

# Southwest Evenings

*by Mary Austin, Witter Bynner,  
and Catharine Savage Brosman*

## Rio Abajo

In Rio Abajo ghosts walk.  
At Socorro I saw them,  
Three and twenty brown gowns, rope-girt and sandalled.  
By old Isleta ford,  
Don Francisco de Coronado with his Spanish gentlemen—  
Armor-rust on their satin sleeves,  
Arrow-slits in their leathern greaves—  
Rode all down the cotton fields  
While the Tegua war-drums thundered.

Once in the dawn below Belen  
Creaked the broad-wheeled carreta train  
Whose single guttering candle showed  
Where La Conquistadora rode  
To reconquest and old pain.

Once by this saguan's ruined arch  
Music its walls absorbed gave back again,  
As in the dusk guitars were playing,  
And on the stamped adobe floor  
The dance still swaying.  
Still is the alameda sweet  
With sun-steeped petals strewn  
Where late the twinkling monstrance passed,  
Mid gold more lucent than its own,  
To bless the fields again.

## Chapala Midnight

What spirit is abroad that so bereaves  
The night? No one has sung, nor a guitar been played.  
A hound under the house has whined and bayed  
And a bat is breathing at the window-eaves.  
When I look out the moon among the leaves  
Of corn becomes a curve of metal. I am afraid  
Lest I may hear the whisper of grass-blade  
Growing out of a body that still grieves.

I lock my door and cringe along the wall,  
Snuffing my candle as I creep to bed;  
And when I hear a fragment of wax fall  
On the table-top I feel at the top of my head,  
Tapping my memory, the bony ball  
Of a finger that was once perfectly made.

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*Witter Bynner (1881-1968)*

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## Metates

### —*Acacia Ranch House, Arizona*

We arrive too soon; the small museum isn't open yet.  
 Chairs and a swing invite us to the porch,  
 as a determined breeze, configuring the trees  
 in random motions, ruffles through my hair  
 and lifts my collar. We're in Oracle, named for a mine,  
 itself the namesake of a ship; and the Acacia Ranch,  
 a slice of time, well past centenarian, sails  
 through the rugged Santa Catalinas, with its timbers

of great age visible in beams and rafters, and its adobe  
 keel, enduring. It has served as sheep ranch,  
 miners' and travelers' lodgings, post office, smithy,  
 smokehouse—also sanitarium and morgue.  
 Don't we feel young and vigorous, walking around  
 with good lungs, hearty voices, muscles  
 well maintained, responsive? Now to the displays:  
 tools, saddles (narrow, plain), embroidered dresses,

vests, tooled boots, a hat devised of feathers.  
 Photographs propose their black-and-white enigmas,  
 mostly stern, occasionally smiling. Bill Cody  
 owned the High Jinks Gold Mine here; Edward Abbey,  
 wanderer of the Southwest, kept a p.o. box.  
 Who's this? Ah, someone less well known,  
 one Alice Carpenter, originally from Detroit, not well,  
 who moved to Arizona, lost her husband to the flu,

then her son to early death, but loved the land,  
 its native peoples, and the past, as it eroded swiftly  
 under time and men's indifference.  
 She assisted the Tohono O'odham who camped out  
 along her property; and she collected artefacts,  
 not carelessly, but learning, labeling and preserving  
 them, even facing down the bulldozers  
 of Indian mounds.—I'll stop this evening with a friend

who owns her house now (paintings, dark wood chairs,  
textiles, terra cotta tile). As dusk moves in, we'll eat  
a simple meal on the veranda, looking over palo verde,  
agave, and bird of paradise in bloom, and Alice's  
*metates* strung like beads along a path, round,  
hollowed, now returned to earth as ornaments, attesting  
to our ancient hunger, ancient toil. A great horned owl  
will call to me toward dawn. "Who? Who, who?"

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*Catharine Savage Brosman*

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