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“SHE DOES NOT WRITE LIKE A HISTORIAN”

MARI SANDOZ

AND THE OLD AND NEW WESTERN HISTORY

BETSY DOWNEY

When Mari Sandoz's *The Cattlemen* was published in 1958 a reviewer for *The Christian Science Monitor* commented that Sandoz “does not write like a woman.” He admitted that his observation was “not all compliment.”¹ Reviewer Horace Reynolds might well have said “Sandoz does not write like a historian.” Such re-phrasing, with its implications of both compliment and criticism, is a good place to begin examining Sandoz as historian. Mari Sandoz called herself a historian by training and vocation. She is best remembered for her historical works, particularly her Great Plains series: *Old Jules* (1935), *Crazy Horse* (1942),

Cheyenne Autumn (1953), *The Buffalo Hunters* (1954), *The Cattlemen* (1958), and *The Beaver Men* (1964).² In these works Sandoz used an unconventional methodology that poses difficulties both for professional historians and casual readers. Despite the difficulties, however, her work has enduring value, both in its style and in its themes, which are an intriguing and, I think, intuitive blend of a variety of approaches to the study of the American West. In this article I will briefly discuss Sandoz's historical training and methodology, and then, using her Great Plains histories, I will examine her themes at greater length and show how they relate to recent interpretations of Western American history.

HISTORICAL APPRENTICESHIP

Mari Sandoz received her formal training in historical writing during her years as an undergraduate at the University of Nebraska between 1922 and 1932. Attending classes sporadically, as time and money allowed, she never finished her degree. Although Sandoz would refer throughout her life to the training she had received from University of Nebraska

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historians Fred Fling and John Hicks, often explaining that "I studied the history of the west under our former dean of the arts college, John Hicks, author of *The Populist Movement*," she exaggerated these associations and rejected significant portions of her "mentors" methodology.³

During the years Sandoz attended the University of Nebraska, upper division history courses could be taken for either two or three credits, depending on whether the student wrote a paper for the course. Majors were required to do advanced historical writing in at least one course. Sandoz took six history courses at the University. Two were introductory courses in Ancient and European history, for three credits each, taught by classicist John Andrew Rice and by Fling's protegee Laura Belle Pfeiffer respectively. Two others were intermediate level extension courses in American history (Foreign Relations and Recent United States) for two credits each, with Roy E. Cochran. Sandoz's final course, during the spring 1932 semester, her last, was the upper division American West after 1829 from John Hicks; she took it for two credits—no paper required.⁴ In her biography of Mari Sandoz, Helen Winter Stauffer says Sandoz met John Hicks as early as the late 1920s and was influenced by many of his ideas, but she does not refer to any writing Sandoz did for the 1932 class.⁵ Hicks apparently did not remember Sandoz's writing from his Nebraska years. He wrote in his autobiography that

Mari Sandoz, whom I had known as an undergraduate, told me later that I had commented favorably on a term paper she wrote for me, noting her admirable understanding of frontier conditions. I'm sure she merited whatever compliments I paid her; her *Old Jules* is one of the most moving narratives of the frontier that I have ever read.⁶

It seems clear from the available evidence that Sandoz was introduced to basic principles of historical research and writing in a few undergraduate courses at the University of

Nebraska, and certainly was introduced to frontier historiography by Hicks. Sandoz apparently did some writing for Rice and Pfeiffer, claiming the latter introduced her to Fling's methodology, although she took no courses from Fling. There is no indication in university records that she wrote a formal research paper for her two credit course with Hicks or that she did any other advanced writing in history. I think she exaggerated her connections with her professors, especially with Hicks, out of defensiveness over her limited training and to increase her credibility among academic historians and critics who had "better" degrees than she and who raised questions about her methodology.⁷

The training Sandoz received in the university's history courses was enhanced by her work at the Nebraska State Historical Society during her undergraduate years. Probably much more significant than her course work, it amounted to a professional apprenticeship with the society's long-time director Addison Sheldon. Sandoz began researching the society's newspaper collection in the 1920s. In 1931, 1932, and again in 1934, she worked as Sheldon's research assistant. During the latter period she served "as associate editor of *Nebraska History* magazine. She also had charge of some of the manuscript collections, directing the organization, filing and moving the archival material, as well as binding the newspaper collection." Sandoz helped Sheldon research and prepare his Chief Red Cloud book, and she helped organize the Eli Ricker Collection of archival materials on northwestern Nebraska Indians. In the process, she established herself as an authority on the Ricker material, much of which she later used in her own work. She remained at the historical society until she won the Atlantic prize for *Old Jules* in the late summer of 1935. Thus, although her university training in history was not noteworthy, Sandoz had exceptional hands-on training in archival research at the historical society; she could have more properly claimed Sheldon than Hicks as her mentor.⁸

SANDOZ AND HISTORICAL METHODOLOGY

This inquiry into Sandoz's formal training is important because of the methodology she developed and because of the interpretive themes in her writing. Whatever claims Sandoz made to Fling, Pfeiffer, and Hicks, or even Sheldon, as mentors, in her own historical writing she departed from their methodological standards in several obvious and important respects.⁹ One departure from accepted norms of historical writing was documentation. Sandoz was a meticulous and thorough researcher who based her writing on extensive primary and secondary materials. Her primary sources included frontier newspapers, particularly from the Panhandle area, firsthand accounts, oral histories, and, in the case of her Indian histories, extensive research in government documents. Sandoz claimed to have found significant original documents in government archives in Washington, D.C., materials that were later lost, so that only her notes on them remain. She also engaged in extensive cross-checking of references.¹⁰ Yet Sandoz avoided the kinds of documentation normally associated with academic writing. She rarely annotated her texts, successfully resisting footnotes and endnotes to the end of her life. She insisted that every fact in her writing was backed by evidence, but the only way a reader could track her sources was with Sandoz's personal assistance. Sandoz was equally terse in providing bibliographies. Academic critics frequently took her to task for these glaring departures from the norms of professional documentation.¹¹

More serious than these omissions, however, was Sandoz's deliberate departure from conventional standards of historical truth and objectivity. As Barbara Rippey argues, Sandoz believed her historical writing had two purposes; one was to draw the reader into the story of the past through her narrative and the other was to increase the reader's social awareness and commitment to a just society. These purposes and the way she carried them out were incompatible with conventional rules of

historical writing. Whether it was because she lacked the academic training of the professional historian or because of her personal literary vision, Sandoz concentrated on producing vivid narratives and clear perspectives, even if she had to distort or "create" the past to do it. She invented dialogue, and often whole episodes, to heighten drama.¹²

Sandoz used fictional devices extensively in all her histories, beginning with *Old Jules*, which is so dependant on them that one reviewer argued it should be called "fictionalized biography."¹³ Nearly half of the first chapter of *The Cattlemen* is a fictional scene of early cattle on the Plains. *The Buffalo Hunters* begins with imagined dialogue between "Wild Bill" Hickok and his hunting partner—perhaps the whole scene is imagined—and fictional dialogue runs through the entire book. The opening of *The Beaver Men*, also, is largely fictional, with invented scenes and dialogue recurring throughout the book. *Cheyenne Autumn* and *Crazy Horse* depend heavily on invented scenes and dialogue. In *Crazy Horse*, a biography, Sandoz uses her imagined dialogue and settings more extensively than in any of her other histories, even her earlier biography, *Old Jules*. The use of these fictional devices may have some claim to legitimacy in biography. Many writers argue that the biographer may take inventive liberties that other historians may not, but Sandoz relies so heavily on fiction in *Crazy Horse* that it might be more appropriate to call it a historical novel than a biography. Sandoz claimed that as long as these inventions were consistent with the actual facts they were acceptable literary tools. Most other historians disagreed and considered these inventions to be serious flaws.¹⁴

Closely connected to her use of fictional insertions is Sandoz's commitment to writing history for social purposes. Sandoz considered herself a liberal Democrat; she wrote western American history like a Populist. Barbara Rippey believes that "Sandoz's use of a subjective narrative and her need to see the past as useful for clarifying present values is supported by theories of relativists such as Carl Becker

and Charles A. Beard.”¹⁵ These historians argued that complete scientific objectivity could not be reached and that historians naturally interpreted the past in light of their own experiences and the issues of their day. Becker, Beard, and other historians in the early twentieth century, including Frederick Jackson Turner, were deeply influenced by the contemporary, Progressive Reform ideals. Their writings reflect the Progressive belief in the evolutionary improvement—or progress—of American democracy, but they also identify dangers to it.¹⁶ Sandoz’s social conscience identified her with the Populist/Progressive/ New Deal political tradition, and her historical writings reflect this bias. She favored the individual—farmer and laborer—against powerful special interests that she believed were located in, or linked with, the East and were hostile to the true interests of the West. She favored benevolent government intervention to protect the individual against the special interests, but, perhaps sharing her father’s paranoia, was constantly aware of the threat to benevolent government from the special interests and the extreme right. These themes recur throughout her writings, both history and fiction, and are reflected even in her legendary battles with eastern publishers.

In developing her approach to historical writing, Sandoz appears to have intuitively arrived at a “perspectivist position,” as opposed to that of an “ideal historical-observer.” The frontier world that she presented was “filtered through particular experiences.” It was re-created, or even created, by Sandoz moving “in alongside” her subjects and showing the past as Sandoz thought her subjects saw and interpreted their world. There are layers of perspectivism here as Sandoz’s “perspectivist data” encounters her own perspectivist position.¹⁷ This perspectivism is a source of both power and problems in her Indian histories especially. It contributes positively to the power and the poignancy of the stories of *Crazy Horse* and *Cheyenne Autumn*, but it raises issues of authenticity and of cultural appropriation as well.

In both *Crazy Horse* and *Cheyenne Autumn* Sandoz’s perspectivism is complicated by the layers in her sources. Her Indian histories rely heavily on oral accounts that were originally told either in “pidgin” English or in an Indian language to a translator. Sandoz got some of these stories from her father who told them to her in his own language (very likely Swiss German, not English). Some she got from Indians who had direct experience of the events, such as White Calf who “saw the stabbing of Crazy Horse” (CH, 417). She drew heavily on her own interviews, especially those from her 1930 trip with Eleanor Hinman, and on the Ricker Collection. Many of these stories, especially from the older Indians, were told to translators, and Sandoz used both transcriptions of earlier translations and simultaneous translations. All of these stories were filtered, and probably distorted, by time and by language problems. Sandoz adds to the inherent dangers of distortion and error by telling these stories in her own language and voice, deliberately using words and rhythms that she thought would convey authenticity and the original patterns and images of Native speech. In this she is like John Neihardt, although Neihardt appears to have been more explicit in explaining what he had done. Finally, Sandoz’s reluctance to acknowledge that any of these things could be distortions, or that there might be multiple versions of the truth, adds to the problems of perspective in her work.¹⁸

Sandoz’s personal views of the Indians also cause perspectivist problems; she is one-sided in her portrayal of the Native Americans. In both *Crazy Horse* and *Cheyenne Autumn* Sandoz clearly favors those Indians who fight, rather than follow the white man’s road; she tells their side of the story with great sympathy. Louis Gottschalk calls this ability to put oneself in the place of a subject “historical-mindedness.” Although the Indians’ resistance was ill advised, doomed to defeat, tragic, Sandoz nevertheless admired it, based as it was on the right of the Native people to be where they were and to live on their land as

they always had. Her heroes are the fighters; their resistance is suicidal, but it is noble, and their end is better than that of the "Loafers" who follow the "paper chiefs" like Red Cloud, whom she portrayed as lazy, soft, drunk, and often treacherous, giving them no sympathy. Here Sandoz has, perhaps, made "a better case for a subject than the subject could have made for himself." Sandoz's problem is that she has too clearly taken sides; she believes in the position she presents, and she cannot apply her "historical-mindedness" to the peace chiefs among the Lakotas and Cheyennes.¹⁹

Sandoz rarely took the position of historical observer to link developments on the frontier and in her subjects' lives to larger world or national issues, or even to provide conventional narrative accounts with clear chronological reference points.²⁰ *The Cattlemen* and *The Beaver Men* do more of this than her earlier histories, but providing the context of plains history is still a very minimal part of these books. In *The Cattlemen* especially she refers frequently to corruption in government and to the sectional problems that continued after the Civil War, but her narrative is scattered and episodic. *The Beaver Men* interweaves the stories of Spanish, French, and British rivalry for empire with the story of the beaver and his trapper, often showing how policies of empire affected the fur trade. It is *The Beaver Men*, with its extensive treatment of material that was less personally familiar to her, that is closest to being a conventional narrative account. Here Sandoz is least personally present and is more the historian as objective observer than in any of her other works.

Despite Sandoz's unconventional approaches to historical writing and the problems arising from them, Sandoz's histories continue to be of interest and value, both because of her success in achieving the vivid accounts she sought and because of her interpretive approach. Many of her themes, and even her biases, are relevant to the contemporary debate over the "Old" and "New" Western history. Although she seems to be rooted in the frontier tradition of Frederick Jackson

Turner, Sandoz reflected many attitudes that are similar to the New Western history and its attacks on Turner. In the rest of this paper I will focus on Sandoz's relation to these two approaches. The debate between the Old and New Western historians is familiar enough that only a brief summary is needed here.

THE "NEW" OF NEW WESTERN HISTORY

The Old or "realwestern" history, as Wilbur Jacobs calls it, has its origins in Frederick Jackson Turner's famous 1893 article, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." Turner's ideas evolved through generations of students and disciples, most notably Frederick Paxson, Frederick Merk, and Ray Billington, all of whom refined and embodied Turner's ideas in their classrooms, articles, and textbooks. The "realwestern" history views the American West as an organic and evolutionary process, a succession of frontiers on which the advancing forces of civilization encountered savage wilderness. The process of "taming" that wilderness was positive and triumphal. It created and then constantly revitalized a new, democratic, and superior Anglo-Saxon American civilization. The focus of the "realwestern" historians was on the period prior to the "official" ending of the frontier in 1890 and on the white males whose efforts closed the frontier.²¹

Since the 1980s, the "realwestern" historians have come under increasing attack for biases and omissions. New Western historians, perhaps most notably Patricia Limerick, Richard White, and Donald Worster, criticize "realwestern" historians for minimizing the enormous human and environmental destruction and tragedy caused by the conquest of the frontier. They charge that "realwestern" historians have focused too exclusively on Anglo-Saxon males. Furthermore, "realwestern" history virtually ignores the twentieth century, and the role of the federal government and the large corporations in the development of the West. Its emphasis on process ignores differences in climate and geography; in other

words, New Western historians argue, there is too much emphasis on "to-the-place" and not enough emphasis on "in-the-place."²²

While the criticisms offered by the New Western historians are clear, the alternative models they offer are less so. Limerick and White suggest that the West may be best viewed in terms of "conquest and of the mixing of diverse groups of peoples," with all of the negative and devastating consequences the term *conquest* implies, for both humans and the environment. Worster adds an emphasis on the need to look at the place, to create new regional histories, "clear-eyed, demythologized, and critical"; Worster's regional focus particularly includes the importance of Western aridity. Nevertheless, as John Wunder and others have argued, the New Western history has not been able to divorce itself entirely from Turner, and there is much that is Old about the New Western history.²³

An examination of Sandoz's Great Plains series shows that Sandoz, in many respects, can be considered a transitional figure between the Old and the New Western history.²⁴ Her writings contain strong Old or "realwestern" history themes: a "Progressive" view of American history; a succession of frontiers, on which "savage" ways clash with "civilized," and a white male heroic emphasis. Unlike the "realwestern" historians, however, Sandoz directly confronted the costs of Western settlement, and in this she is closer to the New Western historians. Sandoz also, like the New Western historians, deliberately sought to correct the biases and to eliminate the omissions that characterized traditional Western histories, particularly in her Indian histories.

It is not clear exactly when or where Sandoz first became aware of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier writings, but she did refer explicitly to Turner at the beginning of *Old Jules* published in 1935. If she had not encountered Turner prior to her course with John Hicks, she certainly did then, but Hicks may not have offered Sandoz the "realwestern" history normally associated with Turner's dis-

ciples, for by 1933 Hicks was breaking "away from the powerful Turnerian tradition that had shaped his early professional life."²⁵ Whether because of Hicks's changing approach or as a result of her own experiences, study, and analysis, Mari Sandoz was eclectic in her interpretation of the frontier, reflecting the "realwestern" approach in some areas, but departing from it significantly in others. Sandoz's portrait of the Great Plains, perhaps because she was an insider as well as a student of the Plains, is of a largely de-mythologized place of great diversity.

THE IDEA OF PROGRESS

Like Turner and other Progressive historians Sandoz always retained an optimistic vision of American democracy and the American West, although she was angry and bitter about the injustices she saw as part of the country's past and present. Because of this dualism Sandoz's histories contain elements of both of the "two large groups of possible plots" that William Cronon sees as possible for plains history. The first, compatible with Turner's Progressivism, is "a story of improvement, in which the plot line gradually ascends toward an ending that is somehow more positive—happier, richer, freer, better—than the beginning." In the second, compatible with the New Western history, "the plot line eventually falls toward an ending that is more negative—sadder, poorer, less free, worse—than the place where the story began." The main problem for Sandoz as a Progressive historian is that while she had an enduring faith in American society and in the Great Plains as an area of opportunity and productivity under wise human planning, she did not consider the pre-white landscape as "neutral or negative in value"; it did not "deserve to be transformed."²⁶ Progress for the white man, which was the main concern of Progressives, was achieved at great cost to others and to the environment. These, in her view, were neither neutral nor negative in value, and her treatment of them in her histories is

significantly different from that of the "realwestern" historians.

The Great Plains series, at least as Sandoz conceived it, is also both compatible with Turner and significantly different from him. Whereas Turner's traveller would stand at the Cumberland Gap and watch the flow of traffic west—the trader, the hunter, the cattleman, the settler—Sandoz could stand at the 98th parallel and watch the same procession: *The Beaver Men*, *The Buffalo Hunters*, *The Cattlemen*, *Old Jules*. Yet Sandoz apparently did not see this march as reflecting the same sort of process that Turner saw. Instead she saw the West as a succession of eras that shaped the character of the Plains and did not so much evolve into each other as displace each other, just as the whites displaced the Indians, until, finally, large scale ranching and farming would learn to co-exist. As early as 1932, Sandoz explained that on the Great Plains "'within one lifetime, we have assembled the conflicts of nationalities and races from all over the world. . . . For me the most important themes of Nebraska will always be those of the farmer and his dispossession.'"²⁷

The way Sandoz wrote the books in the Great Plains series suggests periods defined by distinctive characteristics displacing other periods, rather than an organic process. *Old Jules*, covering the last period in her Plains history, was published first (1935). Then came the two Indian histories, *Crazy Horse* (1942) and *Cheyenne Autumn* (1953), covering the period roughly from 1860 to 1890. They were followed by *The Buffalo Hunters* (1954) and *The Cattlemen* (1958), which were loosely sequential although many of the events in all four of these books occurred simultaneously. *The Beaver Men*, which should have come first, came last in 1964. Since Sandoz conceived the idea for the series very early in her career, one would expect that if Sandoz had perceived the frontier as an organic process she would have written the books in the sequence that reflected it. She actually wrote the series in an order compatible with her opportunities

and command of the material. Nevertheless if she were following a Turnerian approach she should have identified organic development as a theme, and it should appear throughout her works. But even in *The Beaver Men*, where there was a succession of frontiers, and where one might expect to find suggestions of organic development, that theme is absent and Sandoz's focus is elsewhere. She is more interested in the clash of empires than the evolution of a new society; in the rivalries between the fur traders, often as agents of empire; and in the impact of the traders on the Indians and the beavers. She never wrote about the frontier in a way that suggests she saw it as the organic, evolutionary process that the Turner school saw.

In *The Beaver Men*, *The Buffalo Hunters*, and *The Cattlemen* Sandoz is definitely aligned with "realwestern" history in her focus on white males. The only women she singles out in *The Beaver Men* are the heroic wife of Pierre Dorion, and the pathetic Mitain, the abandoned Indian wife of Manuel Lisa. While there are many husbands and sons on the pages of *The Buffalo Hunters* and *The Cattlemen*, there are almost no wives or mothers in either book. She mentions Mrs. Olds, a defender of Adobe Walls, in *The Buffalo Hunters*; Ella Watson, the "Cattle Kate" who achieved notoriety as "one of the few woman lynchings in the nation's history," in the *Cattlemen* (343); and the wives of Print Olive and Charlie Goodnight and the Indian captive Cynthia Ann Parker in both works. A few other women are scattered among the men, but these women appear almost as afterthoughts, not essential or even very important to her story. In *Crazy Horse* Sandoz is similarly silent on the Indian women, despite the important roles played by Black Buffalo Woman and Black Shawl in the life of Crazy Horse; her attention is focused instead on the tribal and warrior chieftains. Only in *Cheyenne Autumn* and in the settlement period covered by *Old Jules* do women begin to emerge from the shadows, although even then they largely occupy a subordinate

role, paralleling, perhaps, their subordinate status even on the frontier. This decidedly masculine focus probably contributed to Sandoz's success in the male dominated field of western history during her lifetime.

SANDOZ AND NATIVE PEOPLES

Sandoz's earliest and most important departure from "realwestern" history is her obvious and consistent sensitivity to the Native peoples, seen most clearly in *Crazy Horse* (1942) and *Cheyenne Autumn* (1953). These books with their tragic themes, based on deep appreciation and sympathy for the Native Americans and their history, brought her closer to the approach of the New Left historians than to Turner and the other Progressive historians. Sandoz would have agreed with New Left historians who believe that "the whole nation has sinned, and mightily," and would have identified treatment of the Native Americans as among the greatest of sins.²⁸ Sandoz offers her "thesis" of frontier history in the preface to *Cheyenne Autumn*. She observed that in 1854 the whites on the Great Plains

were only a few little islands in a great sea of Indians and buffaloes. Twenty-three years later, in 1877, the buffaloes were about gone and the last of the Indians driven to the reservations—only a few little islands of Indians in a great sea of whites. This exploit of modern man is unrivaled in history: the destruction of a whole way of life and the expropriation of a race from a region of 350,000,000 acres in so short a time. (v-vi)

She summed it up tersely: "the general policy was for extermination. The Indian and his treaties stood in the way of progress" (83).

Sandoz traces the sins against the Indians back to the first Europeans and their destruction of native culture through the introduction of disease, alcohol, and the trade in beaver and buffalo pelts. In Turner's view the frontier produced "a being midway between European civilization and Indian savagery, but morally

superior to both."²⁹ For Sandoz, the frontier may have produced a being superior to the European, but it did not produce a being superior to the Indian, and in fact Sandoz's Indian society seems in many respects to be morally superior to the White society that displaced/destroyed it. She condemns the beaver traders, and particularly John Jacob Astor, for deliberately using alcohol to exploit, degrade, and destroy the Indian, often in arrogant violation of national policies. She criticizes the Lewis and Clark expedition for initiating the practice of creating new chiefs through whom "the Indians could be controlled. If not, other men could be put in their places, their cooperation also bought" (BM, 203). In *Cheyenne Autumn*, *Crazy Horse*, and *The Buffalo Hunters* Sandoz shows whites, the Army, and the federal government not as blunderers but as predators, exterminating buffalo, breaking treaties, hunting down innocent marginalized people to secure land and power.³⁰ Her whites were treacherous, not to be trusted in anything. Repeatedly the flag of truce was dishonored, with many dead, "not killed in open fighting, but in a council . . . under a white flag" (CH, 369). The white man's peace was the final degradation, driving the Indians onto reservations like "poor and miserable" prisoners, "with nobody allowed to go away to hunt or even to visit a relative when he liked . . . and the white man's poison whisky [sic] like the flood waters of spring through their villages" (CH, 98-99). Even without the whiskey, the white man's road cost the Indian dearly, as the Indians

took on the white man's quarreling ways. Some even whipped their women and children, a shocking, paleface thing to do. Families were broken, men threw away the mothers of their children, wives slipped out the side of the lodge at night, daughters hung up their chastity ropes and became the pay women of the soldiers. (CA, 8)³¹

The whites were not advancing civilization, they were destroying it. They were intruders

who laid waste to the people and the land. "It was not the Indians who went out making wars in the white man's country, but always the whites pushing in, killing the helpless ones, burning their homes, taking everything" (CH, 375). Thus Sandoz describes the white victories over the Indians as carnage. In *Crazy Horse* the young Curly comes on such a scene. "The dead lay thick, children hacked and gashed through with swords, many shot and blown to pieces, women cut up too, or with their bodies torn . . . by the exploding balls of the wagon guns" (76-77). It is not a "civilized" white, but the young "savage" whose stomach is turned at this sight. Sandoz intended her voice to be the voice of the Indians who asked "who was to punish the whites for all the Indians killed who had done no one any harm" (CH, 90). By the time the fleeing Cheyennes of Dull Knife and Little Wolf were captured, the soldiers had killed so many of the hunted, haunted Indians, women and children as well as men, that "a Deadwood dispatch to the *New York Tribune*" reported: "intense indignation is manifested throughout the whole country, even among the advocates of extermination, over the barbarous treatment of the Cheyenne prisoners at Camp Robinson" (CA, 226).

Sandoz blames a large part of the bitterness between the Crazy Horse Indians and the Red Cloud Indians on the fact that the whites would not keep the agreements they signed. At the same time whites, supported by Custer, were violating treaties and moving into the Black Hills, Indians were starving, kept from their hunting grounds and denied their annuities. At the Red Cloud agency there was

no game at all, no beef coming and no wagons. And those goods already there were poor and too little, the sacks of flour small and moldy, the pork as stinking as bloated buffalo carcasses on the prairie. Even the agent said it could not be eaten. There was only one thin blanket for every three Indians. (CH, 291)

At Camp Supply the Indians were treated so badly that even the army complained. The Northern Cheyennes were "so hungry that they were eating dead horses, dead from disease. 'Unless the rest of the Indians are fed, . . . [scouts] anticipated a larger outbreak in the spring,' Colonel Lewis of Fort Dodge reported" (CA, 55). The white violations, in fact, were behind most of the problems, whether between Indian and Indian or Indian and white. After "twenty-five years on the plains," General Pope concluded "'in every outbreak the cause was bad faith by the government'" (CA, 120).

ETHNIC GROUPS AND WOMEN

Sandoz also writes sympathetically of other people neglected by the "realwestern" historians: ethnic groups and women. Sandoz's Nebraska panhandle was quite evidently peopled by a polyglot population. Herself the daughter of immigrants (a French Swiss father and German Swiss mother) Sandoz was acutely conscious of her ethnic identity and the ethnic identities of her homesteading neighbors and schoolmates. These appear throughout the pages of *Old Jules*: her own Swiss; "honest Hans, the little German" (74); "two young Swedes who got lost in the sandhills" (83); Polish and "Hollander" neighbors on the Niobrara; and various Slavs, French, and other "foreigners." There were also blacks, at least males, on Sandoz's frontier: buffalo soldiers, York of the Lewis and Clark expedition, the bulldogger Bill Pickett, and Andy the "little 'yellah boy' from Virginia" (OJ, 253). Sandoz's writings do not suggest that the frontier produced a new American character, but they do identify the frontier as a place that produced new Americans. Jules Sandoz and his neighbors of every ethnic background—at least the males engaged in public life—quickly learned English and quickly assimilated to American ways of politics, conflict, litigation, and violence.

Women appear as important figures in *Old Jules* and *Crazy Horse*. The frontier in these books was populated by a variety of women

whose presence and contributions were vital to their people, women like Mari Sandoz's abused and long suffering mother; spinster school teachers; the heroic women warriors of the Sioux; the murdered Mrs. Blaska; and even all the anonymous and defeated suicides. White women are most clearly seen in *Old Jules* although Sandoz's main focus remains on the white males. As usual, Sandoz is not analytic—she does not offer any interpretations of a “women's West” or “female frontier”—but she does present women as experiencing the frontier in ways different from the “realwestern” mythology.³² Sandoz showed women as subordinates in a patriarchal society. Romanticized in their absence, they were often abused in actuality, sometimes violently, more commonly by excessive child-bearing and brutal hard work. While Sandoz's focus is on her father, the women in his life are clearly seen in *Old Jules*. They are hard-working contributors to the success of his homesteads, but victims of his explosive paternalism. “You are my wife and I command you not to write,” he orders his second wife Henriette, who later divorced him on grounds of physical cruelty (OJ, 101). “The goddamned woman” he called the fourth wife Mary, “I learn her to obey me if I got to kill her!” (OJ, 230). This frank portrayal of Jules's abusiveness shocked readers and critics alike. In 1935 Mari Sandoz showed Americans a side of frontier life that would not be examined closely by Western women's and New Western historians until well after her death.

Sandoz's women responded to the frontier in various ways. Most, like her mother, learned to cope with the isolation and abuse; others developed social networks; some divorced; many failed: fled, went insane, committed suicide. Like Mary Sandoz, many of the women were vital to the success of their frontier households, managing resources and doing the endless work, even in the fields, while their husbands, like Old Jules, were doing only what they wanted to do. Sandoz's women also performed a variety of roles outside the household. In *Old Jules* there were women home-

steads, prostitutes, post-mistresses, school teachers and music teachers, and hotel workers. *The Buffalo Hunters* shows the heroic Mrs. Olds, Mrs. Raymond the hide hunter, and the Indian captive Cynthia Ann Parker, as well as the Dodge City Girls. In *The Cattleman* the pregnant Mrs. Cluck helped her husband drive cattle through Indian territory. When the Indians attacked, she got the guns ready; “‘if any of you boys don't want to fight,’ she said, ‘then get in the hack here and look after the children and let me have your gun’” (115). More like the “old cowman” than the “realwestern” historian, Sandoz, too, doffed her old Stetson to the memory of these women of the West, to the

beauties . . . and then to those other women, too, the hardy resolute fighters against the wilderness and Indians and loneliness, perhaps thirty, forty miles from a neighbor. Sometimes they bore their children alone, nursed them in sickness alone, even buried them with none to stand by their sides, for the men were so often far away. (CM, 453)

Women also were present and important in Sandoz's Indian books. Usually nameless, they recur throughout the pages of *Crazy Horse* and are more clearly seen in *Cheyenne Autumn*. Sandoz portrayed women as essential to the Indian people, not simply because they did “women's work” but because the Indian woman

brought smoothness to the life of the lodge and to the village about her with the good deed, the gentle word, and the firm hand even with her man when it was a matter of the family, for this was always the first duty of a Cheyenne woman within her lodge. (CA, 16-17)

Moreover, Sandoz acknowledges the important contributions of “the strong ones,” those women who were “strong enough to bring courage, and envy, to any camp.” Among these were the chief's daughters who “dared to say no” to white officers; Singing Cloud and her

friend who saved three children in battle; and Pretty Walker who saved a white soldier because "he had given his horse to an old woman who could not run" (CA, 18). There were women warriors among the Cheyennes, too, "like young Buffalo Calf Road, the warrior woman who had killed in battle and had ridden against the soldiers of both Generals Crook and Custer" (CA, 17). She had "charged her horse into the thick of the battle in the Rosebud fight, to save her brother who was set afoot among Crook's firing troops" (CA, xvii); she also fought beside her husband against Custer on the Little Big Horn. There was Leaf, "her hair braided like a man's, and dressed and acting like" the Sioux scouts; she hid with them to help in the Cheyenne outbreak from Ft. Robinson (CA, 170). And there was Old Grandmother; eighty years old and near death as the Cheyennes began their escape from Indian territory, she was carried on a drag or travois. "Although she had rolled off her drag to die in the grass" early in the journey, "she rode as well as anybody since" (CA, 66). Old Grandmother soon became one of the leaders of the women, showing the younger women many of the old ways they had lost. She lived to comfort Little Wolf in his surrender to Lieutenant Clark. Although these women, Indian and white, were never the main subjects in her work, they were present and important to an extent unusual for the time they were written.

WHO IS A HERO?

Sandoz's de-mythologizing extends to the males on which her histories so largely focus. Tall tales of heroes, and villains too, are found in *The Cattlemen* and *Old Jules* especially, "for early accounts of any region usually concern themselves with important men and out-and-out scoundrels" (BM, 31). But Sandoz usually showed "heroes," as well as villains, with feet of clay. The frontier, Sandoz insisted, was a magnet for society's misfits, attracting "hide-outs from both the North and the South, particularly draft dodgers, bounty jumpers,

deserters, and plain outlaws" (CM, 53). Although she acknowledged the appeal of larger-than-life western heroes, she saw the negative side of them as well. Buffalo Bill Cody was essentially a fake, with his wig of golden curls, and manufactured stories of hunting prowess, "a handsome, gaudy show-off" (BH, 341). Another hero, "Wild Bill" Hickok, was also vain, largely unsuccessful, though appealing. "There was a kind of sadness about the death of James Butler Hickok," she wrote,

as though the romantic times were gone. Perhaps he had been the essence of the frontier, of the men who moved out upon the early buffalo plains, flashy, flamboyant, with no sense of obligation, no respect for any law beyond the whim, no respect for any power beyond that of his buffalo gun and his marksmanship, whether against beast or man. It was unthinkable that such men should live beyond the romance of their own creation. (BH, 261)

There was little romance in her story of Hickok's end. Nearly blind, unlucky at gambling, convicted of "riot and assault" on a Wyoming sheriff, married for two weeks, he was back living alone in a tent in Deadwood, sometimes partying with Calamity Jane and sometimes avoiding her. "Now he was dead, shot down" not in the glory of a gun fight, but, "in cold blood" (BH, 260).

Sandoz's real heroes were the stalwart and determined men—and women—who endured suffering and hardship at the hands of nature or man. Often her heroes were boys, or sometimes women, forced by circumstances to take on the responsibilities of men. Above all there were the Indians, individuals like Crazy Horse whom she describes as a classic tragic hero in his futile resistance to the whites, or whole groups of Native peoples. Among the West's great and "heroic attempts" she wrote in *Cheyenne Autumn*, "none outshines the 1,500 mile flight of the Northern Cheyenne from Indian Territory back to the Yellowstone country, through settled regions netted with telegraph,

across three railroads, and straight through the United States Army" (CA, vii). "Where in history," she asked, "was there another such leader [as Little Wolf], such a dramatic, masterful, such a noble exploit?" (CA, 120). Remarkable, most of them, for simply doing what it took to survive in the most demanding of circumstances, these were the real frontier heroes.

LOSSES AND CONFLICTS

Sandoz's emphasis on the tragedy of the Plains Indian, as well as on many of the individual tragedies as perceived by her ethnic and women subjects, connects her to another New theme: Western settlement as a process of conflict, frequently with devastating results. Sandoz also emphasizes the tragic consequences—and the losers—in the conflicts between Western whites and the Western environment and the destructive lawlessness and senseless violence that often accompanied Western settlement. Her stories of the Kansas cowtowns, Abilene, Ellsworth, Wichita, and Dodge, emphasize the wasteful violence. Sometimes over significant issues, as in the Johnson County Range Wars, sometimes over trivial quarrels, as in Jules Sandoz's constant bickering with his neighbors, these conflicts and their attendant violence were an important part of Sandoz's West.

On Sandoz's frontier, moreover, white was often pitted against white in battles over another New Western theme, land control. The land conflicts began in the days of the fur trade, with the three empires competing for control of the soft gold. They continued into the 1800s, with whites competing with Indians and with each other for control of the land and its resources: fur trader vs. fur trader; buffalo hunter vs. cattleman; cattleman vs. cattleman; settler vs. cattleman; sheep rancher vs. cattleman. Along with the white-Native conflict over land, Sandoz was particularly interested in the conflicts between cattlemen and settlers, very likely because of her own experiences. Cattlemen and settlers both wanted

access to public land and control over it. The cattlemen often used land fraud, illegal fences, and hired guns against the settlers to "preserve the free range as the private empire of their cows," for "there was no legal way to get empires of grass from the public domain" except for the state owned lands in Texas (CM, 329, 335). To the great cattlemen "the settler or small rancher moving into the free range country" was a predator like wolf or Indian, but the "most predatory of all" (CM, 335). "Very few understood," she concluded, that these conflicts were really

war—a war of the ranch interests against the government and its avowed public-land policy: free land for everybody, a 160 acre place for every bona-fide homeseeker. This was the essence of what America meant to peoples of the earth and against this the cattlemen were warring. (CM, 355)

She also shows the conflicts among the cattlemen over problems of moving cattle and over control of land and water on public lands. There was an outcry from the cattlemen when Texas sold off land to finance a new capitol; they were afraid it would end up in the hands of a few large investors or corporations, and this "was against the genius of free institutions and tended to create great and overpowerful interests" (CM, 297). There was particular hostility to the big foreign-owned spreads like the XIT.

In *The Beaver Men* Sandoz described John Jacob Astor in terms she had earlier used of the cattle kings. Astor became "so powerful that" he "showed no respect for any citizen or for agent or official of the government or for its laws and policies" (291). Sandoz also emphasized the conflicts as the fur companies of Spain, France, and the United States protested and resisted not only each other's competition but also the policies of their own governments. In the United States the resistance began in Washington's administration and continued throughout the rest of the trapping period, with John Jacob Astor "the most

active antagonist of the government system," though he sought government aid in getting "Spain and the Russians driven from the Pacific coast" (259). Sandoz also ties this conflict to the Native Americans' rivalries for control of hunting territories, showing the difficulties and dangers the beaver men encountered in dealing with—or siding with—the warring tribes. "The ruinous and violent competition was destroying" the fur trading companies "and particularly the Indians through the rivaling floods of alcohol, and scattering bare beaver carcasses over the farthest wilderness for the wolves and the buzzards" (273).

THE FRONTIER AND THE ECOLOGY

If Sandoz was ahead of her time in portraying the tragic consequences of the Indian conquest, she was similarly farsighted in noting the bloody consequences of the largely white conquest of nature; particularly the near extermination of the beaver and the buffalo. There were great ecological disasters in Mari Sandoz's Western histories just as there are in Richard White's and Donald Worster's New Western histories. Sandoz's focus in *The Beaver Men* was essentially "ecological: the relations of living creatures with each other and with their physical world."³³ The closing of the frontier for Sandoz was measured not in people per square mile, but in bodies: beaver, buffalo, Indians, all linked. Sandoz writes in her forward that she grew up with and shared her father's anger at irresponsible use of land and resources,

his anger about the deforestation, the overgrazing and poor farming that bared the top soil to the roaring spring waters sweeping to the sea, and the consequences he feared—our region a bald and denuded wasteland, all its riches gone the way of the beaver and the buffalo, and the aborigine too, driven to arid reservations. (BM, xiv)

Thus, while *The Beaver Men* tells a "real-western" story of the sweep of empire, it also

tells a tragic story of "the soft gold," the beavers who, as the book opens, "all across the continent . . . slept in the sun on their houses, or cut the glassy surface of the ponds with their whiskered noses as they swam and played and worked" (30). But three nations were racing "to build empires on beaver hides" (30). By the end of the book the fate of the beaver could be seen in "the Blackfeet country"; in the spring hunt "fur-capped, tangle-bearded hunters" picked off the beavers in the flood waters. "Sometimes hundreds were killed by a single party in a day, slaughtered like the helpless antelope in the surrounds. Often not half of the bodies were rescued, perhaps only one in five or even nine or ten, . . . the beaver wasted" (276-77). Equally wasteful was the burning of processed beaver pelts in the warehouses because the European beaver market was glutted. The destruction of the beaver was so complete that by 1832 the Hudson Bay Company "considered the region between the mouth of the Snake and the Rockies a fur desert" (301). There was clearly a succession of frontiers in Sandoz's beaver history, but these were not organic and progressive. They were instead a series of wastelands, marked with empty ponds and bleaching bones. All that saved the beaver from extinction was the luck of changing fashions and the presence of new hunters, drawn not by "gold, glittering or soft," but by land hunger (312).

The Buffalo Hunters tells a similar story of the extermination of a perfectly adapted animal that "roamed the open prairies in the vast dark herds that were uncountable, even apparently inestimable" (vii). Before the coming of the white hunters, buffalo traveled the plains

by the thousands, tens of thousands, perhaps by hundreds of thousands too, for no eye could encompass them all—one great dark moving robe that reached from horizon to horizon; a fine thick robe soft as Indian-tanned that spread over all the breaks, the canyons and the broad sweep

of the valleys, fitting close to the chilling earth. (4)

But by the mid-1870s these too were gone, the whole Republican River herd "destroyed in four days. . . . The valley stank with what was estimated by some as fifty thousand carcasses in one stretch of river, . . . all fallen to the scattering boom of the buffalo guns." At that time, too, "it was estimated that . . . in the Arkansas region, more buffalo meat was wasted than there were cattle in Holland and Belgium together. . . . Yet the winter of 1873-74 thousands of people had died of starvation in the United States" (222-23). There was a chain of destruction here. Strychnine put in the dead buffalo killed the wolves that came to feed on the carcasses; the dead wolves provided hides but killed ravens and crows; later the snowbirds were killed as well, used for bait for the wolves.

The Buffalo Hunters reinforces the accuracy of General Phil Sheridan's linking the extermination of the buffalo and the Indian. "When the Texas legislature . . . was finally about to pass a bill outlawing the hide hunter," Sheridan opposed it and defended the hunters, arguing:

These men have done more in the last two years, and will do more in the next year, to settle the vexed Indian question than the entire regular army has done in the last thirty years. They are destroying the Indian's commissary . . . Send them powder and lead, if you will; but for the sake of lasting peace, let them kill, skin and sell until the buffaloes are exterminated. (173)

Sheridan understood the connection between Indian and buffalo correctly, for "as the buffalo vanished, Indian wars became impossible. Not only were the herds their commissary but also their bank. They bought with robes as with money" (339).

It is fitting that Sandoz ends *The Buffalo Hunters* with the "ghost dancing," and the

Indians' dream "in which they saw great herds of their brother, the buffalo, come running over the terrain, come from canyons and cuts and draws where not even a buffalo chip remained" (359). The new Indian prophet, the Messiah,

told that he saw the Indians in a happy time again, free from the reservations, with the lodges full of meat and other good things, and with buffaloes all around, . . . the white men gone as though they had never been, and all the dead ones of the Indians alive once more and right among them (361).

But this was only a dream, no more than wind on the buffalo grass. *The Buffalo Hunters* ends with Wounded Knee; Sitting Bull, "the most persistent exponent of the nomadic buffalo hunting life was dead" (364). Their resistance gone with the buffaloes, the Indians were driven "to sit morosely on some reservation" (CM, 490). The whites, sheepish now at the damage they had done and freed of competition from the Indians, began to build buffalo herds from the few survivors.

Sandoz was careful to blame slaughter of beaver and buffalo on the whites, who taught the Indians the wasteful ways. She explains in *The Beaver Men* that "the Indian had to be coaxed at first, bribed to take more beaver than he and his family and friends needed for food and their own fur and leather uses," while the inexperienced young whites were "killing the friendly half-grown [beavers], taking worthless summer hides and coaxing the uninitiated Indians into the same foolishness" (61). Later she describes the Indian as "a prudent husbender of the beaver before the white man's tempting goods arrived" (131). In *The Buffalo Hunters* Sandoz insists that before the white man, the Indians had no detrimental impact on the size of the great herds, though some of the Indian's hunting practices were wasteful. The real cause of the catastrophic drop in numbers, "the real enemy of

the buffalo," was the white man and "the incredible extension of the striking arm that the white man carried with him—his powder-stenched shooting stick that reached far beyond any hand-thrown rock, or the spear and the arrow" (47).

Sandoz's ecological focus is on the results of the hunting of beaver and buffalo. She is less consistent in her treatment of the impact of whites—the ranchers and farmers—upon the land itself. In *The Cattlemen* she describes the effects of "over crowding" and overgrazing in south Texas where "640 acres of good grazing land . . . usually fed 150 cattle, but after the grass was thinned and killed out by overstocking, with the usual invasion of mesquite, cactus, and other thorn, ten acres were required for one cow." Similarly "in Wyoming and Montana sagebrush sprang up where good grass had grown"; cattlemen blamed the sheepmen, but in reality they themselves were to blame (254). She also describes the wasteful practices of the cattle industry, "the waste of meat" that "distressed" men like the Texas cattle baron Richard King, who in his early life "had known the hungry and saw this all as profit lost besides" (CM, 67).

Sandoz rarely seems to have questioned the long range consequences that the successful ranchers and farmers had on the land, especially with their irrigation practices, however. There are hints of this in her work, as when the XIT Ranch in Texas finds that one good well depletes another; "there just wasn't enough water for two wells" (312). She never is as forceful about this aspect of Western ecology as she is in reporting her father's anger at the "overgrazing and poor farming" at the beginning of *The Beaver Men* (xiv). In this sense she is closer to the Turner camp than the New Western historians. Or perhaps she betrays her roots as Old Jules's daughter. Senator Norris, champion of cheap power, was one of her heroes, and Sandoz apparently carried to her grave the vision of a Great Plains society with abundant water for irrigation and cheap power—perhaps even nuclear power—with-

out realizing how these would alter the environment or even destroy it. Perhaps if she had lived she would have addressed the consequences of farming and ranching problems in her final projected volume of the Great Plains series. Her angry comment in *The Beaver Men* came just two years before her death and might have indicated a growing awareness of environmental issues.

INSIDER ON THE PLAINS

Sandoz's lifelong identification with the Great Plains indicates another significant departure from the "realwestern" camp. She wrote about the Plains as an insider, bringing to her writings a personal and frankly biased perspective. Except for *The Beaver Men*, Sandoz focuses far more on this particular frontier place than on the frontier process. Sandoz is more like Walter Prescott Webb than Frederick Jackson Turner in attaching great importance to the specific demands that the plains geography and climate, particularly aridity, imposed on plants, animals, and humans. The problems that weather and water—or lack of it—caused are recurring themes in *Old Jules* and *The Cattlemen*. Sandoz is similar to those New Western historians like Donald Worster who emphasize regional identity. Sandoz insisted that there was a specific identity shared by those who live on the High Plains. It was marked by a common environmental experience that produced Native peoples distinct from those of other regions, distinctive confrontations between natives and newcomers, and distinctive patterns of settlement by whites. The process of invasion, settlement, and adaptation produced unique histories and stories and even language that, Sandoz insisted, were far different from those of other regions, just as valid, and perhaps more vital. All of these things mark her as a Western historian whose focus is "in-the-region" rather than "to-the-region."³⁴

Sandoz's regionalism reflects the western views of the East and the federal government

frequently noted by the New Western historians. She not only recorded western views here; she shared them. Sandoz thought and wrote of the Great Plains West as an exploited colony of powerful eastern interests, especially bankers, railroad magnates, and publishers.³⁵ Sandoz seemed to concur with the cattlemen's view that "it was the big packers and the railroads working in cahoots who were sitting in the easy chairs, reaping the cream of the cowman's saddle-pounding work" (CM, 323). Sandoz and her region criticized the federal government for collaborating with these interests and expected it to cooperate with westerners to solve the problems of the West. *The Cattlemen* illustrates the ambivalent western attitude toward the federal government that Limerick discusses in *Legacy of Conquest*.³⁶ The cattle ranchers who depended on freedom from the law in their desire to control the rangelands were quick to turn to the government when it suited their purposes. Thus it was that the cattlemen were converted to anti-trust laws. When Cleveland expelled private herds from Indian reservations, "several cowmen had hurried to Washington" in protest, but to no avail (256). When problems with diseased cattle traveling from Texas to the Kansas railroads became explosive, some agreed that the federal government should buy land for a cattle trail as it had furnished land for the railroads. More serious were demands for federal quarantines. *Old Jules*, too, shows the constant demands for help from the federal government, although here the focus is on Populist themes, settlers seeking protection against cattlemen, railroads, and bankers.

TAKING ON THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Like the New Western historians, Sandoz carried the story of the Plains into the twentieth century. For her the frontier had not ended in 1890 but was a real part of her childhood experiences after the turn of the century. Sandoz believed that the West maintained its

regional identity even after the disappearance of the frontier. She saw the problems faced by the first cattle ranchers on the Plains continuing into the lives of ranchers of her own generation, including her brothers and sisters. Although Sandoz's histories do not detail the western story beyond her father's death in 1928, *Old Jules*, covering the last years of the Great Plains series, reveals twentieth-century concerns, many of which are continuations of earlier ones: the weather and climate, of course; isolation; dependence on transportation and the federal government; boom and bust cycles; and distrust of eastern economic and political interests and power. Many of these issues are repeated in the *Cattlemen*; though Sandoz stops its storyline around the first World War, she does take developments in cattle breeding and disease control into the 1950s. She describes briefly the boom and bust cycles connected to twentieth century wars and depressions; the overgrazing, droughts of the thirties, and blizzards of the late 1940s and the 1950s; and the continued resentment at the power of the big ranchers. The black market of World War II even brought a brief boom in rustling. But, she noted with irony, the modern ranchers were free of one worry; now most of their stock arrived at Omaha's stockyards by truck, not train. "If the cowmen of 1884 were interested in revenge for the monopolistic freight rates they were fighting then, here it is, at the world's beef market" (CM, 482).

Sandoz's allegorical novel *The Tom Walker* takes those twentieth-century themes into the 1950s, as she had intended a concluding historical volume of the Great Plains series to do. The seventh projected volume would focus on oil, carrying the story of the West up to the present. Sandoz signed the contract for this book in the fall of 1965, several months before her death.³⁷ She intended the book

to include a study of the part of the Great Plains oil interests . . . played, and play in U.S. foreign policy. . . . The book would have shown the cycle of the Plains region,

from empire barrier to the Western Sea and the China trade in the 17th and 18th centuries, to the root of power that conditions world politics.

Regrettably, she concluded in her terse way, "the development of incurable bone cancer precludes my further work on the book."³⁸

MARI SANDOZ: NEW WESTERN HISTORIAN

Although Sandoz's approach to the history of the American West clearly ties her to contemporary interpretations of the West, evaluating Sandoz's place in western history writing is problematic. Few contemporary bibliographies of western history include Sandoz's works. Readers outside the academy often find her histories challenging because of their lack of a conventional structure and because they presume so much detailed knowledge.³⁹ Nevertheless Sandoz's writing continues to generate interest in the history of the Great Plains because of her vivid and dramatic narrative style and because the issues she identifies as western have such contemporary resonance. These qualities have led William Unrau to conclude that "her canny perception of frontier society, cultural conflict, and the individual confronting nature at a harsh, rudimentary level seldom have been equaled in frontier historiography." Like the New Western historians, Sandoz viewed the West as an enormously complex yet distinctive place. Her histories reveal the often grim reality behind the tall tales and the myths and tell a story that is much more complete and inclusive than the "realwestern" history. Like the New Western historians, Sandoz confronted the conflicts and injustices suffered by the Native peoples of the Great Plains; the enormous environmental consequences of white settlement, particularly for the beaver and the buffalo; and the continued conflicts that characterized the settlement of the West. Like the New Western historians, she recognized the diversity of the Plains' population. And,

although her stories, like reality, contain failures, destruction, and tragedy, they also reflect the "'ferocious'" regional pride that Howard R. Lamar ascribes to the New Western historians.⁴⁰ This pride is grounded in Sandoz's continued love of the Great Plains and its people and in her essentially optimistic vision of the Plains. Although Sandoz will not be remembered as a major Western historian, which would doubtless disappoint her, she is rightly remembered as a significant regional writer, and this would please her. In this and many other ways, she can properly be regarded as a precursor of the New Western historians. I think she would approve of their version of Western American history and would be proud to be considered among them.

NOTES

1. Horace Reynolds, review of *The Cattlemen* by Mari Sandoz, in *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 June 1958, p. 7.

2. Mari Sandoz, *Old Jules* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1935); *Crazy Horse* (1942; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1961); *Cheyenne Autumn* (1953; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); *The Buffalo Hunters* (1954; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978); *The Cattlemen* (1958; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978); *The Beaver Men* (1964; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978). Subsequent citations to these editions appear in parentheses in the text, with the initials of the titles added if necessary.

3. Mari Sandoz to the Atlantic Monthly Press, 5 October 1932, in Helen Winter Stauffer, ed., *Letters of Mari Sandoz* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), p. 35. This was part of a letter Sandoz sent in relation to her submission of *Old Jules* to the Atlantic's non-fiction contest in 1932. A later version of the letter was used in the foreword to *Old Jules* in 1935. See also her references to Hicks in *Letters* on pp. 193, 375, and 450 and to Fling on p. 313. Stauffer says Sandoz based her filing system on Fling's; see *Letters*, p. 102 n.2.

4. This information comes from University of Nebraska bulletins and announcements from 1922 to 1932, the period when Sandoz took courses. There is no indication on Sandoz's official transcript or in her file that she wrote the research paper for Hicks or her other professors. She was one of 42 students enrolled in Hicks's course.

5. Helen Winter Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz: Story Catcher of the Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 86.

6. John Hicks, *My Life with History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), p. 135.

7. Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz*, (note 5 above) p. 50. Stauffer says Fling "exerted a lasting influence on Mari," who knew him, though not from the classroom. Stauffer emphasizes Fling's "impeccable" approach to historical facts.

8. Stauffer, *ibid.*, pp. 85-95 and 273-74 n. 37; quotation p. 91. See also Barbara Rippey, "Mari Sandoz: Novelist as Historian" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1989), pp. 70-71. Sandoz uses material from the Ricker Collection in *Crazy Horse, Cheyenne Autumn*, and *The Beaver Men*. Sandoz used newspapers extensively in her writings and may have been encouraged in this by Hicks who had learned the importance of newspapers as historical sources from Frederick Paxson; see Richard W. Etulain, "Frederick Logan Paxson," in *Writing Western History: Essays on Major Western Historians*, ed. Richard W. Etulain (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), pp. 156-57. In her 1932 letter to the Atlantic Press (note 3 above) Sandoz listed a number of people who could attest to the authenticity of *Old Jules* "For evaluation of my historical sense and my ability to weigh sources" she referred the Press to Sheldon, not Hicks. Stauffer, *Letters* (note 3 above), p. 34.

9. Barbara Rippey in "Novelist as Historian" (note 8 above) argues that Sandoz "took what was useful to her" from Hicks and Fling "and ignored the rest" (82). Rippey has an excellent discussion of Sandoz's historical methodology and I have drawn on it for my own discussion. Rippey describes Sandoz as similar to late nineteenth century "patrician" or "amateur" historians like Francis Parkman, George Bancroft, and Theodore Roosevelt (97-98). I like to describe her as a "popular" as opposed to an "academic" historian because of the methodological issues.

10. Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz* (note 5 above), p. 122.

11. She provided no notes for *The Buffalo Hunters* (1954). Her last books in the Great Plains series, *The Cattleman* (1958) and *The Beaver Men* (1964) had more documentation than any of her other books. *The Beaver Men*, also contains numerous textual references to her sources. Sandoz's research materials are preserved in the University of Nebraska Archives at Lincoln. I think her filing system is comprehensible, but her notes are so personal that actually tracking down her sources for particular information would be a nearly impossible task.

12. Rippey, "Novelist as Historian" (note 8 above), pp. 4-18, 84; 106; 138-39.

13. Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz* (note 5 above), pp. 85, 101-03.

14. Rippey discusses Sandoz's fictional "problem" in "Novelist as Historian" (note 8 above). She cites support for the use of fiction in history from Wallace Stegner, Catherine Drinker Bowen, and the "New Journalists" (pp. 6, 126, 128, and also 17-18). John Garraty warns against "the over-free use of imagination and the reckless misuse of selection and interpretation," but concludes these failings are not much more serious than the crime of "dull and uninspired" biography. ("The Nature of Biography," in *The Craft of American History*, Vol. 2, ed. A.S. Eisenstadt [New York: Harper and Row, 1966], p. 66.) Frederick B. Tolles also argues for art and drama in biography, but insists it must be kept in check by "a disciplined historical imagination" and states, "flatly that I do not approve of inventing dialogue." ("The Biographer's Craft," in *The Craft of American History*, pp. 76-77.) Fred Fling, whose research principles Sandoz claimed to value would not have approved of Sandoz's inventions either. In his famous guide to historical method Fling warned that "history is certainly not fiction" or even literature and that drama and imagination have, at best, limited application in historical writing which depends on "the facts established by the sources." (*The Writing of History* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1920], pp. 154-55.)

15. Rippey, "Novelist as Historian" (note 8 above), p. 98.

16. Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), pp. 272-77.

17. Gene Wise, *American Historical Explanations: A Strategy for Grounded Inquiry* (Homewood, Illinois: The Dorsey Press, 1973), pp. 136, 159-60. Rippey discusses this at length in "Novelist as Historian," see her "Introduction," especially. I have not found evidence that Sandoz was deliberately following any historical school or even that she was very aware of historiography except that related to the American frontier.

18. John Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks*, (1932; rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979); see the preface and appendix III. Gottschalk has a good description of the layers or filters involved in learning historical facts in *Understanding History*, (note 16 above), pp. 46-47. See also Rippey, "Novelist as Historian" (note 8 above), p. 85.

19. Gottschalk, *Understanding History* (note 16 above), pp. 136-38. See also Rippey, "Novelist as Historian" (note 8 above); she argues that Sandoz is similarly one-sided in favor of the settlers against the ranchers. Rippey believes that Sandoz did not invent facts but that she "manipulated" them to enhance her own perspective (84).

20. Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz*, (note 5 above), p. 8. Some of the episodic and chronologically obscure qualities of Sandoz's writing may relate to Sandoz's regionalism and her use of what Barbara Rippey calls "insiders' talk" which helps to indicate the separateness of the region and the inhabitants identification with it. "Date and place were so clear in her own mind she rarely mentions the year and sometimes doesn't clarify location." Such clarification would not be necessary for fellow "insiders." "Novelist as Historian" (note 8 above), pp. 232-34; 137.

21. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *Frontier and Section: Selected Essays of Frederick Jackson Turner* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1961), pp. 37-62. Wilbur Jacobs, *On Turner's Trail: 100 Years of Writing Western History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994). I am not convinced Sandoz ever thought of herself as a Turner disciple or as following a Turnerian interpretation. There are no references to Turner in her four files of bibliographic cards in the Sandoz Collection at the University of Nebraska archives.

22. For a full discussion on the issues in the debate between the Old and New Western historians, see: Alan Bogue, "The Significance of the History of the American West: Postscripts and Prospects," *Western Historical Quarterly* 24 (February 1993): 45-68; William Cronon, "A Place for Stories," *Journal of American History* 78 (March 1992): 1347-76; John Mack Faragher, "The Frontier Trail: Rethinking Turner and Reimagining the American West," *American Historical Review* 98 (February 1993): 106-17; Wilbur R. Jacobs, review of *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*: A History of the American West, by Richard White, in *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 83 (April 1992): 60-62; Wilbur Jacobs, *On Turner's Trail: 100 Years of Writing Western History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994); Patricia Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin, eds., *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas), 1991; Gerald Nash, "The Great Adventure: Western History, 1890-1990," *Western Historical Quarterly* 22 (February 1991): 5-18; Martin Ridge, "Frederick Jackson Turner and His Ghost: The Writing of Western History," in *Writing the History of the American West*, ed. Martin Ridge and others (Worcester, Massachusetts: American Antiquarian Society, 1991), pp. 65-76; Donald Worster, and others, *The Legacy of Conquest*, by Patricia Nelson Limerick: A Panel of Appraisal," *Western Historical Quarterly* 20 (August 1989): 303-22. Important examples of the New Western History are: Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company,

1988); Richard White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*: A History of the American West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Donald Worster, *An Unsettled Country: Changing Landscapes of the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994).

23. White, "It's Your Misfortune" (note 22 above), p. 4; Donald Worster, "Beyond the Agarian Myth," in Limerick, *Trails* (note 22 above), p. 7 and "The Warming of the West," in *Unsettled Country* (note 22 above), pp. 91-120; John Wunder, "What's Old about the New Western History" in *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 85 (April 1994): 2, 50-58.

24. "Transitional" is John Wunder's term. *Ibid.*, 49.

25. Jacobs, *On Turner's Trail* (note 22 above), p. 18; Hicks, *My Life* (note 6 above), pp. 145-46.

26. William Cronon, "A Place for Stories" (note 22 above), pp. 1352, 1354.

27. Quoted in Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz* (note 5 above), pp. 119. This 1932 observation is very similar to one White makes at the beginning of *It's Your Misfortune* (note 22 above), p. 4.

28. Wise, *American Historical Explanations* (note 17 above), p. 94.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

30. Gene Wise associates the concept of American government as predator with the New Left historians. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

31. See Mari Sandoz, *These Were the Sioux*, (1961, rpt. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985) for Sandoz's very flattering presentation of Indian life; she apparently found many aspects of Sioux family life more appealing than Sandoz family life.

32. See my "Battered Pioneers: Jules Sandoz and the Physical Abuse of Wives on the American Frontier," *Great Plains Quarterly* 12 (Winter 1992): 31-49. See also Melody Graulich, "Every Husband's Right: Sex Roles in Mari Sandoz's *Old Jules*" *Western American Literature* 18 (Spring 1983): 3-20.

33. Don Berry, quoted in William Unrau, "Mari Sandoz," in *Historians of the American Frontier: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. John Wunder (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988) pp. 580-81. See also White, "It's Your Misfortune" (note 22 above), pp. 212-31; and Worster, "Other People, Other Lives," in *Unsettled Country* (note 22 above), pp. 55-90.

34. Michael P. Malone, "The 'New Western History,' an Assessment," in *Trails* (note 22 above), pp. 97-102.

35. "Damn it, you and I know the East has long bled the west white, is still doing it," she wrote to Bill Hooker on 9 February 1937. In more or less temperate language this theme runs through *Old Jules* and *The Cattlemen*. Stauffer, *Letters* (note 3 above), p. 115.

36. See Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest* (note 22 above), pp. 78-96, especially.

37. Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz* (note 5 above), p. 256.

38. Mari Sandoz to Frances W. Schruben, 24 October 1965 in Stauffer, *Letters* (note 3 above), pp. 458-59.

39. Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz* (note 5 above), p. 8.

40. Unrau, "Mari Sandoz" (note 33 above), p. 577. Howard R. Lamar quoted in Patricia Nelson Limerick, "The Trail to Santa Fe: the Unleashing of the Western Public Intellectual," in *Trails* (note 22 above), p. 69.