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An active participant in many extracurricular activities, Amy Cox delights first and foremost in the study of literature through historical analysis. She is particularly interested in the works of the feminist author Mary Austin. As an undergraduate, Amy participated in Humanities Out There, Phi Alpha Theta (history honors society), and many other honor societies. Amy spends her free time reading, collecting books, crocheting, shopping, and cooking. She began her graduate studies in history at UCLA in the Fall of 2001.

Key Terms

- ◆ American Moderns
- ◆ Divorce
- ◆ Free Love
- ◆ Modern Marriage
- ◆ Victorian Marriage

The Shift Toward Modern Marriage: The Transformation of the Victorian Ideal in the Writings of Mary Hunter Austin

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History

Abstract

At the beginning of the twentieth century, new ideas about marriage began circulating in America through the work of the women's movement and gradual changes in the legal status of women. Changes in the perceptions of marriage were heavily influenced by the work of "American Moderns," writers who embraced new ideas including feminism and pushed these ideas into the mainstream. Mary Austin contributed to this flow of new ideas through her writings, in which she explored failed marriages full of unfulfilled expectations, applauded marriages that maintained her standards of companionship, passion and equality, and experimented with the possibilities of "free love." Out of these examinations emerged Austin's requirements for modern marriage: shared interests, work, and sexual feelings, as well as equality. While Austin embraced some popular radical ideas of the day, unlike many moderns she did not abandon the prospect of marriage for "free love." Instead, she suggested a marriage based on passion and companionship rather than convenience and necessity. Through Austin's writings we can better understand the major transformation that occurred in American culture due to the redefinition of relationships between men and women.

Faculty Mentor



It is not a surprise to me that Amy Cox is now a graduate student in history at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her exemplary work on Mary Austin, the California suffragist and author, revealed that Amy is an indefatigable researcher as well as an astute analyst deeply attuned to the complexities of her subject matter. In discussing Mary Austin she does not treat her as "representative" of her era, but instead explores Austin's highly individualistic beliefs concerning marriage in the early twentieth century. Yet paradoxically it is by recovering the full individuality of Mary Austin that Amy ultimately recovers her universality. Her thesis is a wonderful achievement.

Alice Fahs
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Introduction

Let any dogmatist stand where he will upon whatever stiff crust of prejudice, and if he talks with Mrs. Austin he will catch some sound of the stream stirring beneath his feet. Let him watch her career, and he will see how often she has been one of the first to point out that here or there the pattern was breaking up. (Van Doren, 1944)

Carl Van Doren identified Mary Austin as a prophet in a memorial compilation published ten years after her death. During this time period, Van Doren found proof of Austin's insight as her "prophecies" were integrated into American society. However, he did her little justice by only labeling her a prophet of social movements and not taking into account the self-fulfilling nature of her prophecies. Austin accurately foresaw many changes in society and simultaneously contributed to these very changes.

Austin wrote as part of the movement toward the new and modern in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. The participants in this movement, whom Christine Stansell labels "American Moderns," included familiar names such as Willa Cather, Mabel Dodge, Isadora Duncan, Emma Goldman, Max Eastman, and Eugene O'Neill (Stansell 8). These people joined in various ways to promote modern ideas such as socialism, anarchism, suffrage, feminism, free love, birth control, labor, and other radical causes. They were especially involved in the cause of women. According to Stansell, "certainly never before, and probably never since, did a group of self-proclaimed innovators tie their ambitions so tightly to women, waving the flag of sexual equality" (7). She labels their efforts an attempt to "equalize and animate the relations of men and women" (7). The female contingent of the "American Moderns" and their followers went by the title "New Woman." According to historian Carroll Smith-Rosenburg, the New Woman not only eschewed marriage, "she fought for professional visibility, espoused innovative, often radical, economic and social reforms, and wielded real political power." It was "her quintessentially American identity, her economic resources, and her social standing" that "permitted her to defy proprieties, pioneer new roles, and still insist upon a rightful place within the genteel world" (245).

Austin, with her often-radical views and activism on behalf of women, certainly fits the description of the New Woman and the American Modern. The "Modern" theme in Austin's work that this paper will concentrate on is marriage: Austin's diagnosis of the problems with Victorian marriage,

the solutions she offers to these problems, and her assessment of alternatives to marriage. Through a focused analysis of these themes in her writing, Austin's place in the complex modern movement can be determined. In her work, she espoused many common beliefs and views of her time, but also added her own unique interpretations and a sometimes contrary viewpoint. In doing so she stepped outside parts of the modern movement, which often derided marriage entirely, and asserted the superiority of her version of modern marriage over other solutions.

Marriage, composed of intertwined legal and personal aspects, has long been a topic of interest. "No modern nation-state," historian Nancy Cott argues in *Public Vows*, "can ignore marriage forms, because of their direct impact on reproducing and composing the population" (5). The importance of marriage in state formation has led to the incorporation of "particular expectations for marriage" in many government initiatives and "especially in citizenship policies" (7). It followed that as government laws, especially those regarding women, were questioned beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, marriage, the woman's link to the government through her husband's vote, would also come under scrutiny. Cott asserts that the "western political tradition" drew upon common law practices in which "a woman was absorbed into her husband's legal and economic persona upon marrying, and her husband gained the civic presence she lost" (7). This acceptance of marriage began to change with the Seneca Falls convention in 1848. This conference, which sparked women's political activism in the United States, gave women a forum to question marriage and its legal aspects, which in turn would lead them to question its personal aspects as well. Women's conventions in the 1850s were filled with "participants' resentment at wives' subordination within marriage." Lucy Stone deemed marriage "a state of slavery" for women that made them "submissive." These beliefs led to advocating laws for "married woman's property rights and earnings" (64-5). As women began gaining legal rights, including the vote, in the early twentieth century, the "marital model in which the individuality and citizenship of the wife disappeared into her husband's legal persona had to go" (157). With the legal face of marriage changing, the personal aspect also became subject to re-evaluation.

During this period Austin and other Moderns began advocating changes to marriage more vehemently. Although Americans during the Victorian era were "very much committed to marriage founded on love," and were outraged by arranged marriages and proxy brides in other cultures, Austin and her contemporaries found that there was still

something missing from marriage (Cott 150). Cott discusses the importance Victorian-era Americans placed on “true love” as the “crucial requisite” for marriage as opposed to “crass,” “unethical,” “mercenary,” or “cold-blooded motives for marrying” (150). Although these Victorian-era Americans may have valued true love, Austin argued that their marriage models were not pure and that the Victorian marriage was rife with problems. Along with many of her generation, Austin argued for a modern approach to marriage during a time when the changing laws and public interest made such an approach most feasible.

“Marriage, properly viewed, is a union of kindred minds — a blending of two souls in mutual holy affection,” wrote Reverend Daniel Wise in his 1851 book of advice for young women, *The Young Lady's Counsellor: or, Outlines and Illustrations of The Sphere, the Duties, and the Dangers of Young Women* (234). In *The Young Lady's Counsellor* and his other book, *Bridal Greetings: A Marriage Gift, in Which the Marital Duties of Husband and Wife are Familiarly Illustrated and Enforced* (1854), Wise elaborately defines the position of women within the Victorian marriage construct. *The Young Lady's Counsellor* both demonstrates the pressure on women to enter into the correct marriage, and defines what the Victorian marriage should be. The book claims to teach women how to guard against the “years of woes which are inseparable from an unsuitable marriage” (237). The young woman is instructed to find a husband who is “pure-minded, sincere, and spotless in his moral character” (243). This man should be “a self-denying man;” he should “possess a cultivated intellect,” be “industrious,” “economical” and “benevolent,” and above all he “ought to be religious” (243-4). When this ideal man is found the young lady must first consult with her parents and then, with their approval, may “rightly encourage his attentions” (245). All this must be done to ensure that the husband will possess the all-important characteristics of “morality and respectability” (240). However, the woman is warned to do all this with a clear head, ignoring “the voices of passion” that lead to “a dream-land of folly” (245). For the young lady to form the proper Victorian marriage, she must overcome notions of passion and search instead for a suitable husband, a man with high character, respectability, and the ability to provide for her and her family.

The fact that Wise, a man, wrote advice to women on how to behave in the Victorian marriage demonstrates the position of authority that males held in the Victorian marriage structure. In *Bridal Greetings*, Wise tells an anecdote of a discontented wife who complained incessantly about the town where she and her husband lived. Wise admonishes the woman, whose “discontent” had “no excuse” because “it

was her duty as a wife to cheerfully submit to the necessities of her husband's business” (127). This duty was part of “her marriage covenant,” in which “she had vowed to give herself to him; to exchange her early home for his, and to identify herself with all his interests” (127). This wife was not “faithful” in her vows since “she deliberately sacrificed his interests to her feelings” (128). This illustration shows the duties of the wife in the Victorian marriage: she must readily sacrifice any interests and feelings that might interfere with those of her spouse because it is her obligation to “promote and prefer the happiness” of her husband (107).

The “domestic heaven” of the Victorian marriage was to be created even in “the lowliest cottage” (84). This instruction demonstrates another key feature of Victorian marriage: the separation of the spheres. Wise advises women not to be misled; their “sphere” is the “home” and the “social circle” (88). According to historian Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, during the Victorian period sexes “became increasingly segregated into separate spheres, with women remaining in the home with their young children while men went off to work. At the same time, women began to be seen as the more religious, even Christlike, sex.” Therefore, “it came to seem only natural that they would guide the moral development of the young” (De Swarte Gifford 8). In the Victorian marriage, the home, “social circle,” and child rearing were not simply female responsibilities—they were the limit of the respectable woman's life.

Problems with Victorian Marriage

According to Austin, “marriage is the one thing that society won't take the trouble to learn the truth about” (*A Woman of Genius* 291). This conviction drove her to write extensively on the problems of Victorian marriage relations. Austin provides many specific examples of how society had failed marriage relationships. She makes this view clear in her novel *A Woman of Genius* (1912), in a conversation between Olivia and Jerry. Olivia explains that it was not the “loving” that was wrong, but that “the other things that [were] tied up with it and taken for granted must go with loving” (291). When Jerry asks if she means that marriage is the problem, Olivia responds negatively. She thinks instead that the trouble is found in the dictates of society which require “living in one place and by a particular pattern” and “thinking that because you are married you have to leave off this and take up that which you wouldn't think of doing for any other reason” (291).

While in her unpublished 1927 novella *Cactus Thorn* Austin continues to blame society for the problems with marriage,

she also shifts part of the responsibility to the individuals who conform to society. This contrasts with *A Woman of Genius*, in which Austin specifically mentions that she places no blame on women for taking the “path” of society’s ideals “when so many are closed to them” (290). In *Cactus Thorn*, she refers to couples who suffer because they expect that “marriage ought to be something it hadn’t turned out to be with them” (12). These people enter into marriage with “made up ideas that a husband ought to be this and a wife ought to be that” (46). Responsibility falls on these unhappy people because they take “other people’s word for things” including the views of “the church, the state and the party” (46). Although Austin did not cease blaming society, she began passing judgment on the people who were complicit in its questionable institutions. This change may have stemmed from a personal frustration Austin felt toward society, which was slow to change despite her attempts to teach people to “think things out for themselves” so they could “make themselves something worth using” (46). This change, although small, took place in Austin’s assignment of culpability as she began to place a portion of the blame on the people who did not adhere to the modern way of thinking.

Austin discovered one problem with traditional marriage long before she attempted it: the subordination of women within the patriarchal family structure. In her autobiography, *Earth Horizon* (1932), she writes of battling the hierarchical structure of the Victorian family over breakfast. She wanted an egg that had been boiled longer than that of her brother (the substitute husband/father figure) but was not allowed to have it because it would detract from her brother’s authority. Austin critic Jo W. Lyday writes that the result of the episode was that Mary stopped having eggs for breakfast and became convinced that the role of women in marriage was unrealistic and unfair because it completely subordinated the woman to the whims of the man of the house (3). In her autobiography, Austin explores the incident: “To remember Mary’s egg became a constantly annoying snag in the perfect gesture of subservience to the Head, which all her [Mary’s mother] woman’s life had gone to create” (Lyday 129). Responding to this patriarchal structure, Austin comments: “There was growing up in the minds of thousands of young American women at that moment, the notion that [the home] at least, shouldn’t be the place of apotheosis of its male members” (129). The notion that the man in the home should be exalted as an ideal or worshipped as a god is clearly presented in Austin’s writings as a problem with marriage, as she often points out the injustice of this hierarchy and the trouble it caused.

Austin claims that for many women the Victorian marriage was dissatisfying and left them bored and restless. This problem occurs in the short story “Frustrate,” leading the narrator to complain, “I am just kind of hungry...always” (*Western Trails* 229). This feeling of hunger and a desire for more sustenance from marriage permeates many of Austin’s novels and is especially prominent in *Santa Lucia* (1908) and *A Woman of Genius*. In these books, the feeling of desire is coupled with a decided feeling that the woman has “too much of [herself] leftover;” she not only feels that she isn’t getting enough, she also desires to give more to the marriage relationship (*A Woman of Genius* 229). The women plainly need more personal fulfillment combined with the feeling of contributing more to the marriage. The fact that the Victorian marriage prevented husbands from meeting their wives’ personal needs demonstrated a glitch in the system of marriage itself.

The insistence that a woman give up any talents or aspirations she had upon marrying was another problem that Austin found in Victorian beliefs. This theme is heavily emphasized in *A Woman of Genius*, as Olivia finds that traditional marriage has robbed her of the right to exercise her talents as an actress. Olivia is confronted with having to give up her career when she considers marrying Helmeth Garret. Despite Helmeth’s belief that he is a forward-thinking man, he maintains many characteristic Victorian ideas of marriage. He cannot believe that Olivia would think of continuing her career during their marriage. He believes that her having a career and being married violates her role because “a woman has no business to be tied up with any man other than her husband,” even business partners. In addition, Helmeth cannot bear to think “of any other man being able to tell [his] wife what she should or shouldn’t do.” Both statements show how completely wedded Helmeth is to Victorian ideas of marriage. This commitment is further revealed when he mentions that other men should not have the right to tell his wife what to do, implying that a husband should have the right to control his wife. Here his words betray his need for authority over his wife, and for having her merely live up to his expectations. Olivia continues loving Helmeth, but drives him away with her insistence that marrying her would mean marrying her work also. In order to maintain her freedom Olivia must avoid the bonds of traditional marriage, which limit her career and her acting talents.

The marriage of Julia and Dr. Stairs in the book *Santa Lucia* ends in the worst possible way when Julia takes her own life to escape her “suitable” marriage. Julia enters into the marriage of her own accord, but she bases her decision on

Victorian ideas of suitability. Dr. Stairs originally appealed to her because of his education, social standing, and potential for fame. After five years of marriage, during which Julia experienced disappointment in a man who could not live up to these ideal standards, she realizes that they are completely incompatible. When she finally comes upon an opportunity to find the happiness and adventure she longs for, her marriage prevents her from taking it. In despair, her life “spoiled,” she swallows poisonous crystals and dies with the final realization that her life could have been better “had she the wit to make it” (*Santa Lucia* 338). Clearly, the imposition of society’s ideals of suitability could not dictate a happy marriage; instead, it set the couples up for disappointment and misery.

The Modern Marriage

Austin scholar Melody Graulich argues that “Austin’s generation of women believed that marriage could be ‘remedied,’ but Austin found no remedies herself, in her private life or in her fiction” (380). However, Graulich’s statement completely overlooks the remedy that clearly exists in Austin’s stories in the ability of both Austin and her characters to imagine something better. By including characters whose marriages are truly happy, Austin implies the existence of a solution. Examples of happy marriages are scattered regularly throughout Austin’s work, and their happiness is often specifically mentioned as if to counter any negative feelings that some characters might have toward marriage in their own miserable struggles. In *No. 26 Jayne Street*, the heroine Neith struggles with the idea of settling down but is careful to point out the happy marriage of her cousin Millicent, who was saved by marriage: “In time she would become what Emmaline [a foolish spinster] was now except for what sat so graciously upon her, happy marriage and maternity” (38). In this instance, the marriage is not only pleasing and satisfying to Millicent, it actually serves a positive purpose in her life. Examples like Millicent’s marriage demonstrate that Austin believed that the right marriages did provide benefits.

By creating characters who yearned to find the ideal form of marriage, Austin imagined there was a solution. The existence of an ideal shows the possibility of a remedy. This sort of remedy was found in Austin’s short story “Frustrate,” about a woman who has realized that her marriage and her life are nothing like what she expected them to be, and as a result, is disappointed and left hungry for something more. The solution is expressed in the wistful tones of the narrator: “I thought if I could get to know a man who was big enough so I couldn’t walk around him, so to speak—somebody that I could reach and reach and not

find the end of—I shouldn’t feel so— so frustrated” (*Western Trails* 233). The narrator feels empty and unfulfilled not because of her position as a wife per se, but because of her incompatibility with her husband. The remedy, then, lay not in abolishing marriage, as many moderns strove to do, but in reforming the patterns of married life: courtship, judging of suitability, and the marriage relationship. Austin presented solutions to these problems; the fact that she did not settle into marriage in her personal life should not distract from the answers she provided for marriage’s problems.

According to Dudley Wynn, Austin’s *Starry Adventure* holds in solution all that Mary Austin had to say. In it are her characteristic slants about women and their problems. This novel hints at the positive and enduring elements of her activities as prophetess (Wynn 23). In this novel, Austin champions the idea of a companionate marriage relationship. However, she asserts that even these partnerships need sexual passion to remain healthy and functional, adding another dimension to her vision of modern marriage. She does this by pointing out the problem with having an overly platonic marriage, not unlike that of Jane and Gard. Their marriage comes about suddenly, as a way for Jane to escape an unwanted romance. There is deep friendship between them, but no passion, as Jane wished “to go into marriage clear,” not “mixed up with emotions and things” (*Starry Adventure* 221). They marry based on the idea that it could work out because they were not “too much alike” but they “like the same things” (217). Jane is concerned with whether or not the situation is fulfilling, as she has been failed by passion before and therefore does not value it. For Gard, who is inexperienced in these areas, the marriage leaves him in a vulnerable position—he is tied down, but without any real bond; his marriage lacks passion, remains unconsummated, and provides infrequent communication. He is alone when he meets Eudora, the sexually experienced socialite, who inspires a passion in him that nearly destroys his marriage. This infidelity occurs because Gard does not feel that he is “truly married,” since his relationship with Jane represents a marriage partnership at its coldest (221-2). Fortunately, the marriage is not destroyed because Jane recognizes she is not “where [his] feelings were” and that this void in their marriage led to his susceptibility to Eudora’s seduction (221-2). In the end they recognize that a successful marriage requires a combination of friendship, understanding and common interest, as well as sexual feelings. In this illustration, one of her last commentaries on marriage, Austin emphasizes that the best relationship is one of compatibility and friendship combined with sexual desire: the passionate, companionate marriage. As Austin addressed the problems of marriage and their

solutions, she did not ignore the fact that not all marriages could be saved or entered into with the maturity necessary to forge a modern marriage relationship. For these situations she also provided answers, suggesting that more openness and less disapproval from society on marital discord could lead some couples to seek the help they needed in fixing their marriages. She also suggested the possibility of divorce and its merits in certain situations. In addition, she disavowed the shame of remaining altogether unmarried rather than entering into an unsuitable commitment. In this way, Austin provided even more alternatives to the unhappy Victorian marriage.

Although Austin believed in the life-long bond created by marriage and love, she supported divorce under rather liberal circumstances: two people could and would be better people if they were no longer tied. She did not pretend that divorce was an easy fix, and admitted that it could leave scars. But, for some people, she not only allowed for divorce, she actively supported it. In addition, Austin chastised the Victorian ideas that kept couples trapped in unsuccessful marriages, preventing them from seeking help and leaving the marriage to a tragic end. The Victorian perceptions of marriage “in Santa Lucia proper” were that “marriage was the holy state of matrimony” that sanctified “the union of man and woman whatever unsuitability of mind or temperament or cold indulgence or mean subservience went to it” (*Santa Lucia* 299, 301). Thus, marriage is “not to be talked of openly, especially if it [is] unhappy,” leaving little hope for couples like the Stairs, who are unable to solve their marital problems alone (301). Austin disagreed with the notion that society would benefit from all marriages, even if they are poor ones, and aired her views through the character of Evan Lindley, a friend of the Stairs. Lindley argues that the Stairs marriage offers no good to the society “except of its being good for a mighty lot of gossip.” He feels that as a marriage it is not “effective” and that “nobody is so stupid as to maintain any other kind of partnership when it isn’t [effective]” (301-2). Yet because of society’s pressures on Antrim Stairs (i.e., his religious beliefs and the pressure from his position at the “church school” which did not find divorce “acceptable”) he denies Julia a divorce (309). In contrast, Julia desires her “freedom” so that they can each “marry somebody more suitable” (297). By the time Antrim finally acquiesces to a divorce it is too late and her chance at happiness with another man has passed. In despair, with a desire “to be quit of the whole affair,” Julia swallows poison and dies at Antrim’s feet (337). Although the case of the Stairs is extreme, it demonstrates how seriously Austin thought the forces of Victorian beliefs were in people’s lives and how devastating she believed their effects

could be: these ideals could destroy the happiness of a beautiful young woman and lead to the destruction of both her and her marriage.

Although Austin supported liberal ideas such as divorce, there were some solutions with which she did not agree. Austin critic Anna Carew-Miller wrote in reference to the heroine of *A Woman of Genius*, “Olivia’s life reflects Austin’s own experience of estrangement, of leaving the traditional woman’s life behind and entering a dimly lit realm of progressive politics, sexual freedom, and women’s artistic development” (Graulich and Klimasmith 109). Carew-Miller asserts that “unlike many of Austin’s contemporaries, Olivia is not quite ready for the revolutionary future envisioned by the Bolsheviks, free-lovers, and other radicals of the 1910s, yet she is not satisfied with women’s options of the past” (109). Comparing Olivia to Austin, Carew-Miller suggests that Austin, like her autobiographical heroine, had trouble accepting “revolutionary” changes for the future such as the abandonment of fidelity by free lovers. Austin disagreed with the solution of “free love” that was popular with her contemporaries. The idea of free love refers to all impermanent love affairs that are entered into with no intention of a lasting relationship. In her novel devoted to theories of love and marriage, *Love and the Soul Maker* (1914), Austin brands this a backward, primitive relationship pattern which is not the solution to the Victorian marriage but rather an excuse for indulgence and irresponsibility.

In *Love and the Soul Maker*, Austin explores the natural workings of love and its tendencies. In doing so, she writes a good deal to refute the radical notions of free love and claims the supremacy of mate love, which is preserved and perfected in marriage. Austin claims that the more “examples of free alliance” offered during the time are examined, the more they “fail to exhibit either the indispensable social utility or anything which can be identified as the Soul Maker’s mark” (262). She expands on this belief in greater detail in the conversations between Valda, a broken-hearted and misguided woman, and the narrator/author of the book, the Austin character. According to Valda, radicals, whom Austin defines as “the group of social malcontents who insist on being called advanced on the grounds that they are different,” insist that “man is naturally and actually polygamous” (48). Austin swiftly scorns this belief by likening it to the naturalness of cannibalism and of a disposition to be “combative and predatory” (48). She continues to belie the free lovers’ beliefs by asserting that the argument that “all men should be promiscuous because many of them are secretly so, is valid only when you go far enough to say that all men should rob freely because a few privately pecu-

late" (49). In all cases, Austin derides free love not only by openly disagreeing with it, but also by choosing to relate it to habits generally scorned by society. Austin identifies the type of person who makes "love a mere enhancement of the passing time" with a less than complimentary label: the "vicious and insidious" "love pirate" (97). Clearly, the person who takes love lightly is an odious thing to Austin, who cannot abide love that "does not pay anything" (98). Austin claims that love was not made free by nature because "automatically the act of loving ties up with it those who love and the unborn" (78). Therefore, since free love shirks responsibility in avoiding the natural bonds that come with love, it is for Austin an unnatural and unacceptable practice.

Although Austin disagreed with "free love" she did believe that a bond could exist outside of legal marriage, that if taken with the commitments of marriage would be equally sacred. In *No. 26 Jayne Street*, Austin presents a "married/unmarried" anarchist couple, Sadie and Hippolyte. Neith, the main character, "didn't criticize their not being married, because [she] saw that they hadn't left out any of the things that the ceremony was meant to involve" (259). Sadie and Hippolyte decide against what they call "the bourgeois contract" because, as anarchists, they do not believe in it (128). However, Neith explains that although Sadie and Hippolyte "attempt to get liberty by omitting the ceremony," the irony is that "they didn't...succeed in omitting anything else" (255). Neith finds that "they were as devoted to each other, and as bound by that devotion as if they had married in all the religions they were heir to" (255). Sadie and Hippolyte even display some signs of conventional marriage, as Sadie explains that "of course" she calls Hippolyte her "husband" (153). Furthermore, Sadie admits to Neith that she "wanted a ring, really" and because she is not as "noble" as Hippolyte, she even wanted to be married once, "just a little" (222, 226). Yet, she worries that this is too "bourgeois" a feeling, showing that in her efforts to avoid the bourgeois aspects of marriage she had lost something "charming and tender" that was important to her (222).

At one point in the novel, Neith has a flash of understanding as she realizes "something of what was in the hearts" of Sadie and Hippolyte "when they renounced the formality of marriage for themselves," since "all that" seemed trivial "before the mighty forces that draw the lover and the maid" (228). However, even after Neith has this epiphany, she returns to her belief that since Sadie and Hippolyte have a strong tie, even if it is "quite outside the law," they lose nothing by not having the ceremony (256). After all, the lack of a ceremony does not leave them "free to separate" since they are not free at all, but bound by their love and

commitment (256). Although Austin believed that a bond of "true marriage" could exist outside legal marriage, she gives the impression that it is foolish to believe that anything is gained by omitting the ceremony, and that perhaps they might have lost something tender.

Austin does present a potential problem with allowing "marriage" without the legal tie, since it remains possible for one of the pair to cease acknowledging the love bond. Without the documentation of marriage, the jilted lover would have nothing to substantiate his or her claim to the relationship and the other's affections. This problem is demonstrated in Austin's novel, *Cactus Thorn*, through the breakdown of the relationship between Grant Arliss and Dulcie Adelaide. Although they are unwed lovers they feel their relationship has an "extraordinary kind of rightness" (58-9). However, during a period of separation, Grant feels the lure of domesticity, wealth, and political power, and engages himself to Alida Rittenhouse, a woman of high social status. He is greatly taken aback when Dulcie comes to him expecting to continue their relationship, if not to further solidify it by marriage. When he tells her of Alida, Dulcie exclaims, "You are engaged to be...married" with the words "And not to me" "suspended in her tone" (91). This exclamation makes it quite clear that Dulcie expects more from their relationship, since she "couldn't have done what [she] did" "if [she] hadn't believed" that their relationship was a lasting, unifying bond (91). In Dulcie's eyes, the true injustice is that Grant does not recognize that, just as if they had married, they were tied by a "knot," an obvious inference to a marriage bond that is violated by Grant's unfaithfulness (93). The problem is that an unmarried relationship has no mediator of its separation that would recognize the feelings of both members of the couple in a relationship. Without divorce, which would allow them to "untie" the "knot" between them, Grant is able to ignore justice in the break of their relationship and overlook the fact that the affair was partly Dulcie's (93). Yet, Austin provides Dulcie with a version of justice (and Grant with his just deserts) when Dulcie kills him for violating their bond and for his hypocrisy. Clearly, even though Austin did not look down on couples who chose to omit the marriage ceremony, she warns that there is an element of danger in this choice.

Conclusion

In 1934, author Sonya Ruth Das described the "effects of progress of society" in the "rise of a new concept of marriage" (53). She found that "instead of a static and formal institution, marriage" had "become a dynamic and functional relationship between man and woman" (53). In the

rest of her book, *La Femme Americaine dans le Mariage Moderne* [*The American Woman in Modern Marriage*], she continued to describe the transformation toward American modern marriage. Many of her observations of change occurred in aspects of marriage that Austin found fault with, and the solutions for marriage that Das evaluated were similar to those that Austin proposed. Das's book shows that the movement toward modern marriage had achieved recognition and at least some, if not all, of its goals. Had Austin lived past 1934, and consorted with people outside her more radical group of friends, she would have been able to recognize many of her beliefs becoming more widely accepted. She would have witnessed the dwindling of problems that she recognized in the Victorian marriage structure: the male-dominated hierarchy, the mandatory submission of women, the separation of spheres, and the outdated notion of suitability. She also would have seen the solutions that she proposed—divorce, passionate companionate marriages, and spinsterhood—implemented and critiqued. Furthermore, she may have experienced satisfaction in viewing the stagnancy in the “free love” movement that lasted until the 1960s, since Austin, ever the spiritualist, could not agree with the radical view that the “Soul Maker” intended love to be without commitment. Austin wrote as part of a movement toward modernity, and although her activism was not limited to advocating changes in male/female relationships, this sentiment occupied a good deal of her work. Even in this specific area of relationship change, Austin was not alone in her advocacy of modern marriage. Even though she did not change marriage views single-handedly, Austin's contribution to the movement was laudable, as she contributed her own opinions and beliefs to the movement toward the modern marriage.

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