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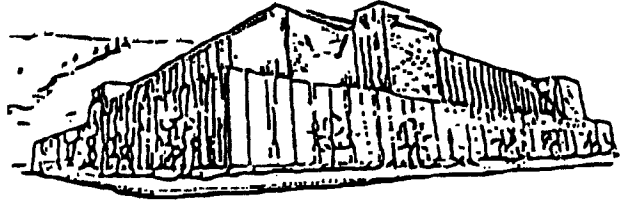
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WOMAN SUFFRAGE AND THE RE-WRITING OF THE DESERT WEST:

EDNA BRUSH PERKINS'S THE WHITE HEART OF MOJAVE

AND

MARY HUNTER AUSTIN'S LOST BORDERS AND LAND OF LITTLE RAIN

by

Cori L. Brewster

B.A. The University of Oregon, 1994

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements


for the degree of

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1997

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Chairperson



Dean, Graduate School

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Woman Suffrage and the Re-writing of the Desert West: Edna Brush Perkins's The White Heart of Mojave and Mary Hunter Austin's Lost Borders and Land of Little Rain (40 pp.)

Director: Brady Harrison 

In The Land Before Her, Annette Kolodny claims that the "need to put the stamp of some domestic past on the new west" (238) shaped much of women's writing about the American frontier in the mid- to late 1800s. Kolodny, like many recent scholars of literature of the western United States, argues that women overcame their initial reluctance to moving west by imagining the landscape "as a potential sanctuary for an idealized domesticity" and as a garden in which they could cultivate both family and community (xii).

I'm interested here in the ways that women's interpretation of the western landscape changed dramatically during the early 1900s as a result of the American Woman Suffrage Movement. Focusing specifically on the work of Edna Brush Perkins and Mary Hunter Austin, two women writers who were deeply involved in the struggle to win the vote and promote the rights of women, I will argue that rather than envisioning the western landscape as an idealized domestic space, these two women nature writers of the early twentieth century imaginatively constructed the the west as a site of new freedoms, as a place to break down and break away from oppressive relationships and the restrictive definitions of womanhood left over from the Victorian age. For Perkins and Austin, the desert landscapes of the southwest provided a surface onto which they could project and work through popular arguments concerning the rights of women and the perceived relationship between women and the natural world. Austin's descriptions of the deserts of the southwest in Lost Borders and Land of Little Rain reflect her desire to assign women greater power in marital and sexual matters. Perkins's descriptions of the desert west reveal her proposed revisions to women's role in intimate relationships, as well as her attempts to map out a larger field of possibilities for imagining women's abilities and appropriate roles in U.S. society.

In The Land Before Her, Annette Kolodny claims that the "need to put the stamp of some domestic past on the new west" (238) shaped much of women's writing about the American frontier in the mid- to late 1800s. Kolodny, like many recent scholars of literature of the western United States, argues that women overcame their initial reluctance to moving west by imagining the landscape "as a potential sanctuary for an idealized domesticity" and as a garden in which they could cultivate both family and community (xii). Other critics, such as June Underwood, have built on Kolodny's analyses, claiming that women "felt a moral imperative, a god-given duty, to transmit religious, social, and humane values to a lawless land" (Underwood 6). The emphasis of much of this scholarly work on the contribution of women writers to the U.S. west has been to demonstrate that the woman's role was to "civilize"-- to ensure the re-creation and stability of the social values, beliefs, and institutions of the eastern United States in the new and "savage" frontier.

Although evidence of this trend can be found in much of the writing from this period, it is by no means representative of all women's experience of the U.S. west. I'm interested here in the ways that women's interpretation of the western landscape changed dramatically during the

early 1900s as a result of the American Woman Suffrage Movement. Focusing specifically on the work of Edna Brush Perkins and Mary Hunter Austin, two women writers who were deeply involved in the struggle to win the vote and promote the rights of women, I will argue that rather than envisioning the western landscape as an idealized domestic space, these two women nature writers of the early twentieth century imaginatively constructed the west as a site of new freedoms, as a place to break down and break away from oppressive relationships and the restrictive definitions of womanhood left over from the Victorian age. For Perkins and Austin, the desert landscapes of the southwest provided a surface onto which they could project and work through popular arguments concerning the rights of women and the perceived relationship between women and the natural world. The work of Perkins and Austin reflects a radical change in the way women writers encountered the west; the landscapes presented in Perkins's The White Heart of Mojave and Austin's Land of Little Rain and Lost Borders are both a challenge to earlier interpretations of the western frontier and a locus for the negotiation of many of the issues brought to the surface in the early 1900s with United States women's campaign to win the vote.

I. Suffrage and social reform

Kolodny argues that women's interpretations of the west as an idealized domestic space in the early to mid-1800s

resulted largely from the domestic "spheres in which their culture had allowed them imaginative play" (12). At a time when women were being "progressively delimited to home and family," she argues, their experiences of the west could not take the shape of male fantasies of "erotic discovery and possession" of the land, nor could they give rise to "radically unprecedented shapes or patterns":

wherever fantasies come from-- subconscious mental processes or biologically based urges-- they always wear cultural clothing. Thus, men sought sexual and filial gratifications from the land, while women sought there the gratifications of home and family relations. Each in their own way . . . enacted sanctioned cultural scripts (12).

By the end of the 19th century, however, as women campaigned for their right to participate more actively in the public world of work, higher education, and politics, they began increasingly to challenge the limited spheres through which their culture had allowed them to define themselves and their experiences.

By 1900, the American Woman Suffrage Movement had succeeded in organizing women across the country in the campaign to win the vote and, in doing this, had generated a number of nation-wide debates centering on the abilities and appropriate roles of women in U.S. society. Throughout the 1800s and into the early 1900s when the 19th Amendment was finally passed into law, suffragists battled "against the hallowed concept that 'woman's place' was at home, her role

still limited to that of housewife and mother" (Flexner 239). They fought not only for women's right to vote, but for greater access to jobs and education, improved working conditions for women and children, property rights, less restrictive dress, access to birth control, and greater equality in marital and sexual relationships (Flexner 238).

Both Austin and Perkins were deeply involved in the suffrage movement during the first two decades of the twentieth century, writing as well as speaking publicly on women's right to participate in the public world of work and politics. Perkins was an "active leader in the campaign for woman suffrage during 1912-20, making numerous speeches and doing much organization work" for both national and Ohio state campaigns (NCAB 449). In 1913 she was elected chairman of her ward of the Woman's Suffrage Party, and between 1916 and 1918 served as chairman of the Woman's Suffrage Party of greater Cleveland. According to an acquaintance, U.S. circuit court Judge Florence E. Allen, Perkins's "eloquent and commanding voice was raised at all times in every place on behalf of freedom, justice and international understanding" (NCAB 449).

Although Austin did not become as actively involved in the suffrage movement until several years after the publication of Land of Little Rain and Lost Borders, she had been exposed to and impressed by suffragists' arguments throughout her childhood. In I-Mary, biographer Augusta Fink writes that Austin's early "exposure to the temperance crusade, and its sister movement, the struggle for the right

of women to vote, laid the groundwork for [her] ardent espousal of the feminist revolt" (28). As she grew into adulthood, Austin's frustration with the restrictions imposed on her education and her anger at the abuses she witnessed other women in her community endure contributed both to her belief that women's relegation to the domestic sphere was an outrageous "misuse of women's gifts" (Fink 79) and to her developing commitment to suffragist ideals. During the first years of her own marriage, when she was in the process of writing Land of Little Rain, Austin met and became friends with Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose ground-breaking work on women's social and economic oppression, Women and Economics, she strongly identified with. Through Gilman and others, Austin became increasingly active in the suffrage movement, traveling to New York and Europe after the publication of Land of Little Rain (1903) and Lost Borders (1909) to join activist friends Emma Goldman, Emmeline Pankhurst, Margaret Sanger, and Henrietta Rodman in the struggle to expand the rights and opportunities of American women beyond the confinements of the domestic sphere.

II. Re-constructing nature and the desert west

The three texts I am concerned with here are based primarily on Perkins's and Austin's personal experiences, and are presented, for the most part, as autobiographical accounts. Perkins's The White Heart of Mojave (1922), based on two trips Perkins and fellow suffragist Charlotte Hannahs

Jordan made into the deserts of Eastern California in the late 1910s, recounts the mystical journey of two women seeking freedom and spiritual renewal in a female-identified outdoors. The text follows the women's journey on foot through the sparsely populated Mojave Desert, alternating between reverent descriptions of the "all-powerful" desert landscape and the women's reflections on their position as 'ladies' traveling in a land "traditionally viewed as inimical to women" (Norwood and Monk 1).

Austin's Land of Little Rain and Lost Borders, also written about the deserts of Eastern California, are presented as "mere record[ings]" (LLR 12) of a land and people Austin felt had not been accurately represented by earlier writers. In Land of Little Rain, a series of detailed, descriptive essays about the land and wildlife of the Mojave desert, Austin expresses her reverence for the natural world while maintaining the more removed tone of a naturalist or scientific observer of the land. In Lost Borders, on the other hand, Austin approaches the desert from a number of different and more engaged perspectives. She intersperses her own descriptive sketches of the land with essays and short stories written from the point of view of both the desert and the individuals who live there -- miners, priests, individual Native American men and women, and white women occupants of desert towns, to name a few. As one critic describes it, Austin's project in Lost Borders is to convey "the intensity of connection between natural landscape and human life" (Pryse xix) by retelling the stories of men

and women who are "marked" or changed by their relationship to the land.

Although Perkins's and Austin's texts are in many ways quite different, they share similar concerns and are alike in several important ways. I am interested in arguing here that both writers use their interpretations of nature in general and of the desert west in particular to explore and propose solutions to specific feminist and suffragist issues and concerns. First, I want to show that rather than envisioning the west as a place in which to cultivate family and community, Perkins and Austin instead imaginatively construct it as a space in which women can escape from the restrictions of the domestic sphere. Second, I will demonstrate that Perkins and Austin employ the desert west as a symbolic terrain on which they project and work through feminist and suffragist arguments.

Implicit in my argument is the assumption that nature is a socially-constructed concept. As Karen J. Warren stresses in "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism," this claim does not require anyone to deny that there are . . . actual trees, rivers, and plants. It simply implies that *how* . . . nature is conceived is a matter of historical and social reality. These conceptions vary cross-culturally and by historical time period (Warren 25).

In addition, other ecofeminist theorists have argued, definitions of nature have been "re-conceived" at different periods of time in the service of different social,

political, and economic interests.¹ For example, as Catherine Roach points out in "Loving Your Mother," nature has been depicted as a mother both by environmentalists urging people to treat the natural environment "with respect," and by non-environmentalists encouraging the view that the planet is capable of providing an unlimited supply of resources for human consumption (Roach 53 - 56).

Both Perkins and Austin call attention to and raise questions about the manner in which women and nature have been similarly conceptualized in Western literature and thought. And both writers attempt, albeit in different ways, to revise dominant perceptions of women, nature, and the American west to better reflect their political views. In stating this, however, I don't wish to suggest that Perkins and Austin are equally concerned with the domination of women and the domination of the natural environment. Rather, both are primarily concerned with fighting for women's rights. Though both express their reverence for the land, they use their descriptions of the natural landscape mainly as a medium through which to discuss questions about the oppression and exploitation of women.

Both Perkins and Austin begin by defining nature in opposition to the civilization they perceive as oppressive and restrictive to women. In Lost Borders and Land of Little Rain, Austin depicts the deserts of the southwest as a place women can escape from what she considered to be the

limitations of patriarchal civilization and city life. In both Land of Little Rain and Lost Borders, she describes city life as oppressive and restrictive. In her essay "The Little Town of the Grape Vines," she writes, "We breed in an environment of asphalt pavements a body of people whose creeds are chiefly restrictions against other people's way of life" (LLR 279 - 80). In her essay "The Land," she again criticizes the codes and conventions of the city, claiming:

I am convinced that most men make law for the comfortable feel of it, defining them to themselves; they shoulder along like blindworms, rearing against restrictions, turning thereward for security as climbing plants to the warmth of a nearing wall. They pinch themselves with regulations to make sure of being sentient, and organize within organizations (LB 156).

These "restrictions" and "regulations," though they take their toll on people of both sexes, are most damaging to intelligent women, Austin argues. In "The Woman at Eighteen Mile" she writes that in the city, women who possess "great power and possibilities" are "mostly throw[n] away" (LB 206).

In Austin's deserts, however, the laws and social conventions of the city are exposed as meaningless. In Land of Little Rain, she writes that beyond the borders of the city, "not the law, but the land sets the limit" (LLR 3). The land is described as a place of shifting relationships and constant change which has only "the least concern for man" (LLR 68): the desert in particular makes "the poor world-

fret of no account. Of no account you who lie out there watching" (LLR 21). In Lost Borders, Austin's narrator claims to prefer this aspect of the desert because it means that "there is no convention, and behavior is of little account except as it gets you your desire, [and] almost anything might happen; does happen, in fact" (LB 156).

Austin then capitalizes on this conventionless quality of the desert, peopling many of her essays and stories with women who go to the desert to break free from the limiting roles afforded to women in the city. The Walking Woman, for example, is a woman who "walked off all sense of society-made values" (LB 261) in the desert and then proved herself by working side by side with a man, "not fiddling or fumbling" as women in the city are perceived to work (LB 259). "The Walking Woman" ends with Austin's narrator finally accepting the truth of the Walking Woman's philosophy, which stands in direct opposition to city-identified codes governing female sexuality and marriage. The Walking Woman grasped "the naked thing, not dressed and tricked out" as social conventions demand male/female relationships to be:

love, man love, taken as it came, not picked over and rejected if it carried no obligation of permanency; and a child; any way you get it, a child is good to have, say nature and the Walking Woman; to have it and not to wait upon a proper concurrence of so many decorations that the event may not come at all (LB 261 - 62).

Rather than adhering to what Austin describes in another

story as the "traditions of niceness and denial and abnegation which men demand of the women they expect to marry" (LB 207), the Walking Woman asserts her ability to enter into sexual relationships with men on more straightforward terms.

In "The Basket Maker," Austin again focuses her narrative on a woman who comes to realize her abilities in the desert. Seyavi, a Paiute woman, tells the narrator, "A man must have a woman, but a woman who has a child will do very well" (LLR 163). Unlike the city, where Austin herself had dealt with trying to survive as an abandoned wife and single mother at a time when there were few job opportunities open to women, Austin's desert provides a space in which women come to realize "the sufficiency of mother wit, and how much more easily one can do without a man than might at first be supposed" (LLR 164).

Edna Brush Perkins's The White Heart of Mojave (1922) similarly depicts the limitations and oppression of cities in opposition to the greater freedoms and possibilities for women in the deserts of the southwest. As suffragists of her time-- including Perkins herself-- were campaigning for women's right to play a wider variety of roles in the public realm, Perkins imagined the outdoors as the only place that escape from the domestic sphere and the limiting roles available to women in the city would be wholly possible.

In "A Wilderness of One's Own," Jane Marcus argues that British women's "frustration and disappointment at the city's

refusal to accept women in the centers of patriarchal power" in the years following the winning of the vote was the main inspiration for a flood of feminist novels which appeared in the 1920s, depicting powerful women retreating to and triumphing in the wilderness (140). In the opening pages of Perkins's White Heart of Mojave, published two years after universal suffrage was achieved in the United States, the speaker makes clear that this frustration is the main motivation behind her proposed "adventure with the outdoors." Perkins writes that though it was

our habit to tell large and assorted audiences that freedom consists in casting a ballot at regular intervals and taking your rightful place in a great democracy . . . our chiefest desire was to escape from every manifestation of democracy in the solitariness of some wild and lonely place far from city halls, smokestacks, national organizations, and streets of little houses all alike (12).

Their trip to the Mojave, she makes clear, is not simply a vacation, but "a personal assertion and a protest against the struggle and worry, the bluff and banality and everlasting tail-chasing" that characterized women's struggle to access power (i.e., the right to vote and represent their own interests in government) via the sanctioned channels of a male-governed society (12).

Through a series of examples of male responses to their proposed journey, Perkins paints a picture of men's

relationship to women in towns and cities as being oppressive, restrictive, and, even in the best cases, patronizing. She notes that the women's initial "inquiries about directions [to Mojave] met with discouragement on every side. It seemed to be unheard of for two women to attempt such a thing" (20). Later, at the Automobile Club in Los Angeles, Charlotte and Edna are advised to "stick to the main routes" because the travel agents have "no faith in [their] skill as drivers, nor belief in [their] purpose" (21). After interviewing "everybody, hotel-managers, ranchers, druggists and garage-men" (29), Charlotte and Edna finally find one man who speaks encouragingly about their proposed trip to the Mojave, but even he expresses his doubts about their abilities when another man scolds, "Surely, you would not send the ladies that way!" (32).

It is only in Perkins's "outdoors" that restrictive definitions of womanhood and unequal relationships between men and women begin to break down. Although Charlotte and Edna also have their doubts about their abilities to survive the trip into the "vast and terrible wilderness," they make preparations to go, slipping past their discouraging friends by saying "nothing more about it and start[ing] down the coast with every appearance of having a ladylike programme" (22). As they get closer to the desert, they not only begin to feel more confident in their own abilities, but also meet less opposition to their plans. In Silver Valley, for example, they meet a desert man who refuses to let them fall back on the familiar arguments that women are weaker or less

competent than men. Shady Myrick persuades them, "You are well and strong. . . . You can take care of yourselves as well as anybody" (38). Charlotte and Edna, admitting the truth of Myrick's reasoning, note that it was "refreshing to meet a man who looked into your feminine eyes and said: 'You can do it.' It made us feel that we had to do it" (38).

Perkins draws out the opposition between cities and the less restrictive outdoors to a much greater degree than does Austin, however, making the two women's escape from an oppressive, male-identified civilization the central theme of her text. Sherrill E. Grace has argued that contemporary women nature writers "seem doubly drawn to the natural world, expressing through that affinity their resentment and fear of a perceived patriarchal civilization, symbolized so well by the city, that conquers the landscape 'by imposing an alien and abstract pattern upon it'" (Grace 195). This is certainly true of Perkins's text: published nearly fifty years before the texts Grace refers to, a central theme of The White Heart of Mojave is the women's rejection of roads and houses in favor of the natural world.

In setting up the terms of the text and the women's trip to the desert, Perkins immediately establishes an opposition between walls and houses, which she identifies as symbols of male-centered civilization, and the outdoors, which she identifies as more closely associated with women. She characterizes the walls as violent and oppressive forces which go to great lengths to impress their importance upon their inhabitants: The walls "assert themselves and

domineer. They insist on the unique importance of the contents of walls and would have you believe that the spaces above them, the slow processions of the seasons . . . are accessories, pleasant or unpleasant, of walls" (9). She then cites as examples the walls of lawyers' and dentists' offices-- two professions which women continued to be discouraged from entering in the 1920s-- which work hard to prevent women's happiness and maintain control:

While you wait for [the lawyer or dentist's] ministrations, you look out of his big window. . . . Nothing is changed around you, but you are happy. You only know that the sun did it, and those far-off hills. When the man you are waiting for comes in you congratulate him on his fine view. Then the jealous walls assert themselves again; they want you to forget as soon as possible (10).

Walls, and the patriarchal civilization they symbolize, we are to understand, purposely obscure the outdoors from women.

Perkins then characterizes nature -- which she claims men mistakenly view, like women, as an "accessory to civilization" (10) -- as an indomitable and romantic force capable of fighting back against male-identified attempts at domestication and domination of the natural environment. According to Kay Schaffer, one of the results of the association of women with nature in Western discourse is the popularly held "assumption that the masculine (man, Empire, Civilization) has an unquestioned God-given right to subdue or cultivate the feminine (woman, Earth, Nature) and

appropriate the feminine to masculine domination" (Schaffer 82). In an attempt to combat this assumption and argue that men are incapable of overpowering either nature or women, Perkins embraces and exploits the perceived connection between women and the natural world. In doing this, she advances what Roach describes as the nature feminist argument. Nature feminists "agree that women are closer to nature but disagree that this association must be disempowering" (Roach 57). They instead "promote this association as enriching, liberating, and as according both women and nature high value" (57).

Perkins's tactic of emphasizing the positive and empowering aspects of women's perceived closeness to nature and essential difference from men also reflects the persuasive strategies employed by suffragists in the latter end of the U.S. campaign. Unable to win the vote by demonstrating "the ways men and women were identical," suffragists of the early 1900s turned instead to cultural feminist arguments that women's "natural" differences rendered them somehow superior to men (Kraditor 262). Like these suffragists, who combated arguments that women were too pure to participate in the corrupt world of politics by arguing that women's "natural" purity would enable them to "clean up" politics and perform the much-needed task of "social housekeeping" (Flexner 306), Perkins capitalizes on what she sees as women's close relationship with nature in an attempt to demonstrate women's ability to triumph over the oppressive systems of patriarchal civilization.

In arguing men's inability to dominate nature, Perkins returns repeatedly to images which depict the desert overpowering and overshadowing men. At several points in her narrative Perkins stops to provide brief histories of men's attempted development of the landscape, concluding them all with nature's triumph over civilization. In describing the agricultural development of the Imperial Valley, she emphasizes nature's fighting back against men's attempt to turn desert soil into farm land. The Imperial Valley has become one of the richest farming districts of California. But the drama is still going on. A few years ago the untamed Colorado . . . turned wild and flooded into the Imperial Valley. . . . Its yellow waves now break near the irrigated area; it drowned the salt works. . . . in a little while the valley will again be dry and white and glistening (25).

At another point in her trek across the desert, she stops to explore an abandoned mining camp where she observes that the kilns "merged back into their background, become again a part of Nature herself" (196). Perkins heralds this erasing of men's mark on the desert as proof that nature renders male exploits insignificant, claiming, "Everywhere men have left their footprints on the Mojave, sojourners always, never inhabitants. The seven kilns were the most impressive testimony of brief possession that we saw. . . . Mojave was already breaking down the edges preparing to brush it away" (196 - 97).

III. Land as text

Though a great deal of dialogue about social change is made explicit on the surface level of The White Heart of Mojave, Land of Little Rain, and Lost Borders, I would argue that the bulk of Perkins's and Austin's revisionary work happens at a much deeper level of the texts. Perkins and Austin use their descriptions of the natural landscape to explore a number of the social and political arguments of their time, employing the desert west as a blank page on which to map out their solutions to perceived social problems.

Eric Heyne has argued that the U.S. west has "always existed primarily as a text written and read by Americans" which has "had not to be inhabited but invented" (3). He argues that the U.S. west, like the concept of nature, has been reinvented through narratives at different periods of time according to the dominant culture's political and economic interests in the region (4). The most common of these versions of the west, Jay Gurian has argued, are those which attempt to justify development and exploitation of natural resources: western American tradition is largely based on the belief that "though God 'gave the world to men in common,' He did not mean that it should remain so. God intended that 'the industrious and rational' should transform nature into commodity" (Gurian 3). Other prevalent -- and often intersecting -- interpretations of the western landscape, according to Gurian, justify westward expansion by

constructing the west as a wild, savage and lawless land.

Perkins and Austin both begin their texts by calling into question and attempting to clear their "page" of certain of these earlier representations of nature and the American west. Austin, for example, begins several of her sketches of the desert by attempting to erase the markers which men have used to map its surface. She writes in "The Land" that landmarks and guide-posts are rarely reliable in the desert and that "the best part of it remains locked, inviolate, or at best known only to some far-straying Indian, shepherd, or pocket hunter, whose account of it does not get into the reports of the Geologic Survey" (LB 159). She then expresses her belief that male writers have not adequately represented the desert west, asking in Land of Little Rain, "is it not perhaps to satisfy expectations that one falls into the tragic key in writing of desertness? The more you wish of it, the more you get, and in the meantime lose much of its pleasantness" (LLR 20). In "Jimville," Austin again accuses earlier writers of misrepresentation, claiming that in desert towns "there is a certain indifference, blankness, emptiness if you will, of all vaporings . . . no bread-envy, no brother-fervor. Western writers have not sensed it yet; they smack the savor of lawlessness too much upon their tongues" (LLR 221).

Although Charlotte and Edna emphasize in the first chapters of The White Heart of Mojave that they are drawn to the desert precisely because it is a "great empty space on the map" (13) which there seems to be "no very definite

information" about (21), Perkins nonetheless devotes a great deal of her text to trying to clear the landscape of the few representations of it which do exist. She begins by claiming that despite her reluctance to shatter the "dear myth[s] of the movies" and "Wild West story-tellers," she finds them to be inaccurate (41). She then criticizes the "typical attitudes" of Old Johnnie and the other miners who describe the desert as "an enemy to be out-generaled" and as a wild woman to be subdued (138 - 39), emphasizing at several points that though the men think they know the desert, Mojave "will get [them] in the end" (109).

Both women are highly critical of representations of the land which seek to justify expansion and development, frequently objecting to accounts which define the desert in terms of its economic value. In The White Heart of Mojave, Edna and Charlotte politely dismiss men's claims that nobody "ever went to Death Valley unless they expected to get something out of it" (73) and disagree with the idea that "Death Valley was a desperate place" simply because "there had never been any mining there to amount to anything" (79). Perkins also attempts to refute claims that the desert can be tamed for human use by suggesting that nature is somehow able to overcome and overpower men. In one instance, she describes the desert's reclaiming of the mining town of Ryolite: "The desert is licking the wound with her sandy tongue until not even a scar will remain. Sooner or later she heals all the little scratches men make on her surface" (88).

Though Austin is considerably more conservative in this

regard than Perkins, she too rejects the definition of nature solely in terms of its value to humans and often objects to narratives which construct the desert as a place to be "bitted and broken" for human use (LLR 3). In her essay, "My Neighbor's Field," she argues that a wild field is happier as a field than it will be when her neighbor sells it "to make town lots . . . and his fortune in one day" (LLR 139). She often describes the plants of the desert as resisting development by depicting the "retaking of old ground by the wild plants" (LLR 131): the wild clematis, though it is cut back further every year, "slips down season by season to within a hundred yards of the village street" (LLR 132). Austin differs from Perkins, however, in that she believes that there is a natural system-- what she calls the "economy of nature"-- by which humans and nature are meant to exist symbiotically. Though she argues, as several critics have noted, that modern land use practices "violat[e] nature's economy" (Pryse xxiii) and that "the land will only be lived in on its own terms" (Harwell 7), she nonetheless believes that nature is intended to help support and provide for human needs. She writes in "Other Water Borders" that it is the "proper destiny of every considerable stream in the west to become an irrigating ditch" (LLR 225) and notes that plants which grow near "man haunts . . . are chiefly of the sorts that are useful to man, as if they made their services an excuse for their intrusion" (LLR 232).

Once Perkins and Austin have succeeded in modifying or clearing off the interpretations of nature and the desert

which run counter to their beliefs, they are able to move forward with their own descriptions of the land which better reflect their political views. Unlike earlier generations of women writers who sought to reinscribe the codes and conventions of the "domestic" past on the "unmapped" western frontier (Kolodny 238), Perkins and Austin use their nature writings to explore issues and ideas central to the women's rights and suffrage movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their descriptions of the land in The White Heart of Mojave, Land of Little Rain, and Lost Borders reflect their challenges to women's confinement in and definition through the domestic sphere as well as their proposed revisions to social codes and institutions based on imbalances of power between men and women.

In I-Mary, Fink writes that though Austin's novels reflect her resentment of women's position in family and society in turn-of-the-century America, her nature writings are only "occasionally tinged with a stroke of her feministic feeling" (80). Albert Harwell similarly argues that Austin's "feminist concerns were secondary to her concerns for the land" and played only a minor role in shaping her descriptions of the desert in Land of Little Rain and Lost Borders (185). While Austin's emphasis on environmental themes can hardly be ignored, I believe that her "feministic feelings" contribute a great deal more to her experience of and writing about the land than these critics are willing to admit. Although for a number of reasons her feminist themes

are not made as explicit in her nature writings as they are in her fiction and her political texts, these themes are central to Austin's representation of the desert and the plants and animals which inhabit it. In both Land of Little Rain and Lost Borders, Austin's descriptions of the desert clearly reflect suffragist and feminist ideals, namely her proposed revisions to women's marital and familial responsibilities.

Austin's position as a long-term resident of the land she wrote about limited the extent to which she felt she could take liberties and explicitly imbue her interpretations of the land with political meanings. Unlike Perkins, who visited the desert for a matter of months and wrote mainly for an audience with no first-hand experience of the Mojave, Austin was held accountable for the accuracy of her writing by her many friends and acquaintances who lived in and shared her knowledge of the region. In "The Land," Austin describes an instance when she slightly embellished a story which she wrote for "a magazine of the sort that gets taken at camps and miners' boarding-houses" (LB 158): after the story was published, not only were "several men . . . at great pains to explain to [her] where [her] version varied from the accepted one of the hills," but she admitted feeling a "spasm of conscience" when one of her friends accepted the embellished story as truth (LB 158).

Perhaps as a way to satisfy her peers' demands for accuracy while continuing to employ the desert as a terrain on which to project suffragist and feminist ideals, Austin

uses a number of devices to escape being accused of inaccuracy. In her preface to Land of Little Rain, for example, she justifies her inaccurate accounts by attributing them to her desire to protect the land:

if you do not find [the desert] all as I write, think me not less dependable nor yourself less clever. There is a sort of pretense allowed in matters of the heart, as one should say by way of illustration, 'I know a man who . . . ,' and so give up his dearest experience without betrayal. And I am in no mind to direct you to delectable places toward which you will hold yourself less tenderly than I (LLR vii - ix).

Similarly, in the first essay in Land of Little Rain, she again makes a move to release herself from accountability by claiming to have drunk many times from the "fabled Hassaympa, of whose waters, if any drink, they can no more see fact as naked fact, but all radiant with the color of romance" (LLR 20). In making these concessions for herself, Austin opens up more room to interpret the desert in terms of her political objectives, while still keeping "faith with the land" and avoiding the criticism of her community (LLR ix).

These minor allowances made, Austin nevertheless largely submerges the blatant politics of her fiction in less obviously political descriptions of the weather, land, animals, and plants of the desert. Rather than make explicit reference to feminist issues in her nature writing, she instead puts forth her belief that humans should emulate

nature and then interprets the organization of the natural world in a manner reflecting her political ideals. In many of the sketches in Land of Little Rain, for example, Austin argues that humans should imitate the behaviors of plants and animals and pattern their communities according to the organization of the natural world. After describing a desert plant's perseverance, she adds, "One hopes the land may breed like qualities in her human offspring" (LLR 7). In "Shoshone Land," she praises the Shoshone people for living "like their trees, with great spaces between" them (LLR 88). She writes approvingly that the "manner of the country makes the usage of life" in Shoshone Land and "breeds in the men, as in the plants, a certain well-roundedness and sufficiency to its own ends" (LLR 88 - 90). Later, in "Jimville," Austin applauds a desert town for having organized itself according to "the language of the hills" (LLR 120). She argues that Jimville's adoption of the "desert perspective" represents the pinnacle of cultural evolution: "Here you have the repose of the perfectly accepted instinct which includes passion and death in its perquisites. I suppose that the end of all our hammering and yawping will be something like the point of view of Jimville" (LLR 120 - 22).

Austin does not draw explicit connections between the resolutions of the problems she sees in human society and the elements of the land she describes, however. Instead, she suggests the connections more subtly, taking up many of the same issues she deals with in her fiction and introducing her idealized solutions to these problems through descriptions of

the land and animals she proposes humans imitate. While in many of her short stories Austin addresses men's neglect or abandonment of their families, for example, in her descriptions of the land, she depicts the animals and natural forces cooperating in the parenting and nurturing of children. Unlike her fictional character Mr. Wills, who disappears into the desert and leaves his wife to raise and support their four children on her own, the wind in the desert is described as a responsible father, who both "harries and helps" the plants reproduce: the wind "rolls up dunes about the stocky stems, encompassing and protective, and above the dunes . . . the blossoming twigs flourish and bear fruit" (LLR 8). Later in the same essay, Austin describes the cooperative parenting of a pair of meadowlarks who work together to protect their incubating eggs:

I never caught them sitting except near night, but at midday they stood, or drooped above [the nest], half fainting with pitifully parted bills, between their treasure and the sun. Sometimes both of them together with wings spread and half lifted continued a spot of shade in a temperature that constrained me at last . . . to spare them a bit of canvas for permanent shelter (LLR 15).

By specifically focusing her nature sketches on subjects such as the cooperative parenting of animals in the wild, Austin indirectly illustrates for her readers alternatives to the social problems she addresses in her other works.²

The feminist themes which crop up most often in Austin's short stories and political tracts reflect arguments circulated by the temperance and woman suffrage movements during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. These arguments focused mainly on women's need for increased control in sex and marriage, emphasizing the injustice of holding women responsible for the "horrid appetites of husbands" who subjected their wives to the physical and psychological burdens of constant pregnancy (EH 103). In Earth Horizon, Austin describes the all too common situation of a woman being brutally beaten by her husband for "presenting him with a child every year or two" (EH 222). She writes angrily that while women may have "all possible intelligent reason for not desiring another child," with no control over sex or fertility, they find "themselves without possible resort from having another and another" (EH 222).

Like many reformers of her time, Austin believed that releasing women from "the endless chain of bearing" (EH 222) -- by providing them access to birth control as well as access to equal power in marriage and sexual matters -- was essential to improving women's quality of life and paving their way into the public sphere. Although, again, she does not refer to this issue explicitly in her nature writing, she focuses a great deal of attention on plants and animals' reproductive habits, using her descriptions of the land in Lost Borders and Land of Little Rain to illustrate the benefits associated with women's control over their own fertility. In "My Neighbor's Field," for example, Austin

stops to emphasize the important role played by the late frosts in preventing the wild almond from "multiply[ing] greatly" (LLR 134). In "Water Borders," she again focuses on this issue, remarking on the privilege of the fir tree who "can afford to take fifty years to its first fruiting" (LLR 220). Unlike the women Austin describes in her fiction whose bodies and souls bear the scars of too frequent pregnancy (LB 183; 248), the fir tree, able to limit the frequency of its "fruiting," keeps "all that half a century, a virginal grace of outline" (LLR 220). Austin's description of the fir also reflects the argument that women would be better mothers if they were allowed to limit themselves to a small number of wanted pregnancies. Unlike the women Austin describes in Earth Horizon who have little time or energy left to care for their multiple, often unwanted children, "having once flowered," the fir tree is free "to spend itself secretly on the inner finishings of its burnished shapely cones" (LLR 220).

Finally, in the desert environments Austin describes in Land of Little Rain and Lost Borders, females are not blamed or resented by their husbands for becoming pregnant. In "The Scavengers," Austin depicts the connection between limited, wanted pregnancies and the improved quality of relationships between husbands and wives. She writes that "it seems unlikely from the small number of young [buzzards] noted at any time that every female incubates each year" (LLR 52). When the females do incubate, however, their children are cherished by both parents, who, "full of crass and simple

pride, make their indescribable chucklings of gobbling, gluttonous delight" (LLR 52). By directing her attention again and again to examples of plants and animals limiting their births, Austin indirectly illustrates for her readers an alternative to women's subjection to constant pregnancy and subsequent confinement in the domestic world.

Perkins's descriptions of the desert, published nearly twenty years after Austin's, reveal most notably her deep concern with the questions about women's abilities and appropriate roles which were being debated in U.S. society during the 1910s and 20s. Frequently using the desert as a metaphor for women, Perkins interprets the desert in a manner reflecting her desire to break down restrictive definitions of what women "are" and her desire to create for herself and her readers a larger field of possibilities for imagining and understanding women. In describing the desert landscape, Perkins depicts women's ability to take on formerly unavailable and unheard of qualities, throws into question the traditional, limiting representations of women in Western literature and thought, and proposes alternatives to what she considers to be the oppressiveness of heterosexual relationships and marriage.

Perkins employs a number of tactics to address these concerns in her text, relying most often on her personification of the desert as a woman to illustrate the many possible roles and characteristics she believes women are capable of taking on. For example, while Edna and

Charlotte discuss throughout the text their resentment at being dealt with as "ladies" whose role it is to be "receptive" to men (76), Mojave is personified instead as a woman who "asserts [herself] tremendously" and who is "utterly indifferent whether or not eyes and hearts can endure it" (126 - 27).

Perkins places much emphasis on the idea that the desert's identity cannot be determined or assigned by men, depicting Mojave's ability to change at will and assume an infinite number of identities. The desert is a place of "shifting sands" where it is "hard to tell what are the real colors and shapes of things" (44): the wind is "forever at work upon [the sand], blowing it into dunes, changing their shapes, piling them up and tearing them down" (80), while the desert itself "changes its colors as though they were garments, and . . . changes the relations of things to each other" (44). At the beginning of the text, Perkins describes the difficulty of discovering who or what the desert is, writing that "Mojave is not easily to be known as we would know her" (72). By the end of the text, she erases all possibility of simply understanding the desert or fixing its identity by claiming, "You can look day after day at the deep, hot basins of the desert without ever knowing them. . . you must stay all the hours of a long day to find out what she really is, and then you will not know" (175 - 76).

The desert's ability to change and escape from behind the limiting definitions men assign to her is most developed near the end of the text, however, when Perkins gives Mojave

a voice through which she can speak back to those who have tried to tell her who she "is". Mojave, emphasizing again her ability to change identities like clothing, tries on and casts off a number of the roles which have been used to categorize women in Western literature and thought. She describes herself with images suggestive of a virgin, a witch, a nun, a bride, and then a treacherous and seductive woman who "would steal behind and grip . . . by the throat" any lover who dared to come within reach (177):

Come down to me! . . . I am all in white like a young girl with a turquoise breastpin. You don't believe that? I am a witch, I can be anything. My wardrobe is full of bright dresses. I will put them on for you one by one.

. . . I look like a nun, but am not. Here is my yellow gown. You do not like it? See, I have all degrees of red, fire red and crimson and pink, the color of bride roses (176 - 77).

In doing this, Perkins throws into question the range and accuracy of traditional modes of representing women and opens up the possibility for new and more complex ways of understanding and portraying women. Mojave concludes her speech by asserting that she cannot be forced to occupy any one role-- that she is instead capable of taking on an infinite number of new identities. She claims that her finest gown is "made of every color" (177) and that her dress maker, Beauty, "experiments with many materials; she makes new combinations forever" (178).

Similarly, Perkins uses her descriptions of individual features of the natural landscape to construct the desert as a place where seemingly contradictory characteristics can combine and create new meanings. As I noted earlier, two of the major arguments which divided suffrage groups across the country in the early 1900s had to do with whether it was appropriate for women to use militant tactics to further their campaign and whether suffragists should emphasize women's equality to men or instead focus on their "natural" differences in order to assert women's right to participate in government. Perhaps in response to these arguments, which, again, arose from disagreements concerning women's abilities and appropriate roles, Perkins describes the desert both with peaceful, domestic images and with militant images of violence and war. The clouds over Mojave both "scou[r] the world incredibly clean" (175) and come on "like an army of giants in bright armor," with the "sun gleaming on their million spears" (110 - 11). Death Valley is described alternately with images suggestive of a living room and a battle field: the "rounded hills [are] folded over each other and dimpled like upholstered sofas" (204), the valleys are "hung with misty curtains" (99), and the sagebrush covers the ground like "blue carpet" (159). At the same time, the valley floor is peopled by "marching sands" (80) and "the wind scream[s] around the rocks" like the "war-whoop" of "Indians galloping on the war-path" (203).

Perkins argues that these conflicting characteristics "merge" in the desert, creating new meaning and qualities not

previously imagined possible (100). She claims:

We were justified in the pilgrimage, for only
by going thus to the White Heart [of the desert]
. . . could we have known what a miracle it was.
The words 'terror' and 'beauty' which we had
spoken during the first look down into the valley
and had thought we understood, had real content
now. We knew that they belonged together and that
one covered another and changed its meaning (218).

By creating a place in which a number of seemingly opposing qualities can combine to create new or fuller meaning, Perkins again invites her readers to imagine a much broader range of roles and identities for women. It is possible, she suggests, for women to exhibit both traditionally feminine traits and traditionally masculine ones, to perform a combination of roles in both the public and the private world.

It should be noted that Perkins's suggestion that women are capable of possessing both masculine and feminine traits seems to contradict her earlier insistence that women are closer to nature than and essentially different from men. Whereas earlier in her text, she appeared to support the cultural feminist argument that women possess certain traits which are fundamentally different from and superior to those of men, here she seems to question the polarization of male and female traits and to advance the view that there are "multiple possibilities of gender identity" (Roach 58).

Finally, Perkins's descriptions of and interactions with

the desert in The White Heart of Mojave reflect her negotiation of her era's changing perceptions of female sexuality and marriage and reveal her most radical departure from the interpretations of the American west produced by the earlier generations of women in Kolodny's study. Historian Christina Simmons has argued that by "the 1910s young middle-class women's foothold in higher education, the labor force, and feminist and reform politics and institutions gave them an increasingly critical perspective on the old sexual order" (Simmons 159). During the first two decades of the twentieth century, women across the country began challenging "the conventional practices of heterosexual marriage and family life that repressed and distorted women's identity" (Schwarz, Peiss, and Simmons 119). At the same time, more radical women such as Emma Goldman and Charlotte Perkins Gilman outlined the connections between women's economic dependence on men and the imbalance of power in heterosexual relationships, "term[ing] the marriage-based family a shackle that bound women to men in a property relationship" (D'Emilio and Freedman 230). Perkins's work reflects her concern with these issues, particularly her belief that heterosexuality and marriage are oppressive institutions which confine women both physically and psychologically, rendering them "prisoners shut in by the walls" of themselves (Perkins 126).

In keeping with her identification of walls and houses as symbols of the patriarchal civilization she wishes to escape, Perkins uses bedrooms -- which she describes as dungeons -- to represent the restrictiveness of marriage and

intimate male/female relationships. In the opening chapters of the text, Charlotte and Edna grow gradually more and more reluctant to sleep indoors until finally bedrooms especially are described as unbearable. Although at Silver Lake, one of the first stops on their trip, they feel at home in a shack which "faced the open desert, the threshold only three inches above the sand" (49), after two days of traveling on foot across Death Valley they cannot "bear even for a night to have a roof between [them] and the blue deeps of the star-filled sky" (105). By the final days of their trip, their fear of being shut in is so strong that they refuse to sleep indoors even in the middle of a snow storm. Perkins writes, "After supper we had to reckon with the dungeon that was the bedroom. . . . we viewed it with a certain awful apprehension. We had a devil's choice between that and the frigid outdoors" (201). Though the women decide at first to brave the bedroom, they become overwhelmed by fear and an extreme feeling of suffocation which they associate with men:

When the candle was blown out fear crouched in the blackness. All the tales we had ever read of prisoners in damp cellars assailed us-- horrors, tortures, black holes. The terrors of these man-made fears in this shut-in, man-made place were far worse than the wild outdoors. . . . Unbearable then was the walled darkness. We gathered up the bed and went outside (201 - 202).

It is only in the outdoors that the women are released from their feelings of imprisonment. When they move their beds

outside, Perkins exclaims, "The clean outdoors! Let it snow, let it hail, let the water run down the mountain and seep through the bed, let the wind tear at the ponchos! It was nothing compared to being shut up in a dark place" (202).

In place of the heterosexual relationships she considers to be suffocating and oppressive, Perkins constructs the female-identified outdoors as a lover who makes men seem "an unreality" and who offers women complete release from the worries associated with the "man-made" world. Using particularly suggestive sexual imagery, Perkins describes the women's journey as a pilgrimage to the "climax of the feel of the outdoors" (71). She emphasizes that this climax -- the "supreme expression" of female power and happiness -- cannot be reached through any male-identified means: "no matter if we could get there in an automobile . . . not thus would we enter the White Heart [of Mojave], not with the throbbing of an engine, not dependent on gasoline, not limited in time, not thwarted by roads" (71). Instead, the women go on foot into the desert, "advancing through progressive suggestion toward some kind of a climax" (64) which, when reached, "releases [them] very unexpectedly from all manner of anxieties" (140). The climax at the White Heart of the Mojave reveals to them the insignificance of the male-identified culture they believe to be oppressive, making a ranch below seem "more ephemeral and unimportant than any of man's efforts to tame the desert" (126). Through the "point of view born of the desert," the ranch and the patriarchal civilization it represents become "an unreality, a dream, and

the dwellers on it are shadows in a dream" (126 - 27).

In addition to Mojave, Perkins describes a number of other objects in the natural world as the women's lovers, using Edna and Charlotte's interactions with them to model more equitable and respectful relationships. When the women sleep outside at Camp-in-the-Cedars, for example, she writes, "The wind rose and fell softly through the pines and cedars, like the breathing of the great white mountain beneath whose side we slept" (185 - 86). She differentiates between the women's attraction to the mountain and the disrespectful, selfish desires of others: "It is not the height of a mountain nor its difficulty which makes it desirable" to lovers of mountains, "but something in the mountain's own self" (171). She argues that the "tourist keen for adventure," the "boy scout outfit," and the "mountaineer who carves the record of his conquests on his pipe-bowl or his walking stick" do not truly love mountains, and cites as evidence their need to "desecrate" and "disfigure" the summits with their initials (171 - 72).

Perkins then describes the difference between violent and destructive relationships with the mountain and the more caring and respectful relationships of those who "truly love" it. When Edna and Charlotte climb to the top of Mt. Baldy, she writes, "The exhilaration of walking thus in the clear air high above the spread-out world is always a boundless joy. . . . Like a victorious lover you walk the heights of your conquest; everything to the great circle of the horizon is yours; by right of patience and love you possess it"

(190). Although, admittedly, her reversion to the language of conquest and possession is questionable, Perkins modifies the women's "conquest" to a certain extent, emphasizing their respect and love of the mountain for its own sake rather than alluding to a desire to rape or exploit it for personal gain. It is important to note also that this "conquest" is only temporary and entails no alteration or "disfiguring" of the land. This suggests that instead of envisioning women's ability to assume a dominant or exploitative role in relationships, Perkins sought to model through Edna and Charlotte's interaction with the mountain a more empowered role for women in which they are able to actively participate and express themselves in intimate and equal relationships.

Conclusion

I have argued here that Perkins's White Heart of the Mojave and Austin's Lost Borders and Land of Little Rain represent a radical change in the way women imagined and wrote about the U.S. west. Deeply concerned with issues raised by the suffrage and women's rights movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, both women employ the desert west as a surface on which to project and explore changing ideas about the rights and appropriate roles of women in family and society.

In making this argument, however, I have skirted certain issues which warrant further consideration. Because my focus has been on illustrating the ways in which Perkins's and

Austin's descriptions of the land reflect suffragist and feminist concerns, I have not spent a great deal of time discussing the problems that these writers' texts and approaches to the land imply. Despite Perkins's and Austin's emphasis on rethinking and revising certain exploitative modes of representing women and nature, both writers rely heavily on a number of other equally problematic ways of characterizing the land and people they encounter.

Though Perkins and Austin spend much time attempting to clear the desert of certain narratives of westward expansion and development, for example, they offer little criticism of -- and often blatantly recreate -- related racist narratives which have been used to justify westward expansion and appropriation of the land. Because Perkins's and Austin's concern is with the land, they criticize and attempt to clear off representations of the desert which justify exploitation of natural resources and which define the land solely in terms of its economic value. However, perhaps because they too are invested in appropriating the land for their own purposes (i.e. employing it as a surface on which to map out their political ideals), Perkins and Austin draw freely on the racist and imperialist tropes which have been used to justify whites' possession and use of the land. Perkins, for example, has no qualms about describing a group of Native Americans she meets in the desert as savage, morally-inferior, animal-like beings. She writes,

The Indians at the ranch are employed as laborers,
when they will work. . . . The women and girls

. . . star[e] with the stolid curiosity of cattle, not like burros who twitch their ears saucily, though they have the burro's reputation for theivishness (120).

Though Austin expresses some criticism of whites' treatment of Native Americans in stories such as "Agua Dulce" and "Shoshone Land," she too relies on fairly racist and imperialist tropes in her representations of and assumed ability to speak for individual Paiute and Shoshone characters. Rather than emphasizing their savagery, as Perkins does, Austin instead idealizes the customs and beliefs of Native Americans, misrepresenting them to a certain extent as she uses them to illustrate her own Utopian visions of society.

Neither Perkins nor Austin is particularly self-critical about the implications of her own use of the land, or about the extent to which her ability to make trips into the desert seeking "freedom" and "power" depend on her already relatively privileged position in a race and class system based on exploitation and imbalances of power. Although the women's symbolic appropriation of the land is perhaps less insidious and damaging than physical appropriation of the land and development of natural resources, it nevertheless suggests that on some level, Perkins and Austin duplicate the exploitative relationship to the land they claim to object to.

Despite these limitations, Perkins's White Heart of the Mojave and Austin's Land of Little Rain and Lost Borders

should nevertheless be acknowledged as ground-breaking texts. Unlike women in the early to mid- 1800s who envisioned the west as a garden in which to cultivate family and community (Kolodny xii), Perkins and Austin imagine it instead as a place to reevaluate and write their way out of the domestic sphere. Strongly influenced by the feminist and woman suffrage movements of the early twentieth century, Perkins's and Austin's descriptions of the desert west reflect their proposed revisions to women's position in marriage and family, as well as their attempts to map out a larger field of possibilities for imagining and understanding women's abilities and appropriate roles in U.S. society.

Notes

1. See, for example, Catherine Roach's article, "Loving Your Mother" in Ecological Feminist Philosophies, ed. Karen J. Warren.

2. It is important to note here that although many of the issues Austin works through in her nature writing center on problems related to home and family, her project is far different from that of her predecessors who constructed the west as a site in which to cultivate an idealized domesticity. Rather than imagining the west as a place to revitalize and reenact the traditional roles of wife and mother, Austin is interested instead in revising familial and marital codes in order to release women from their confinement in what she considers to be a limiting and abusive domestic sphere.

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