremony of what he could remember of the burial service, and the Navy Chaplain's prayers, and the tall, hard-riding Texans and Tennesseans, clanking in their spurs, came to be pall-bearers, lean as wolves drawn from the hollows of the mountains as lonely as their lairs (Fl, 222).

By Mary Austin's own account, in The Flock and Earth Horizon, her acquaintanceship with Beale and the type of material he made available was of great importance in indicating where her true interest in the land lay. She would study not only the land, as a scientist would, and not only the land in relation to herself, as a naturist would. She

would also study the relationship of the land to the people living on it and, as a literary folklorist would, she would use their indigenous expressions of their experience to do so. The cultural expressions of the land - stories, tales, gossip, reminiscences, casual conversation - were to be saturated along with its purely factual data. Eventually the two aspects merge to become inseparable contributions to a total literary statement combining the scientist's detached analysis of natural and human phenomena and the committed "vision" of the artist.

Mary Austin's approach to folklore from the position of a natural historian rather than a student of culture is unusual in itself and sets her apart from the literary folklorists of the local color school, from Cable, for instance, and his use of Creole lore. Mary Austin's approach sets her folklore in a much closer and more direct relationship with its naturalistic environment and gives a consequent deemphasis to aspects of formal autonomy. These casual lines from The Flock demonstrate both characteristics:

> One finds tales like this at every point of contact with the Tejon, raying out fanwise like thin, white runways of rabbits from any waterhole in a rainless land (Fl, 221).

Here the exactly realized simile superimposes the oral material on the land so that it becomes almost a topographical feature. Since the connection is so close, the cultural phenomena can be assimilated by the author in the same way

as the natural phenomena. Sometimes, indeed, a direct causal relationship is indicated:

> The palpable sense of mystery in the desert air breeds fables, chiefly of lost treasure. Somewhere within its stark borders, if one believes report, is a hill strewn with nuggets; one seamed with virgin silver; an old clayey water-bed where Indians scooped up earth to make cooking-pots and shaped them reeking with grains of pure gold. Old miners drifting along the desert edges, weathered into the semblance of the tawny hills, will tell you tales like these convincingly. After a little sojourn in that land you will believe them on their own account. It is a question whether it is not better to be bitten by the little horned snake of the desert that goes sidewise and strikes without coiling, than by the tradition of a lost mine (LLR, 7).

Given this firm basis of Mary Austin's folklore, saturated with the land itself, it is not surprising that the folklore plays an important role even in The Land of Little Rain, generally the most naturistic of her books. The folklore material is sometimes used as a source of information, sometimes as a point for debate. Always the records of the folk, whether Indian or white, represents something of the texture of the land and the experience it presents:

> You should hear Salty Williams tell how he used to drive eighteen- and twenty-mule teams from the borax marsh to Mojave, ninety miles, with the trail wagon full of water barrels (LLR, 6).

> The swamper he buried by the way with stones upon him to keep the coyotes from digging him up, and seven years later I read the pencilled lines on the pine headboard, still bright and unweathered (LLR, 7).

> When Timmie O'Shea was lost on Armogosa Flats for three days without water, Long Tom Basset found him, not by any trail, but by making straight away for the points where he saw buzzards stooping (LLR, 18).

> The flood went against the cabin of Bill Gerry and laid Bill stripped and broken on a sand bar at the mouth of the Grape-vine, seven miles away (LLR, 26).
>
> He was a perfect gossip of the woods. . . full of fascinating small talk about the ebb and flow of creeks, the pinon crop on Black Mountain, and the wolves of Mesquite Valley (LLR, 27).
>
> It is true that I have been in Shoshone Land, but before that, long before, I had seen it through the eyes of Winnenap' in a rosy mist of reminiscence. . . (LLR, 48).
>
> . . . the sames pines of which the Indians relate a legend mixed of brotherliness and the retribution of God (LLR, 48).
>
> . . . this while Seyavi and the boy lay up in the caverns of the Black Rock and ate tule roots and freshwater clams that they dug out of the slough bottoms with their toes (LLR, 59)
>
> That was the Homeric age of settlement and passed into tradition. Twelve years later one of the Clarks . . . shot one of the Judsons (LLR, 82).

These random examples represent some of the types of oral material, from legend to reminiscence to casual conversation, that Mary Austin uses and some of the ways in which they are used. They also demonstrate the presence of a loosely-defined oral culture, a culture of story, arising from experience of the land. Unlike the local colorists, however, Mary Austin does not take the stories and legends that reach her through this culture and formulate them into literary shape, abstracted from their environment. Instead she stresses their casual but unavoidable insinuation into her own saturation with the natural environment. Given The

Land of Little Rain's immediate naturist context, Mary Austin's use of this oral secondary material is a significant break from the conventional forms of writing about nature. Quite simply, her use of folklore brings "wild Nature" itself into direct contact with human experience:

> There are many areas in the desert where drinkable water lies within a few feet of the surface, indicated by the mesquite and the bunch grass (Sporobulus aeroodoles). It is the nearness of unimagined help that makes the tragedy of desert deaths. It is related that the final breakdown of that hapless party that gave Death Valley its forbidding name occurred in a locality where shallow wells would have saved them. But how were they to know that (LLR, 3).

In Mary Austin's California, wherever there are facts like this there are stories. The stories give the facts a human relevance and become the central thread in the interconnected patterns of natural phenomena and human experience.

A good example of Mary Austin's awareness of story and its expression of the relationship between natural and human is her obsession with names and naming , the area that might be called folk-toponymy:

> The trail begins properly at the place of the Year Long Wind, otherwise Mojave (Fl, 74).
>
> In the fall the Basques forgather at a place in Oak Creek called by the Indians "Sagaharawite, Place-of-the-Mush-that-was-Afraid" (Fl, 83).[2]

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[2]In The American Rhythm (1930), Mary Austin looks back on this name in its cultural setting. It is interesting that she proposes the Indian concern for naming as a folk culture's equivalent for the intellectual concerns of

In contrast to Illinois with "that curious poverty of the naming faculty which is the earliest true note of middle-westerness" (EH, 7), she found Southern California's names redolent of the history of the land and the experience of the namers. Just as her "middlewestern botany" could not supply her with the names of California plants, so the California place names presented her with an entirely different world, and she appears enthralled by their variety and their cultural relevance:

> There is always a certain amount of local history to read in the names of mountain highways where one touches the successive waves of occupation or discovery, as in the old villages where the neighbourhoods are not built but grow. Here you have the Spanish Californian in Cerro Gordo and pinon; Symmes and Shepherd, pioneers both; Tunawai, probably Shoshone; Oak Creek, Kearsage - easy to fix the date of that christening - Tinpah, Piaute that; Mist Canyon and Paddy Jacks (LLR, 67).

Mary Austin's account of the potential and human interest of geographical names is quite straightforward here but it takes on more portentous overtones in her preface to The Land of Little Rain, where she praises the Indian habit of naming subjectively, calling a man "Mighty-Hunter or Man-afraid-of-a-Bear accordingly as he is called friend or enemy" (LLR, xvii). Names, she rationalizes, express a

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formal culture: "Sitting on the sunny side of the wickiup, considering with the elders of Sagharewite how it came to be called the Place-where-they-gave-him-mush-that-was-afraid, I thought of doctors disputing in the temple; of academicians loitering amid olive groves" (Ad, 39).

relationship between the namer and the named, a record of their mutual experience. This explains her own use of Indian-derived, or entirely personal names to disguise the geography of the Little Rain country. Lone Pine Peak takes its Indian name, Oppapago, the Weeper; Owens Lake becomes Bitter Lake. But in spite of this it is really the objective story-potential of names, rather than the subjective, that interests Mary Austin, their record of collective rather than individual experience. In her sketch of Jimville she recalls the legend behind the name of Squaw Gulch - the story of a good deed and a reward - and she gives a gloss on the name of the town itself:

> Jim Calkins discovered the Bully Boy. Jim Baker located the Theresa. When Jim Jenkins opened an eating house in his tent he chalked up on the flap, "Best meals in Jimville $1.00", and the name stuck (LLR, 41).

The anecdote has a pleasing shape to it; it makes a good story. And it does far more than sets of population statistics, even if such were available, to crystallize the spontaneous development of the mining camps and a part of the history of the country.

In The Land of Little Rain Mary Austin's use of folklore material comes directly from her appreciation of a particular locality, a paricular natural environment, and from her efforts to understand it. Almost literally, for Mary Austin, the land speaks - it is available to the aural as well as to the visual faculties. The legends, anecdotes

casual conversations and stories she uses are a means of getting at the hard facts of the nature of the land - patterns of settlement, problems of aridity and irrigation, the character of mountain storms and desert rainwashes, the effect of the desert on the human mind, the ways of flora and fauna. This is the most primitive level of capturing and using the folk-experience; its expressions are casual, inchoate and unpretentious, and they serve a purpose larger than their own preservation. Yet even this casual use of folklore for scientific and naturist purposes marks the exact point at which Mary Austin moves away from naturism. It marks the point at which a natural environment presents a cultural experience as well as the scientific and spiritual experience of the naturists, and the point at which Mary Austin's method is able to resolve the naturist dichotomies of art and nature, man and nature, literature and science.

In The Flock Mary Austin continues along this path on which an increasingly conscious and deliberate use of folklore marks a retreat from naturism. Although at times, she continues to use the folklore of The Flock in the same way she used the folklore of The Land of Little Rain - to evaluate facts and make deductions about the workings of natural phenomena - there is an important difference of stress. A single example will illustrate this. One of

Mary Austin's whimsically "scientific" concerns in The Flock is to establish as fact her belief that sheep dogs have all the necessary faculties to appreciate narrative. This in itself indicates the way Mary Austin's mind is moving, thinking of story as a formally cohesive entity. She attempts a proof by collating various experiences of her own and incidents told her by the shepherds. For instance:

> How long recollection stays by the dog is not certain, but at least a twelvemonth, as was proved to Filon Gerard after he had lost a third of his band when the Santa Anna came roaring up by Lone Pine with a cloud of saffron-colored dust on its wings (Fl, 148).

Here she uses Filon Gerard's story as ostensible proof of part of her theory, but the poetic flourish that describes the wind indicates that Mary Austin is really more concerned with her method of proof than with the proof itself. The faculties of sheepdogs are of less interest than the natural environment of the shepherd's experience, and this, in turn, is less important than Filon Gerard's willingness to shape this experience and this environment into terms of story. In a slight but important way this indicates the changing stress Mary Austin is placing on different aspects of her material. It is too much to say that naturist purposes are completely discarded, but in The Flock she is concerned more, rather than equally, with the literary potential of the land rather than its scientific and spiritual potential; more with people than the land itself; more with cultural expression than with its naturalistic

origins. In The Flock these things are of intrinsic rather than accidental importance and the folklore of The Flock, both the material and Mary Austin's approach to it, has much more in common with conventional ideas of folklore than the oral material of The Land of Little Rain.

In The Flock Mary Austin looks at folklore with a sympathetic objectivity, restoring story to its traditional role with her consideration of oral narrative as a distinct art-form with its own cultural context, its own aesthetic and conventions.[3] As her acknowledgement to "the book of Noriega, of Sanger and the Manxman, of Narcisse Duplin and many others" makes clear, she is more free in The Flock than in The Land of Little Rain to act as a "mere recorder" of human activity and expression, as less of a naturist and, perhaps, as less of an organizing sensibility. The structure of The Flock is less studied, less claustrophobic, and Mary Austin's own contribution appears, for a large part of the book, as nothing more than the linkage between stretches of oral narrative, directly or indirectly related. She does not need to recreate the naturist experience from her own point of view, since she has

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[3]Other folk arts are touched in passing- Little Pete's ballade (Fl, 67) and the "curious handicrafts as old as sheepherding" (Fl, 102) - and there are countless references to the customs, beliefs and superstitions of the shepherds.

many characters who, by virtue of their own activities and experience, are better able to do this. Her California shepherds belong to a folk-culture that would be recognized as such by the local colorists and by the theorists of the Folk-Say group; they are "men who have not lost the sense of the earth being good to lie down upon" (Fl, 72) and whose every expression is saturated with their natural environment.[4] Their culture would also be recognized by the scientific folklorists. These shepherds are isolated by their occupation and their various ethnic allegiances from industrialism, urbanization and mass culture. In consequence they possess, as a group, the patterned stability "necessary to permit the development and perpetuation of verbal art forms characteristic of the imaginative vision of the group toward the typical experiences of its life and its attitude toward nature and intrapersonal relations".[5] The cultural stability of the group not only permits the story to develop as an art form but uses the story as its symbol. Alone for months at a stretch, the shepherds come together only for shearing and lambing, and

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[4]For the environment-saturated philosophy of the shepherds see The Flock, pp. 66-67 and pp. 157-160.

[5]Hoffman, "Folklore in Literature", 17.

it is at these times that stories and reminiscences come to symbolize common experience and a common pattern of life:

> "We drove them to the Alps in summer, I remember very well. We went between the fenced pastures, feeding every other day and driving at night. In the dark we heard the bells ahead and slept upon our feet. Myself and another herd boy, we tied ourselves together not to wander from the road. We slept upon our feet but kept moving to the bells. This is the truth that I tell you. Whenever shepherds from the Rhone are met about camps in the Sierra they will be talking of how they slept upon their feet and followed after the bells" (Fl, 52).

It is not only particular stories, like this one, that provide the element of cultural continuity, but the institution of story-telling itself, the existence of a story-culture. Mary Austin describes the end of a shearing, with the shepherds gathered around a fire and a Basque shepherd telling the story of a bear that menaced his flock in the Tres Pinos country:

> Echenique lifts up his staff and whistles to his dogs; like enough the flock will move out in the night to feed and the herder with him. Not until they meet again, by chance in the summer meadows, will each and several hear the end of the bear story (Fl, 45).

Here, as throughout the book, Mary Austin recreates the actual circumstances of narration and emphasizes the necessity of placing the story firmly within its cultural context.

The following passage is an epitome of The Flock's folklore. It illustrates how the common environment and experience of the shepherds works itself up to story by way of the thoroughly traditional forms of folk literature.

Also, it shows Mary Austin using the environment of the shepherds' stories - her story, as it were, - as a frame for their own stories of human and natural enemies:

> "By noon, then, you should see a flock coming; it should be White Mountain Joe. I passed him Tuesday. He has a cougar's skin, the largest ever. Four nights it came and on the fourth it stayed."
>
> So announced and forerun by word of their adventures the herders of the Long Trail come in. At night, like kinsmen met in hostelries, they talk between spread pallets by the dying fires.
>
> "You Octavieu, you think you are the only one who has the ill-fortune, you and your poisoned meadows! When I came by Oak Creek I lost two score of my lambs to the forest ranger. Two score fat and well grown. We fed along the line of the reserve, and the flock scattered. Ah, how should I know, there being no monuments at the place! They went but a flock length over, that I swear to you, and the ranger came riding on us from the oaks and charged the sheep; he was a new man and a fool not to know that a broken flock travels up. The more he ran after them the farther they went into the Reserve. Two score lambs were lost in the steep rocks, or died in the running, and of the ewes that lost their lambs seven broke back into the night, and I could not go into the Reserve to hunt them. And how is that for ill fortune? You with your half-score of scabby wethers (F1, 42-43).

The form of this tale of the forest ranger and the lost sheep is known to folklorists, somewhat disparagingly, as that of the "cumulative lie". Although the content of the story is quite contemporary, relating to the situation that existed after some of the best sheep-pasture had been incorporated into the Yosemite National Park, its form is one of the oldest, most widespread and most durable forms of folk narration, part of a relaxed cycle of anecdotes and tales dealing with any aspect of human experience. Another

shepherd would try to top this story of ill-fortune just as the narrator had attempted to top Octavieu's. There are other instances in The Flock in which a simple record of experience is narrated through, and defined by, the time-honoured conventions of folk narrative: the story of how Little Pete tricked another French shepherd out of water by celebrating with him the Fourteenth of July, and the stories of revenge on mean masters and hostile townsfolk. In this way the "verbal art forms" of the shepherds establish the "imaginative vision of the group towards the typical experiences of its life and its attitudes toward nature and intrapersonal relations".[6]

But although folklorists might recognize the culture and lore of The Flock as warranting their professional attention, they would not be happy about the kind of attention Mary Austin gives. The objectivity and detachment of her treatment of folklore in The Flock, while being a good deal more noticeable than in The Land of Little Rain, come nowhere near satisfying the rigorous demands of the scientific folklorists. They would probably regard The Flock as merely a somewhat indulgent exercise in the creative use of local color. This is also the opinion of

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[6]This, for Daniel Hoffman, is the primary function of folk literature (Hoffman, 17).

Dudley Wynn, who dismisses the book as a "romanticizing of human characters" in the local color tradition.[7] At first glance there appears to be a good deal of truth in this, and Mary Austin would be the first to deny her exploitation of the romantic elements inherent in her material:

> All the lost weathers of romance collect between the ranges of the San Joaquin, like old galleons adrift in purple open spaces of Sargasso. Shearing weather is a derelict from the time of Admetus; gladness comes out of the earth and exhales light. It has its note, too, in pipings of the Dauphinoises, seated on the ground with gilias coming up between their knees while the flutes remember France (FL, 36).

But one of the most interesting aspects of The Flock is Mary Austin's own appraisal of her "romanticizing" and her interpretation of the idea of Romance. This, in itself, is no mean achievement, given the confusion of ideas about folklore and local color that would have surrounded the public reception of her material, and it is important in considering Mary Austin as a folklorist.

The concerns of the local color folklorists were with the quaint, the picturesque, the life close to the soil and the divorcement from a standardized culture of technology and rationality. This led to the popular identification of the materials of local color and the mater-

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[7] Wynn, p. 329.

ials of folklore, as we have seen, and also to the identification of both with the elements of escapism and nostalgia which go by the general name of Romance. The Flock, however, is more than a piece of local color exotica, and there are two aspects of the book that indicate that its folklore element can be abstracted from this confusion and seen as more worthy of serious consideration than most local color folklore. First, Mary Austin is concerned with the basic mechanics of story-telling in the oral tradition (Chapters IV and V will deal with some of the ways in which this influences her own stories), and, second, though she admits Romance she is careful to distinguish between romance and "tradition", romance and folklore.

She describes the Tejon country as "a reach of hills where mists of grey tradition deepen to romance" (Fl, 250) and implies, at least, a quantitative relationship, a progress of material and response from tradition to romance. But she also makes the distinction between the two a well-marked distinction of quality. She writes, for instance, of the camels imported in the eighteen-fifties to provide passage over the Great American Desert:

> Nothing remained of them but tradition and [my emphasis] a bell with the Arabic inscription almost worn out of it by usage, cracked and thin . . . Hanging above my desk, swinging, it sets in motion all the echoes of Romance (Fl, 227).

In The Land of Little Rain and The Flock, in neither of

which is the term 'folklore' actually used, "tradition" stands for the body of oral lore that comes down to Mary Austin in her saturation with the environment. "The real repository of the traditions of Tejon is Jimmy Rosemeyre" (Fl, 223), for instance. The tradition that exists in the grey mists of oral lore is diffuse, sketchy and immediately inchoate, but it is available to saturation, and Mary Austin can, and does, use it to bring out the patterns of life on the land. Tradition, though intangible, can be rendered concrete, but exactly the opposite applies to Romance. Romance exists in the camel bell, which is specific and can be weighed and measured. But it is valued for its powers of evocation, and these can never be formulated into objective patterns; and never being able to approach the objective forms of folk art, romance can reign only in the realm of ethereal and subjective speculation.

Mary Austin indulges in some provisional myth-making to contain her conception of romance:

> At any rate, it was not people who went into the desert merely to write it up who invented the fabled Hassayampa, of whose waters, if any drink, they can no more see fact as naked fact, but all radiant with the color of romance (LLR, 7-8).

She mentions Hassayampa, the spring of romance, in her prefatory poem to Lost Borders, but it is not until Christ in Italy that she provides an elaboration:

> What happens if you have drunk Hassayampa is that all place and time dissolve, so that if you should see, for example, a young girl with the shadow of dreaming in her eyes, working purple roses on centre pieces and making embroidered pillow shams, you would see much more besides: maidens spinning and spreading flax upon the grass, Indian women weaving baskets; savage women beating fibres from the palm, wild birds that gather down - sea birds that take it from their breasts and mothering ewes that tread out grassy hollows; lift and urge of the world. . . . It is to find no things inconsiderable and few things ridiculous (CII, xi-xii)

Romance, then, involves the systematic blunting and warping of the mental tools of scientific enquiry and defies the sense of the specific, the relative and distinct. Mary Austin's use of romance is like her use of folklore in that it draws the mind away from the finished and exclusive objects of the scientists and naturists. But her own use of folklore - narrative and oral history - denies exclusivity only to reach the total objective truth suggested by her own experience. She can work outwards from a study of landscape or climate, for instance, to include their human consequences, but her area of expansion is rigidly controlled by the idea of being "saturated with a limited environment". Romance recognizes no such objective limits; it allows for a free sweep of the imagination, linking apparently unrelated and incongruous images to picture the"lift and urge of the world".

A few examples from The Flock will illustrate the use of a positive conception of Romance. The book opens:

> A great many interesting things happened about the time

> Rivera y Moncada brought up the first of the flocks from Velicata. That same year Daniel Boone, lacking bread and salt and friends, heard with prophetic rapture the swaying of young rivers in the Dark and Bloody Ground; that year British soldiers shot down men in the streets of Boston for beginning to be proud to call themselves Americans and think accordingly; that year Junipero Serra lifted the cross by a full creek in the port of Monterey;- coughing of guns by the eastern sea, by the sea in the west the tinkle of altar bells and soft blether of the flocks (Fl, 3-4).

It is only using Romance to relax her attention to environment that enables her to indicate an imagistic pattern this large and this bold. In the same way she uses the imaginative pliancy of Romance to evoke impressionistic images of history that anchor themselves in images of circumstantial reality but float back as far as imagination will allow:

> "In the Pyrenees my father keep sheep, his father keep sheep, his father" - He threw out his hands inimitably across the shifting shoulders of the flock; it was as if he had directed the imagination over a backward stretch of time, that showed to its far diminishing end generations of small hairy men, keeping sheep (Fl, 45).

The stretch of time conjured by the shepherd's hand reaches back beyond the grasp of objective history to the very beginnings of mankind, but the workings of Hassayampa bring this era of mythical origins into direct contact with the sheep trade in the San Joaquin Valley. Of the many similar passages of evocation in The Flock, the one below is perhaps the most striking. Mary Austin takes the Basque shepherds salt-call, a scrap of legend and a natural landscape and, through the workings of Hassayampa, creates a free-ranging yet perfectly controlled piece of Romance:

> Suppose it were true as we have read, that there was once an Atlantis stationed toward the west, continuing the empurpled Pyrenees. Suppose the first of these Pyrenean folk were, as it is written, just Atlantean shepherds straying farthest from that happy island, when the seas engulfed it; suppose they should have carried forward with the inbred shepherd habit some roots of speech, likeliest to have belonged to shepherding - well then, when above the range of trees, when the wild scarps lift rosily through the ineffably pure splendor of the alpenglow, when the flock crops the tufted grass scattering widely on the steep, should you see these little men of long arms leaping among the rocks and all the flock lift up their heads to hear the ululating Ru-u-ubru-u-uuu! would not all these things leap together in your mind and seem to mean something? Just suppose (F1, 130-131).

This passage is of particular interest in a discussion of Mary Austin's folklore since it is based on a piece of authentic folklore material - the salt-call of the Basque shepherds. But this piece of folklore is used for rather different purposes than the oral material treated in the rest of this chapter. In combining the experience of hearing the salt-call with other elements, Mary Austin is claiming no objective authority; nothing is being proved and nothing is being illustrated. The images and conjectures released by the salt-call are purely tentative and speculative. Mary Austin recognizes this subjective and illusory quality and, indeed, emphasizes it. The image of the Atlantean shepherds' exploits an imaginative potential that cannot be realized by conventional methods of elucidation or, even, by Mary Austin's technique of saturation, but only through the insubstantial forms of speculation and wonder. Characteristically Mary Austin uses folklore to establish

the reality of human experience on the land. She can also use it as a component of Romance, of an extravagant yet delicate luxury of the imagination.

A glance at some critical accounts of Mary Austin's first books indicates some of the difficulties they have presented. Categorization has been a particular problem. The books are technically non-fiction, yet they are conceived in a thoroughly literary mode. Thus they fall into a category of semi-literature that has always tried the techniques of strictly literary criticism, built up on the study of fiction. Furthermore, Mary Austin's use of materials and conventions from various minor genres does not facilitate analysis. How is the critic who wishes to do more than "appreciate" the books, to approach a combination of autobiography, popular naturism, local color romance and chatauqua mysticism? The prospect is slightly embarassing. The general tendency has been to force everything in the books into the pattern suggested by any one of these genres, or, easier still, to ignore the books altogether. Though Pearce makes much of the philosophy Mary Austin bases on the naturism of The Land of Little Rain and The Flock, he does not really consider the books themselves. Dudley Lynn gives them only cursory attention in his appendix on "Nature

Writing".[8] Unfortunately these self-limiting approaches - Pearce's philosophical approach, Wynn's "Nature Writing" and Van Wyck Brooks' "picturesque"[9]- draw attention away from the fact that the various types of material and attitude that go into the books are only as important as the method by which Mary Austin combines them all. Brooks is the one critic who indicates anything at all of the complexity of this method. For him, The Land of Little Rain and The Flock are "singularly happy books, both deeply felt and picturesque, though perhaps a little too cunningly, or too consciously wrought."[10] Though Brooks does not expand his comment it seems likely that the structural complexity he notes is very much a function of Mary Austin's developing interest in, and use of, various aspects of folklore. In these early books Mary Austin moves from consideration of pure Nature to nature as environment to human experience of this environment and its cultural expression in folklore, and uses, when it suits her, the techniques of autobiography, local color and Romance. Yet, since this is only a schematic progression, Mary Austin

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[8] See Chapter III, p. 8 above.

[9] Van Wyck Brooks, The Confident Years (New York, 1952), p. 354.

[10] Ibid.

need not abandon earlier material as she reaches new stages in the development. The books are constructed, "cunningly" perhaps, from the point of view of a shifting relationship between the actual environment, the personal response of the author and the communal and cultural response of received folklore.

None of the commentators on The Land of Little Rain and The Flock mention folklore or, even, the use of oral material,[11] yet this is the factor that distinguishes the books from the literary traditions with which they would otherwise tend to associate themselves. Dudley Wynn's comments illustrate the danger of neglecting this aspect. Wynn links Mary Austin's early non-fiction very closely with Muir's naturism and, while recognizing that she "glances frequently at the patterns of human culture instead of looking only at wild nature", he dismisses this as "a comparatively unimportant consideration".[11] In fact, Mary Austin not only "glances at" human culture but looks at "wild nature" through the folklore forms of the culture. Wynn's dismissal seems a wilful disregard for his material

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[11] Van Doren does note Mary Austin's reliance on an equivocally-labelled "history" in Many Minds, p. 7.

[12] Wynn, p. 325.

and Mary Austin's, and his judgements of her short stories, deprecatory and superficial, can be traced to this basic misreading of The Land of Little Rain and The Flock.

CHAPTER IV

SHORT STORY INTO FOLK STORY: LOST BORDERS

Mary Austin's short stories mark the point in form at which she moves from the mere appreciation of folklore to use the materials, conditions and techniques of folklore in the interests of formal literature and fiction. Also, they constitute the very best of her fictional output: Mary Austin is a far better writer of short stories than she is a poet, novelist or dramatist. I suggest there are grounds for seeing a connection between these two factors.

Between 1890 and 1934 Mary Austin published over a hundred short stories, but the discussion here will be confined to two collections, Lost Borders, published in 1909, and One Smoke Stories, published in 1934. While these contain only a third of her total output they provide a representative and coherent sample of her work in the short story form. The two collections will be discussed separately since the stories in each are very different, seeming to represent absolutely opposed methods of construction and writing. But they have in common an attempt to use in fiction aspects of the type of folklore that fascinated Mary Austin in her earlier books about California. Though the two collections are separated by a quarter of a century the

differences between them are best explained not only in terms of chronological development (One Smoke Stories contains some material that pre-dates Lost Borders) but in terms of the complexity of Mary Austin's experience of folklore and the aesthetic of folk life.

Both collections come out of the experience of folklore related in the ostensible non-fiction of The Land of Little Rain and The Flock. In these earlier books Mary Austin celebrates oral narrative as a record of the folk experience, as the response to saturation with a limited environment, and there is a useful, if vague, formula for distinguishing the continuation of this theme in Lost Borders from the continuation in One Smoke Stories. In Lost Borders, as in The Land of Little Rain, Mary Austin is concerned with the origins of this response, in terms of natural and cultural environment. In One Smoke Stories she is more concerned with the formal and finished nature of the response, following the direction indicated by The Flock.

Lost Borders contains thirteen stories together with a piece entitled "The Land", a personalized introduction to the locale of the stories, the mining towns and prospectors' camps in the desert country of the Death Valley -Panamints - Armagosa section along the California-Nevada boundary. Lost Borders thus shares muchof its geo-

graphy with The Land of Little Rain, and this establishes the short stories as a continued treatment of the non-fiction material of the earlier book. Mary Austin's image of the relationship of the stories to their natural environment substantiates the impression of continuity:

> Every story of that country is colored by the fashion of the life there, breaking up in swift, passionate intervals between long, dun stretches, like the land that out of hot sinks of desolation heaves up great bulks of granite ranges with opal shadows playing in their shining, snow-piled curves(LB, 4).

The stories of the land share their insinuative, environment satu rated character with the oral material of The Land of Little Rain, and this enables Mary Austin to continue using the stories of Lost Borders in the interests of science and natural history. She introduces and explains "The Pocket Hunter's Story":

> The way he came to tell me about it was this. I had laid by for a nooning under the quaking-asp by Peters-creek on the trail from Tunawai, and found him before me with his head under one of those woven shelters of living boughs which the sheepherders leave in that country, and he moved out to make room for me in its hand's breadth of shade.
>
> Understand there was no more shade to be got there. Straight before us went the meagre sands; to every yard or so of space its foot-high, sapless shrub. Somewhere at the back of us lifted, out of a bank of pinkish-violet mist, sierras white and airy. Eastward where the earth sagged on its axis, in some dreary, beggared sleep, pale, wispish clouds went up. Now and then to no wind the quaking-asps clattered their dry bones of leaves (LB, 139).

Between the two there is talk of the way in which, in the desert, the mind seems to move ahead of the body, travel-

ling forward on its own.

> I had said that this accounted to me not only for the extraordinary feats of endurance in desert travel, but for the great difficulty prospectors have in relocating places they have marked, so mazed they are by that mixed aspect of strangeness and familiarity that every district wears, which, long before it has been entered by the body, had been appraised by the eye of the mind.
> "But the mind can only take notice," I protested. "It can't do anything without its body."
> "Or another one," suggested the Pocket-Hunter.
> "Ah," said I, "tell me the story." (LB, 140).

Here the story Mary Austin anticipates is used ostensibly at least to induce and prove, to throw light on something she wishes to establish and quantify as a scientific phenomenon. As in The Land of Little Rain, the preliminary thesis in its natural context and Mary Austin's catalyst-like involvement with it are given as much weight as the story itself.

But there are three important differences between the inductive use of story in The Land of Little Rain and in this example from Lost Borders. First, the thesis to be proved is rather more metaphysical than scientific; Mary Austin is concerned with the subtleties of mind and matter rather than with the characteristics of storms or the location of water-holes. While the human experience is still dependent on its natural environment, the passage from "The Pocket-Hunter's Story" reveals this shift of emphasis and this in turn reveals a growing concern for the human experience as such, a growing respect for the traditional mater-

ial of formal literature. Second, the phenomenal aspect and the description of climate and landscape at the time of the story's telling are not ends in themselves, as they would be in The Land of Little Rain, but merely an elaborate build-up to the actual story the pocket hunter has to tell. Third, the pocket hunter's story (as distinguished here from Mary Austin's story with that title) is finished and formed in itself and Mary Austin recognizes in it a formal value that is, to some extent, independent of her own awareness of the story and of its naturalistic origins. In combining the pocket hunter's story, a description of its natural setting and an account of her own involvement in the circumstances of its narration, in her own story, she is not only bringing the various elements together to comment on each other within the context of the larger natural environment. She is also recognizing the ability of her own story to stand as a detached and internally coherent piece of formal literature.

While the whole purpose of this discussion is to demonstrate the relationship of Mary Austin's work to the various concepts and uses of non-fictional folklore and non-formal culture, it would be pointless to deny that the primary relationship of Lost Borders is with the culture of formal literature, the mode of fiction and the specific form of the short story. A discussion of Lost Borders in

in these terms, particularly with reference to its literary context, is the best way of reaching the distinctive quality of the stories and, also, of establishing their relationship to foklore. The fictional context of Lost Borders is, of course, provided by the acknowledged influence of Rudyard Kipling. Mary Austin is quite emphatic about her literary debt to Kipling. She sees in his work an affective influence on her analysis of her own material - "Everywhere in the Early West you met men like that, following the 'something lost beyond the ranges' which Kipling nearer than anybody, made us understand" (EH, 245) - and she acknowledges him as the one writer who awakened her interest in the short story form and as the dominant literary influence on the techniques and attitudes of her early stories.

> It had never been any part of my intention to write short stories. If you have access to the popular examples of them in the early nineties, you will not need to be told how little the sentimental personalities of that form would have had for a mind always reaching wider and more deeply into the movement of American society. But the Kipling tales with their slightly mocking detachment, the air of completely disengaging the author from any responsibility for the moral implications of the scene and the people of whom he wrote, had at least pointed the way for a use of the sort of material of which I found myself possessed. There was then - there still is I suspect - deeply rooted in the American consciousness a disposition to take offence at what is strange, because being strange it implies a criticism of the familiar of which we lack any criterion of authenticity other than that it is ours. Mr. Kipling had, happily, made the tales so completely strange and far away that comparison failed, and one could, as my husband had said, "just enjoy them" (EH, 230).

Now Kipling has never been held as an unequivocally healthy

influence on other writers, and Van Wyck Brooks is possibly a little underhanded when he casually notes Mary Austin as "another disciple of Kipling, - like Frank Norris and Jack London, - he showed her how to treat a strange milieu".[1] Dudley Wynn, however, evidently regards Kipling's influence as wholly meretricious. He dismisses Lost Borders' putative claims for its characters' "boldness, audacity, freedom from convention":

> But what the stories of Lost Borders actually emphasize is a sort of local color smartness; Mrs. Austin constantly implies that these people gain their ends in delightfully eccentric and unconventional ways. In short, too much of Kipling's manner remains in her approach to her material.[2]

While Wynn's judgement seems to be based on a ridiculously superficial reading of both Kipling and Mary Austin, it does work together with Brooks' comment and Mary Austin's acknowledgements to fix attention on two important and interconnected aspects of Lost Borders, the calculated strangeness of the setting and the "freedom from convention" of its characters.

Mary Austin does show an obvious sympathy for the unconventional behaviour of her characters in Lost Borders.

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[1] Brooks, p. 353.

[2] Wynn, p. 67.

In "The House of Offence" the prostitutes are treated with sympathy, and a respectable miner's wife adopts a child of sin; the formalities of marriage are blissfully disregarded in "Aqua Dulce", "A Case of Conscience" and "The Walking Woman"; the adultery in "The Fakir" is forgiven and the offenders protected; throughout the stories the ethical teachings of religion and the urgings of conscience are, alternately, ridiculed and ruefully deprecated. But, although Mary Austin ascribes her "moral disengagement" to Kipling's influence, it could, as it stands, have come just as easily from the conventions of the local colorists. Local color's stress on the exotic quality of the locality and its acceptance of the value-laden dialectic of national and local, urban and rural, industrial and closeness to the soil, provides fertile ground for the propagation of self-evaluating eccentricities. Human behaviour as well as geographical setting is removed from the normal experience and expectations of the predominantly citified local color audience, and this image of the unfamiliar is completed by what we can call the exotic morality indulged in by the more aggressive authors, the convention-defying mechanisms of approval and disapproval they bring into play. In Harte's California stories, for instance, the rejection of conventional moral standards means that moral considerations can easily be transferred into aesthetic require-

ments: what is interesting is good; what is dull is bad. On this basis Hatre can defend the morality of prostitutes, gamblers and gunmen as a necessary part of his depiction of the picturesque, action-filled patterns of life in the mining camp. Conventional values have no place in this environment.

At first glance, Kipling's presentation of India as a land apart, "a land beyond the law", and his stress on India's ability to defy civilized social, moral and aesthetic values, seems to owe something to this type of local color convention.[3] The smashing of pre-conceptions is the most important theme of the Indian stories. It is the single formula of the many stories in which Kipling delights in the discomfiture of newly-posted subalterns and civil servants and visiting members of Parliament when their ideals and assumptions - the Brotherhood of Man, the Mysterious East - wither on exposure to the savagery of the Pathan, the obsequious incompetence of the Bengali, the merciless heats of the Plains summer and the stink of the bazaars. But India's power of defying convention does not

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[3]Kipling knew Harte's work, admired it, and acknowledged it as a formative influence on his own. Walter Morris Hart, in Kipling the Story Writer (Berkely, 1918), offers a rather simple-minded near-contemporary view of Harte's influence on Kipling.

rest, ultimately, on a simple transference of moral and aesthetic values, nor on an abstract opposition of the exotic and the familiar. Instead, Kipling roots human behaviour firmly in India's specific natural environment, in the concrete facts of topography, vegetation and climate. He uses his considerable powers of natural description to establish the Indian experience in naturalistic terms, and lets these explain diversions from normal civilized society and the challenge to European assumptions. This is how he substantiates the idea of India as a place where inexplicable things happen and where anything can be forgiven and, more important, where few things demand either explanation or forgiveness. In his story "At the End of the Passage" from Life's Handicap (1891) the dreadful oppression in the atmosphere before the breaking of the monsoon is a correlative for the oppression of Hummil's spirit. It is also, naturalistically, the cause of Hummil's oppression and of his final surrender to the thing that comes to him in the night. The beginning of the story is worth quoting, as an epitome of Kipling's method and as a prototype of Mary Austin's:

> Four men, each entitled to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of hapoiness', sat at a table playing whist. The thermometer marked - for them - one hundred and one degrees of heat. The room was darkened till it was only just possible to distinguish the pips of the cards and the very white faces of the players. A tattered, rotten punkah of whitewashed calico was puddling the hot air and whining dolefully at each stroke. Outside lay

> gloom of a November day in London. There was neither sky, sun, nor horizon, - nothing but a brown purple haze of heat. It was as though the earth were dying of apoplexy.
>
> From time to time clouds of tawny dust rose from the ground without wind or warning, flung themselves tablecloth-wise among the tops of the parched trees, and came down again. Then a whirling dust-devil would scutter across the plain for a couple of miles, break, and fall outward, though there was nothing to check its flight save a long low line of piled railway-sleepers white with the dust, a cluster of huts made of mud, condemned rails, and canvas, and the one squat four-roomed bungalow that belonged to the assistant engineer in charge of a section of the Gaudhari State line then under construction.[4]

This India is so far removed from the expectations of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" that it cuts away all assumptions of human experience and behaviour that come from a civilization that accepts these noble ideals as self-evident. There is a concrete rationale for the story's suspension of moral evaluation - "I judge no man this weather"[5] and for Kipling's general direction that "civilized people who eat out of china and own card-cases have no right to apply their standard of right and wrong to an unsettled land".[6]

I suggest that it is not "moral disengagement" as

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[4] "At the end of the Passage", Life's Handicap (London, 1964), pp. 183-184.

[5] Ibid.

[6] "Georgy Porgy", Life's Handicap, p. 381.

much as an awareness of its roots in natural environment that Mary Austin really owes to Kipling. Her later formulation of her respect for the power of natural environment and for those who "shaped in mind and social reaction . . . by profound saturation with a limited environment" has one of its sources in Kipling's respect for India's power to shape those exposed to its infuence. But until Lost Borders Mary Austin has been content with the picturesque environmentalism of The Land of Little Rain and The Flock, with their personal observations of the human consequences of landscape and climate. It was Kipling who indicated the way in which she could move her study of the connections between environment and human behaviour from the periphery of naturism to fiction, from isolated personal impressions to the short story. By demonstrating that natural forces and phenomena can be used as a bedrock of experience for fictional characters and as a rationale for their actions, Kipling enabled Mary Austin's fiction to discard accustomed experience together with its conventional morality, and fix her material and her attitudes toward it in the concrete facts of natural environment.

Near the beginning of Lost Borders Mary Austin explains the significance of the title and, in doing so, makes clear her idea of the connection between the physical make-up of the land and its power to defy convention and

force defiance on its inhabitants:

> The boundaries between the Indian tribes and between the clans within the tribes were plainly established by natural landmarks - peaks, hill-crests, creeks and chains of water holes - beginning at the foot of the Sierra and continuing eastward past the limit of endurable existence. Out there, a week's journey from everywhere, the land was not worth parcelling out, and the boundaries which should logically have been continued until they met the canon of the Colorado ran out in foolish wastes of sand and inextricable disordered ranges.
>
> For law runs with the boundary, not beyond it; it is as fast to the given landmarks as a limpet to its scar on the rock. I am convinced most men make law for the comfortable feel of it defining them to themselves . . . .Out there, then, where the law and the land marks fail together, the souls of little men fade out at the edges, leak from them as water from wooden pails warped asunder.
>
> Out there, where the borders of conscience break down, where there is no convention, and behaviour is of little account except as it gets you your desire, almost anything might happen, does happen, in fact (LB, 2-3).

Whatever the appeal this conception might have accidentally held for the urban, ethical audience of the local colorists, the presentation of Lost Borders' locale as a country of "foolish wastes of sand and inextricable disordered ranges" is no more attractive than Kipling's picture of the earth "dying of apoplexy". Nature here has power but not beauty, only a brutal, dulled and hopeless squalor. This seems to envelop the human environment so that the mining camps can put up no resistance as the desert seeps into its houses and streets and into the souls of its inhabitants:

> And the life at Maverick was deadly, appallingly dull. The stark houses, the rubbishy streets, the women who went about them in calico wrappers, the dragging speech

> of the men, the wide, shadowless table-lands, the hard bright skies, and the days all of one pattern that went so stilly by that you only knew it was afternoon when you smelled the fried cabbage Mrs. Mulligan was cooking for supper (LB, 115-116).

The difficulty of most of the people in Lost Borders lies in the very inscrutability of the desert's power; they cannot understand the desert and its power to baffle all previous experience of landscape, climate and beauty while offering no compensating standards in their place. We have seen how Mary Austin was presented with the same problem when she came to California and how she overcame it, coming to understand the new land and its ways, and to recognize a strange beauty where she first thought there was only incomprehensible emptiness. But only rarely in Lost Borders, as in "The Ploughed Lands" in which she invokes "the blazonry of wind-scoured buttes, the far peaks molten with the alpenglow, cooled by the velvet violet twilight tide, and the leagues and leagues of stars"(LB, 40), does she bring her own informed attitude directly into play. Mostly she is quite dispassionate about the way the land wastes and destroys those who are not aware of its ways. While the geographical position of the country of Lost Borders and the mining and prospecting activities of its inhabitants might indicate an affinity with the material of local color and western romance, Mary Austin's land is neither the setting nor the instigation of exotic and picturesque adventures. And while her desert does free men "from convention"

it substitutes another, and more deadly, form of slavery.

The story "The Return of Mr. Wills" is a case in point. Mr. Wills is one of the "little men" whose souls "fade out at the edges" in the desert. He comes west with his family and works as a clerk in the Miners' Emporium of one of the desert shanty-towns, and here, dislocated from his previous experience, he falls under the spell of the familiar prospectors' talk:

> There is a sort of man bred up in close communities, like a cask, to whom the church, public opinion, the social note, are a sort of hoop to hold him in serviceable shape. Without these there are a good many ways of going to pieces. Mr. Wills' way was Lost Mines (LB, 53).

He begins by grubstaking prospectors and then he goes after the mines himself, leaving his wife to manage as best she can:

> It was when her husband went out after Lost Cabin she fell into the habit of sitting down to a cheap novel, with the dishes unwashed, a sort of drugging of despair common among women of the camps (LB, 57).

Mr. Wills is claimed by the desert from family obligations and all demands of "church, public opinion, the social note" When he returns to his family between _paseas_ he returns "like a blight", for "a man who has prospected lost mines to that extent is positively not good for anything else" (LB, 60). Desperately trying to make her way out of the hopelessness her marriage now entails, Mrs. Wills tries for a divorce, but the minister, who recognizes only adultery as legitimate grounds, dissuades her:

> The minister himself was newly from the East and did not understand that the desert is to be dealt with as a woman and a wanton; he was thinking of it as a place on the map (LB, 60).

The desert, of course, is not just a place on the map but an environment so total and overpowering that it replaces religion, morality, society and family as the framework within which characters must work out their destiny. And it has the dynamic power, "like a woman and a wanton", to lure men and destroy them.

Clearly a land with this sort of power is not to be treated casually, as a mere "place on the map" and as a source of local color. Neither is it to have imposed upon it the arbitrary rules of conduct suitable for another and different land. Mary Austin's insistence on the desert's right to set its own rules is strongly reminiscent of Kipling:

> Clear out beyond the borders the only unforgiveable offence is incompetence; and conscience, in so far as it is a hereditary prejudice in favour of a given line of behaviour, is no sort of baggage to take into the wilderness, which has its own exigencies and occasions and will not be lived in except on its own conditions. The case of Saunders is in point (LB, 25).

> I was out of it, smitten anew with the utter inutility of all the standards which are not bred of experience but merely came down to me with the family teaspoons. Seen by the fierce desert light they looked like the spoons, thin and worn at the edges. I should have been ashamed to offer them to Netta Saybrick (LB, 120).

The negation of moral responsibility which Mary Austin admired in Kipling seems to have come from the respect they

share for the concrete power of their respective locales effectively to wither away the arbitrary standards of civilized convention.

Whatever strength (even validity) this concept might have as naturalistic philosophy, it does present difficulties in its transformation into fiction. For just as Mary Austin's desert or Kipling's India demolish the moral standards of civilized life, so they subvert the traditional patterns of fictional narrative expected by the civilization that constitutes the writer's public. Introducing "The Fakir", Mary Austin points out that human love, for instance, has provided the greatest theme of formal literature; not love in itself but love in its relations with the institutions and expectations of complex civilized society, "with Respectability, with the Church and Property":

> Threading through these, love weaves the fascinating intricacy of story, but here in the Borders, where the warp runs loose and wide, the pattern has not that richness it should show in the close fabric of civilization. If it lived next door to you, you probably wouldn't have anything to do with it (LB, 110).

In The Land of Little Rain Mary Austin quarrelled with the validity of Harte's highly-colored, action-charged depiction of life in the mining camps, pointing to Jimville's quality of "indifference, blankness, emptiness" and the absence of any fictionally negotiable form or structure in its life. In Lost Borders she clarifies this point, but

now she is not concerned with the lack of form itself but with the absence, "where the warp runs loose and wide", of the elements that make form worthwhile - the other aesthetic values of fiction: scale and intricacy. In Plain Tales from the Hills (1890), Kipling, using a different but still appropriate metaphor, makes much the same point about his material:

> One of the many curses of our life in India is the want of atmosphere in the painter's sense. There are no half-tints worth noticing. Men stand out all crude and raw, with nothing to tone them down, and nothing to scale them against.[7]

The power of Mary Austin's desert to cut aesthetic values, as well as moral, down to its own conditions, leaves men and their affairs bleak and exposed. The story the pocket hunter tells when "the earth sagged on its axis, in some dreamy, beggared sleep" is about "one of those expansive enmities which in the spined and warped humanity of the camps have as ready an acceptance as the devoted partnerships of which Wells and Basset furnished the pre-eminent example"(LB, 135). Just as the relationships are reduced to their desolate essentials by the conditions of the desert, so are the protagonists:

. Mac was one of those illy-furnished souls whom the

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[7] "Dressley of the F.O.", Plain Tales from the Hills (London, 1965), p. 310.

> wilderness despoils most completely - hair, beard and skin of him burned to one sandy sallowness, the eyelashes of no color, the voice of no timbre, more or less stiffened at the joints by the poison of leaded ores, his very name shorn of its distinguishing syllable; no more of him left, in fact, than would serve as a vehicle for hating Creelman (LB, 136).

In a sense there is the material here for the conventional Western melodrama, the material of Zane Grey and Dan Black, but the presentation of the characters and their story is so uncompromisingly stark that the hatred is purged of aesthetic attraction and the "fascinating intricacy of story" just as it is denied the attentions of the moralist. "The Pocket Hunter's Story" makes no attempt to compromise the expectations of the local color audience (and in this Mary Austin is a good deal more honest than Kipling) and the story is effective just because of the glaring starkness of its presentation, matched with the indifferent brutality of its natural setting.[8]

The facts of the desert, then, its weather, its topography, its vegetation, underlies all the human context of Lost Borders. The desert is the book's greatest concern and its power over its inhabitants its greatest theme.

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[8] It is possible, of course, to miss the point completely. Dudley Wynn objects that "The Fakir" - admittedly not the best story in Lost Borders but one whose method is very carefully explained - succeeds only in stressing "the bareness of the story as of the land", and complains about the "lack of motivating sharpness" (Wynn, p. 71).

The other theme that is played upon throughout is that of the "man-woman relationship", and Dudley Wynn goes so far as to claim that this is the "real theme" of Lost Borders and that it culminates in the ideal of the "shared task" epitomized in the last story, "The Walking Woman"?[9] Later in her career Mary Austin was to write, at great length and with little distinction, about marital and extra-marital problems, using concepts like "Maleness" and "the Female Urge", and there is a case to be made for studying Lost Borders as an early exploration of this subject. The man-woman aspect of her work does not qualify for lengthy discussion in my approach to Mary Austin, but it is worth taking a brief look at "The Walking Woman", her only story to have been widely anthologized, in connection with Wynn's idea that it epitomizes the "real theme" of Lost Borders. The Walking Woman is one who has "walked off all sense of society-made values, and knowing the best when the best came to her was able to take it" (LB, 208). This "best" comes to her, strange as it may seem, in a sandstorm, after she meets the shepherd Filon Gerard in his spring camp on the edge of the desert:

> At such times a sandstorm works incalculable disaster. The lift of the wind is so great that the whole surface

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[9] Ibid., p. 68.

> of the ground appears to travel upon it slantwise, thinning out miles high in air. In the intolerable smother the lambs are lost from the ewes; neither dogs nor man make headway against it.
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> "Such was the force of the wind said the Walking Woman that when we came together we held by one another and talked a little between pantings. We snatched and ate what we could as we ran. All that day and night until the next afternoon the camp kit was not out of the cayaques. But we held the flock. We herded them under a butte when the wind fell off a little, and the lambs sucked; when the storm rose they broke, but we kept upon their track and brought them together again. gain. At night the wind quieted and we slept by turns, at least Filon slept. I lay on the ground when my turn was and beat with the storm. I was no more tired than the earth was. The sand filled in the creases of the blanket, and dripped back upon the ground. But we saved the sheep" (LB, 221-222).

Obviously there is something reasonably portentous going on in this account, certainly in the context of the relationship between the man and the woman but also in the context of what used to be called "communion with nature". The important point is that the love affair, or whatever it is, cannot be separated in any sense from its desert environment. It is the desert in its most archetypally concrete and violent form - the sandstorm - that brings the two together and allows the consummation to take place. In the same way it is the deadening squalor of the desert that pushes Netta Saybrick into adultery in "The Fakir", and the spurious glamour and mystery of the desert that brings about the desertion of Mr. Mills. Different aspects of the desert instigate the significant action in all the stories that deal with the relationship of men and women. The experience these stories present is bred of a particular en-

vironment, and far from constituting an autonomous theme, it only demonstrates, once again, the power of the land over human behaviour.

In The Lonely Voice Frank O'Connor develops a persuasive thesis that the one great subject of the formal short story is that of human loneliness, and that all the great critics of short stories should have been able to take their epigram, as he has done, from Pascal: "The eternal silence of those infinite spaces terrifies me".[10] For the obvious reasons O'Connor does not elect Kipling to that circle.[11] But by O'Connor's standards (and they are better than most) it would seem that Mary Austin is entitled to a place on the periphery. The dominant feature of the characters in Lost Borders is the terrible loneliness that the desert imposes on them, the continual awareness of their human ignorance, insignificance and impotence. Whereas Kipling's heroes are generally those who keep their upper lips stiff and hold at bay, without breaking down or going native, the hostile environment that would destroy them, Mary Austin recognizes no place in the desert's scheme

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[10] O'Connor, The Lonely Voice (New York, 1968), p. xiii.

[11] Ibid., pp. 155-157.

for this kind of defensive heroism. She is interested by those who are defeated by the land or by those who adapt to it. The first group, the Wills', Netta Saybrick in "The Fakir", Emma Jeffries in "The Readjustment", are driven to a frenzy of loneliness and forsakenness because they do not fully understand the ways of the desert and its power; they live out their lives in shame, despair and hopeless regret. Those who reach some accomodation with the desert's demands, the Walking Woman and the stage-driver in "Aqua Dulce" choose loneliness, the superior loneliness of being alone, just because they do understand and realise there can be no other way. Perhaps Mary Austin as narrator is too desert-wise ever to be personally terrified, but she fully understands the various terrors that the desert provokes in others, and in her first collection of short stories Pascal's abstraction has its convincing naturalistic correlative in the "foolish wastes of sand, and inextricable disordered ranges", the "burning alkali flats" and the "wide shadowless tablelands" of the country of Lost Borders .

So far the stories of Lost Borders have been discussed as though they were conscious creations of formal imaginative literature. Comparisons have been made with Kipling, and behind both Kipling and Mary Austin stand the great masters of the formal short story, Chekhov and de

Maupassant, Turgenev and Joyce; their work should provide the logical framework of analysis and comparison. Mary Austin, however, chooses to describe Lost Borders as a collection of "folk stories" (EH, 336): this brings them into relationship with the very different, inchoate body of non-formal, oral literature and, also, into the context of the various ideas about the folk and folklore that were discussed in Chapter I.

In what sense is the description "folk stories" justified? The forgoing discussion of the content of Lost Borders suggests two ways in which the "folk" aspect of the stories can be aligned with some of the more liberal concepts of folklore in literature. First, at the most superficial level of both the stories and the theory, Lost Borders is a collection of stories "about the folk", about those who live close to the soil, in a distinctive local setting, removed from the cultural perils of industrialism and the urban society. Thus they constitute the type of loose folklore exploited by the local colorists and given loose sanction by the later theorists of the Folk-Say group. Second, the characters of Lost Borders are "folk" according to Mary Austin's own formulation concerning the profound influence of environment. Following on The Land of Little Rain and The Flock, Lost Borders is basically an imaginative study of the way in which characters are

"shaped in mind and social reaction . . . in character and so finally in expression" by the desert country in which they live.

In this sense Lost Borders is a comment on the concept of the folk and the general environment of folklore, but the book extends farther towards a concrete relationship with folklore. This is revealed more by the techniques of the stories than by their content; it is revealed in the care Mary Austin takes to reproduce the processes by which the stories emerge from their surrounding environment, through human sources, into the formal condition of short stories. At this point, it is worth repeating MacEdward Leach's rubric for the collector of folklore, that he "must not be content with merely collecting the song or the story; he must collect the matrix as well" and, further, that "he must go beyond that and collect the singer of the songs and the teller of the tales".[12] I do not wish to suggest that, in Lost Borders, Mary Austin is acting as a collector of folklore rather than as a writer of short stories but that there is something of the collector in her, that there are parallels between her fictional techniques and Leach's collection methods that are too impor-

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[12]Leach, p. 56.

tant to ignore.

One important point is that Mary Austin goes to some lengths to emphasize that her stories are stories from the oral tradition; that they come to the reader at second-hand and that she is merely transferring to the printed page stories given her by other inhabitants of Lost Borders. This immediately places some sort of stress on a "collector" role. She credits the driver of the Keeler-Mojave stage with many of the stories (EH, 258) and in "Aqua Dulce" she allows him to become the principal narrator. Mary Austin does provide an introduction in her own voice, in which she repeats the circumstances of hearing the story. It begins circumstantially:

> The Los Angeles special got in so late that day that if the driver of the Mojave stage had not, from having once gone to school with me, acquired the habit of minding what I said, I should never have made it (LB, 82).

There follows an account of the journey through the night. The stage passes within sight of a far-off line of Piaute camp fires and Mary Austin, up on the box with him, sees the driver stare after them, "By which I knew there was a story there". The story proper follows, the story of the Indian girl Catmaneda at the spring called Aqua Dulce, as told in the stage-driver's own words.

Here Mary Austin is using the conventional frame-device beloved of the local colorists from Washington Irving onwards, and of Kipling. In its usual form the frame allows

for the central story to be narrated by a character other than the author, who relegates himself to the role of listener and transcriber, and who frames his narrator's story with a character sketch of the narrator, a description of the setting or an account of how he (the author) came to be hearing the story he brings to print. The use of the frame device sets up a pretence of authenticity for the material within the frame and invites the reader to see the author as the purveyor of the story rather than as its creator. Usually the authenticity is intended as no more than a conventional pretense, but when Mary Austin uses the frame in "Aqua Dulce" she is evidently making a serious attempt to establish something of the cultural and environmental matrix of the stage-driver's story and its authenticity within the larger culture and environment. Some of the Lost Borders stories, "The Bitterness of Women" and "The Last Antelope", are completely self-contained and do not have frames. Some have the author as a participant in the events of the story, as in "The Fakir" and (thinly disguised) in "The Readjustment" and so do not need formal frames. But most do, and Mary Austin's use of the device reveals significant attitudes to the folklore content of the stories.

"Aqua Dulce" is the simplest and most conventional of Mary Austin's frames. They are usually more complex

than the frames of Kipling and the local colorists, and more important to individual stories. In terms of verbal quantity Mary Austin feels it is worthwhile to devote a considerable proportion of her story to the frame surrounding somebody else's. The central story of "The Walking Woman", for instance, is presumably the story of the woman's experience with Filon Gerard, yet only twelve hundred words are given to it amid the twenty-six hundred of the total story. Apart from this central story and a few paragraphs in which Mary Austin meditates on the validity of its moral, the rest of the story is an expanded and elaborated frame. It begins:

> The first time of my hearing of her was at Temblor. We had come all day between blunt, whitish cliffs rising from mirage water, with a thick, pale wake of dust billowing from the wheels, all the dead walls of the foothills sliding and shimmering with heat, to learn that the Walking Woman had passed us somewhere in the dizzying dimness, going down to the Tulares on her own feet. We heard of her again in the Carisal, and again at Adobe Station (LB, 195).

Almost half the story is taken up with a consideration of fragments of lore about the Walking Woman, gathered from "sheepherders at whose camps she slept, and cowboys at rodeos" who "told me as much of her way of life as they could understand", and with conjecture about her personality and motivations. What made her choose the life of a vagrant in a hostile country "where the number of women is as one in fifteen" and avoid human contact? How did she live?

What had she to tell? Mary Austin reports how she tried to meet the Walking Woman, to talk with her and to resolve conflicting accounts. Finally she does come across her in favorable circumstances:

> It was at Warm Springs in the Little Antelope I came upon her in the heart of a clear forenoon. The spring lies off a mile from the main trail, and has the only trees about it known in that country. First you come upon a pool of waste full of weeds of a poisonous dark green, every reed ringed about the water level with a muddy white incrustation. Then the three oaks appear staggering on the slope, and the spring sobs and blubbers below them in ashy colored mud. All the hills of that country have the down plunge toward the desert and back abruptly toward the Sierra. The grass is thick and brittle and bleached snow-color toward the end of the season. As I rode up the swale of the spring I saw the Walking Woman sitting where the grass was deepest, with her black bag and blanket, which she carried on a stick, beside her. It was one of those days when the genius of talk flows as smoothly as rivers of mirage through the blue hot desert morning (LB, 200).

It is only here that the Walking Woman begins her own story. Similarly, in "The Pocket-Hunter's Story" there seems to be an undue emphasis on the frame material. Not only are a great many words devoted to the frame - the account of Mary Austin's meeting with the pocket hunter and their conversation about the power of the desert - but frame material is constantly interspersed with the pocket-hunter's story of Creelman and Mac. The line of Mary Austin's narrative moves quite freely from one to the other and the frame is so constructed that it is impossible to separate it from the story it encloses.

The importance Mary Austin gives to what would con-

ventionally be regarded as merely the trimmings of the story is closely connected with the material content of her frames. As well as acknowledging the oral credentials of the stories, they are concerned with three things: the general point that can be made from the story - "Judge how a conventional pew-fed religion would flourish in the face of what I am about to relate to you" (LB, 134); the environment of the story in terms of natural phenomena; and an account of the teller of the story. The first of these is the least important here. While there are exceptions - "The Fakir", for instance - Mary Austin's abstract generalizations are usually overblown and redundant. Mary Austin herself denies responsibility for their inclusion in the book, claiming they were written "at the insistence of the publishers", who felt the stories needed "explanatory comment".[13] But the others, the attention to natural environment and to the human source of the story, are important, not only to Mary Austin's stories but to the stories she uses. They are the elements of the frame that make the "explanatory comment" redundant, since they imply everything in establishing the total context of the stories. One of Mary Austin's favorite devices to emphasize the

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[13]Austin, "The Folk Story in America", p. 17.

context provided by natural environment is the inclusion, as in "The Walking Woman" and "The Pocket-Hunter's Story", of a lengthy description of landscape and weather within the frame, at the time of the story's telling, as well as within the story proper, at the time of the incidents it relates. This has the effect of bringing together the incidents of the story, the story itself and Mary Austin's awareness of it, and of resolving any competing strains of form and attitude, by exposing them to the all-powerful natural environment. The attitude to the teller of the story has the same effect, for the desert forms the character of the story tellers just as it forms the incidents of its stories. To take the obvious example, the Walking Woman is not used merely as a story vessel but as a living symbol of adjustment to environment. Her personality overpowers both her own story and the frame around it, because, on the one hand, her character is strongly marked by her experience of the desert and, on the other, because the story she tells is congruent with the total experience of environment.

In this way Mary Austin's frames always point back from the particular stories they enclose to their total context in human character, experience and environment. While the stories told - the record of specific incidents - might crystallize some aspect of this total context, their poten-

tial is wasted if they are reduced to their bare line of incident. Referring to conventional folklore, Leach has noted that "a song or story does not stand alone"[14] but emerges, with many others, from an established matrix of natural, cultural and personal circumstances, and this is even more true of Mary Austin's type of folklore, the diffuse and unresolved body of oral traditions. Mary Austin's frames are essentially the method by which she insists on the relationship of individual stories to the matrix while allowing her to capitalize on the literary advantages of the short story form. Indeed, the term "frame" is something of a misnomer whem it is applied to these stories, since "frame" implies a formal afterthought or decoration, or, in the context of local color folklore, a whimsical trick to suggest oral authenticity. Mary Austin's frames are neither formal nor afterthoughts, since they represent the organic background out of which the stories emerge. The frames stand in the same relationship to the stories as the natural and human environment to the incidents the stories relate and the truths they reveal.

In one sense, all the stories, whether they have individual frames or not, have the effect of being consci-

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[14] Leach, p. 49.

ously set within a larger context, for Lost Borders is one of those collections of short stories in which all the individual stories are forged into a larger unity. Obviously the main unifying agent is the emphasis on the role of the natural environment as denominator of all the stories and of all the themes they pursue. But this sense of all the stories being only random pieces out of a much larger pattern is reinforced by the circumstantial connections not only between the stories in Lost Borders but between them and The Land of Little Rain and The Flock:

> The Walking Woman was at Maverick the time of the Big Snow, and at Tres Pinos when they brought home the body of Morena; and if anybody could have told whether De Borba killed Mariana for spite or defence, it would have been she, only she could not be found when most wanted. She was at Tunawai at the time of the cloudburst . . . (LB, 196).

In Lost Borders Mary Austin uses the Walking Woman as her informant for one story but it is suggested that she has just touched in her wanderings the line of many other stories, just as worthwhile. In fact Mary Austin has already used something of the story of De Borba and Mariana in The Flock (156-157). Both Long Tom Basset and the pocket-hunter appear in The Land of Little Rain. Mary Austin's mention of the pocket-hunter's lucky strikes and his mysterious trips to Europe (LLR, 29-30) suggest another good story, and it seems only by the merest chance of selection that he appears in Lost Borders as the narrator of the

story rather than as the protagonist of one of his own. The stage-driver of "Aqua Dulce", it is casually mentioned, is working for MacKenna at the time of his meeting with Catmaneda; this MacKenna has a story of his own in "The Hoodoo of the Minietta". Sometimes the stories themselves trip upon other stories and Mary Austin is tempted to sidetrack from the main line of narrative. "A Case of Conscience", for instance is the story of the Englishman, Saunders, and his gray-eyed Shoshone squaw, but there is another story behind this one:

> There is a story current and confirmed, I believe, by proper evidence, that a man of one of the emigrant trains that suffered so much, and went so far astray in the helltrap of Death Valley, wandering from his party in search of water, for want of which he was partly crazed, returned to them no more and was accounted lost. But wandering in the witless condition of great thirst, he was found by the Shoshones, and by them carried to their campody in the secret places of the hills. There, though he never rightly knew himself, he showed some skill and excellence of the white man, and for that, and for his loose wit, which was fearful to them, he was kept and reverenced as a Coyote-man and a medicine maker of strange and fitful powers. And at the end of fifteen years his friends found him and took him away. As witness of his sojourning, there is now and then born to the descendants of the campody a Shoshone with gray eyes (LB, 29).

These consistent connections between stories and other stories, between stories and characters, between characters as sources, protagonists and casual participants suggests (as Kipling's recurring 'but that is another story" suggests) that there are far more stories in the Lost Borders country than are given formal status in Mary Austin's book.

The land, through its people, is full of stories below the surface of formality, existing in the formally unstable oral traditions, in casual anecdotes and reminiscences. They wait only for the attention of one who will collect and formalize them.

The most complex and interesting of the formal frame devices of Lost Borders is the one in the fine and strange story "The Woman at the 18-Mile" and it is in this story that Mary Austin brings attention to the problems for the writer working with oral material, to the contradiction between the formal requirements of the short story and the formal instability of the story material. "The Woman at the 18-Mile" is not so much a story in the formal sense as an account of an effort to organize such a story from seemingly intractable material. Her intentions are unexciting, offering only a local colorist extraction of the essence of an interesting locale:

> I had long wished to write a story of Death Valley that should be its final word. It was to be so chosen from the limited sort of incidents that could occur there, so charged with the still ferocity of its moods that I should at length be quit of its obsession, free to concern myself about other affairs. And from the moment of hearing of the finding of Lang's body at Dead Man's spring I knew I had struck upon the trail of that story (LB, 94).

She first hears of the story when a teamster reminisces about his own part in the exhuming of a body from a Death Valley grave, one incident in a complex story that, she is

later to learn, contains a mine," "a murder and a mystery, great sacrifice, Shoshones, dark and incredibly discreet, and the magnetic will of a man making manifest through all these; there were lonely waterholes, deserted camps where coyotes hunted in the streets, fatigues and dreams and voices in the night" (LB, 97). As Mary Austin's narrative progresses the frame, or what appears to be the frame, extends itself in an irregular way to cover her path on the trail of the story.

> Then I heard the story again between Red Rock and Coyote Holes, about moon-set, when the stage laboured up the long gorge, waking to hear the voices of the passengers run on stealthily with the girding of the sand and the rattle of harness-chains, run on and break and eddy around Dead Man's Springs, and back up in turgid pools of comment and speculation, falling in shallows of miners' talk, lost at last in a waste of ledges and contacts and forgotten strikes. Walking and falling, the story shaped itself of the largeness of the night; and then the two men got down at Coyote Holes an hour before dawn, and I knew no more of them, neither face nor name. But what I had heard of the story confirmed it exactly, the story I had so long sought . . . I went about asking for the whole of it, and got sticks and straws. There was a man who had kept a bar in Tio Juan, at the time, and had been the first to notice Whitmark's dealing with the Shoshone who was supposed to have stolen the body after it was dug up. There was a Mexican who had been the last to see Lang alive and might have told somewhat, but death got him before I did (LB, 95-97).

Finally, it appears, she is reaching toward the story itself when she hears of a vague connection between Whitmark and a woman whose husband, one of the "feckless men whom the desert sucks dry and keeps dangling like gourds on a string" (LB, 98), keeps a stage-relay house, the "18-Mile" of the

title. Mary Austin goes to the woman hoping for some last details to complete her knowledge of the story and to enable her to formalize it:

> At the time I learned of her connection with the Whitmark affair, the story still wanted some items of motive and understanding, a knowledge of the man himself, some account of his three month's pasear into the hills beyond Mesquite, which certainly had to do with the affair of the mine, but of which he would never be persuaded to speak . . . .
>
> Consider how still it was. Off to the right the figures of the men under their blankets stretched along the ground. Not a leaf to rustle, not a bough to creak. No grass to whisper in the wind, only stiff, scant shrubs and the sandy hills like shoals at the bottom of a lake of light. I could see the woman's profile thin and fine against the moon and when she put up her hand to drag down the thick, careless coil of her hair, I guessed we were close upon the heart of the story (LB, 99-100).

The "heart of the story", however, differs from the expectations that might have been built up. The woman tells how she fell in love with Whitmark and that she helped him in his mysterious work; but this is all that can be told. In the end there is, effectively, no story at all, for the woman swears Mary Austin to secrecy before she reveals the events that surrounded the death of Lang and the abduction of his body. The frame of Mary Austin's story, shaping itself according to the various ways she came upon the "sticks and straws" of the Whitmark-Lang story, becomes the whole story in itself. Tantalizingly Mary Austin conjectures that Whitmark and the woman "must have had great moments at the heart of that tremendous coil of circumstance" (LB, 102),

and the structure of her story is a re-creation of that tremendous coil, refusing to unravel itself. The material of "The Woman at the 18-Mile" refuses to accomodate itself to the demands of the formal short-story, and remains inviolate in the secrecy of the desert and the fragments of its oral traditions.

With the proximity of its techniques to its environment-saturated content, "The Woman at the 18-Mile" epitomizes much of Lost Borders and raises, almost directly, the question of relationship to the body of theoretical folklore. Can the stories be legitimately described as "folk stories" by any other than the liberal standards of local color's cultural bias or Mary Austin's concept of expression shaped by environment? To answer this question we must explore an area overlapped by three supposedly autonomous "disciplines": formal literature; the oral traditions of the folk literature-folk history matrix; the formal study of folklore. In Chapter I I discussed the relationship to folklore of each of these individually, and used a story from Cable's Strange True Stories of Louisiana as a case in which their interests coincide, and where one leads quite naturally into another. Cable recognizes that the folk-history material gathered by his casual collecting activity can possess "such symmetrical order as to make an artistic whole" and transformed it into formal

literature, becoming, in the process, an agent in the transmission of folklore, a surrogate folk artist. The stories of Lost Borders do not follow exactly this pattern but they are witness to the same relationship of complementary compatibility not only between the work of the collector and the literary artist, but between the artist working in formal and non-formal media.

Theorizing on the relationship between literature and folk literature, B. A. Botkin considers the way in which an individual writer can "lose his self-consciousness in order to merge his individuality with that of the group". The idea of the consciousness of the group is slightly inappropriate in Mary Austin's case, since her concept of the folk and folklore rests on natural environment rather than cultural differentiation (this distinction is particularly important in Lost Borders where the inhabitants of the desert are not seen as a folk group in Botkin's sense if for no other reason than that the desert environment works to keep them apart). But individual consciousness of environment plays the same role as cultural determinant of folklore in Mary Austin's model as group-consciousness in Botkin's, and, if one is substituted for the other, we have a formulation from Botkin of one of the ways in which Mary Austin's fiction is working. Formally, the whole point of "The Woman at the 18-Mile" and the other frame stories is

that Mary Austin does submerge her individuality in the specific conditions and characteristics of her material. Individual creation is subordinated to transcription as Mary Austin refuses to forge a story by imposing a conventional formal structure on the "tremendous coil of circumstance". In the end the subject of Mary Austin's story is not the Whitmark-Lang story but rather Mary Austin's approach to it along paths made tortuous by the configurations of natural environment and human sources. The frame device has the effect not so much of holding the story back for dramatic purposes but of allowing the story to emerge on its own conditions from its surroundings in nature and in human experience.

Another, and more respectable differentiation of formal literature and folk literature, Stith Thompson's distinction in terms of the "formal instability" of folklore,[15] offers the same approach to Mary Austin. The "formal instability of a story is, as I noted in connection with the oral material of The Land of Little Rain, a direct function of its inextricable relationship to its circumstantial environment. It is just this formal instabil-

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[15] Stith Thompson, "Story-Writers and Story-Tellers" in Clarke, pp. 40-47.

ity that Mary Austin attempts to preserve and transfer to her own stories by subordinating potentially autonomous material to the length and complexity of the surrounding frames.

The paradox here, of course, is that by stressing her submergence in the context of her material and by insisting on its formal instability, by allowing the raw material to dominate the artistic impulse to organize and refine, Mary Austin is also emphasizing the importance of her role as transcriber and organizer. Without her there would be no story to tell. The frame device, for instance, brings as much attention to its manipulator as it does to the central story it supposedly surrounds, and this emphasis is proportoinal to the length and complexity of the frame. "The Woman at the 18-Mile", in which the frame takes over the whole story, is in this way a great technical tour de force and, whatever else it might do, it brings direct attention to Mary Austin's own formal achievement.

The emphasis through de-emphasis paradox is not only characteristic of the theory and practise of the direct transference of folklore to literature but of the folklore-literature relationship concealed in MacEdward Leach's collection model. In collecting the matrix of folklore rather than merely transcribing individual pieces, the collector must use his own organizing faculties in order to give his

collection form and meaning. Techniques that are basically subjective and impressionistic are to be used for objective understanding, and the distinction between scientific and literary collection becomes blurred. The inchoate oral material that forms such a large part of the matrix of folklore becomes, quite legitimately, literary material at the same time as it forms the subject-matter of a transcription of cultural phenomena. This is essentially the same pattern that emerges from Mary Austin's relationship to her folklore material in Lost Borders. At all points her book touches on some conception, or combination of conceptions, of folklore and its transformation into literature: the humanistic naturism of Mary Austin's own conceptions; the loose cultural formulations of the local colorists and the Folk-Say group; the formal characteristics of the oral tradition; the idea of collection put forward by MacEdward Leach. The varigated nature of folklore theory itself, makes impossible an unequivocal statement of Lost Borders' relationship to folklore, but it is fair to say that the book is peculiarly dependent on its various possible validities as a collection of "folk stories". Certainly the real worth of Lost Borders as fiction is closely related to its asserted validity as non-fiction, and its value as formal literature to its proximity to the non-formal material from which it is fashioned.

CHAPTER V

FOLK STORY INTO SHORT STORY: ONE SMOKE STORIES

Lost Borders is a literary response to an experience of folk life that is both complex and diffuse, and as its rendition into literature touches on many varied aspects of the folklore-literature relationship. The stories of One Smoke Stories represent not only a different response but a different kind of response, a different reaction to folklore as a source of formal literature. Introducing One Smoke Stories, Mary Austin explains her title in terms of the techniques of oral narration and the shapes into which these records of folk experience fall. Although she uses the archetypal setting of an Indian campfire she explains that this is a paradigm of the manner of story-telling in "Indian country":

> Now and again, holding the crisp cylinder between thumb and fingertip, unlighted, one begins, always gravely, and holding on for the space of one smoke, tales, each one as deft, as finished in itself as a ceremonial cigarette. Or, if not a tale, then a clean round out of the speaker's experience, such as in our kind of society might turn up a sonnet or an etching (OSS, xii).

The comparison with a sonnet or an etching makes it clear that Mary Austin is concerned here with the formal character of folklore, in a way that she was not in Lost Borders, where she did everything possible to preserve the non-formal characteristics of her material. Folklore is used in One

Smoke Stories as a source of formal technique, which she attempts to carry over directly from oral to printed media. The process is analogous to the collection of folklore through formal transcription rather than the imaginative "matrix collection" that provided the analogy for Lost Borders.

With Lost Borders the character of Mary Austin's material and the manner of its integration into literature precluded the presence of any coherent context of theory for the stories. For One Smoke Stories there is such a context in Mary Austin's own commentary in the Introduction and in her essay "The Folk Story in America", which, contemporary with One Smoke Stories, acts as a theoretical companion piece. "The Folk Story in America" is an interesting, idiosyncratic piece of work that does much to clarify Mary Austin's objectives and illuminate the methods of her later stories, and to establish their relationship to folklore. In fixing the relationship between folk stories and the formal short story she uses not models of culture but actual techniques of story-telling as principles of differentiation. She begins the essay with an account of her dissatisfaction with the short stories of the eighteen-nineties, and with her own first attempts at the form:

> I had slipped into the limitation of Washington Irving, when he said "I consider the story merely a frame on which I stretch my materials. It is the play of thought and sentiment and language, the weaving of characters,

> lightly yet expressively delineated, the familiar and faithful delineation of scenes of common life . . .". But the popular story of that period was not in the least like that. What the editors of the day wanted was "reading matter" . . . of which the salient ingredient was what went by the name of local color. The more highly-colored the better, and you might take as much space as you wanted for elucidating that color and spread it on as thickly as you liked.
>
> But my own notion was that color was something you ought to find already on the reader's hands. What I wanted was a background completely existent, such as you find taken for granted in fairy tales, or in that single example of the short short story in perfection, the story of the Prophet and the Woman Taken in Adultery. You weren't, in that story, held up on the question of what constitutes adultery, or the common behaviour of prophets. The people were simply there with a given pattern of reactions and the story happened. But the mode of the nineties was that authors went to no end of trouble to account for and describe, until the whole atmosphere was so completely drenched with local color that you couldn't get into the story anyway but by getting yourself thoroughly sloshed about in it.
>
> There was an excuse for that, perhaps, in the circumstance that the fashion of life in any particular locality in the United States varied to a degree that induced variations in behaviour, which had to be fully explained before the track of the story could be securely plotted amid them. But what I wanted was a certain solidity and alikeness of the underpinning of all stories, which you could take in a measure for granted, the way you could the universality of motive and behaviour in a story like Cinderella. You didn't, for instance, have to explain the Proud Sisters, not the existence of Fairy Godmothers, and the ease with which pumpkins turned into coaches. But the world of the short story in my young day was so completely at variance with itself that you had to do an immense amount of constructing and explaining to make it come out right with the story incident.[1]

While the logic of this passage is slightly elusive, particularly in defining the distinction between the story as

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[1] "The Folk Story in America", pp. 10-11.

Irving's "frame on which I stretch my materials" and the story as an outline to be generously filled in with local color, it does depict the conventions of the short story to which Mary Austin reacts in One Smoke Stories and the discrepancy between her ideal and the common practise. Mary Austin goes on to talk about the facility of sheep dogs to appreciate narrative when it is cut down to its most basic elements, about her experiences telling stories to schoolchildren in Los Angeles, and about the various types and conventions of story-telling among the American Indians. She reaches the heart of the matter in her explication of "folk style":

> What I had finally to discover was that the economy of style which characterized Indian story-telling was no mere trick of words, but the essential item of the teller's grip on the quality of life out of which the story issued. If one were to tell Indian tales, or sheepherders', or cowboys' or bear hunters' - any sort of distinctively folk stories - they must be the sort of tales such people told each other with complete adjustments of the mode of life and the environment involved. The environment had absolutely to disappear into the story, with nothing left over. The story itself would have to be completely resolved, every item so satisfyingly disposed of that no question remained to be asked nor explanation offered.[2]

What Mary Austin is reaching for here and offering as an antidote to the local color story is a conception of "pure story", story purged of everything extraneous - frame-

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[2] Ibid., 15.

material, explanation, scene-setting, verbal style, authoresque comment - and reduced to the bare line of incident and behaviour, action and reaction. The theory about dogs and narrative, for instance, reduces the ideal of the story to a purity verging on the non-existent, yet the absolute concision necessary for the story-teller in this case is a model for stories told to human audiences.[3]

The idea of the pure story continues a trend of thought about stories and story-telling that began very early in Mary Austin's career. The theory of "The Folk Story in America" and its practise in One Smoke Stories have their roots in her observations on the subject in The Flock:

> There is a writer of agreeable animal stories who takes pains modestly to disclaim any participation in the event, but in fact he need hardly be at such trouble. It is not the man to whom such adventures occur as by right who makes a pretty tale of them, and I am oftenest convinced of the truth of an incident in an ancient piece of writing rather misdoubted these wordy days, because it is so much in the manner of the people to whom these things happen in their way of life. It is also an excellent model for an animal story

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[3]This is an ingenious, and legitimate, variation on the idea of saturation with environment as the defining factor of the folk and their lore. In Lost Borders, the saturation of the stories with their natural and cultural environment provided the rationale for Mary Austin's expansive preservation of the formal instability in relation to that environment. Now her stories' "complete adjustments of the mode of life and the environment involved" accounts for the opposite, for the precise stability of their form.

> and is told in three sentences:
> "Then went Samson down to Timnah . . . and behold a young lion roared against him . . . and he rent him as he would have rent a kid . . . but he told not his father and mother what he had done."
>
> "Jean Baptiste," say I, "where did you get the splendid lynx skin in your cayaca?"
>
> "Eh, it was below Olancha about moonrise that he sprung on the fattest of my lambs. I gave him a crack with my staff, and the dogs did the rest" (Fl, 175-176).

And again:

> Pete Miller is the official bear-killer of the Ranchos Tejon, though his accounts of the killings are as short as the items in a doomsday book.
>
> "Tell me a bear story, Pete," say I, sitting idly in the patio about the time of budding vines. Says Pete -
>
> "Up here about three miles from the house there was a deaf old Indian saw a bear going into a hollow tree; he heaved a chunk of fire in after him and shot him with a six-shooter when he came out" (Fl, 236).

Although "The Folk Story in America" does not make clear whether or not Mary Austin regards the "folk stories" of Lost Borders in the One Smoke category, it would seem, from an objective point of view, that in rejecting Irving's ideal of the story as a stretching-frame she is also rejecting her own early stories, for they are great examples of stories being used in just this way. To some extent, they all stress the "great coil" rather than the "clean round", the complexity of surrounding circumstances and motivation rather than the lines of the story itself. The Lost Borders stories all rely on, and comment on, material other than the story line - incidental characters; the power of environment; subsidiary stories; natural description - and

in preserving the formal instability Mary Austin feels quite free to expand on the stories in the light of her knowledge of the story's background:

> It was, went on the Pocket-Hunter, after he had told me all that I have set down about the four men who made the story, about nine of the morning when he came to Dry Creek on the way to Jawbone Canon, and the day was beginning to curl up and smoke along the edges with the heat, rocking with the motion of it, and water of mirage rolling like quick-silver in the hollows. What the Pocket-Hunter said exactly was that it was a morning in May, but it comes to the same thing (LB, 140-141).

In the One Smoke type of story, this sort of gratuitous expansion and comment is almost entirely cut out. Where it remains it does so at the level of the minimal aside:

> The matrons of Cuesta la Plata, to whom this was privately communicated, put their hands over their mouths with astonishment; by which sign you may know that the particular community was founded on and had absorbed a Tewa pueblo (OSS, 164).

The language of the One Smoke stories is spare and unadorned so that there are none of the rather splendid biblical evocations of Lost Borders. Neither are there any of the capitalized generalizations and spirit-mongerings that spoil some of the Lost Borders stories. Now the aim is concision, sharpness and the elimination of the author as interpreter of background and modifier of story.

One Smoke Stories is more of a retrospective collection than Lost Borders, all the stories having been published elsewhere (one of them, "The Last Antelope", appeared previously in Lost Borders itself) and it does not

have as much internal unity. Some of the stories do not follow at all the pattern suggested by the Introduction or by "The Folk Story in America". "The Conversion of Ah Lew Sing", Mary Austin's first published story, belongs in the very worst local color tradition, its central character being "the lankest, obliquest-eyed celestial that ever combined an expression of childlike innocence with the appearance of having fallen into a state of permanent disrepair" (OSS, 96). "Papago Kid" is an undistinguished piece of "literary" horse-opera. "Speaking of Bears" is a multiple-frame story outdoing even "The Woman at the 18-Mile" for baffling formal complexity: "Any good bear story is bound to have as many layers as a quamash root" (OSS, 110). Even the stories that do fulfil the One Smoke ideal have a wide range of subject material, though most are drawn from an Indian context or from the life of Spanish New Mexico. Some are realistic, dealing with relations between Indians and whites or Mexicans and Anglos; some are humorous anecdotes; some, like "A'wa Tseighe Comes Home from the War", are hardly stories at all in the formal sense but stretches of linear narrative. Also in One Smoke Stories Mary Austin tackles what is apparently the material of conventional motif-index folklore, which she does not do in Lost Borders. She includes Indian tales of such mythological beings as Glooscap, the magic-maker of the Micmacs, Coyote of

of the desert tribes and the primal twins of the Paiute mythology, Hinumo and Pamaquash. But these had been popularised enough as the material of formal literature, and there is no reason to believe that the transcription analogy used earlier in this chapter is anything more than an analogy. "The Devil in Texas" provides evidence that as conventional folklore Mary Austin's is pretty spurious, for the story consists of an entertaining but very improbable grafting of some lily-white Texas tall stories - "The first thing he encountered was a Texas sandstorm by which the skin was all taken off his face and he was so blown about that his clothes were all turned inside out while still wearing on him" (OSS, 59) - onto a Spanish picaro cycle. Mary Austin is clearly choosing (and this case, constructing) her stories for their quality as stories rather than for their integrity as transcriptions of field work. In One Smoke Stories the factor that binds the different stories together and that indicates their folk character is the denominating pure story technique by which the story is neither a stretching frame for other materials nor a framed centrepiece but the object of first and last concern.

An immediately instructive example of pure story is "The Governor's Eye", which can be usefully compared with one of Bret Harte's best efforts, "The Right Eye of the

Commander". Both stories are based on the legend of the malevolent glass eye sold by a Yankee trader to one of the last Spanish governors of Monterey and used to replace an eye lost to an Indian arrow. Mary Austin probably obtained the story from Harte rather than from a direct oral source, but in the transmutation the method of presentation is completely altered. Harte's story is decoratively elaborate, narrated in the Irvingesque guise of a gentlemanly antiquarian:

> It is further alleged that under the malign infuence of Peleg and aquardiente the commander lost somewhat of his decorum, and behaved in a manner unseemly for one of his position, reciting high-flown Spanish poetry, and even piping in a thin high voice diverse madrigals of an amorous complexion, chiefly in regard to a "little one" who was his, the commander's "soul". These allegations perhaps unworthy of a serious chronicler, should be received with great caution, and are introduced here as simple hearsay.[5]

Harte sees the legend from above, as would a California Knickerbocker, treating it as a 'popular antiquity' and as material for the comment and analogy of the private library. Particularly it is the material for a sentimental lament over cultural change. Much space is given to a description of the governor's regime "in that bland, indolent autumn of Spanish rule, soon to be followed by the wintry storms of Mexican independence and the reviving spring of

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[5]Harte, "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" and Other Stories (New York, 1961), p. 20.

Mexican conquest".[6] It is clear that Harte is using the governor's acquisition of the eye as a symbol of the change wrought on the natural, indolent, paternalistic Spanish rule by the forces of trade, technology and the other local color bugbears. The story aspect of the legend is subordinated to the narrator's sentimental generalizations and conceits, and "The Right Eye of the Commander" becomes a vignette in the Washington Irving tradition with the story as merely a stretching-frame for other material.

In Mary Austin's version the events of the story line assume an exclusive importance. Mary Austin reverts to the direct method of exposition, presenting the story as a transcribed oral narrative rather than as a framed 'popular antiquity' and so casts off the need for any explanatory material or generalization mediating between the story and its audience. Her story begins:

> This is a Telling that I had of my grandfather, who remembered it from the times of Governor Hermenegildo Salvatierra of the Presidio of Monterey. Now it happened that Governor Hermenegildo had one of his eyes shot out by an Indian arrow and went eyeless. But after Pegleg Scudder, of the schooner General Court, had visited the port of Monterey in 1797, the Governor was miraculously furnished with another eye, which was an amazement to the Indians as well as to many of the citizens (CSS, 30).

This is the only way in which Mary Austin is at all con-

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[6] Ibid., p. 17.

cerned with the background of the story and the actual acquisition of the eye, the source of Harte's treatment of the story as symbol and analogy. The bare facts of date, place, character and event, conveyed in eighty-six words, replace Harte's languid seventeen hundred of scene-setting comment and explanation. Her concern is not so much with the acquisition of the eye as with its loss, and in this area she expands the facts of Harte's account, while still cutting down on the circumstantial meandering. The "undisciplined Indian" is given a name, a simple motivation and a clear relationship to the other story elements. These are cut out from Harte's colorful fabric of subsidiary characters to form four constituent factors : the governor; the Indians under his jurisdiction; Tonio, the thief; and the mission priests who provide an ironic frame of reference for the "miraculous" accounts of the evil eye. The story consists in its entirety of an account of the line of action as it touches these factors and forms relationships between them.

Harte's concern in "The Right Eye of the Commander" was with background, and it is background, though not necessarily of this type, that Mary Austin sets out to eliminate in <u>One Smoke Stories</u> as proof of her fidelity to the folk style. Yet all the various concepts that link the

earlier Lost Borders stories with folklore - formal instability, matrix collection, consciousness of environment, "the individuality of the group" - all depend on establishing and substantifying a vital relationship between an individual story and its background. The purpose of the frame devices, frame effects and interconnections of the stories in Lost Borders was precisely this, to establish a sense of background and the relationship of a story to its natural environment, to its protagonists and to its hearer. With the elimination of background in One Smoke Stories there is corresponding alteration in the function of the vestigial frame techniques of the stories. Basically, the frames are withered so that they almost disappear. They do disappear in the majority of stories, the narrator being an impartial third person with no personal involvement in the events of the story or their consequences. However, a good minority of the stories like "The Governor's Eye", have an implied frame in that an oral context is established by a simple verbal formula - "In my father's time there were two men of our camp . . . " (OSS, 213); "Hear a Telling of the song the Coyote gave to Cinoave . . . " (OSS, 34) - or by a brief direct acknowledgement - "'Of a woman, even his own woman child,' said Running Thunder, the White River Ute . . ." (OSS, 2); "The story of the lamb band . . . was told to me by Juan Ruiz, the mail carrier" (OSS, 200).

even for the two stories told entirely in dialect, the author's frames go no farther than this into the story. The stories have their intended effect of seeming to be taken straight out of an oral context and transferred directly into print without any intrusion by their transcriber. One slightly more sophisticated use of frames, but one which does not alter their essential unimportance, is the inclusion of a frame ostensibly supplied by the purveyor of the story himself, once the oral context has been established. In these introductory frames the speakers might explain why they come to be telling the story, as in "Hotseen Hatsanai Recants", or to point to a humorous analogy, as in "The Canoe that Partridge Made":

> 'My friends', said Charlie the Micmac, invoking the inknowing thought with cigarette smoke 'you have heard that Mister the President makes aplan at Washington by which everything among the tribes of men will go smoothly ever after. Which proves that even the White People are very much like the First People who afterward became the animals because of their foolishness. And for this plan, I think it will be like the canoe that the Partridge made . . . (OSS, 177).

Even the longest of tthe One Smoke frames, the one surrouning "White Wisdom", does nothing more than expand slightly on the circumstances of narration and, once over, the speaker sticks firmly to his main narrative:

> My Friends: Touching the matter of the horses of my brother's widow which have strayed in your reservation, all is made beautiful between us. Therefore, going, I leave a Telling with you as a gift in return for your gift of kindness while I have been in your hogans. For I see that you Navahos, though you be called horse-

> thieves and cattle-stealers, are sound men and honorable; and as far as the grass which my brother's horses have eaten, I hold it but witness to the goodness of your country, for in no other could so few horses have eaten so much . . . But seeing you are troubled, coveting the Wisdom of the Whites for your children, so that you pray Washington to build schools for them with the money your elders saved for breed cattle, I leave this Telling with you as a seed which may grow to a tree of protection (OSS, 181-182).

In spite of a few individual achievements One Smoke Stories is not collectively as satisfying as Lost Borders. The overall impression is that it is merely diverting, whereas Lost Borders has all the makings of greatness and some of its realizations. I think this difference between the two collections can be explained in terms of their different approaches to folklore. The basic difference, from which all others spring, is that in One Smoke Stories folklore is seen not as a response to experience but as a technique, that of the pure story, through which the response is communicated. In Lost Borders Mary Austin deals with the human response to a broad and fully rounded folk experience, a unique experience since it is bred of, and saturated with, a particular environment. In One Smoke Stories she stresses not the unique and specific but formal, technical factors that are intended to reduce specific circumstances to the basic elements by which experience of them can be communicated from teller to hearer, from writer to reader or from an oral to a formal culture, in spite of differences of environment between them. The eclectic nature of the

story theory's deductive material - sheepdogs, Indians, white schoolchildren, the Bible, bearhunters - breaks down all distinction of environment and appears to set up the form itself as an arbiter of folkness. In short, the story becomes a folklore without a folk.

Ultimately, the validity of this concept depends on how well the techniques of the pure story, the "clean round" of experience purged of explanation, comment, and other intrusions, can adapt themselves to a variety of material and environment; and Mary Austin's own attempts to do this with them are not completely successful. Most of the stories are concerned with Indians, and here she is content to give the "clean round" of the story or to give it a very loose mock-transcription frame. But the Indian stories do not really need anything more than this in the way of explanation and mediation, just because the Indian setting is so totally alien to the environment of the consumer of formal literature. The same is true, to a lesser extent but for the same reason, of the Mexican stories. A whole treatise would be needed to bridge the gap between the social, moral and psychological assumptions of these stories and those of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant reader. Mary Austin's theory takes the sensible way out and presents the reader with the pure story in a cultural vacuum, forcing him to take the story on its own inherent and formal merits. This

recalls her comment on Kipling, that he "made his tales so completely strange and far away that comparison failed, and one could . . .'just enjoy them'", and a theme she pursued in The Flock, in terms of personal relations:

> The outlier accepts you not because you are on the same footing, but because you are so essentially differentiated there is no use talking about it (Fl, 265).

This treatment is effective in the Indian stories. It is, as Mary Austin promises in "The Folk Story in America", something of a relief to encounter the life of a totally alien and bewildering culture reduced to the formal universals of the pure story. It even works in the stories in which Mary Austin has a Message about Life to convey. "The Man who walked with the Trues" and "The Medicine of Bow Returning" are simply and directly narrated but set in Amerind mythology and very obviously and self-consciously devoted to the theme that Life is a Pattern Designed by Higher Beings:

> He saw how the Trues wove with men, as it were, the pattern of a blanket. Of the different sorts of men they wove different patterns, red and yellow and blue, as they had dipped them. But what the pattern would be no man could say until it was finished. According as the Trues had need of men, they took them, and the happiest were those who understood no more than that they were being used. But whether they understood or not, the Trues kept weaving (OBS, 53-54).

In spite of the dubious validity of the proposition and the pomposity of its presentation the stories are quite acceptable, since they do nothing more than fulfil our (perhaps

unfortunate) preconceptions about the delightfully picturesque simplicity of Amerind philosophy. The reader can take the story, straight, as a formal expression, and suspend the judgements of validity he would make on material closer to his own experience and culture.

"Lone Tree" and "Pan and the Pot Hunter" are also stories with messages thinly disguised in their clean rounds of experience. They are pieces of emblematic ecology, urging the reader to Respect Nature, but this time their protagonists are white. By using characters named Hogan and Greenlow rather than Running Thunder and Waku-Takin Mary Austin cannot help but bring these stories closer to the cultural environment of her readers, and it is because of this that they cannot claim the almost automatic validity of the Indian stories. The natural reaction of the reader is to want to know more about the surrounding circumstances of the story and the characters than the "clean round" allows them to know. In "Lone Tree" a prospector destroys out of spite the tree at a waterhole, and in so doing, he accidentally blocks up the spring. This is later to cost him his life, and the story ends

> Across the sand-choked basin lay the withered stock of the Lone Tree but it was three years before anybody came that way to find the bones of Hogan mixed with its stark branches (033.29).

The story is as simple as that yet it is a disingenuous simplicity. In matching the story with the starkness of the

the subject-matter Mary Austin seems to be using simplicity for archly dramatic purposes, and the reader, realizing that Mary Austin is not Hemingway, is annoyed by both the gratuitous sparseness of the story and the transparency of its purpose. In "Pan and the Pot Hunter" Mary Austin goes to the other extreme and pads out the line (but still not the background) of a story about how "the Spirits of the Wild" punish an indiscriminate hunter, with references to the "People-Who-Understand" and "the great God Pan". These stories reveal the limitation of the one smoke method, that it is only good for communicating experience within a totally alien culture, and when it is applied to material that is, even slightly, within the cultural grasp of the reader it must resort either to an affectation of simplicity or to whimsy. "The Fakir" in Lost Borders is a story that is open to both these charges but manages to withstand them just because Mary Austin is careful to delineate and explain the story in terms of its various environments, natural, moral, psychological, the "background" that is rejected in One Smoke Stories. That this rejection should be of the very things that established the folklore relation of the early stories but that the rejection should be made in the name of the formal integrity of folklore indicates the expansive looseness of the folklore concept and the distance Mary Austin's awareness of folklore's literary poten-

tial has travelled from her first realization of the usefulness of oral material in establishing the factual patterns of pioneer California.

CONCLUSION

In The Land of Little Rain and The Flock Mary Austin writes from 'saturation' in a distinct natural environment of a people, a folk, cut off from standardized society and forming their cultural expressions out of a direct relationship to their environment. In Lost Borders she gives these expressions a fictional form, and, though the principle by which she attempts to assimilate oral material into fiction has greatly altered, she attempts the same thing in the characteristic "one smoke" stories. My attempt has been to map the various paths by which all these originate from, and circle around, the theoretical centre I have been calling 'folklore'. The insistence of Mary Austin's work on relationship to natural and cultural matrices; the particular use of frame techniques; the attention to the formal techniques of oral story-telling; the particular adaptations and rejections of techniques from Harte, Kipling, and the naturists; all these point back to roots in folklore, although none, by themselves, make the connection explicit. Perhaps the only conclusion to be drawn from my effort to connect Mary Austin's work with folklore is that no definite conclusions are possible. I have been able to make no coherent use of the general theories of folklore's relation to literature. The convention-

al academic approach is too restrictive, and the local color and Folk-Say approaches too liberal, to provide any useful guides for identification and interpretation. Even the two ideas I found most useful in approaching a concrete rather than a theoretical relation of Mary Austin's work to folklore, Leach's idea of matrix collection and Thompson's idea of the formal instability of folklore, do not, in themselves indicate either the creation or the transcription of authentic folklore, since their presence can easily be fabricated in the interests of purely formal literature. Yet I am still convinced that my treatment of Mary Austin's work compromises neither folklore nor the work itself, and that folklore - made felt as a cumulative impression built up from the work itself rather than from a single unequivocal definition - provides a valid context for that part of Mary Austin's work with which I have been concerned.

If I am justified in thinking that, in spite of formal objections, folklore is of great use in a discussion of Mary Austin's work, the factor that must make itself felt most strongly is the precariousness of the folklore concept's relation to Mary Austin's material and to its own theoretical and literary contexts. Mary Austin's success in assimilating folklore into her work depends on her establishing and maintaining a set of delicate balances, between the objectivity of the reporter, the collector and the

scientist, and the subjective response of the literary interpreter, and between the essential instability of her material and the stability demanded by its formulation in literature. Furthermore, the maintenance of these precarious balances seems to depend on a unique and probably unquantifiable combination of circumstance, intention and ability. One of the most important of these circumstances is one that I have not treated at any length in this thesis just because it is largely unquantifiable. This is the certain naturalistic "closeness" that seems to be demanded between author and material, a closeness that, just because it is so firmly grounded in inchoate circumstantial reality, does not allow itself to be formulated into easy theoretical patterns. It can surely be no coincidence that One Smoke Stories, the only one of the works discussed which is formulated on such a pattern and in which Mary Austin makes a conscious acknowledgement to folklore, does not arise directly from a folk environment but from twenty-five years of its author living away from the folk, as a professional writer and pundit in New York and the artists' colonies of New Mexico. And, though the techniques of oral storytelling might be useful to the writer of formal short stories, this particular use of folklore seems a sad distance from The Land of Little Rain and Lost Borders with their reflection of Mary Austin's direct participation in the

unique cultural processes of a living folk culture.

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