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VISIONARIES OF THE AMERICAN WEST:
MARI SANDOZ AND HER FOUR PLAINS PROTAGONISTS

BY

LISA RAE LINDELL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts
Major in English
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1993

VISIONARIES OF THE AMERICAN WEST:

MARI SANDOZ AND HER FOUR PLAINS PROTAGONISTS

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

Dr. Mary R. Ryder
Thesis Advisor

Date

Dr. George A. West
Head, English Department

Date

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The authorial reputation of Mari Sandoz has long rested in the shadow of other writers of her era. First of all, Sandoz wrote from and about a relatively remote region of the United States. In addition, she firmly refused to produce popular works at the expense of sacrificing the truth she perceived and wished to express. Consequently, Sandoz has often been classified as a regional writer and her works have been overlooked by many readers and critics. Her status as a woman, her unconventional writing style, point of view, and subject matter, and the blending of historical and fictional elements in her works have variously tended to hinder Sandoz's reputation as a literary artist. Although her works received national reviews and careful scrutiny from western critics and historians, and recently from feminists, critical recognition has generally eluded Sandoz.

However, given the skill she demonstrated as novelist, historian, and cultural commentator, Sandoz deserves greater attention. The very elements which have precluded her widespread recognition are those which provided Sandoz with her unique experiences and interpretations. Her unusual background on the Nebraska frontier and independent perspective and writing style, combined with her proclivity

for storytelling, enabled Sandoz to dramatize powerfully the land and inhabitants of the Great Plains and to explore the universal qualities in the characteristics and conflicts of the region. Letters, interviews, autobiographical writings, and the personal elements contained in her biography of her father (Old Jules) reveal how Sandoz's childhood experiences shaped her historical vision and helped determine the content and form of her writings.

The daughter of Swiss immigrant parents, Mari was born on May 11, 1896. Mari's father, Jules Ami Sandoz, had come to America in 1881 at the age of 22. Following a three-year sojourn in northeastern Nebraska, Jules abruptly abandoned his wife and land and headed further west, settling in the recently surveyed region northwest of the Nebraska sandhills. Egotistical, deliberately uncouth, and possessing a violent temper, Jules had undergone three divorces by the time he married Mary Elizabeth Fehr in 1895. In Mary, a hard-working, perseverant, and stoic woman, Jules at last found a wife who was willing to stay with him.

As the eldest of the six Sandoz children, Mari (named Mary after her mother but called Mari at home) was given great responsibility at an early age. She helped extensively with the care of her young brothers and sisters and with the cooking, cleaning, and other household chores. Growing up in a family that exhibited little intimacy or outward affection, Mari experienced deep feelings of

estrangement. As a result, she was inclined to retreat into her own fanciful world. However, her tendency to withdraw did not prevent Mari from eagerly observing the dramatic, sometimes violent facets of life within her family and community or from forming a strong attachment to the land.

One means through which Mari's imaginative faculty showed itself was her love for stories. She would often perch on the gatepost facing the heavily-traveled road running past the homestead, intently listening to and imagining the stories of the passersby. Mari further satisfied her penchant for storytelling by sitting in the woodbox by the stove absorbing the tales of the trappers, traders, prospectors, and Native Americans who stopped to converse with her father. Jules's various roles as land locator, postmaster, and storekeeper; the proximity of his homestead to a long-used crossing of the Niobrara River and to the road; and his preference for socializing over physical work ensured that many travelers and visitors found their way to the Sandoz place.

Mari was nine years old before she attended school. Contemptuous of the abilities of country school teachers and desiring the extra help at home, Jules had kept his children out of school, teaching them various practical skills but neglecting to instruct them in reading or writing. Still, Mari appreciated the extent of the early education she and her siblings received from their father:

We were taught a wonderful at-homeness in the world and the universe by this violent father. We learned the meaning of every change in the sky and earth. At seven I knew the theory of spontaneous generation, something about spiral nebulae, and that there was enough latent energy in the atoms of a handful of sand, if released, to do all the hated tasks of washing, ironing, housework and hoeing for my lifetime. I knew the lead to take one wild goose on the wing, or a grouse, and how to catch a mink, ermine, coyote or eagle and how to remove the pelt and cure it, although my brothers were much better at this than I. I retained more of Napoleon's campaigns and of the multiplication table to 25 x 25 than they.

("Brief Biographical Resume, 1953-4")

Finally, however, the county superintendent discovered their truancy, and the Sandoz children were sent to school. When Mari entered school, she spoke Swiss German and knew only a few words of English. She was unable to attend regularly (receiving four and one-half years of formal education between the ages of nine and seventeen) and was often tormented by schoolmates because of community animosity toward her father. Mari nevertheless loved school and worked diligently to develop her language and reading

skills. Learning to read was a momentous event for her. She later described the experience:

In just a few days, I had . . . the greatest thing that one can have in this world. I had the power to get thoughts from the written page. If it had been taught me earlier, the wonder would never have struck me as it did when I was nine. ("How I Came to Write" 20)

As soon as Mari learned to read, she began to devour all the material that was available, including her father's pamphlets, newspapers, and government agricultural bulletins. Since Jules disapproved of novel reading, calling it suitable "only for hired girls and trash,"¹ Mari avoided her father's wrath by smuggling books up to her attic room. Borrowing novels, both popular and classical, from neighbors and teachers, she hid the books in her straw tick and read them avidly at night by lantern light. Joseph Conrad quickly became a favorite author. As an adult, Mari credited Conrad as her earliest literary influence. In a letter to H. L. Mencken, Sandoz noted the similarities between Conrad's sea and the sandhills of her own experience, referring to conflicts

. . . that must be resolved in spiritual isolation as complete as that of Conrad's characters, for these people, too, were outcasts

on a sea, a sea of endless, undulating hills, stretching in yellow-green monotony toward a remote and unfriendly horizon. (May 28, 1931)

When Mari was eleven years old, the Omaha Daily News published one of her original stories on its Junior Writers' Page. Furious at his daughter for wasting her time writing fiction, Jules punished Mari, giving her a whipping and sending her to the cellar. Her family's negative reaction to her accomplishment made a deep impression on Mari, but even the prospect of Jules's wrath could not stop her from writing.

When Mari was fourteen, the Sandoz family moved about twenty-five miles southeast into the sandhills. Living in this isolated, treeless region, a land she conceived of as being inhabited by "gray wolves, cattlemen, and rattlesnakes" (Old Jules 327), Mari was, as always, receptive to the ethos of the community and the character of the land. Her firsthand experience and observation of economic, political, and cultural conflict and the settlers' confrontation with nature shaped her sense of history and future choice of subject matter.

In the years 1913 to 1919, Mari passed the rural teacher's examination and taught intermittently; married (and ultimately divorced) Wray Macumber, a neighboring rancher; and moved across the state to Lincoln to attend business college.

Lincoln was Sandoz's primary residence for the next two decades, a time period in which she struggled and, finally, succeeded in her quest to become a recognized author. Supporting herself with temporary jobs, Sandoz attended the University of Nebraska from 1923 to 1932 as her finances allowed and began seriously to write. During her years of study at the University, Sandoz discovered and grew to appreciate classical literature. In "Mari Sandoz and the University of Nebraska," scholar Helen Stauffer describes Sandoz's introduction to the Greek tragedies and comedies in the spring of 1924 and their influence upon her writing:

She delighted in Greek literature, and Aristophanes became one of her favorite authors. She would later reflect the world view of those ancient Greeks in her treatment of her Indian heroes, in whose lives she saw many parallels.

(257)

Barbara Rippey, in her dissertation "Mari Sandoz, Novelist as Historian," further emphasizes the impact of Sandoz's education in ancient history on the author's vision of the historical development of the Great Plains region:

John Andrew Rice's vivid presentation of the sweep of Greek history provided Sandoz with a pattern to interpret Jules's tales of conquered lands, Jules's own battle to develop a new land, and the

Native Americans' recent struggle and defeat.

(64)

Sandoz's early writings were short stories and articles, principally set in the Niobrara frontier region of her childhood. She regularly sent out her works to magazine editors, but, for the most part, they were returned with rejection slips. Her portrayal of the harsh, often violent aspects of frontier life and her use of regional terminology generally unfamiliar to outside readers alienated eastern publishers. The reader's report sent to Sandoz by her literary agent Margaret Christie on a short story Sandoz was seeking to publish ("Twin Mills of the Gods") is typical:

In this story the author presupposes certain knowledge on the part of her readers which the average person does not possess. Lacking this knowledge, the story becomes meaningless to such an extent that the reader takes no further interest in it. . . . One is constantly being balked and confused by not understanding the words, expressions and phrases that the author uses. (qtd. in Pifer, Making of an Author. Book 2, 138)

Editors informed Sandoz that her stories were too starkly realistic and morbid; their readers preferred light, romantic plots. Her agent advised her, "The consensus of demand is for a fast moving, hold-the-interest, romantic-

angled up-to-the-minute tale" (October 5, 1929). Sandoz nevertheless persisted in her own manner of writing, resisting recommendations that she alter her style or themes. Prizing the literary value and historical accuracy of her stories over their potential for commercial success, Sandoz refused to produce writing which she perceived as formulaic or catering to the tastes of others. She was resolved to be a serious writer, presenting an authentic picture of life as she found it. As Sandoz wrote on January 3, 1931, to Bernice Baumgarten of the literary agency of Brandt and Brandt, "Life is a serious business to me, and any artificial treatment of it is a major insincerity in my eyes" (qtd. in Pifer, Making of an Author. Book 3, 6).

When her father died in November of 1928, Sandoz was at his bedside. His request "'Why don't you write my life sometime?'" (qtd. in Pifer, Book 2, 13) startled and pleased her. Jules's early attitude toward his daughter's writing had been clearly expressed in a letter to Sandoz in 1926, after she received an honorable mention in Harper's intercollegiate short story contest. He tersely wrote, "You know I consider writers and artists the maggots of society" (Old Jules viii). Jules's deathbed withdrawal of his erstwhile fierce objections to Sandoz's writing, particularly to her writing about him, freed her to pursue a project she had long contemplated. Sandoz wished to

dramatize the character of her father and to explore his role in the development of the sandhills region.

Over the course of several years, Sandoz had meticulously studied the Nebraska newspaper collection housed in the State Historical Society. She focused on the many articles recounting the activities of Old Jules. After her father's death, Sandoz began to write his story, making extensive use of these newspaper resources, along with interviews, published and unpublished accounts of the frontier, and, of most value, some 4,000 letters and documents from Jules's files.

Early in 1931, Sandoz commenced the formal writing of Old Jules; and in 1932, she sent the manuscript to several publishers, all of whom rejected it, variously citing awkward style, plotless structure, strong language, and its unattractive protagonist. In 1935, after fourteen such rejections and a corresponding number of extensive revisions, the Old Jules manuscript was accepted at last by the Atlantic Press and its publisher Little, Brown. The book won the Atlantic nonfiction prize of \$5,000, having been unanimously chosen over 582 other manuscripts by the judges. In addition, Old Jules was the Book-of-the-Month selection for November of 1935.

Having gained a certain amount of attention and some financial security, Sandoz devoted herself to research and writing. For the next thirty-one years, until her death in

1966, she wrote persistently, publishing twenty-one books and numerous short works of fiction and nonfiction. Focusing on the land and people of the Great Plains, Sandoz was particularly skilled as a social historian and cultural analyst.

Inherent in Sandoz's work is a unique perspective on the history of the trans-Missouri region and the diverse values of its inhabitants. Having grown up during the settlement period of northwestern Nebraska and having studied the development of the American West, Sandoz felt a deep sense of responsibility to present the region and its history to readers. Central to her work is condemnation of the exploitation of the vulnerable at the hands of the powerful. Sandoz was especially concerned with the displacement of Native American culture by white encroachment. She declared,

[There are things] that I cannot watch with detachment. . . . One is the sight of the earth exploited, and the other is the knowledge of man, red, white or whatever color, deprived of the right to walk in pride and dignity before all the world. ("Brief Biographical Resume, 1953-4")

Sandoz believed that white civilization had destroyed an integral part of itself in the process of appropriating the land and disrupting the culture of the Plains Indians. She thoughtfully examined this physical and cultural

dispossession in her ambitiously conceived Great Plains series. Sandoz's purpose in writing the series was to chronicle the history of the region, focusing on confrontations between human beings, animals, and nature. In the foreword to The Beaver Men: Spearheads of Empire, the final book she wrote in the six-volume series, Sandoz expressed her aspiration "to understand something of the white man's incumbency on the Great Plains from Stone Age Indian to the present, to understand something of what modern man does to such a region, and what it does to him" (xv). Sandoz believed she could gain a better understanding of the nature of the universe by closely examining a part of it. She explained in a 1947 letter to Dial Press:

I decided early that most writers do their best work in material with which they have emotional identity. Therefore I restricted myself to the trans-Missouri country. . . . Through the discovery of this one region, this one drop of water, I hope to discover something of the nature of the ocean. (qtd. in McDonald, "An Educational History" 166)

Although Sandoz had contemplated writing a sequence of books dealing with the trans-Missouri region, she did not systematically plan the composition of the Great Plains series or write the individual volumes in chronological order. Indeed, the series evolved rather haphazardly.

Sandoz added books that she had not originally conceived of as part of the series; composed the fourth work in the sequence, The Buffalo Hunters, at the request of a publisher; and never completed a projected seventh volume, a book about oil in the Great Plains region. Nevertheless, the six books that ultimately formed the series effectively represent Sandoz's historical vision.

Old Jules (1935) covers the time period from 1884 to 1928, Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas (1942) portrays the reactions of a culture threatened with displacement in the years from 1854 to 1877, and Cheyenne Autumn (1953) recounts the flight of the Northern Cheyennes from 1878 to 1879 in the wake of the destruction of their way of life. The Buffalo Hunters: The Story of the Hide Men (1954) traces the history of the buffalo from 1867 to their virtual disappearance by the mid-1880s. The Cattlemen: From the Rio Grande to the Far Marias (1958) spans several centuries, beginning with the first appearance of cattle in North America and focusing on the 1860s through the 1880s. Finally, The Beaver Men: Spearheads of Empire (1964) extends from the beginning of the beaver trade in the seventeenth century to its decline in the 1830s. In each of these works, Sandoz drew upon experience, observation, and research to depict the nature of conflict throughout the history of the Plains.

Until recently, criticism of the writings of Mari Sandoz has consisted chiefly of biographical and source study. Limited attention has been given to a close reading of her texts. Some recent critical study has been directed toward Sandoz as a female writer and as a regional writer, and much of this current consideration arises out of the Midwest. However, the topic of character development in Sandoz's works remains largely unexplored.

In this study, I focus on Old Jules, Crazy Horse, and Cheyenne Autumn, the first three books in Sandoz's Great Plains series. Published over an eighteen-year span and variously labeled biographies, narrative histories, and nonfiction novels, these three works depict characters struggling to combat powerful forces at a transitional time in the history of the Plains.

Although the books have received attention individually, little critical effort has been made to connect Old Jules, Crazy Horse, and Cheyenne Autumn thematically or as character studies. Various critics have referred to one or another of these books in their assessments of Sandoz's performance as a novelist or historian. In her 1989 dissertation, Barbara Rippey seeks to reconcile Sandoz's roles as novelist and historian, theorizing about Sandoz's purpose and achievements in combining these two genres. Although Rippey considers the three biographical novels separately in terms of their

expression of Sandoz's historical perspective, she does not focus on the books' thematic relationships.

Kathleen Walton devotes only a portion of her 1970 dissertation "Mari Sandoz: An Initial Critical Appraisal" to an examination of the characters of Old Jules and Crazy Horse. Classifying these two protagonists as epic heroes, Walton compares and contrasts their personalities and actions. She terms Crazy Horse a "Virgilian hero" who is "motivated by devotion to a cause" (80) and characterizes Jules as a "Homeric hero" who seeks personal honor and renown. Walton praises Sandoz for her combination of the "living past" and the "living character" in Old Jules, Crazy Horse, and Cheyenne Autumn (311). Through the telling of the individual stories of the central characters in these three biographical histories, Walton asserts, Sandoz has succeeded in dramatizing general motivations and values.

A critic who has focused her attention on Old Jules, Crazy Horse, and Cheyenne Autumn as an inclusive group is Helen Stauffer. In her dissertation, "Mari Sandoz: A Study of the Artist as a Biographer," written in 1974, and in several more recent critical articles, Stauffer evaluates Sandoz's merits as a literary artist, based on the three biographical works. Mainly concerned with the events and factors influencing Sandoz's writing and the sources and methods Sandoz used, Stauffer conducts some limited textual and character analysis. An examination of contemporary

studies of these three works reveals that too little attention has been paid to the comparative analysis of Sandoz's protagonists.

In this thesis, I explore, therefore, Sandoz's vision of the development of the American West by focusing on the central characters of Crazy Horse, Cheyenne Autumn, and Old Jules. A careful reading of the three works discloses Sandoz's striking technique of depicting her personal historical vision of the West through her remarkable characterizations of her four protagonists. Sandoz communicated her view of the displacement of the Native American culture by the white settlers through the differing perspectives of these central characters.

Disclosing the strengths and weaknesses of her protagonists, Sandoz rendered an authentic account of the representative roles these leading figures played during the period of cultural transition on the Great Plains. The conflicting values and incompatible lifestyles, as well as the common experiences and similar goals of Crazy Horse, Dull Knife, Little Wolf, and Old Jules, are revealed through Sandoz's three biographical works. Each protagonist has a unique perspective and personal motives. However, these four men of the Plains function as representative characters, as well. The cultural values of the Lakotas and Cheyennes and the contrasting values of the white settlers are typified in the attitudes and actions of Sandoz's

protagonists. In the order of the time periods they cover, Crazy Horse, Cheyenne Autumn and Old Jules thus chronicle the development of the frontier as envisioned by Sandoz.

Notes

¹ Mari Sandoz, Old Jules (New York: Little, Brown, 1935. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1962) 340. All further references to Old Jules are from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

CHAPTER TWO

Crazy Horse: Visionary for a Lost People

Upon its publication in 1942, Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas received mixed reviews. Reviewers focused almost exclusively on the extent of Sandoz's research and use of detail, her style and point of view, and her inclusion of invented dialogue. Opinions differed concerning the importance and interest of the book's protagonist and themes. Touching upon several of these issues, Clifton Fadiman, book editor for the New Yorker, reviewed Crazy Horse quite negatively. He charged Sandoz with "carrying on a fervent historico-literary affair with a dead Indian, the consequence of which is a curious, half-interesting, uneven book." Calling it "half history, half heroic epic, and not entirely successful as either," Fadiman maintained that "[Crazy Horse's] story is told so completely from his own point of view that it seems to belong as much to the literature of apologetics as to the literature of biography." He criticized the "quagmire of detail" and accused Sandoz of writing with more "drive and passion . . . than the average reader will think the theme deserves" (100, 102).

Stanley Walker, reviewing in New York Herald Tribune Books, combined positive and negative criticism. Terming the quantity of Sandoz's research "downright astounding," he

declared that she "has brought to the task an indefatigable spirit and an understanding heart." Walker regarded Crazy Horse as an outstanding warrior and believed that his story was "eminently worth doing." However, he acknowledged that he found the book difficult to read. In his opinion, Sandoz's attempt to "write and think as a Sioux of the period of Crazy Horse would think and write" results in convoluted, awkwardly-constructed writing (4).

Western historians and writers were inclined to respond more favorably to Crazy Horse. Fellow Nebraska author John G. Neihardt regarded the book as "a glorious hero tale told with beauty and power." He commended Sandoz's exhaustive research and commented on her "rich background of sympathetic insight and understanding." Countering the negative appraisal of Sandoz's style, Neihardt praised her writing, observing that her "skillful use of characteristic figure and idiom creates the illusion that the tale is growing directly out of an Indian consciousness" (4).

Noted western author Wallace Stegner appreciated Sandoz's work as well. Reviewing the book in the Atlantic Bookshelf, he described Crazy Horse as "a story with the inevitable movement and the dignity of great tragedy" (140). In a letter to Sandoz, Stegner affirmed that Crazy Horse is "a marvellous fusion of fact and the method of fiction, and the whole book has a grand epic sweep" (December 2, 1942).

This blending of fact and fiction was not uniformly valued. The acceptability of employing fictional dialogue in historical works was an issue frequently debated in regard to Sandoz's writing. As Stanley Vestal noted in the Saturday Review of Literature, "Some will wish to be assured that all the words put into the Chief's mouth were actually his own" (20). Some reviewers unfamiliar with the story of Crazy Horse criticized Sandoz for writing a romanticized biography and distorting facts.

Sandoz received favorable responses, though, from Native American readers of Crazy Horse. Lone Eagle, son-in-law of Luther Standing Bear (author of My People the Sioux), wrote to Sandoz, "I recently read your splendid book 'Crazy Horse' and must say, without thought of flattery, that your writing is by far, and far, the finest work ever composed on this famous Dakota" (February 2, 1955). Chief Henry Standing Bear, an Oglala, likewise praised Sandoz for her "splendidly written book" (May 16, 1943).

Recent criticism of Crazy Horse has been scanty. The unusual protagonist, subject matter, style, and point of view of the book all may be factors precluding its rediscovery and scrutiny by literary critics. One scholar who has examined Crazy Horse is Stauffer. She focuses on Sandoz's sources and transformation of historical accounts into literary form, language and point of view, and the qualities of the classical hero displayed by Crazy Horse.

Stauffer emphasizes the affinity Sandoz felt with her protagonist and her perception of him as a vital symbol to his people.

As this summary of Crazy Horse criticism indicates, analysis of Sandoz's title character has been modest. From the publication of Crazy Horse in 1942 until the present, critical study has been dominated by investigations of Sandoz's sources, writing style, and historical accuracy. Character and cultural study remain areas inviting analysis.

Yet, Crazy Horse was the character with whom Mari Sandoz most closely identified in her writings. In a letter to Charlotte Curtis, she named him as her favorite character and cited "the mystic turn of the man, and the exalted theme of his story" as reasons for her partiality (March 11, 1956). Crazy Horse's connection with the stories and land of Sandoz's childhood attracted the author to the Oglala Lakota warrior.

Growing up on the Niobrara River near a popular campsite of the Lakotas and Cheyennes, Mari had the opportunity to observe Native American culture firsthand. The Niobrara site was a natural camping spot for Native Americans traveling south from the nearby South Dakota reservations. With a willing ear and an open door, Old Jules drew stories from these travelers. In These Were the Sioux, Sandoz described the process by which she and the Lakota storytellers communicated:

These old buffalo-hunting Sioux of my early childhood spoke very little English and I knew only the German-Swiss dialect of my grandmother. But young children learn the rudiments of sign talk more quickly than any spoken language, perhaps because it usually tells a story and is so descriptive, so amusing. (17-18)

Little Mari eagerly drank in the stirring tales of hunting and war, tales through which the heroic deeds of a man named Crazy Horse ran "like a painted strip of rawhide in a braided rope." She was intrigued to learn that as a youth Crazy Horse had camped with his people on what became Sandoz land.

In the summer of 1930, Sandoz pursued her interest in the life of Crazy Horse and Native American culture. With her friend Eleanor Hinman, she made a 3,000-mile trip through Nebraska, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana, visiting a number of Indian reservations, battle grounds, and other sites important to the Native Americans. On the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, Sandoz and Hinman interviewed several surviving friends and relatives of Crazy Horse, including his close companion He Dog. With his accurate memory and a willingness to share his recollections, the 92-year-old He Dog proved their best

source, providing valuable information about Crazy Horse's personal life and the events leading to his death.

Hinman had originally planned to write a fictionalized biography of Crazy Horse; but lacking the time and money to continue this writing project, she eventually offered the story rights to Sandoz, along with her notes and research materials. Sandoz was well suited for the task. While working at the Nebraska State Historical Society in the early 1930s, she had read and organized the Ricker Collection, studying the numerous interviews with Native Americans, soldiers, and settlers conducted by Judge Eli Richter of Chadron, Nebraska, several decades earlier. Many of these interviews dealt with the Indian wars and Crazy Horse's role in them. Sandoz was also familiar with the 1929 issue of Nebraska History Magazine, exclusively dedicated to an examination of Crazy Horse and the circumstances of his death.

Following her decision to write Crazy Horse's story, Sandoz conducted intensive research, spending long hours in historical archives throughout the Midwest and in Washington, D.C., gathering pertinent material. Basing her story on primary material, Sandoz fashioned a biographical history with which she felt a personal involvement. Completed in 1942, Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas reflects the author's identification with her protagonist, her exhaustive research, and her historical

vision. As Stauffer asserts, Sandoz created her best works when she could relate herself to the people, places, and events of which she wrote ("A Study of the Artist" 210-211). In writing Crazy Horse, Sandoz combined her personal ties to her subject with careful historical investigation, thereby producing a sympathetic and authentic account of Crazy Horse's character and culture.

Sandoz wrote in the foreword to Crazy Horse, "In [this book] I have tried to tell not only the story of the man but something of the life of his people through that crucial time" (xxvi). A principal concern throughout the book is the conflicts and losses experienced by the Plains Indians as the whites relentlessly dispossess the indigenous peoples of their land and livelihood. Torn between living in peace with the whites or fighting the power of the U.S. government, the characters in Crazy Horse experience the emotions and conflicts of a displaced people. Sandoz consciously set out to chronicle this period of cultural disruption on the Plains from the perspective of the Native American. Highly esteeming the customs and lifestyle of the Lakota people, she hoped to convey something of the vibrancy and richness of the culture threatened by white encroachment.

Sandoz's identification with traditional Native American culture and perspectives is evidenced through her attempt to capture the Lakota language patterns in Crazy

Horse. Her use of the Lakota names for the months highlights the Lakotas' close ties to nature. The month names commemorate the seasonal changes and properties of the animals and plants upon which the Native Americans depended for their livelihood: for example, "The Moon of the Dark Red Calves" for February, "the Moon of the Shedding Ponies" for May, "The Moon of the Cherries Blackening" for August, and "The Moon of the Falling Leaves" for November.

Of great influence upon the content and style of her work was John Neihardt's Black Elk Speaks, termed by Sandoz in a letter to Bruce Nicoll (director of the Nebraska University Press) as "one of the three best . . . first hand accounts of American Indians" (June 12, 1960). Published in 1932, this narration of the power-vision of Black Elk, Crazy Horse's second cousin, provides a mystical, intimate portrait of Plains Indian history and culture in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Emphasizing the uniqueness of Sandoz's vision and writing methods, Stauffer, in her "Two Authors and a Hero: Neihardt, Sandoz, and Crazy Horse," recognizes that Sandoz drew on the images, tone, and speech patterns of Neihardt's work.

Sandoz sought to approximate the rhythms of the Lakota language by forming long, flowing sentences with many clauses and by employing images from the life of the Lakotas. The first paragraph of Crazy Horse serves as an excellent example of Sandoz's fluid writing style:

The drowsy heat of middle August lay heavy as a furred robe on the upper country of the Shell River, the North Platte of the white man. Almost every noon the thunders built themselves a dark cloud to ride the far crown of Laramie Peak. But down along the river no rain came to lay the dust of the emigrant road, and no cloud shaded the gleaming 'dobe walls and bastions of Fort Laramie, the soldier town that was only a little island of whites in a great sea of Indian country two thousand miles wide. (3)

Sandoz used striking word imagery throughout her book, as well. Her descriptions of the natural elements were particularly deft. In the following passage, Sandoz described a storm:

Then the air filled and darkened, the flaming braids of lightning whipped the earth, the thunders falling upon it. Before the wind the small pines along the ridge bent down and let the storm sweep over them like a buffalo herd moving fast. (77)

According to Kathleen Danker, scholar of Native American language and literature, images of movement are used extensively in the Lakota language. As the preceding passages illustrate, Sandoz incorporated motive imagery into her writing of Crazy Horse. Using the active voice in her

descriptions of the thunders, lightning, clouds, and wind, the author animated the natural elements, exploring the power of their movement. Her use of images integral to Lakota daily life is likewise evident in these passages. References to fur robes, buffalo, and braids, as well as to the forces of nature, all contribute to her distinctive representation of the Lakota world.

Sandoz did not attempt to replicate directly the language patterns of the Lakotas. The basic Siouan sentence order of subject, object, verb; the relative absence of descriptive adverbs and adjectives; and difficulties of translation precluded her from literally transcribing Lakota sentence structure and phraseology into written English. Rather, she endeavored to recreate the Lakota way of life and points of view through her style and choice of idiom.

The author asserted her stylistic intention in the foreword to Crazy Horse:

[I was] hoping by idiom and figures and the underlying rhythm pattern to say some of the things of the Indian for which there are no white-man words, suggest something of his innate nature, something of his relationship to the earth and the sky and all that is between. (xxvi)

But, it was in her character development that Sandoz most aptly conveyed her sense of the region and the human forces that shaped its history. She perceived Crazy Horse

as possessing both universal, timeless qualities and attributes in the fullest sense representative of the particularity of his Lakota world. Recognizing the heroic elements embodied in the personality and experiences of the historical Crazy Horse, Sandoz sought to convey these qualities through the style and substance of her creative work. Crazy Horse traces the life of the title character from a pivotal experience of his youth through his betrayal and death in 1877. Within that time frame and the three-division structure of the book, Sandoz used her protagonist as a representative figure.

In a letter to Helen Blish, a friend who shared her interest in Lakota history and culture, Sandoz referred to the story of Crazy Horse as "tremendous, with all the cumulative inevitability of Greek tragedy" (June 16, 1941). Throughout Crazy Horse, parallels between the characteristics typically possessed by the classical hero and the qualities exhibited by Crazy Horse are readily discernible.

In the tradition of epic characters, Crazy Horse is a figure of heroic dimensions. Although unexceptional in physical stature, Crazy Horse is striking in appearance and ability. With his unusually light skin and hair, he stands out from his fellow Lakotas. Crazy Horse's mental acuity corresponds to that of a Ulysses or Theseus. Throughout the

text, Sandoz built her striking portrait of the man. She noted:

He was a small man for a fighter, less than six of the white man's feet, and slim as a young warrior. . . . 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. (361)

Another classical epic convention found in Crazy Horse is the presence of supernatural intervention in directing the hero's destiny. From his youth, Crazy Horse endeavors to live up to the trust and powers conferred upon him in his dream vision. Deeply affected by the death of the Lakota peace chief Conquering Bear at the hands of white soldiers, Crazy Horse experiences a vision in which his potential as a great warrior and leader of his people is revealed to him:

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, sitting well forward, only the heel fringe of his moccasin stirring as he rode. 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. . . .

And all the time the enemy shadows kept coming up before the man, but he rode straight into them, with streakings all about him, like arrows and lead balls, but always disappearing before they struck him. Several times he was held back, it seemed by some of his own people who came up from behind and caught his arms, but he shook them off and rode on, while behind him a storm cloud rolled and thunder was in the air. (104-105)

Accompanying an Oglala raiding party, Crazy Horse remembers the protection promised him and, like Achilles of old, rides unscathed through the battle.

Paralleling the experiences of the epic hero, the Oglala warrior confronts numerous trials which he must struggle to surmount. Critical problems impacting upon and shaping the actions of Crazy Horse include the increasing number of hostile encounters between the Lakotas and the soldiers and settlers invading their lands and culture and the growing division among the Oglala people. This internal friction is variously precipitated by a disregard for traditional ways, vying for positions of power, and disagreements on how to respond to the white presence.

Sandoz detailed the personal trials undergone by her hero, such as his ill-fated love (an epic convention) for Black Buffalo Woman and his expulsion from the chiefs' (or

shirt-wearers') society. Crazy Horse's long love for Black Buffalo Woman, who exercises her Lakota right to leave the husband she had not wished to marry and chooses to go with Crazy Horse, leads to dissension throughout the camp and his eventual giving up of the ceremonial shirt.

Like the traditional epic hero, Crazy Horse experiences great loss. The deaths of his brother Little Hawk, his warrior friend Hump, and his small daughter deeply grieve the Oglala. Crazy Horse feels responsible in part for the deaths of Little Hawk at the hands of white soldiers and of Hump during a fight with the Snakes; he accuses himself of attending to his own cares rather than exclusively dedicating himself to the good of the people (247, 262). Sandoz described Crazy Horse's reaction to the death of his brother:

So Little Hawk was gone, the gay, brave younger brother, lost to the bullets of the whites while he had stayed behind with his woman plans. This thing had happened because a man thought of himself instead of the good of his people and so misery fell on all those around him, upon all those who loved the laughing young Lakota. And as Crazy Horse realized what had been done a dust-gray bitterness settled in his heart, a bitterness that would take a long, long time to be gone. (247)

Crazy Horse also suffers greatly at the death of his little daughter from the "choking cough" brought by the whites, and his cumulative sorrows are reminiscent of Aeneas' grief at the death of his wife, his father, and his faithful Achates. Mourning the loss of his daughter, the Oglala warrior undergoes a symbolic descent into the underworld, a descent comparable to that of the classical epic hero. Deep in mourning, Crazy Horse visits his daughter's death scaffold:

The father could hold himself no longer.

Face down beside the body of his daughter he let the sorrow locked in his heart sweep over him, the rickety scaffold creaking a little under his weight. (286)

Skilled leadership is another quality shared by the classical hero and Crazy Horse. As the Oglala people confront the perils and disorder of warfare, they need strong direction. In an attempt to assure themselves of competent guidance, respected older men of the tribe create a new chief's position and select Crazy Horse to serve as leader and protector of the people. Crazy Horse takes the responsibility seriously. Fasting, seeking visions, and striving to draw strength from the natural elements, the Oglala warrior endeavors to learn what must be done to preserve his people. As tensions mount and fighting with the white forces increases in frequency and violence, Crazy

Horse provides competent leadership. Chosen as lance carriers, he and He Dog demonstrate their bravery in battle, "always first and closest to the enemy, always last to retreat from the charges, showing the people had chosen well" (238). Crazy Horse is particularly adept at formulating effective battle plans, calming and organizing the often impetuous young warriors, and fortifying the courage of the people.

In the midst of heated debate among the warriors, the Oglala leader quietly allays their anger and impatience. His persuasiveness is reminiscent of that of Ulysses:

Finally Crazy Horse arose, looking slihter than ever in the open, fire-lit center of the great dark crowd.

"Wait, my friends," he said to the warriors. "There will be fighting pretty quick--"

"Hoppo! Let us go!" one called from far out, hearing only the repeated words, not knowing who had spoken them first.

But the quiet voice of Crazy Horse went on and slowly a silence came over the people, starting around him and spreading outward like the branches of a great tree, reaching far into the night, until every woman and child could hear or was told what he was saying. (314)

Sandoz's use of similes (such as that of the spreading silence) so highly representative of the Lakota use of language is reminiscent of epic simile. Thus, the author achieved a melding of Lakota and classical style.

In his profound and unbreakable commitment to his people, Crazy Horse uses his leadership skills for the preservation of the men, women, and children under his care. Resolutely resisting all attempts to remove his people from their traditional hunting grounds and unfettered way of life, Crazy Horse sadly watches his maternal uncle Spotted Tail and his long-time antagonist Red Cloud settle their respective Brule and Oglala bands on agencies provided them by the U.S. government. In an attempt to force the remaining non-agency Indians to surrender and to submit to agency life, the army sends three columns into the Big Horn-Powder River country in the spring of 1876. Faced with the annihilation of the people's way of life, Crazy Horse exhorts his warriors to abandon their traditional conception of making war and to adopt the white man's way of continuous battle to the death:

"In this war we must fight them in a different way from any the Lakotas have ever seen, not with the counting of many coups or doing great deeds to be told in the victory dance. We must make this a war of killing, a war of finishing, so we can live in peace in our own country." (315)

Crazy Horse, leading one thousand warriors, confronts the forces of General George Crook in the Battle of the Rosebud and compels them to retreat. Eight days after this battle, white and Native American forces fight again. Functioning as a united, well-ordered force, as they had at the Rosebud River, the Lakotas and Cheyennes defeat the troops of General George A. Custer in the Battle of the Little Big Horn.

Despite his strong leadership abilities and his power to unite those under his command, Crazy Horse endures the isolation and alienation, both physical and spiritual, often associated with epic heroes. Crazy Horse is somewhat distanced from the Oglala people. Known as "Our Strange Man" by the Oglalas, he possesses traits which set him apart within the community. With his light skin and hair, his disinclination to sing, dance, wear paint or feathers, or boast of his feats,² and because of his habit of going off by himself to meditate or to attack those invading Lakota country, Crazy Horse is inevitably isolated to some extent from his people:

Sometimes it was days before visiting warriors saw the man they had come to follow, for often Crazy Horse kept far from the noise and the drumming, perhaps making a fast, hoping for a vision or a dream to tell him what must be done. (312)

Unlike Achilles', Crazy Horse's isolation is not motivated by stubborn choice but is out of concern for his people's future.

Stauffer capsulizes Crazy Horse's epic stature in "Mari Sandoz's Use of Sources":

He lived in the nineteenth century, on the Plains of the United States, and was a tribal war chief, but his life had in it all the archetypal elements of the classical hero: he was exceptional both in appearance and actions, he had dreams and visions, he was called upon for unusual sacrifice, he led his people well, and he was betrayed and killed.

(48)

Related to the timeless qualities embodied by Crazy Horse are the characteristics he displays which are representative of his particular culture and environment. Sandoz presented him as an exemplary symbol of the Lakota people and their desire to retain their traditional values and way of life. He is daring in battle: "With young Crazy Horse along nobody was afraid of being left wounded or dead to the enemy" (132). He is generous. For example, he usually gives away the horses he captures in raids and battles (122). He is humble, shrinking in embarrassment before the great honor of being selected as a shirt wearer but soberly accepting the responsibility of shielding the

people from all harm (177-178). He is a strong leader of his people:

The Oglala council made a new kind of chief for themselves, one who would be both a strong, bold leader of the warriors and a gentle, firm, and wise father of the people. It would be a hard place to fill, but there was one who would never fail it--their Strange Man. (309)

Moreover, he is a mystic who continually seeks wisdom and strength to protect his people. Often separating himself from the Oglala camp in order to deliberate upon the plight of the people, Crazy Horse longs to find the way to maintain their safety and traditional lifestyle:

Towards night a gray cloud did come fast from the north, with wind and snow in its heart. Crazy Horse felt the strength of it, the strength of all the earth and the sky close around him, if he could only reach it. Nothing less could save his people now. (350)

In another instance, Crazy Horse reassures the old holy man Black Elk about his actions, explaining that he seeks mystical assistance for the people:

"Uncle," he said, "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. The time is short, and I must plan for the good of my people." (359)

Not popular with all the people and, indeed, occasionally a source of divisiveness (such as that which results from his relationship with Black Buffalo Woman), Crazy Horse nevertheless epitomizes many of the qualities esteemed by the Great Plains tribes, and, interestingly, by the white western civilization that would call him enemy and barbarian. As a champion of the old ways, a visionary, and a leader of the people, he serves as a heroic figure combatting all that threatens to disrupt the traditions of his people.

The author deliberately ended her work with the death of her protagonist. In the spring of 1877, Crazy Horse makes a fateful decision. Profoundly desiring peace and agonizing over the welfare of his people, he leads the Oglala band into Red Cloud Agency in northwestern Nebraska. The confined, inactive lifestyle is difficult for the Indians to endure; tension is high; and broken promises, misunderstandings, and animosities abound. Malicious rumors and unfortunate interpretations of his words and actions result in Crazy Horse's arrest. Realizing that he is to be imprisoned, Crazy Horse resists, drawing his knife and striking out at those around him. In the ensuing fracas, he is mortally wounded by the bayonet of a guard. Moved to the

adjutant's office, the Oglala chief dies on the night of September 5, 1877. There Sandoz ended her book.

She explained in a letter to Lone Eagle that she disliked anticlimaxes and felt that the story was finished (February 5, 1955). That feeling of completion reflected for Sandoz the sense that she had recorded the end of an historical era. In this she departed from epic tradition which does not record the hero's death and instead suggests the growth and continuation of a culture, in essence, a victory. Thus, as manifested through her inclusion of Crazy Horse's death, Sandoz proposed that the expansionist epic vision of the white culture necessitated the reversal of the Native American epic possibilities.

Sandoz considered Crazy Horse to be as artistically and historically complete a work as she could achieve. Acknowledging in a letter to Charlotte Curtis that "every book of mine falls short of that first fine conception I have of it," she nonetheless regarded Crazy Horse as coming close to what she had hoped to express (March 11, 1956).

The universal and cultural qualities which Sandoz perceived and developed in the character of Crazy Horse are closely linked with her historical vision of the American West. As she reflected on the course of western development, Sandoz discerned a universal significance in that process. Comprehending the widespread occurrence of the powerful overcoming the powerless, Sandoz viewed the

events taking place in Crazy Horse as representative of the experiences of many other minority groups throughout history. She maintained in a letter to Douglas T. Barker that "any minority that possesses something the majority wants is in danger of dispossession, even extermination" (February 16, 1954). Sandoz reiterated her views on the subjugation of a minority culture in a letter to Adolph Kaufman: "The pattern of expropriation of a minority by a covetous, and uncontrolled, majority, no matter what the greatness or the bravery of the minority leaders [is] always the same, always inevitably successful" (February 25, 1948).

In the foreword to The Beaver Men, Sandoz expounded upon her theories about the representative, as well as the unique, nature of the Great Plains experience:

Gradually I discovered that what the white man did to the Great Plains, good and bad, was largely a repetition of what man of any color did elsewhere, Europe, say, or Asia, from Stone Age to the present. In the older regions, the process had been very gradual, so protracted that much of the record was lost. On the Plains the transition was swift, the tangible records preserved in local repositories or farther away, and amazingly complete, much of what happened still visible on the earth itself, much of the story still within the memory of the great-

grandfathers, ready for investigation, ready for anyone who would listen. (xiv)

In this passage, Sandoz demonstrated her lack of sympathy for western civilization's vision of epic quest, even though in her writing she employed epic heroic characters. Through her historical vision, Sandoz revealed a telling irony. In her depiction of the downfall of Crazy Horse and the disintegration of Native American epic possibilities, she presented the white man as unresponsive to the very values he claims to admire.

Sandoz used the voice and actions of Crazy Horse to convey her personal vision of frontier development. Through her portrayal of Crazy Horse and the cultural displacement of the Lakota people, Sandoz explored some of the tragic consequences resulting from the period of westward expansion in the United States. She revered the cultural, spiritual, and environmental values of the Lakotas and lamented the violent overthrow of their way of life. In her partisan characterization of Crazy Horse, Sandoz presented the Great Plains settlement experience from the standpoint of the victimized and displaced Oglalas. In her next biographical work, Cheyenne Autumn, Sandoz would once again follow the approach of writing from the Native American perspective, reinforcing the epic dimensions of the dreams of Native Americans and white men alike, dreams that must inevitably clash.

Notes

¹ Mari Sandoz, Crazy Horse: The Strange Man of the Oglalas (New York: Knopf, 1942. Lincoln: Bison Book-U of Nebraska P, 1992) xxiii. All further references to Crazy Horse are from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

² Interestingly, Sandoz departed from the classical heroic stance in reference to boasting. Whereas Ulysses and Achilles were expected to boast of their deeds of valor, Crazy Horse is modest by nature. This variance between the Native American and the classical epic traditions informs my later conclusion that the two cultural paradigms were bound to clash.

CHAPTER THREE

Divided Visions:

Dull Knife and Little Wolf in Cheyenne Autumn

Unlike Crazy Horse, Sandoz's Cheyenne Autumn, published in 1953, received mainly positive reviews. However, many of the same issues that preoccupied reviewers of Crazy Horse resurfaced in the critiques of Cheyenne Autumn. Sandoz's fictional technique, imitation of Indian speech and point of view, and her qualifications to write on Native American subjects continued to concern reviewers. Recurrently, they noted the epic qualities of the book. Oliver La Farge, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning Laughing Boy and of several other works centering on Native American life, when reviewing Cheyenne Autumn in the Saturday Review, called the flight of the Northern Cheyennes a story on a grand scale and considered the participants epic heroes. He ended his review with the statement,

Not only in American history but in all history it is hard to find stories as moving, noble and dramatic as this one. The highest praise one could give any book about it would be to say that it was worthy of its subject. 'Cheyenne Autumn' deserves that accolade. (26-27)

Merrill J. Mattes, in Nebraska History, declared, "For sheer drama this 'Cheyenne Autumn' equals any epic of the ancient

Greeks" (147); and J. Frank Dobie, in the New York Herald Tribune Book Review, asserted, "Miss Sandoz has made it into a Lear-like tragedy of displaced persons" (1).

The review appearing in Nation likewise highlighted the epic nature of Cheyenne Autumn, discussing Sandoz's use of "direct speech and other fictional devices rightly frowned upon by historians" and concluding that "Miss Sandoz justifies this breach of the rules by her artistry and the keenness of her ear for the rhythms of Indian speech" (473). Orville Prescott in his New York Times review, however, referred to Sandoz's "high-handed fictional daring" and objected to her style, contending, "Her sentences twist and turn in a pseudo-Indian manner that is difficult to follow for anyone accustomed to the English way of arranging words rather than to the Cheyenne." Despite his negative assessment of Sandoz's manner of writing, Prescott acknowledged the heroism of the fleeing Cheyennes, displayed in their courage and fervent desire for liberty (29).

Some reviewers felt Sandoz's sympathy for the Cheyennes was too evident. In the New York Times Book Review, W. R. Burnett remarked upon the author's "wild partisanship in favor of the Cheyennes." He conceded, however, that despite its biased presentation, Cheyenne Autumn was a great book (6). The December 6, 1953, New York Times Book Review ranked Cheyenne Autumn as one of the 275 outstanding books of 1953 (44).

Scholars in the historical and anthropological fields have generally commended Sandoz for the authenticity of Cheyenne Autumn. Although a few of Sandoz's interpretations have been disputed and her practice of describing the thoughts of her characters has troubled some, scholars have basically praised the book. Several historians have cited Cheyenne Autumn as an important source for their own works. E. Adamson Hoebel, in his work The Cheyennes, praised Sandoz's book, calling it "a true and insightful account of the Cheyenne trek from Indian Territory to their northern home" (103).

An ardent admirer of Sandoz's works on the Plains Indians is Father Peter J. Powell. Powell credits Sandoz with having inspired him in his career of serving, studying, and writing about the Native American people. He calls Crazy Horse a "spiritual classic," extolling its beauty and power. In reference to Cheyenne Autumn, Powell avows, "No book, not even Crazy Horse, ever moved me so profoundly" ("Bearer of Beauty" 4, 8).

Literary criticism of Cheyenne Autumn has not been extensive, however. Stauffer, in her dissertation, devotes a section of her chapter on Cheyenne Autumn to a critical evaluation of Sandoz's work. She studies the characters of Little Wolf and Dull Knife, focusing on the contrasting attitudes of these two leaders and their final philosophical reconciliation. Stauffer concludes that Sandoz, through her

artistic vision and the book's characters, events, and literary devices, created an epic work.

Two other critics who have recently studied Cheyenne Autumn are Barbara Rippey and Pam Doher. In "Toward a New Paradigm: Mari Sandoz's Study of Red and White Myth in Cheyenne Autumn," Rippey centers on the mythic dimension of the book, exploring the contrast between the white and Native American worldviews and the resulting conflicts between the two cultures. In the course of her study, Rippey examines the character of Little Wolf, one of the book's two protagonists, and rightfully suggests that his downfall is precipitated by the misplaced values of white culture. A significant omission in Rippey's article is her failure to study Dull Knife, the book's other protagonist.

Pam Doher, in her "The Idioms and Figures of Cheyenne Autumn" (1977), investigates the language patterns in Sandoz's work. She considers the author's endeavor to match the language of the book to the lifestyle of the Cheyennes and concludes that Sandoz successfully managed to convey something of the interrelationship between the people, the land, and their time.

Cheyenne Autumn has, then, received only limited character analysis and cultural study. Sandoz's portrayal of the historical and literary roles of her Cheyenne protagonists, of their values, motives, and actions as they

confront the destruction of their way of life, merits further investigation.

In writing Cheyenne Autumn, as in writing Crazy Horse, Sandoz drew upon the stories that had enthralled her as a child. Having grown up hearing tales of the 1878 flight of the Northern Cheyennes recounted by her father and aged trappers, traders, and Cheyennes reminiscing at the Sandoz fireside, Sandoz wished to convey to readers what she perceived as the heroism of the Cheyennes as they struggled for freedom. Two survivors of the flight north whose stories Sandoz became acquainted with early in her life were Old Cheyenne Woman and Wild Hog. Old Cheyenne Woman often traveled with the Lakotas to the Niobrara and talked with Mari (using rudimentary English and some French) about her experiences and the Cheyenne way of life. Wild Hog, one of the headmen of the Cheyennes and a friend of Old Jules, had died before Mari's birth. She learned much about his life and views, however, through the stories of her father and the copious notes Jules had taken during his conversations with the Cheyenne warrior..

Although Cheyenne Autumn was not published until November, 1953, Sandoz had begun research for a projected book on the Cheyenne outbreak before committing herself to the Crazy Horse story. In 1936, she informed her editor Edward Weeks of her intention to write Flight to the North, a book chronicling

the tragic, epic escape of the disarmed and dismounted Cheyennes under Little Wolf and Dull Knife in 1878 from Indian Territory towards Canada through the winter high plains, with the whole frontier and the U.S. Army, aided by the cooperation of the frontier forts, the transcontinental railroads and telegraph, [in pursuit]. (August 12, 1936)

In the fall of 1939, learning that novelist Howard Fast was writing about the same subject, Sandoz set her Cheyenne material aside. Nine years later, deciding that readers would once again be interested in the topic, she resumed her research on her Cheyenne book.

Among the sources Sandoz closely studied were government records; newspaper accounts; memoirs written by Cheyennes, Indian fighters, soldiers, and settlers; and published works on the Cheyennes. Of particular interest to the author were two pictographic records of the Cheyennes. The first of these records portrayed the events of the 1875 Cheyenne massacre on the Sappa River, and the other depicted incidents occurring on the 1878-1879 flight north. This latter pictographic history was composed by Little Finger Nail, the nephew of Old Cheyenne Woman, and was discovered by Sandoz in the American Museum of Natural History. The young artist, singer, and warrior was among those killed during the Cheyenne trek. It was Little Finger Nail who had

expressed the viewpoint of the people when the Northern Cheyennes were forced to stay at the southern agency where they were suffering from hunger, disease, callous treatment, and a longing to return to their own country:

"We are sickly and dying men. . . . If we die here and go to the burial rocks, no one will speak our names. So now we go north, and if we die in battle on the way, our names will be remembered by all the people. They will tell the story and say, 'This is the place.'"

Sandoz was intrigued by the Cheyenne view of life, time, and motion as being interconnected and boundless. In her preface to Cheyenne Autumn, she described the traditional Cheyenne attitude toward life:

The old Cheyennes, even more than their High Plains neighbors, had a rich and mystical perception of all life as a continuous, all-encompassing eventual flow, and of man's complete oneness with all this diffused and eternal stream.

(vii)

Through her choice of language and writing style, Sandoz hoped to convey "something of the rhythm, the idiom, and the figures of Cheyenne life" (vii).

In traditional epic style, Sandoz illustrated the Cheyenne notion of the concurrence of past and present as the people begin their journey north:

Many of the older ones found themselves . . .
throwing their hearts back over all the long time
since the Cheyennes had left their corn patches
near the great sweetwater lakes and moved with the
sun out across the Missouri and down the ladder of
east-flowing streams. . . . Men like Old Bear and
Dull Knife looked westward, where the moon stood
on the land, and remembered what had happened on
each of these streams they were passing--things
that would always be a part of the today here
because all things that ever happened in a place
were always of the today there in the Cheyenne
pattern of time. (31)

As pointed out by Doher, Sandoz's use of language reflects the cultural and physical environment of the Cheyennes (120). In particular, Sandoz drew upon the Cheyennes' intimate relationship with the land in her use of figurative language throughout Cheyenne Autumn. She recurrently incorporated imagery from nature into her descriptions of the Cheyennes' flight and their constant skirmishing with the pursuing soldiers. Frequently, Sandoz juxtaposed images reflecting the Cheyennes' close identification with their natural environment with images

highlighting the invasive and aggressive behavior of their white pursuers: "The bullets drove the sand upon the Indians like frozen sleet whipped by a blizzard; the thunder of the Gatling guns hammered the shaking earth, women screaming as they were hit" (87).

The following passage further illustrates Sandoz's technique of contrasting the Cheyennes' close relationship with nature with the conflicting reality of pursuit and disruption:

The fog began to break into waves like a wind-stirred lake. Soon it would be no more than the soft white breath-feathers from an eagle's tail, to float along the hills, lifting away into the sun, laying bare every horse and moccasin track on the wet earth, and the string of soldiers very close. (131)

In Cheyenne Autumn, as in Crazy Horse, Sandoz ably conveyed her perceptions about the nature of conflict in the Great Plains through her character development. On the surface, Sandoz's story of the Cheyennes' journey may appear as purely historical panorama. However, beneath the factual narrative is a philosophical study of a clash of values and of cultures. During a time of physical and cultural dispossession, the Cheyennes find themselves battling the encroachment of white soldiers and settlers, as well as disputing with one another. Sandoz emphasized this

dissension within the Cheyenne tribe through her portrayal of the conflicting values of her two protagonists. Dull Knife and Little Wolf hold differing perspectives on the trustworthiness of the white soldiers. Sandoz focused on these contrasting qualities in a 1949 letter to Alfred A. Knopf:

The two men represent the two points of view that had long split the tribe. Dull Knife was for the old morality, which accepted a man's word, even a white man's, as an inviolable thing. . . . Little Wolf was the realist, who saw the white man's word as something loose and shifting as the sands of the Platte. (qtd. in McDonald, "An Educational History" 172)

Dull Knife, one of the four tribal chiefs of the Northern Cheyennes and a Dog Soldier in his youth, is a revered leader and a man of absolute integrity. In spite of great suffering at the hands of the whites, the experience of sickness, hunger, and the loss of his people's land, and his witnessing of many broken promises and much killing during the journey north, Dull Knife steadfastly believes that the northern soldiers will not harm his people. Having been promised that the Northern Cheyennes would be free to return to their homeland if they were dissatisfied at the southern agency, Dull Knife takes the whites at their word. In the face of malaria, dysentery, and starvation, he is

determined to go north while some of the people are still alive: "To this old-time Cheyenne the promise of the officers in the north was like iron, and so he was going home" (xvi).

Little Wolf, also a tribal chief, is the bearer of the sacred chief's bundle of the Northern Cheyennes. He is honored for his bravery as a warrior and has been entrusted with the responsibility of protecting the people:

Soft-spoken and gentle, he could whip any unruly Elk warrior to his duty and still, at fifty-seven, lead him in any battle. The Wolf had fought so hard when the soldiers struck the Cheyennes up on the Powder Fork two years ago that it stopped the heart. . . . Under his arm he bore the bundle brought to the Cheyennes by Sweet Medicine very long ago, and so was selected as the dedicated one of all the tribe, the man who must always forget himself, as their culture hero had done, and remember only the people. (15-16)

Unlike Dull Knife, Little Wolf has learned to distrust the word of the white man. Sandoz contrasted the attitudes of the two leaders:

[Dull Knife's] wisdom was of the old days--of the wool-blinded buffalo feeding with his nose always into the wind, snuffling out danger, of the young grass waiting under the winter snow, and the

Powers of the earth and sky and the four great directions--the old wisdom of the time when a man spoke what he believed and his word was his life. But long ago something new had come into this, the veho, the white man, and to Little Wolf it seemed that the whites had to be met on their own terms, for now the power of numbers and of guns and the twisted tongue was with them. Now, as for over twenty years past, it seemed that the only Indian surely never killed was the Indian never caught.

(20)

Through her characterization of Dull Knife and Little Wolf, Sandoz continued her exploration of the history of conflict on the Plains. The wide rift between the values that the Native Americans yearn to maintain and those that the whites impose leads to bitter conflict between the two cultures and to dissension within the Cheyenne tribe. By examining the discord and the greed exhibited during this time of cultural transition on the Plains, Sandoz offered a minuscule portrait of a larger issue. She believed that the subjugation of the Native Americans was representative of the suppression of any minority culture.

In the preface to Cheyenne Autumn, Sandoz cited "the discovery of gold and the rise of economic and political unrest over much of the civilized world" as reasons for the

white usurpation of Native American lands, culture, and sovereignty: "With millions of men hungry for a new start, . . . the romantic Red Hunter [became] a dirty, treacherous, bloodthirsty savage standing in the way of progress, in the path of manifest destiny" (vi). As Stauffer asserts in "Mari Sandoz and Western Biography,"

Sandoz's mythic vision was predominantly that of the Indian rather than that of the white man of "manifest destiny." If she subscribed to the concept of a "new Eden," it would be from the point of view that the white man was the serpent who corrupted the paradise of the Indian. (63)

Sandoz had both Dull Knife and Little Wolf wrestle with the issue of adapting to white values and demands. Dull Knife clings steadfastly to his own integrity, refusing to conform to white values or to accede to white demands that he and his people return to the south: "'No,' he said in his soft Cheyenne. 'I am here on my own ground and I will never go back'" (192). The old chief declares that he will never again leave his beloved homeland, even if he must die fighting. Ironically, it is his people who die, killed by the white soldiers in their breakout from Fort Robinson, while Dull Knife is condemned to live, a disillusioned and defeated man: "'I am an empty man!' he cried to the Powers, 'I have become so weak that I cannot even die with my people!'" (246).

Little Wolf, torn apart "as though he were both the rabbit and the eagle who fed on the quivering entrails," sadly concludes that the old ways must be forgotten:

The Cheyennes could escape the veho only by the veho road. The white man had the power and the Indian must learn to smile too when his heart was bad, say "Hou!" when he meant a roaring against it, say the "Yes, yes, this will be done," when it is only for so long as the eye was there to see.

(107)

Sandoz lamented the necessity of Little Wolf's cynicism and, likewise, Dull Knife's disillusionment. Although she respected Dull Knife's idealism, she questioned the desirability, or even the possibility, of integrating Native American and white culture. In "Toward a New Paradigm," Rippey addresses Sandoz's attitude concerning the conflict between the two cultures: "Her desire is to impress upon us the need for change in the white myth before such openness to change as Little Wolf's can be of any help in achieving a synthesis of red and white myth and culture" (262). In the absence of such a synthesis, Dull Knife and Little Wolf are left to follow their own judgment and principles as they struggle to lead their people to freedom.

Through her representation of these larger-than-life characters and their extraordinary odyssey, Sandoz created an epic work, a work paralleling and building upon the

classical elements present in Crazy Horse. Recognizing the epic themes inherent in the Cheyennes' experiences and actions, she consciously developed these themes in Cheyenne Autumn. In the preface, Sandoz referred to the flight of the Cheyennes as "the epic story of the American Indian, and one of the epics of our history" (vii). Noting the mythic tradition and archetypal patterns followed by Sandoz in her biographical works, Stauffer attests to their presence in Cheyenne Autumn:

The Cheyenne chiefs, leading their people home, inevitably recall the biblical exodus, but Little Wolf's feats recall something also of the fabulous Odysseus; Dull Knife reiterates the sorrows of Priam, mourning over his people and his family, his beautiful sons and daughters killed. ("Mari Sandoz and Western Biography" 64)

Dull Knife and Little Wolf clearly possess many traditional epic heroic traits: they lead their people during a time of extreme adversity and suffering; they seek guidance and strength from supernatural powers; and they experience feelings of alienation and separateness. Despite their divergent points of view regarding the motives of the whites, Dull Knife and Little Wolf share many of the same goals. Both characters struggle with questions of cultural identity and destiny and both are dedicated to guarding the welfare of the Cheyenne people. The two men pursue their

visions dissimilarly. Yet, with their overarching aims and devotion to community, Sandoz's Cheyenne protagonists together embody her vision of epic heroism.

However, Sandoz, in Cheyenne Autumn, did not follow the epic tradition indiscriminately. Instead, she adapted the traditional structure to fit her own purposes. A primary goal of the classical epic is to show a continuation of the culture in question. As Sandoz sought to convey her own historical vision, she overturned epic convention by portraying an odyssey that is destined to failure. Not vitality and hope, but death and disillusionment, characterize her perception of the outcome of the native peoples' epic struggle:

The names of these dead men were like a song, a song of the sun dance bloodletting, a great red blanket spread upon the ground to plead for a vision to save the people. But nothing came of all their dying, only more blood. (107)

Thus, in Cheyenne Autumn, as in Crazy Horse, Sandoz departed from epic tradition, presenting a society experiencing decline rather than growth. She dramatized what she perceived as the tragic and willful destruction of a vital and heroic culture. Of the nearly three hundred Cheyennes who begin the trek north, many of them women and children, most die before reaching their homeland. Even those Cheyennes who do survive the horrendous journey must

live under an unfamiliar system imposed by the whites, a system which runs counter to the unfettered lifestyle and the spiritual and cultural traditions to which the Cheyennes are accustomed.

Sandoz concluded Cheyenne Autumn by recounting the unhappy fates of her protagonists. Dull Knife is allowed to settle in the Rosebud Valley, later to become the Tongue River Reservation of Montana. Described as silent, sorrowful, and embittered, the old chief resides there until his death in 1883:

With his crippled, orphaned band he came to sit in this north country that had cost so much. But the beaded lizard of his medicine dreaming, of his power to save the people, no longer hung on his breast. (271)

When Little Wolf and his followers finally reach the Yellowstone country, they are forced to surrender and are taken to Fort Keogh to live. Little Wolf's last years there are filled with pain and remorse. As the bearer of the sacred bundle, Little Wolf is obliged to act solely for the people, displaying anger only at an injustice done to them and not at any personal wrong. However, drunk, and allowing his personal wrath to surface, Little Wolf betrays his oath to forget himself and remember only the people and vindictively shoots Thin Elk, a long-time adversary. Deprived of his chief's status by the whites and never again

smoking the sacred pipe, Little Wolf humbly separates himself from the people. However, his past deeds as a bold warrior and his dedication to the people are not wholly forgotten:

When he died in 1904, there were some who still remembered and still loved him. They propped his body up tall on a hill and piled stones around him, drawing them up by travois until he was covered in a great heap. There Little Wolf stood on a high place, his face turned to look over the homes of his followers and beyond them, down the Rosebud that flowed northward to the Yellowstone. (272)

In Cheyenne Autumn, Sandoz inverted the traditional structure of the epic by making the minority peoples the leading figures. Her sympathies lying with the victims, Sandoz asserted the superiority of their values. Here, however, Sandoz followed the Homeric example of the Iliad wherein the minority--the Trojans--elicit sympathy as a superior culture confronting forces that would oppress them. Despite the Cheyennes' internal conflicts, which indeed are brought on largely by the actions and threatening presence of the whites, Sandoz's Native Americans display a richness of culture and a nobility of character not exhibited by their aggressors. Living in communion with nature and championing an unfettered way of life, this minority culture

is inevitably overpowered by the majority culture, losing its autonomy and nomadic lifestyle in the process. However, the vanquishing of the native peoples does not diminish the greatness of their culture or character or the exalted nature of their struggles. Thus, in her Native American biographies, Sandoz conveyed a new epic vision in which the members of a suppressed society, traditionally represented as the antagonists, serve as the protagonists, heroically defending their community.

Notes

¹ Mari Sandoz, Cheyenne Autumn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953. Lincoln: Bison Book-U of Nebraska P, 1992) 11. All further references to Cheyenne Autumn are from this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

CHAPTER FOUR

Old Jules: The Vision of Community Development

Of Sandoz's published works, her first, Old Jules, has gained the most critical attention. Appearing in 1935, winner of the Atlantic nonfiction prize, the biographical work attracted the notice of a number of prominent reviewers. Nearly all reviews were favorable. Reviewers typically focused on the eccentricities of Old Jules and on the honesty, frankness, and objectivity exhibited by Sandoz. Generally, they reacted positively to the book's unusual subject matter, style, and setting.

Bernard DeVoto, in the Saturday Review of Literature, expressed his concern that eastern readers might fail to understand or appreciate Old Jules. He declared,

It is achingly, glaringly necessary to get the High Plains written about and understood, to force a realization of them and their place in our culture and our problems on the national mind. But Miss Sandoz is a native and a literary artist and, I suspect, disqualified on both counts.

(5)

DeVoto maintained that eastern readers were accustomed to unrealistic portraits of the West and observed, "[Miss Sandoz's] accents and rhythms, her assumptions, even her vocabulary, are alien." Despite his skepticism about reader

response to Old Jules, DeVoto praised the representative qualities of the book: "There is a good deal of America in 'Old Jules.' It is, heaven knows, an enthralling story. But it is more than that, and much deeper. It is an experience in citizenship" (5-6).

Another reviewer who emphasized the comprehensive nature of Old Jules was Robert Van Gelder in the New York Times Book Review. He noted, "Old Jules was a most singular chap, surely no type. Yet on putting down this book one feels that one has read the history of all pioneering." Van Gelder, like many reviewers, devoted a considerable portion of his review to a summary of Jules's exploits and characteristics. Calling him a "D'Artagnan" after the soldier-hero of The Three Musketeers, the reviewer focused on Jules's violent encounters as he strove to build up the country (1).

William Allen White, in his Atlantic Bookshelf review, similarly dissected the character of Old Jules, terming him "a coarse, strong, unwashed, passionate, contentious, domineering, amorous old male." White described Sandoz's writing as being "as rough and raw as Old Jules himself" and contended that "one sees and feels the pioneer life" in this chronicle (16, 18).

But, Sandoz's manner of presentation was a central topic for several reviewers. Stanley Williams, in the Yale Review, asserted that the author conveyed "truth of event

and scene on the frontier" in a vital and imaginative style (392); and the Newsweek reviewer commented, "[Sandoz's] stark, lively report on life in the Sandhill district takes the bloom off the romantic pioneer legend, but her human portrait breathes life" (47). Pursuing a related train of thought, B. E. Bettinger concluded his New Republic review with the words, "Miss Sandoz has opened to the present public the pioneer West, which has been treated nostalgically, picturesquely, gruesomely, but never before with such salt of the great plains--salt of wit and sorrow" (205).

Reviewers tended to compare Old Jules with the works of other midwestern writers. Stephen Vincent Benet, writing for the New York Herald Tribune Books, regarded Old Jules as "the best and most honest picture of its kind since Hamlin Garland's 'A Son of the Middle Border'" (1). In the October 31, 1935, issue of the Herald, Lewis Gannett affirmed, "'Old Jules' deserves a place beside 'My Antonia' and 'Giants of [sic] the Earth'" (13).

In addition, a number of individuals who had known Jules or who had experienced life on the frontier voiced their reaction to the work. A few questioned the typicality of Jules's character or the verity of Sandoz's presentation of pioneer life. Others objected to the book's frankness of expression and to the harshness of Sandoz's portrayal of her father. However, other readers responded favorably to Old

Jules, attesting to the authenticity of Sandoz's depiction of frontier life. A number of those who had known Jules affirmed that his daughter had captured his character accurately.

Recently, feminists have turned their attention to Old Jules. They emphasize the violent, domineering nature of Jules and other pioneer men in Sandoz's work and the extent to which the abuse of women was socially accepted on the frontier. Elaine Limbaugh, in "A Feminist Reads Old Jules," focuses on the women in the biography, particularly the four wives, and explores how Jules's character is illuminated through the women's struggles and experiences.

Melody Graulich, in her article "Every Husband's Right: Sex Roles in Mari Sandoz's Old Jules," analyzes Sandoz's ambivalent attitude toward the roles of her father and her mother. Graulich contends that Sandoz identifies most fully with her father's vision, with the "heroic virtues of the masculine West" (16). Stressing the value of Old Jules for students of women's history, Graulich notes the book's unusually candid exploration of the institution of marriage and relations between pioneer men and women. She concludes that the exploitation of women in the American West was "supported by tradition, by law, and by simple brute force" (5). Graulich pursues her feminist studies in "Violence Against Women in Literature of the Western Family," in which she devotes a portion of her article to Old Jules. She

asserts that the women writers of the works she is considering reached the same conclusion as present-day feminists: "Violence against women is the result of patriarchal definitions of gender and marriage rather than of individual pathology" (14). Graulich maintains that society's sanctioning of "male power and authority" (14) inevitably leads to the abuse of women.

Rosemary Whitaker similarly examines the human desire to acquire power and its connection with violence. Studying the violence in Old Jules and Sandoz's 1937 novel Slogum House, Whitaker concludes that the pursuit of power is "responsible for both the cruelty and the strength in the pioneer character" (224).

Thus, since the publication of Old Jules, critics have concentrated on the book's autobiographical elements, Sandoz's manner of presentation, and the authenticity and comprehensibility of the subject matter. Much of the character analysis that has been applied to Old Jules has been conducted by feminist critics. Other approaches to the study of the book's central figure are worth pursuing.

First, one must recognize that Sandoz regarded her father as a representative figure in the development of the American frontier, even though Jules possessed contradictory and conflicting qualities. Through her depiction of her father's attitudes and experiences, Sandoz effectively conveyed her understanding of the varied and sometimes

paradoxical forces which shaped the history of the Great Plains. In her exploration of Jules's character and his relations with the inhabitants of the Niobrara region (settlers, cattlemen, Native Americans, and the members of his own family), the author candidly presented both the positive and the negative facets of her father's personality, recognizing the universality and the uniqueness of Jules's character. She expressed her perceptions of her father's representative role in a letter to Mrs. J. W. Babcock:

It gradually dawned upon me that here was a character who embodied not only his own strengths and weaknesses but those of all humanity--that his struggles were universal struggles and his defeats at the hands of environment and his own insufficiencies were those of mankind; his tenacious clinging to his dream the symbol of man's undying hope that over the next hill he will find the green pastures of his desire. (January 21, 1936)

The dream to which Jules clings is the dream of frontier development, of progressive movement in which he acts as the guiding force. He thus fulfills a role not dissimilar to that of his historical antecedents Crazy Horse, Dull Knife, and Little Wolf. His vision, like theirs, is epic; but he has the added advantage of

representing the majority rather than the minority culture. His success is both expected in terms of literary models and believable in terms of cultural history. As Stauffer discerns in "Mari Sandoz and Western Biography," Old Jules is "a tattered Aeneas, a visionary, settling his people in a new and hostile land, often performing truly heroic feats" (63).

In her study of her father, Sandoz accordingly emphasized Jules's persistent efforts to develop community. When Jules, as a young man, first beholds the unsettled Niobrara River country, he recognizes that this is where he belongs and envisions a flourishing settlement:

Jules saw his home and around him a community of his countrymen and other homeseekers, refugees from oppression and poverty, intermingled in peace and contentment. There would grow up a place of orderliness, with sturdy women and strong children to swing the hay fork and the hoe. (19)

From the time of his early vision for the land in 1884 until his death in 1928, Old Jules consistently plans for the growth of the community and battles for the rights of the settlers. Often obtaining only a portion of his locating fees and generously supplying destitute families with provisions and lodging, Jules declares, "'I am not in this business for the money. I'm trying to build up the country'" (270). He sends numerous letters to family and

acquaintances in Switzerland and to prospective landseekers throughout the United States promoting the region and encouraging settlement. Furthermore, he continually writes to government officials, including President Theodore Roosevelt, complaining about the illegal fencing of free land by the cattlemen and their use of underhanded, often violent tactics to drive away settlers.

Jules's last words underscore the depth of his commitment to develop his community: "'The whole damn sandhills is deserted. The cattlemen are broke, the settlers about gone. I got to start all over--ship in a lot of good farmers in the spring, build up--build--build--'" (424). The November 16, 1928, issue of the Rushville Standard, appearing three days after Jules's death, observed that he "has done more to develop Western Nebraska than any other person" (qtd. in Stauffer, "A Study of the Artist" 160).

It is important to recognize that Jules's far-reaching vision and his ability to influence western development spring in large part from his enormous ego. Jules's ego is reminiscent of the self-adulation displayed by such epic characters as Ulysses, Achilles, and Aeneas. Limbaugh underscores the paradoxical nature of Jules's egotism in "A Feminist Reads Old Jules":

It was Jules' ego which fed the passion that drove him and dominated his life. On one hand, his ego

enabled him to garner success in the face of unbelievable difficulties. On the other hand, this same ego tended to absolve him from the distractions of human love and compassion.

(41)

His sweeping vision is indeed motivated by (and sometimes obliterated by) his powerful ego.

Jules's undoubted visionary qualities do not prevent him from engaging in abusive and violent behavior. Embedded in his ego-fueled vision is the drive to take advantage of weaker figures to achieve his ends. Jules's patriarchal actions and attitudes toward his wives exemplify his custom of subjugating the desires and needs of others to his own need for domination. As Limbaugh asserts, Jules views women as objects of possession and often ridicules their feelings and opinions (46, 48). His assertion that "'women who won't obey their husbands are worthless'" (95) and his habit of striking his wives when they question his authority delineate his chauvinistic attitude and violent behavior. Two scenes in particular reveal Jules's frequently cruel treatment of his family:

When the little Marie [Mari] was three months old and ill with summer complaint, her cries awakened Jules. Towering dark and bearded in the lamplight, he whipped the child until she lay blue and trembling as a terrorized small animal. When

Mary dared she snatched the baby from him and carried her into the night and did not return until the bright day. (215-216)

On another occasion, Jules strikes Mary across the face with a wire whip when she is unable to hold a bull calf that is to be castrated: "'I learn her to obey me if I got to kill her!'" he rages (230).

Egocentric and stubbornly proud, Jules does not express regret for an action or admit to any wrongdoing. His abrasive personality often alienates potential friends:

No one had ever been able to work with Jules long. The settlers who carried his surveying chain often considered throwing it into the sand and walking to the railroad without land. Few went hunting with him more than once, although they got game enough. (314)

Sandoz realistically analyzed her father's character in a letter to Frank C. Hanighen of Dodd, Mead & Company:

Jules was no Hamlet. He did no soul searching. He was almost never conscious of wrong or fault in himself. Others made mistakes and compelled him to make them. His anger was never against himself. (November 21, 1933)

However, a careful study of Sandoz's narrative voice reveals that the author's intention was not to condemn the conduct of her father. Her tone in describing Old Jules's

actions and personality is matter-of-fact and nonjudgmental. She presented the negative aspects of his character bluntly and realistically but not with the purpose of turning her readers against Old Jules.

It was the formidable task of community development coupled with Jules's forceful, far-seeing vision that Sandoz emphasized throughout Old Jules. Essentially, Sandoz recognized and admired Jules's sense of vision. In her biography, she aptly conveyed the visionary, passionate nature of her father through her references to his eyes. Her allusions to Jules's "live, piercing, far-focused eyes" (416) and to their burning intensity occur frequently. In her earliest description of Jules's appearance, Sandoz focused on his eyes

. . . as strange and changing as the Jura that towered over his homeland. They were gray, and glowed at a lusty story well told, withdrew in remote contemplation of the world and the universe, or flashed with the swift anger and violence of summer lightning. (4)

The eye/visionary metaphor is woven throughout the biography.

Friends and acquaintances of Old Jules remarked upon his ability to focus on the future of the region, to visualize a thriving community and to plant innovative crops and orchards. Rosalie, the object of Jules's lifelong but

unfulfilled love, writes him from Switzerland that he "saw only the far, the large, the exalted canvas," while she "preferred the smaller, the more familiar things" (191). Big Andrew, an early settler of the Niobrara region, likewise philosophizes about Jules's visionary qualities:

"Maybe he see what we don't. He is like the tree that grow on the bluff of the river--the pine. He get the wind and the storm that do not touch us who are the cottonwood and the willow near the water. But his root is strong and he see the cloud from far off--and the sun before she shine on us." (39)

In comparable terms, the county clerk describes her meeting with Old Jules and her impressions of him:

"He pointed out what he saw in the country the day he came. There was something of the prophet in him, a prophet who remains to make his word deed. He is rooted in a reality that will stand when the war and its hysteria are gone, a sort of Moses working the soil of his Promised Land." (406)

Johnny Jones, a long-time acquaintance of Jules, similarly reflects upon the prophetic qualities of the old settler: "'There's something in the old locator--maybe what the old Sioux call a vision'" (403).

In fact, the content of Jules's powerful vision both mirrors and diverges from the essential visions of the

native dwellers of the Plains portrayed in Crazy Horse and Cheyenne Autumn. In their desire for stability, coherence, and the freedom to follow their chosen lifestyles, Sandoz's four protagonists share a similar dream. Each struggles against the forces and attitudes he perceives as threatening his cultural vision. Yet, Old Jules's aims are quite different from those of Sandoz's Native American characters. In contrast to the orientation of the Lakota and Cheyenne leaders who heroically struggle to preserve their people and traditions in the face of cultural devastation, Old Jules's vision contains no attempt to recover old ways. In regard to Native American culture, he respects the traditions of the Lakota and Cheyenne peoples; but, unlike Sandoz's native protagonists, Jules is willing to sacrifice the old customs and lifestyles of the Plains tribes.

Sandoz highlighted the disparity between the perspectives of the Native Americans and Jules in an incident concerning the sacredness of land. Oglalas camped along the Niobrara warn Jules against entering the land of rounded hills to the east, calling it "the land of the Gone-Before-Ones": "Strange things happened to those who went. If they came back, the tongue was twisted and none could understand" (28). However, Jules regards the land differently, eying it as a potential place of settlement and as a source of food. He enters "the forbidden land of the Indians" (80), hunting the plentiful game and gathering the

abundant fruit. Many years later, Jules files on land to the east: "the sandhills . . . still drew him as they had the day on the top of Deer Hill with the Sioux" (307). Thus, his expansionist vision take no account of the sacred prohibitions of the Oglalas. Above all, Jules is eager to build a new community. The advancement of his own dream of a settled, prosperous community is his priority.

Throughout Old Jules, Sandoz traced her father's impact upon community development. Midway through the novel, she surveyed the general conditions in northwestern Nebraska two decades after Jules's arrival, conditions which, to a large extent, stemmed from Jules's unwavering efforts to settle and develop the land:

By 1906 the Indians along the Niobrara, the big game,--elk, deer, even antelope,--were gone. The winters were still cold, but now there were railroads, good houses, fuel, warm clothing, better roads. The summers were still dry, and . . . the farmers on the table from Alliance to Gordon were doing what Jules said must be done: learning how to handle their soil, practising diversified farming, finding drouth-resisting crops. When corn failed, wheat often succeeded, and despite bugs and early freezes there were usually potatoes and Indians from Pine Ridge to pick them up behind the digger. (276-277)

While Sandoz respected the visions of all four of her protagonists--Crazy Horse, Dull Knife, Little Wolf, and Old Jules, she recognized the diverse methods by which her Native American protagonists and Old Jules pursued their dreams. The differing circumstances out of which these figures operate play a significant role in determining the nature and content of their visions. The indefatigable efforts of the protagonists of Crazy Horse and Cheyenne Autumn to save their people and their traditions arise from within vital, long-established communities. In contrast, Jules, working out of relative isolation, attempts to create a community. He is motivated by a desire to fulfill personal plans and dreams and a need to wield power over others, or at least to command their respect. He regards himself as one who must "keep moving always ahead, always alone" (76) and often boasts: "'I had to fight for it alone --for all I got'" (401).

Emanating from Jules's high regard for individualism is his respect for independent, self-reliant figures, those who stand alone, resolute and unafraid. Only a few men earn Jules's unalloyed admiration. Two such figures are Gentleman Jim, an uncommon outlaw whom he first encounters in Valentine and who later saves Jules's life, and Crazy Horse, about whom Jules hears many tales during his stay at the Fort Robinson hospital (following a sixty-five-foot fall into a well): "Somehow Crazy Horse reminded him of the man

in the saloon at Valentine, the one with the beautiful Winchester. Lone men, both of them, self-reliant. It would be good to be so" (51). Also gaining Jules's full respect is the Oglala chief Young Man Afraid of His Horse whom Jules meets in a tipi at a Fourth of July celebration in Rushville:

Across from the opening was the older man, with no beads now, no paint, no feathers, and yet he was easily the finest there, this Young Man Afraid.

A long time the Swiss stared, but the chief gave no sign to this deepest discourtesy to a Sioux. Finally Jules sat and smoked, but inattentively. The thing that had drawn him to the man with the Winchester at Valentine he found once more, here, and in an uneducated Indian.

(66)

Thus, despite the gulf between Jules's often self-centered, individualistic aspirations and the selfless, community-inspired aims of Sandoz's Native American protagonists, Jules is able to respect the noble qualities of the indigenous peoples. This admiration for the nobility possessed by one's traditional adversaries or members of a different culture is a quality Jules shares with the conventional epic hero.

In his relations with Native Americans, Jules clearly differs from the typical pioneer, who feared and mistrusted the indigenous peoples. Soon after his arrival in the Niobrara country, he becomes friendly with a group of Oglalas camping across the river, especially with a young Oglala named White Eye. Jules spends many hours with these Native Americans, hunting with them and learning something of their knowledge about nature, their customs, and the tremendous losses they have experienced. As a sign of their respect for Jules, the Oglalas give him the name "Straight Eye," a tribute to his hunting skills. His friendship with the Indians and his sympathy with their plight remain with him throughout his life. On his hospital deathbed, Jules is visited by his old friend White Eye:

One day the room was suddenly full of Indians. In the centre was White Eye, an old man between two graying sons. It was bad, this, to find Straight Eye in the medicine house with women in black robes to keep friends away. Jules was pleased, but soon the old Oglala led his people into the sunlight. "It is the land of the Gone-Before-Ones," he said, and the young Indians looked at him tolerantly. (420)

In an early discussion with acquaintances, Jules denounces the butchery of the Native Americans and the theft of their land. However, when he is reminded, "'You were

glad enough to come and take up a piece of the country,'" Jules declines to take upon himself any personal responsibility for the displacement of the native peoples, responding that the Indians made him welcome (87). This disavowal of individual culpability is based on practical motives. Acknowledging accountability on this score would thwart Jules from pursuing his dreams of community development.

In the fall of 1890, rumors run rampant that the Native Americans are on the war path. General Miles asks Jules to scout out the Indians and attempt to persuade them to return to the agency. Jules heatedly refuses, retorting, "'I have lost no Indians. You lose any, you hunt for them'" (129). In December, though, when news arrives of the massacre of Big Foot's band at Wounded Knee, Jules braves a coming storm to ride up to the battle site:

From a hill to the north he looked down over the desolate battlefield, upon the dark piles of men, women, and children sprawled among their goods. . . . Here, in ten minutes, an entire community was as the buffalo that bleached on the plains. . . . The man suddenly knew that he was very sick. (131)

Through her depiction of her father's revulsion at the scene at Wounded Knee, Sandoz revealed Jules's spiritual side. Although Jules never would assume personal responsibility

for the cultural displacement of the native peoples, he does implicitly acknowledge cultural responsibility for the annihilation at Wounded Knee. Unlike the typical classical epic hero, Jules does not intend deliberately to subdue the indigenous peoples. Rather, he is vehemently opposed to their destruction. After viewing the carnage at Wounded Knee, Jules writes to Rosalie in Switzerland. In the letter,

he poured out all the misery and confusion of what he had just seen. A deep pessimism held him. There was something loose in the world that hated joy and happiness as it hated brightness and color, reducing everything to drab agony and gray.
(131)

When his neighbors press Jules for his opinion of the battle, he pronounces it "'a blot on the American flag'" (132). Certainly, Jules does not regard the inhuman treatment toward the native peoples as a blot on himself but on the government of which he is a part.

The brutality with which Jules often treats his family is difficult to reconcile with his abhorrence of the brutal treatment of the Native Americans. Possibly, Jules is able to rationalize his abusive treatment of his women and children because he regards their charge as a personal responsibility not affecting anyone else. The subjugation of the indigenous peoples with its far-reaching, cultural-

historical consequences, on the other hand, awakens and offends Jules's spiritual sensibility. He recognizes that such an injustice leaves a blight on both oppressed and oppressor. Jules thus resembles the epic hero in terms of the possession of a spiritual dimension which is uncovered only with difficulty.

As has been demonstrated, some of the very qualities which contribute to Jules's success as a community leader and a developer of the region ironically manifest themselves in unpleasing, offensive behavior. Jules's mammoth ego not only allows him to believe in his abilities as a community developer but also drives him to dominate and abuse the members of his household. His passionate, volatile nature often provokes him to erupt in anger and violence; his ability to hold fast to and bring to fruition his own dreams threatens to be subsumed in stubbornness and an unwillingness to listen to the opinions of others; and his capacity to view the "exalted canvas" allows him to leave everyday, menial tasks to his family. When his wife Mary brings up the subject of work, Jules is indignant: "'You want me, an educated man, to work like a hired tramp!' he roared, and threw her against the wall" (199). Jules follows the same line of argument when a friend questions his work habits: "'I work my head. I'm not a Grobian with a strong back and a weak mind'" (278).

Reflecting on the deep chasm separating Jules's exalted vision and his often malicious behavior, Sandoz observed:

"But in Jules, as in every man, there lurks something ready to destroy the finest in him as the frosts of earth destroy her flowers" (46). Big Andrew, though, defends his friend's ways:

"Jules is then only what he must be. . . . One can go into a wild country and make it tame, but, like a coat and cap and mittens that he can never take off, he must always carry the look of the land as it was." (375)

Sandoz echoed this theme in a letter to Adolph G. Kaufman:

"Even the least probable man can learn to conquer a wilderness, but not without having it live on in him, unconquered, to the end" (February 25, 1948).

As she developed her historical vision, Sandoz came to believe that individuals like Jules were essential to the settlement of the West, despite the fact that their actions were not always admirable, or even civilized. She expressed her views in a letter to Mrs. L. A. Hornburg, written June 3, 1936:

People who are disturbed by Old Jules forget that only the strong and the ruthless stayed--that the squeamish may be nicer to live with but they conquer no wildernesses. If you look into history you will find that vision is always accompanied by

a degree of thoughtlessness, impatience, and even intolerance for others.

Through her portrayal of her father, Sandoz asserted that the very qualities that can sabotage the dream of coherent community are the qualities that make possible its realization. Comprehending the potential for destruction in Jules's attitudes and behavior, Sandoz nevertheless perceived that the dream transcended the elements that might have overthrown it. She recognized that Jules's hardness, his unwillingness to allow himself to become weak through a sense of personal responsibility, his sympathy for the plight of the victim in society, and even his cruelty to those close to him are attributes which fuel his drive to achieve settlement of the Niobrara region.

Sandoz summed up her perceptions of her father in a letter to Herbert Cushing:

A man of less impatience and less violence could not have come from his sheltered and safe environment and stood alone, cap to his brows, gun across his forearm, against his entire little world. Such ego, such courage is given to but few of us. The world is full of ordinary women and children to be sacrificed. And by one of life's paradoxes, we were not sacrificed at all. Instead we were given a close look upon the lightning such as is granted to few. I, for one, have no

complaint to make over my singed eyebrows.

(January 6, 1936)

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

The preceding chapters in this thesis demonstrate the determinative place that each of Mari Sandoz's four protagonists inhabits in the author's overall conception of western development. Through her depiction of the values, actions, and visions of Crazy Horse, Little Wolf, Dull Knife, and Old Jules, Sandoz explored the representative nature of conflict (physical, cultural, and spiritual) on the Great Plains. Examining the intense, often violent clashes between the minority and majority cultures, Sandoz revealed the universality and the uniqueness of the Plains experience. In "Mari Sandoz and Western Biography," Stauffer reflects upon the status of Sandoz's protagonists:

On her particular landscape, the trans-Missouri basin, certain memorable men appeared from time to time. Her subjects are significant not only because of their own individual qualities as human beings, but because they exhibit in their particular lives universal qualities. (67)

As Sandoz's characters struggle to overcome the forces, both external and internal, which threaten to overpower them, they often rise to heroic dimensions. In a letter to Frank C. Hanighen, Sandoz expressed her perceptions of the heroic potential present in any struggle:

You would hardly expect anyone of my temperament to emphasize the hopelessness of the struggle in the sandhills. I don't recognize any hopelessness in any struggle with nature. Defeated we are, of course, for death is inevitable, but to the people that seem interesting to me the struggle is a magnificent one in any event. (November 21, 1933)

In describing this struggle, Sandoz was clearly influenced by classical epic tradition. Epic themes, actions, and style are discernible throughout her biographies. Sandoz's protagonists parallel the traditional epic hero in their possession of leadership skills and visionary qualities and in their experience of adversity and alienation as they pursue their visions. However, in her study of the settlement of the Great Plains, Sandoz also perceived elements which did not fit the classical epic mold. Sandoz's desire to convey accurately her understanding of Plains history resulted in a reshaping of epic tradition. Thus, in each of her three biographies, Sandoz adapted classical conventions to conform with historical experience.

Several elements distance Crazy Horse from western civilization's expansionist epic vision. Writing from the perspective of the victimized Oglalas and depicting the disintegration of a culture rather than its growth and continuation, Sandoz inverted the traditional epic pattern.

Selectively following and veering from the classical epic framework, she created an authentic narrative of cultural displacement and conflict. Similarly, Sandoz restructured usual epic formula in Cheyenne Autumn. As with Crazy Horse, she cast minority peoples as the leading figures in her work, portraying the richness of their culture and the heroism of their struggles. Despite their inevitable defeat at the hands of dominant white society, the Native American leaders function as heroic figures, striving against all odds to protect their people and culture.

As a member of the majority culture and a tireless promoter of community growth, Old Jules more visibly conforms to the conventional image of the classical epic hero than do Sandoz's Lakota and Cheyenne protagonists. Yet, the very qualities which empower Jules's epic quest threaten to subvert it. His dynamic vision of western development is offset by his self-centered and, at times, destructive nature. Jules's antiheroical traits thus prevent him from wholly fulfilling the exalted role commonly expected of the epic hero. However, Jules's impassioned dreams and heroic feats transcend, in part, his shortcomings and establish him as a qualified epic figure. Kathleen Walton's characterization of Jules as resembling the self-seeking "Homeric hero," as opposed to the disinterested, altruistic "Virgilian hero" (a designation which more

fittingly describes Sandoz's Native American protagonists), is apt (81, 291).

Sandoz's epic patterning was not an end in itself. Rather, she used epic style and themes as a means through which she expressed her historical vision. Sandoz carefully grounded her writing in historical verity. Her childhood experiences, her extensive archival research, and her close identification with her literary subjects were all instrumental in forming the author's conception of western development. As Sandoz chronicled the settlement of the Great Plains, she achieved a blending of epic and mythic images with factual, historically-based narrative. As a result of this synthesis, the epic and the historical coexist in Sandoz's characterization of her four protagonists--Crazy Horse, Little Wolf, Dull Knife, and Old Jules.

Through epic style and historical narrative, Sandoz sought to capture the essence of the characters about whom she wrote. Performing actions of epic magnitude in their struggle against powerful and conflicting forces and profoundly (although dissimilarly) affected by Native American victimization and white dominance on the Plains, Sandoz's protagonists collectively embody her comprehensive vision of Great Plains history.

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