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Review of Letters of Mari Sandoz

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on the importance of the West, on the masculine and, often, on the heroic; it was overlaid with a Populist's undying distrust of eastern oppression. But Sandoz also foreshadowed the "new" western history, emphasizing the land itself, its original inhabitants, the influence of the newcomers, and the tragedies and brutalities of the West. The *Letters* reveal her preoccupation with the history of the Plains Indians and her concern both with details and with broader issues of interpretation, particularly of the Sioux Wars. Sandoz viewed the Plains Indians as dignified and heroic and blamed white settlers for debasing them, partly to justify broken treaties and broken promises. She devoted a significant part of her professional life, and her correspondence, to learning and telling their story properly.

If Jules Sandoz considered "artists and writers the maggots of society," his daughter had similar feelings about publishers and editors. The *Letters* chronicle Mari Sandoz' almost endless battle with the eastern publishing establishment over the structure and language of her writing. Sandoz insisted these were integral parts of her stories and her western voice and that they could not be altered. Letter after letter reveals her almost paranoid conviction that willfully ignorant and patronizing eastern editors and publishers were determined to destroy her work with their changes. Stauffer suggests that a less hostile Sandoz might have benefited by taking more of their advice. The hostility, however, helps to make the *Letters* a "good read." Sandoz' acerbic wit enlivens the selections throughout the book, and Stauffer has included enough variety in the letters to please a broad spectrum of readers.

The value of *The Letters* is enriched by Helen Winter Stauffer's editing. Author of *Mari Sandoz: Story Catcher of the Plains*, Stauffer has written a twenty page introduction for the *Letters* presenting the themes on which she based her selections and providing readers with the larger framework of Sandoz' life. The letters are meticulously annotated, many with several notes, which demonstrate Stauffer's own mastery of Plains history. Stauffer also

Letters of Mari Sandoz. Ed. Helen Winter Stauffer. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992. Preface, introduction, bibliography, index of addresses, index. xxxiii + 493 pp. \$60.00.

In this splendidly edited collection, Helen Winter Stauffer presents more than four hundred of the nearly thirty thousand letters that Mari Sandoz wrote between 1926 and 1966, focusing on Sandoz' "writing, researching, and publishing" (p. xv). Sandoz' sense of herself as a western historian dominates the *Letters*. Her western view embodied a traditional emphasis

provides a complete bibliography of Sandoz' writing and a subject index as well as an index of addressees. The *Letters* make a substantial contribution to the resources on Mari Sandoz, and the wealth of information about plains history contained in Sandoz' correspondence and Stauffer's editing makes the book a valuable historical document as well.

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