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Helen Stauffer

Kearney State College

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TWO AUTHORS AND A HERO: NEIHARDT, SANDOZ, AND CRAZY HORSE

HELEN STAUFFER

The western writers John G. Neihardt and Mari Sandoz had much in common, not the least of which was their admiration for Crazy Horse, the famous Oglala Sioux chief during the Indian wars of the last century, whom both considered the "last great Sioux." The chief was a fine tactician and warrior, fighting successfully against General Crook at the Battle of the Rosebud and General Custer at the Little Bighorn in 1876, but the authors found much more to admire in his personal life. Born on the Great Plains around 1841, he remained a "hostile savage" all his life; nevertheless, he encompassed the virtues of the

exemplary classical hero. As Neihardt more than once remarked, he had qualities a Virgilian hero would aspire to: daring and brave, he was also selfless, humble, pious, and generous. Like many another tragic hero, he was doomed to be a scapegoat, killed through the treachery of both friends and enemies, at Fort Robinson, Nebraska, in 1877.

With such a heroic career, personality, and fate a man might easily attract interest, but the aspect that seems to have appealed most to both Neihardt and Sandoz was his spiritual quality, his mysticism, for he was a "god-intoxicated man" who lived his life according to mystical power-visions and experiences. He won for himself a unique place of reverence and awe among his own people. Although he lived, as Neihardt states, in "the deepening gloom of his disintegrating world" as the whites increasingly trespassed into his land, his had

Helen Stauffer is a professor of English at Kearney State College. Currently president of the Western Literature Association, she is the author of Mari Sandoz: Story Catcher of the Plains (1981).



John G. Neihardt and Mari Sandoz in the home of Dr. and Mrs. Winkelman, Lincoln, Nebraska, in July, 1962. Source: Lincoln Journal.

been “a rich life, nobly lived.” It is this aspect of the man, his spiritual life, that both writers stress, Neihardt in *Black Elk Speaks* (1932) and Sandoz in her biography, *Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas* (1942), both written from the Indian point of view. Because the authors shared similar backgrounds and concepts, Neihardt’s works were of major significance to Sandoz’s *Crazy Horse*, although their approaches were different and her work is in no sense a duplication of his.¹

Sandoz and Neihardt knew and admired each other. It is not clear just when they first became acquainted, but they met on various occasions at the homes of mutual friends when Sandoz lived in Lincoln during the 1930s.

Sandoz received national recognition upon publication of her *Old Jules* in 1935, while Neihardt’s popularity as an author and poet had waned. She helped whenever she could to gain the recognition she thought due him and was particularly consistent in praising *Black Elk Speaks* to anyone who would listen.²

The literary treatment of *Crazy Horse* by the two authors differs according to their purpose in writing about him. He is an important figure in *Black Elk Speaks* as a tribal war leader and the revered older cousin of Black Elk, but he is not the protagonist. Sandoz, as his biographer, makes him the central figure of her book, presenting his life from childhood until his death. In *Black Elk Speaks*, Neihardt

serves as an amanuensis for the holy man; his primary function is to help the old man explain his great power-vision for all men. Sandoz acts as a historian for a warrior. But though their books are quite different, Neihardt and Sandoz shared a deep respect for Crazy Horse and his culture, an attitude much rarer than it is today. American interest in Indian literature was practically nonexistent in the 1930s and '40s. Nevertheless, both writers persisted in telling the story they thought America needed to know.

Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks*, which is actually Black Elk's autobiography, came about after the writer's meeting with the holy man in 1930. As Neihardt points out in the preface to the 1961 edition, he came to the Pine Ridge Reservation searching for someone who could give "deeper spiritual significance" to the facts he already had concerning the Ghost Dance about which he was writing in his *Song of the Messiah*, the fifth and final poem in his *Cycle of the West*.³ He already had the facts; what he sought was "something to be experienced through intimate contact, rather than to be received through telling."⁴ This meeting with Black Elk became the single most significant influence upon the writer's life and thought. From his meetings with Black Elk he felt he had become the instrument to preserve the wisdom and culture of the Sioux; he could give a sense of the "Indian psyche and condition within which all the dreadful battles and deprivations were experienced."⁵

Although primarily concerned with Black Elk's power-vision and his attempts to understand and implement it, the book also details the history of the end of the Indian Wars and the fate of Crazy Horse, Black Elk's second cousin. Neihardt gives us glimpses of Crazy Horse from the time he is about nineteen until his death around the age of thirty-three, as Black Elk, his younger relative, remembers him. Sandoz, on the other hand, presents the life of the man she felt had the qualities of the ancient classical hero. In addition, she intended to show what happened to a small group of people owning something the majority wanted

(primarily the Black Hills in this case) and to point out that America had irretrievably lost part of its greatness by its treatment of the Indians. She also wanted to depict something of the life of the people and to suggest the Indian's "innate nature, something of his relationship to the earth and the sky and all that is between."⁶

With regard to their writing methods and procedures, the two authors had little in common. Neihardt was a romantic, and he took a romantic's approach to his work. Secluding himself for a certain number of hours each morning, usually in a separate room or a little building detached from his house, he followed a rigid but limited writing schedule. He relied, according to his own account, on an assisting power, an "otherness" or "daemon," to help him. He believed this heightened awareness, which had first manifested itself in his childhood, was available to anyone willing to become receptive to it. Beginning each day by rereading his previously written lines in deep concentration, immersing himself in the atmosphere until he reached a near-trance state, he would wait for the next lines to form in his mind. The line formed, he polished it in his mind, perfecting it before he moved on to the next line. He seldom revised once the lines were on paper. Although some days were more productive than others, he refused to be hurried, nor did he continue working beyond his allotted time, even when he felt inspired.⁷

Sandoz believed as firmly as Neihardt in mythic truths and the mystical and at times had precognition, although she was not able to consistently tap that higher awareness for her own writing. The importance of intuition was a major concept in her world view. She also accepted the psychologist Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, that all mankind shares a common, inborn, unconscious life inherited from the distant past, expressed in archetypal (universal) images and symbols.⁸ Nevertheless, her writing method was based on research, organization, and revision. All her historical source material was recorded on 3 x 5 cards, her notes and cards filling file

cabinet after file cabinet. Any given statement in any of her historical books could be traced instantly to source records in her own files. Once her long and arduous research was completed, she would pull the cards and arrange them, usually in chronological order. From these would come the first, incomplete version of the work. Once she hammered out the form for the book, she would begin to reshape it. A painstaking worker, she would sometimes revise a page twenty or more times, honing it down to the style she wanted. Whereas Neihardt, writing only a few hours every day, would inscribe his lines only once, seldom crossing out so much as a word, Sandoz, working sixteen to twenty hours a day, made almost innumerable revisions before she was satisfied. This was particularly true of *Crazy Horse*, for she wanted this book especially to be good.⁹

The two writers shared, on the other hand, a similar frontier heritage. Both grew up on the Nebraska prairie frontier, Neihardt in the 1880s and 1890s, Sandoz fifteen years later, in the 1890s and early 1900s. Both lived near Indian reservations and knew Indians from their youth, Neihardt at Bancroft, near the Omaha tribe in northeastern Nebraska, Sandoz near the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations forty miles north of her Niobrara River homestead in northwestern Nebraska. They shared a great respect for the culture of the Indians, particularly their sense of the religious, their mysticism, and their reverence for nature. Both placed the physical world in the foreground of their work. As Kenneth S. Rothwell observes, Neihardt is a regionalist, essentially a pastoralist: "The size of the land, the sky, the heat of the winds, the ferocity of the sun, the snarl of thunderheads, the smoke of prairie fires—these are the elements he knows first-hand, loves, and respects." This is readily apparent in Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks*, as the Indian recalls his sense of defilement of the land when the Indians, returning to an area sacred to their sun dance, find "the soldiers had come through that way, and the holy place was all cut up with shod hoofs and made dirty with horse

droppings." Neihardt's book also reflects how vital the land was to the Indians' physical survival. Black Elk says, "We went back deep into our country, and most of the land was black from the fire, and the bison had gone away . . . a hard winter came on early. It snowed much: game was hard to find, and it was a hungry time for us. Ponies died, and we ate them. They died because the snow froze hard and they could not find the grass that was left in the valleys and there was not enough cottonwood to feed them all."¹⁰

Sandoz was even more intimately associated with the land, for she required an actual physical relationship to the regions she wrote about. She did not complete *Crazy Horse* until she had visited the reservations and lands where the chief's tribe had roamed. Even more important to her was the realization that as a youngster he had actually lived in the area of her Niobrara River home: "I knew that if this was not the exact spot, it could not have been far from there. . . . Certain it was that the young Oglala had often walked this favorite camping ground of his people." This tie to the land seems essential to her artistic vision. When she describes the hill on which the young Crazy Horse tried for his power-vision, she is probably describing the spot called Indian Hill on their own farmstead: "Then he hunted out a high point back from the river . . . then he stretched himself . . . on the gravel and looked into the deep blue of the sky."¹¹

The historical accuracy of Neihardt's works were of vital concern to Sandoz. Although Neihardt regarded himself primarily as a poet, and as such sought material to furnish subjects for great poetry (his work with Black Elk came rather late in his career and was, to some extent, an extemporaneous work), he nevertheless did a good deal of research before he attempted his writing. He knew many of the people in his Indian songs: campaigners, Indian fighters, and Indians. He traveled much of the country about which he wrote, interviewed many participants, and sought such details of authenticity as the color of Indian and cavalry horses, the kinds of guns used in battle, and the

height and build of individual men. Lucille F. Aly, Neihardt's biographer, says that for each of his Indian songs, Neihardt carried on research so thorough he gained the respect of historians. Certainly by the time he came to interview Black Elk in 1930 he had gathered a great deal of historical background material.

Sandoz considered herself a historian and almost always judged or discussed a work according to its historical accuracy rather than its literary style. She seldom recorded her approval of Neihardt's literary merits in her correspondence, but she consistently recommended *Black Elk Speaks* as one of the three best sources she knew for Plains Indian history. Her own research, which sometimes included the same sources as Neihardt's, led her to recognize that his historical information was the kind she could trust. Had this accuracy been questionable, his style, no matter how excellent, would not have influenced her. She did not agree with him on all points, most noticeably in the details of Crazy Horse's death, but overall the two authors present similar pictures of the hero and of his life, his place, and his time as well. Sandoz trusted Black Elk's integrity and she trusted Neihardt as his interpreter.

Both writers came to their major Indian works relatively late in their lives and found the style they wanted to use after years of writing experience. Neihardt wrote many short stories and tales using Indian themes in the late 1890s and early 1900s for such publications as *Overland Monthly*, drawing his material from his knowledge of the Indians on the Omaha reservation, where he was for some years assistant to the Indian agent. Some of the early stories were slight, but he worked at them for several years and received high praise from Indian friends who felt he had evoked their culture. One told him he was the first white to write about Indians who did not offend her, and that included James Fenimore Cooper and Frederick Remington.¹² When he began to write his books about fur traders and mountain men and the series of five songs that make up his epic *Cycle of the West*, he dropped these stories, but

the early apprenticeship served him well years later when he wrote *Black Elk Speaks*.¹³

Sandoz's years of working with Indian material were not as extensive, but she too spent a long time perfecting her style for *Crazy Horse*. Her early stories, written in the 1920s, were primarily of settlers and other white protagonists in the sandhill country. In 1930 she made a three-thousand-mile trip with a friend, Eleanor Hinman, through the South Dakota Sioux reservations, the Rosebud and the Pine Ridge, and the area of the northern plains Indian wars, locating Indian sites and interviewing the ancient friends and relatives of Crazy Horse.¹⁴ After that trip Sandoz began to tie together her own experiences with the Indians she had known as a child, her recollections of her father's Indian knowledge and experiences—for the Indians of the nearby reservations often camped at the Sandoz homestead and visited with Old Jules, her father—the great number of manuscripts she had read while researching and working for the Nebraska State Historical Society during the 1920s and 1930s in Lincoln, and her recent reservation interviews; from all this she began to write articles, essays, and stories about Indians for publication. By 1931 she was attempting Indian locution and the Indian point of view.¹⁵ She started experimenting with this narrative style by writing down bits of material or dialogue and stuffing them into shopping bags from which she would later retrieve them.

In 1932 she sent the first manuscript in which she attempted Indian phraseology to the *Saturday Evening Post*; it was an account of events surrounding the Sioux-United States Government treaty meeting of 1875, known as the Lone Tree Council. This version was one of several she eventually wrote of this affair, none of them published during her lifetime. At that time she advised the *Post* she was beginning a novel with an Oglala Sioux subject (almost certainly the protagonist was Young Man Afraid of His Horses, a fellow tribesman and friend of Crazy Horse) and listed a series of articles she planned to write relating to the Indians: a treaty of 1876; the killing of the

Brule Sioux chief Conquering Bear in 1854 by "the drunken Grattan over a foot-sore Mormon cow"; the Indians' killing of the white man Frank Appleton at the Red Cloud Agency; the killing of Crazy Horse at Fort Robinson, and many others. Although her letters do not specifically say so, she must have intended these to be from the Indian point of view. Most of the incidents later appear in *Crazy Horse*.

The important point is that Sandoz was trying to tell her stories from the Indian viewpoint, experimenting with her material, and using various perspectives. She not only used historical research for her material, she also studied the personalities involved, particularly of the Indians, in attempting the Indian idiom. Surviving remnants of these early writings, like the following example, show that her efforts to approximate Indian phrases and references are often awkward and abrupt: "After much saying of no, Young Man Afraid did what he did not like." Sometimes she uses terms that do not sound Indian. In describing an Indian's attempt to spear a buffalo, she says, "Inexpertly he overbalanced and went down. . . ." Such words as *inexpertly* and *overbalanced* do not fit Indian cadences.

In 1935 Sandoz made the last attempt for some time to publish her Indian writings. Except for long Sunday feature articles written for the Omaha and Lincoln papers, she found that newspaper and magazine editors were no more interested in her Indian work than in her other short stories and novels at that time. On February 10, 1935, the *Omaha Sunday World-Herald* published "The Birdman," a short story about a prehistoric Indian boy who diverts part of a buffalo herd over a cliff to secure food for his village, told from the young hero's point of view. Other than that, none of her Indian material sold. Then her first book, *Old Jules*, was accepted for publication and she turned to other writing.

Apparently she wrote no more about Indians until *Crazy Horse*, seven years later. Now her style was beautifully controlled; the words and images had authenticity. In *Crazy Horse*, Sandoz produced a tone and language that is

carefully integrated with the story material. Her previously published books are all concerned with whites; suddenly she developed an entirely new language form, different from that for the white-man books and much superior to her earlier Indian attempts. It seems that Neihardt's works, particularly his *Black Elk Speaks*, must have played a major part in this development.

Her style was not influenced by most of her source material, although she knew it thoroughly, including books dictated by or actually written by Indians; there is no noticeable correspondence between their literary style and hers. For example, *Wooden Leg*, by Thomas B. Marquis, and *Plenty-coups, Chief of the Crows*, by Frank B. Linderman, were books she usually recommended as valuable: both are autobiographies drawn from interviews of Indians by white writers, but the amanuensis in each case was interested primarily in the historical information and was not a skilled writer.¹⁶ She saw scholarly dissertations, treatises, reminiscences, and texts, ranging from poor to excellent, dealing with intimate details of Indian life, written by such experts as Luther Standing Bear, a Sioux educated in white schools; George Bent, part Cheyenne and a student of his tribe's history; Charles Eastman, a Santee Sioux who became a medical doctor; and anthropologists such as Clark Wissler, George Bird Grinnell, Stanley Vestal, and others. These works provided information she often used, but their various styles did not influence hers. In some cases the material is valuable historically or sociologically, but the literary quality is not high. Even when the work has literary merit, the author usually employs the white man's metaphor, syntax, and point of view.

Nor was her style influenced by the Ricker interviews, which she read at the Nebraska State Historical Society. These were personal interviews with Indians and settlers made by Judge Eli Ricker of Chadron, Nebraska, in the late 1800s and early 1900s.¹⁷ Although they were a major source of information for her, and in a few cases she could actually take the

dialogue verbatim for her book, the judge did not always transcribe his notes literally and her own notes were often only resums. Thus her Ricker Interview notes seldom include any personal idiosyncrasies or noticeable characteristic language styles of the speakers. Her other major sources of information were all written by whites and seldom affected the language of her book.¹⁸

With few exceptions, it is Neihardt's works that seem to have impressed her most strongly. When Sandoz was preparing herself psychologically to write she would often read Neihardt's work for inspiration and mood.¹⁹ Undoubtedly many lines in his *Twilight of the Sioux* are reflected in her writing, but it was primarily *Black Elk Speaks* that inspired both content and style. In contrast to most of her sources, it is a consciously conceived literary work. It is true that Neihardt functions as the "voice" of Black Elk, who narrates his own experiences as a plains Indian during the last half of the nineteenth century; but Neihardt is also a creative artist, and while he remains faithful to the spirit and meaning of Black Elk's story, he does not make any pretense of transliterating Black Elk's speech.

The Sioux language, because of the differences in structure, is almost unintelligible to the English-speaking reader in the exact transliteration that appears in scholarly papers. Careful translations will produce something more understandable, but again because of differences in point of reference, in culture, and in language form, the tone and individuality of the original speaker is usually lost. Neihardt, in discussing problems of translating Sioux into English with fidelity, points out that he attempted to recreate in English the mood and manner of the old man's narration rather than to make a precise interpretation. He also states that in *Black Elk Speaks* the use of the first-person singular is a literary device: Black Elk did not give Neihardt his story in chronological order and at times considerable editing was necessary. Neihardt calls his work a transformation of what has been given him, expressed so it could be understood by the white world.²⁰

Neihardt's art, then, is to phrase the story in language appropriate to the speaker, using imagery and figures of speech identified with him, in a style that is graceful and artistic—to preserve the spirit rather than the letter of the text.

Neihardt had a mystic rapport with Black Elk that sometimes negated the problems of language differences. Sandoz had to rely on sources less intimate, for despite her great sympathy for and knowledge of Indians, both collectively and as individuals, she gives no indication that she ever had the singularly close relationship with any Indian that Neihardt had with Black Elk. Her intent was different also. *Crazy Horse* is a biography, not an autobiography. On rare occasions she assumes knowledge of his mind or emotions, but most of the story is told from "over the shoulder." We see events from almost the same perspective as the hero; sometimes we are as close as his shadow, but this solitary man who would not allow photographers to take his picture because they might also "take away his soul" would not want his soul captured in autobiography. Sandoz respected this.

Sandoz undoubtedly found many Indian phrases, terms, and speech patterns in Neihardt's book. Black Elk speaks of Wasichus (whites) who "have made little islands for us and other little islands for the four-leggeds, and always these islands are becoming smaller." Sandoz uses this concept of the Indians as "an island in the great sea of whites" repeatedly. One chapter in *Black Elk Speaks*, detailing the disasters forcing the hostiles into the agencies, is called "Walking the Black Road," the road of sorrow for the Indians. Sandoz speaks of Crazy Horse having to learn a new way of life when he comes into Fort Robinson, needing "wisdom to walk on this new road." Later, Crazy Horse knows he must "walk this road of darkness" as he attempts to help his people in their captivity. Black Elk says of the Indians' anger at their agent's treatment of them, "their hearts were bad." Black Elk hears the rumor that Crazy Horse is planning to go to war, that he is "getting ready to tie up his horse's tail



Black Elk at the Duhamel Sioux Indian Pageant in the Black Hills. Source: South Dakota State Historical Society.

again"; Sandoz notes Crazy Horse's denial of the idea, saying that "his people had untied their horses' tails." In addition to such phrases, her naming of months, place names, and sometimes events from which time was counted, are similar to those of Neihardt's work.²¹

Certainly Neihardt did not invent these terms in *Black Elk Speaks*, and Sandoz was undoubtedly familiar with them from other sources. In *Wooden Leg*, by Marquis, for instance, the Indian speaks of his great sorrow, saying "my heart fell down to the ground"; Standing Bear, in *My People the Sioux*, speaks of a deserted camp as "the camp standing empty"; Wooden Leg says that when he and his warriors won a battle the enemy was "wiped out." All these expressions appear in Sandoz's book. She listed another source on her index

cards: "An old Indian woman said this, 'He walked as always, straight and tireless, but she knew his heart was on the ground.'" Nevertheless, Neihardt and Sandoz, perhaps because both could relate sympathetically to this oral language, share many language similarities.

Neihardt's influence can also be seen in other, more substantial ways. Several incidents appear in both books: Crazy Horse teasing his young relative, who is a little afraid of him; Black Elk coming to visit Crazy Horse and finding his tepee empty and his cousin gone. Sandoz makes good use of Neihardt's book for such details. *Black Elk Speaks* also describes the moods of the Plains Indians and Sandoz's work shares those feelings. Several times, for instance, Black Elk wonders why the wicked get fat and the poor stay lean. He mentions specifically the Brule Sioux Chief, Spotted Tail, sent to Leavenworth prison for two years, who returns convinced that the Indians cannot fight the whites. Although he has gone to prison in fighting trim, he returns fat from prison food. Black Elk says of Spotted Tail, "I did not like him. He was fat with Wasichu food and we were lean with famine. . . . How could men get fat by being bad, and starve by being good?" Sandoz makes a similar reference to the chief: "[Crazy Horse heard] his own uncle [Spotted Tail] talking of the many, many whites on the earth. 'It is useless to fight; they are too many,' he said. Perhaps Spotted Tail must sweat off all the fat of the soldier food before his heart was his own again. But it was hard to see a good man so," and later, "Now that [Spotted Tail's] white-man fat was really gone the warriors once more followed upon the heel fringe of his moccasin."

Another idea that Black Elk expresses again and again is that the whites are trespassing on the Indian lands: "We were in our own country all the time and we only wanted to be let alone." He displays great anger when Custer goes into the Black Hills to see if there is gold there: "Afterward I learned that it was Pahuska [Custer] who had led his soldiers into the Black Hills that summer to see what he could find. He had no right to go in there, because all that

country was ours." Sandoz gives Crazy Horse similar sentiments: "More soldiers marching through their country! This was their country and no one could tell them where to go or when," and again, "Curly [Crazy Horse] stood . . . on ground that was all their own only a few years ago, with no whites stirring up dust on it or spilling Lakota blood." His attitude toward Custer is as angry as his young cousin's: "When Crazy Horse returned to his camp there was bad word waiting. Long Hair, Custer, had really gone into the Black Hills, into that sacred place. He had come into their Black Hills and was going back without anybody shooting at him."²²

Sandoz follows Neihardt's description of Crazy Horse's actions during the difficult winters before his surrender. Black Elk remarks that Crazy Horse sought help from spiritual sources: "He was a queer man. Maybe he was always part way into that world of his vision." Sandoz notes that, during the winter of 1873, "Crazy Horse was often away from the camp. Sometimes a hunter or a trapper told of seeing the lone Oglala in the timber or at a cave in the hills somewhere." At one point she quotes Black Elk almost exactly. He says, "After that the people noticed that Crazy Horse was queerer than ever. He hardly ever stayed in the camp. People would find him out alone in the cold, and they would ask him to come home with them. He would not come. Once he said to my father: 'Uncle, do not worry; there are caves and holes for me to live in, and out here the spirits may help me.'" In Sandoz's version, when old Black Elk, his relative, found him, he said, "Uncle, you notice the way I act, but do not worry. There are caves and holes for me to live in, and perhaps out here the powers will help me."²³

Black Elk's description of his cousin's appearance is also followed in *Crazy Horse*. Black Elk says, "All the Lakotas like to dance and sing; but he never joined a dance, and they say nobody ever heard him sing. But everyone liked him and they would do anything he wanted. He was a small man among the Lakotas and he was slender and had a thin face and his

eyes looked through things and he always seemed to be thinking hard about something." Sandoz's description of his appearance agrees with Black Elk's: "He was a small man for a fighter, less than six of the white man's feet, and slim as a young warrior. But they knew it was Crazy Horse, for he wore no paint and nothing to show his greatness. One feather stood alone at the back of his head, and his brown, fur-wrapped braids hung long over a plain buckskin shirt, his Winchester in a scabbard at his knee." Sandoz had many authorities for Crazy Horse's appearance, for although he apparently never allowed his picture to be taken, many of his contemporaries recalled how he looked and acted. Almost all noted his small size, his unusually light skin and hair, his "un-Indian" eyes, and his quiet dignity. But the descriptions she uses throughout her book do not contradict Black Elk's.²⁴

There is a marked contrast between *Black Elk Speaks* and *Crazy Horse* in sentence structure. Neihardt's sentences tend to be short and either simple or compound: "There was a man by the name of Bear Sings, and he was very old and wise. So Black Road asked him to help, and he did. . . . Also they painted horses, elk, and bison. Then over the door of the sacred tepee, they painted the flaming rainbow. It took them all day to do this, and it was beautiful." Sandoz prefers long sentences, full of clauses and phrases, cluster building on cluster. These, she felt, came close to the rhythm of Indian life as she understood it—the rhythm of nature, of camp life, and the horses:

So Black Elk's people went, looking back with uneasiness, and with uneasiness ahead too, for it was known that this had been a starving winter at the agency, with often only horse meat to eat and the soldiers always there, the sound of their wagon guns shooting the sun into the sky every morning.²⁵

Despite the difference in sentence structure, the two books share a similarity of tone and convey the unique sense of the Indian world in a way more noticeable when compared with others written about the same circumstances

and period. The dream vision, for example, as a major religious phenomenon, is discussed by most authors writing about the Plains Indians. The vision vigil appears in *Plenty-coups, Chief of the Crows*, and in *Wooden Leg, A Warrior Who Fought Custer*, as well as in *Black Elk Speaks* and *Crazy Horse*.²⁶ Plenty-coups had two dreams when he was nine, the age at which Black Elk had his vision. In contrast to Black Elk, who felt he had not successfully lived out his great vision, Plenty-coups believed he understood his. Furthermore, his Crow tribe followed their leader's dreams, which they interpreted to mean cooperating with the whites. Thus Plenty-coups's dream was considered a vital factor in his tribe's history. But it does not seize our emotions or imagination as Black Elk's and Crazy Horse's do, because Linderman, the author, continually breaks into the narrative, reminding the reader that Plenty-coups and his friends are giving him the story through sign language and an interpreter, and intersperses their comments with his own opinions:

Coyote-runs and Plain-bull began a conversation between themselves when Plenty-coups left off talking. Both said that the dream of the chief was well known to all the tribe, even the day after he had returned from his dreaming. "We traveled by that dream," said Coyote-runs.

When Plenty-coups tells Linderman, "Everything foretold by my great dream has come to pass. All through my life I have seen *signs* that told me to go ahead, that all would be according to my dream," the author interjects his own response:

What a life he has seen, I thought, looking into his strong wide face, seamed and almost pale compared with Pale-bull's. I tried to turn him back to talk of his childhood, to get him started on some incident that would show more of the life of an Indian boy seventy-five years ago. But he laughed at my suggestions. "We played at being men," he said, as though I knew all about it.²⁷

Wooden Leg, a Cheyenne, discusses his attempts at "making medicine" also. Wooden

Leg did not experience any visions as such, but expressed satisfaction in accomplishing "the ordeal of fasting, thanksgiving, prayer, self-denial—even of self-torture" as a devotional exercise to subdue the passions of the flesh and to improve the spiritual self. Wooden Leg communicates to Marquis through sign language, so the style of the book is Marquis's own. Although he avoids interjections in first person, he seldom establishes any particularly Indian-like characteristics in Wooden Leg's recitation either. His experiences are presented in the syntax and vocabulary of standard English, as in this description of his second attempt at "making medicine."

My second medicine experience took place a month or so after the first one. Black White Man, a medicine man, took me through it. I made the dome lodge according to the same rules as had governed in making the first one, which was the regular way of making them. I had the same kind of harassing sensations while alone, but they covered only two days instead of four. The resumption of water and food was carried out in a manner exactly like had been done in previous proceedings. The sweat bath devotions had a like preparatory programme and followed a course like that of the other one and of all such affairs entered upon among the Cheyennes.²⁸

In both cases the white authors give a conscientious portrayal of an Indian religious experience, but they do not draw the reader into the scene. Neither makes much use of the poetic imagery that is characteristic of Indian language. Both authors have great respect for Indian beliefs but they do not convey the sense of reverence so evident in both Neihardt's and Sandoz's works.

Black Elk's dream is a religious experience similar to Plenty-coups's or Wooden Leg's, but in the Neihardt account there is no suggestion of an intermediary to gather and share information, and he avoids the jarring practice of putting standard English phraseology into the mouth of a non-English-speaking Indian. As he narrates his dream, Black Elk gives us the

impression of a person speaking from within his culture:

I could see out through the opening [of the tepee] and there two men were coming from the clouds, head-first like arrows slanting down, and I knew they were the same that I had seen before. Each now carried a long spear, and from the points of these jagged lightning flashed. Then they turned and left the ground like arrows slanting upward from the bow. When I got up to follow, my legs did not hurt me any more and I was very light. I went outside the tepee, and yonder where the men with flaming spears were going, a little cloud was coming very fast. It came and stopped and took me and turned back to where it came from, flying fast. And when I looked down I could see my mother and my father yonder, and I felt sorry to be leaving them.

The reader hears of the dream from Black Elk, not from an intermediary; Black Elk himself comes through in the narrative.²⁹

Sandoz, in describing Crazy Horse's dreams, uses similar language and a similar attitude of belief and reverence for the mystical. As a youngster of twelve, Crazy Horse had attempted to achieve a dream vision without the proper preparation. He failed, but after he gave up his exhausting vigil he fell asleep and had a dream. Several years later, he revealed it to his father, a holy man:

It seemed he must have slept because he had a feeling of giving up and letting himself go, and almost at once his horse that was hobbled out there eating started towards him, his neck high, his feet moving free. A man was on his back. It was not like the world the boy knew but the real world behind this one, the sky and the trees in it, the grass waving, but all in a strange and sacred way. Then he saw that the horse the man was riding changed to a bay and then yellow-spotted and many other colors too. [The man] wore plain blue leggings and a white buckskin shirt, with no paint and only one feather in his long brown hair that hung loose below his waist. There were a few beads in his scalp lock and a small

brown stone was tied behind his ear. Over him flew the small hawk with red on his back, making his killy-killy crying.³⁰

Crazy Horse's father interprets the dream (given here only in part), saying that it is a great vision and that the man on the horse was Crazy Horse himself. Sandoz's presentation of Crazy Horse's early failure and the references to his physical discomfort are reminiscent of the experiences of Plenty-coups and Wooden Leg rather than of Black Elk. But in language and attitude her description of Crazy Horse's dream is closer to that of Neihardt's hero. The references are those of the Indian culture; the language does not seem incongruous. Although the details of the dream follow details given by those who knew Crazy Horse, including the medicine man Chips who prescribed the hero's sacred objects for him on the basis of the dream, one is also reminded of Black Elk's vision in the horse that changes from bay to yellow-spotted and many other colors. And Black Elk too spoke of the real world behind this one.

Black Elk Speaks actually makes only a small explicit contribution to Sandoz's book. Some similarity could be expected because the concepts of the two writers were permeated with the Indian world view and they were writing of the same time and the same people. But other writers could claim those characteristics; the affinity goes deeper than that. Sandoz knew and appreciated Neihardt. It seems only reasonable that she would draw on the language, content, and tone of his works.

I once asked Neihardt what he thought the difference was between his and Sandoz's work. He replied that while she was a fine researcher and reporter, he was a mystic, and for that reason they approached their work from entirely different points of view. While it is true that Sandoz excelled as a researcher, she was never a reporter in the journalistic sense. But like Neihardt, she was also a mystic and a romantic, even though she worked with her materials in a different way. Both were superb storytellers in the ancient, honored, oral tradition, and both were eminently able to use the

magnificent materials they had gathered. Indeed, Neihardt could have taken some personal credit when he wrote in his *New York Times* review of *Crazy Horse*, "Here is a glorious hero tale told with beauty and power."³¹

NOTES

1. Sandoz was certainly familiar with the songs in Neihardt's epic *Cycle of the West*, including the "Song of the Indian Wars" (1925), which recounts the war deeds and the heroic death of Crazy Horse, and some of her prose descriptions could well have been drawn from Neihardt's poetry. While her copy of the "Song of the Indian Wars" has no marginalia in it, her *Black Elk Speaks* is heavily underlined and annotated (occasionally with an emphatic "No!").

2. Sandoz continued to insist on the importance of this book. In 1960, when the University of Nebraska Press was launching its new Bison paperbacks, primarily books of historical value, she urged them to publish *Black Elk Speaks*, at that time out of print and very hard to find. Her own copy she had bought for \$.49 after Neihardt's publisher had remaindered his stock. Calling it one of the three best first-hand accounts of American Indians, she also admired it because she felt Neihardt had used his "poet's hand" in allowing Black Elk to speak for himself, thus exposing the shallowness of other researchers who, she felt, tried to interpret Black Elk's mysticism through their own preconceived ideas (letter from Sandoz to Bruce Nicoll, June 12, 1960).

3. Neihardt began his epic poem in 1912 and finished it in 1941. It consists of five songs, all related to the exploration and winning of the West. The entire epic, containing more than 16,000 lines, on which Neihardt worked almost every day for thirty years, is the longest such poem written by an American, as long as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, according to Blair Whitney, *John G. Neihardt* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), p. 101. See also Lucile F. Aly, *John G. Neihardt: A Critical Biography*, Melville Studies in American Culture, vol. 7 (Amsterdam: Rodopi N.V., 1977).

4. John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the*

Oglala Sioux (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, 1961), p. vii. All quotations are from this edition.

5. Robert F. Sayre, "Vision and Experience in *Black Elk Speaks*," *College English* 32 (February 1971): 509-35.

6. Mari Sandoz, *Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), p. x. All further quotations are from this edition.

7. Lucile F. Aly, *John G. Neihardt*, Western Writers Series (Boise, Idaho: Boise State University, 1976). For another explanation of Neihardt's understanding of "otherness," see p. 169. I have used Aly's material from this pamphlet and her book extensively in this article.

8. Carl Jung was one of the first to recognize the importance of *Black Elk Speaks*. He saw it was an example of his theory of the collective unconscious—Black Elk's dream vision expresses Jung's concept of the universal aspect of dreams and visions in the individual's unconscious mind (Aly, *Neihardt*, p. 172).

9. Helen Winter Stauffer, "Mari Sandoz: A Study of the Artist as Biographer" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1974), pp. 199-202.

10. Kenneth S. Rothwell, "In Search of a Western Epic: Neihardt, Sandburg, and Jaffe as Regionalists and 'Astoriadists,'" *Kansas Quarterly* 2 (Spring 1970): 52-53; *Black Elk Speaks*, pp. 135-36, 138.

11. *Crazy Horse*, pp. viii, 41.

12. Neihardt was speaking of Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte, the first woman physician of the Omaha tribe (interview with Helen Stauffer, January 30, 1972).

13. This early experience was also useful when he wrote the last two songs of his cycle "Song of the Indian Wars" and "Song of the Messiah," later published separately as *Twilight of the Sioux*.

14. By coincidence it was the same summer that Neihardt first met and talked with Black Elk.

15. By Indian phraseology I do not mean actual Indian language or direct translation. Rather, the aim was to create for the reader a sense of the Indian's world, his point of view, through language that was compatible with Indian symbols and references. Both Sandoz

and Neihardt remarked that the Indian language is lacking in synonyms, adjectives, and descriptive adverbs, so epithets, inflections, and nuances of language must be used instead. The Sioux called the month of January "The Month of Frost in the Tepee" for example. One of their games was "Throwing Them Off Their Horses." Neither Sandoz nor Neihardt spoke Sioux, to my knowledge, although both certainly heard it spoken and were sensitive to its particular cadences and rhythm.

16. Thomas B. Marquis, *Wooden Leg, A Warrior Who Fought Custer* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, [1931] 1971); Frank B. Linderman, *Plenty-coups, Chief of the Crows* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, [1930] 1962).

17. The large Ricker Collection, acquired by the Nebraska State Historical Society in 1926, includes thirty boxes of manuscript material, most of it pertaining to Indians. Part of the collection consists of the "Ricker Tablets," a series of more than two hundred pencil tablets on which Judge Eli Ricker transcribed his interviews with those who had experienced the Indian wars, the Ghost Dance troubles, and early reservation adjustments. The interviews, either typed or in longhand, often in pencil, provide invaluable personal insights into events on the plains during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth. Sandoz worked with the material in the early 1930s when she was doing research for Addison E. Sheldon, then director of the society, and later when working on *Crazy Horse*. She said she could not have written the book without information from these interviews.

18. These sources included the December 1929 *Nebraska History* magazine, which was devoted entirely to Crazy Horse, books by and about army men who had fought on the plains, and many army records.

19. Ron Hull, interview with Helen Stauffer, June 7, 1972. He was speaking primarily

about Neihardt's poetry.

20. Sally McClusky, "Black Elk Speaks: And So Does John Neihardt," *Western American Literature* 6 (Winter 1972): 231-42.

21. *Black Elk Speaks*, p. 9; *Crazy Horse*, pp. 388, 406; *Black Elk Speaks*, p. 253; *Crazy Horse*, p. 66, passim; *Black Elk Speaks*, p. 145; *Crazy Horse*, p. 391.

22. *Black Elk Speaks*, p. 142; *Crazy Horse*, pp. 91, 154; *Black Elk Speaks*, pp. 105, 79; *Crazy Horse*, pp. 301, 83, 287-88.

23. *Black Elk Speaks*, p. 87; *Crazy Horse*, p. 279; *Black Elk Speaks*, p. 140; *Crazy Horse*, p. 359.

24. *Black Elk Speaks*, p. 87; *Crazy Horse*, p. 361.

25. *Black Elk Speaks*, p. 166; *Crazy Horse*, p. 302.

26. I am limiting the comparison to these two books because they have much in common with *Black Elk* and *Crazy Horse*. All four protagonists are contemporaries: Crazy Horse was born around 1841, Plenty-coups around 1848, Wooden Leg around 1858, and Black Elk around 1863. Plenty-coups, Wooden Leg, and Black Elk gave their stories to white narrators; the three autobiographies were published within two years of each other in the early 1930s. All discuss the Battle of the Rosebud and the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

27. *Plenty-coups*, pp. 75, 82-83, 84.

28. *Wooden Leg*, pp. 138-39.

29. *Black Elk Speaks*, p. 22.

30. *Crazy Horse*, p. 104.

31. "Crazy Horse, Who Led the Sioux at Custer's Last Fight," *New York Times Book Review*, December 20, 1942, p. 4.

In addition to sources listed, information came from material in the Sandoz Corporation at the home of Caroline Sandoz Pifer, Gordon, Nebraska, and the Sandoz Collection, University of Nebraska Archives, Love Library, Lincoln, Nebraska.