SANDOZ WRITING (RIGHTING) HISTORY

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and
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by

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Mari Sandoz’s dedication to her research topics, personality, candor, and work ethic allowed her an intimate place alongside those she chose to write about. This yielded a moving written product. In the same way that Sandoz was able to infiltrate the groups she researched, they permeated Sandoz’s consciousness. As she developed story ideas and noted observations about Plains life, Sandoz encountered factions that she saw were unjustly treated. She utilized her platform as a writer to attempt to redress these injustices. Her work with Native Americans, women, and workers greatly touched the people she wrote about and, ultimately, for. This work considers how this frontierswoman was able to transgress gender boundaries and question authority about those she felt were disenfranchised. Her acerbic writing, in both her literary texts and letters, was remarkable in a time and place when and where women typically did not provide such pointed commentary.

Mari Sandoz’s literary works were supported by extensive historical research, which employed ethnohistory, and detailed research notes to support her stories of both fiction and
non-fiction. Her advocacy through her writing and personal efforts were important in shaping opinions in Nebraska and the United States. While Sandoz’s intricate work invites critique, analysis, and commentary, her work has remained obscure to scholars in either a historical or a literary sense. This work demonstrates the methodology by which Sandoz comments on issues of her time more accurately and, more importantly, the effect of her writing on those issues. The importance of this research is how Sandoz effectively comments about these issues and utilized her texts and letters to promote her advocacy, providing interest to feminist rhetoricians. Sandoz’s interventions are related to ongoing issues, as they demonstrate the ways by which an author can influence and affect public sympathy and awareness in order to effect change.
APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies have examined a dissertation titled “Sandoz Writing (Righting) History” presented by Jillian Leigh Wenburg, candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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Dedicated to Mari Sandoz.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Mari Sandoz sits next to best friend Eleanor Hinman on the darkening South Dakota plains. The two have spent twelve days with Crazy Horse’s descendants, earning their trust and hearing their stories. Each looks with anticipation straight ahead, as the chief dancer, a 78-year-old Lakota man, prepares himself for the first Sun Dance to occur in the Pine Ridge since 1881. Each wait, not moving, not breathing, afraid that one small movement will break the spell that has afforded them a place of honor alongside He Dog, the close friend and Warrior brother of the greatest Indian war chief in the Midwest, Crazy Horse. The dancers begin their Sun Dance. The rhythms of the dancers’ bare, weathered feet stomp in rhythm nearly as loudly as Sandoz’s heart. She was about to experience something no white woman had seen on this reservation for more than 51 years. Viewed as a granddaughter by He Dog, she was family here (Sandoz, “Letter to Gentlemen at New York Times” 22); she felt she belonged (Sandoz “Letter to Gentlemen at Saturday Evening Post” 278).

Sandoz’s dedication to her research topics, personality, candor, and work ethic allowed her an intimate place alongside those she chose to write about. She was afforded a unique privilege to participate in this ceremony because of the way she approached her work. In the same way that Sandoz was able to infiltrate the groups she researched, they permeated Sandoz’s consciousness. As she developed story ideas and noted observations about Plains life, Sandoz encountered societal factions that she saw were unjustly treated. She utilized her platform as a writer to attempt to redress these injustices. Her work with Native Americans,
women, and farmers and laborers greatly touched the people she wrote about and, ultimately, for.

I consider how this frontierswoman was able to transgress boundaries and question authority about those she felt were disenfranchised. Her acerbic writing, in both her literary texts and letters, was remarkable in a time and place when and where women typically did not provide such pointed commentary. My research asks questions about her texts and activism and her ability to push limits of acceptable gender roles, societal norms, and stereotypes. This work recovers and uncovers the significance behind Sandoz’s work and provides a platform from which to start a conversation about the merit of that material. Archival materials, which include her primary source materials, copious notes, letters, and photos, provide evidence as to how Sandoz was able to effectively circumvent limitations for women born on the frontier and discursively and legally challenge the dominant roles for women, farmers, laborers, and Native Americans. I examine how her texts represent these issues and assess the ways her texts and activism worked in conjunction to advocate for disenfranchised parties.

It is important to contextualize Sandoz to understand why her texts are divergent from other Plains writers and why they deserve closer analysis. This work then can serve as a place to begin the conversation of more broad based comparison of Sandoz’s texts and their significance in her time. Her activism is my primary focus, but I am interested in how her history caused her to arrive at these conclusions and to develop such passionate stances. As a native Nebraskan, I am also invested in examining the larger significance and stakes of this marginalized author. It is more than a recovery narrative here, however, as I demonstrate the
ways in which Sandoz’s work can be better understood through the theoretical lenses of gender and queer theory, Marxist political theory, and deconstruction.

Sandoz was a Nebraska-born author and the daughter of Swiss immigrants who articulated life on the Great Plains of Nebraska with clear descriptions of the difficulties residents endured. She was an activist for those treated unjustly and used her position as an author to bring these issues to light in a factual, stark way. I explore Sandoz’s advocacy for disenfranchised peoples, which invokes immigrants’ struggles, farmer and laborer rights, women’s rights, the dwindling of the frontier, and the abuse and misunderstanding of Native American peoples and traditions. Sandoz used extensive historical research and applied ethnohistory to support her literary works of fiction and non-fiction. She did not just write about what interested her; she researched it relentlessly. That research was, to some degree, obsessive. She had notecards hanging from bags on doorknobs and bits of paper with notes and details strewn about her research spaces (Hull 106). She sometimes even lived the experiences she wrote about. When researching Foal of Heaven, for example, she moved to Denver and often stayed at the ranch she was using as her resource point. For her Crazy Horse biography, she traveled to the Pine Ridge Reservation and stayed with the Lakota tribe, attempting to better understand their ways and metaphors. Her advocacy for these groups through her writing and personal efforts shaped opinions in the Midwest and the United States. Sandoz’s unique writing methodology stood out for a historical fiction writer. It appears that she engages in over-the-top research for her purpose of literary fiction. Why would an author attempting to sell her work as fiction research and interview for the stories to be sure they are historically accurate? A visit to her archives demonstrates the maddening
amount of time she spent obsessing upon on each text. The archives show the 45,000 notecards in her research files, which join clipping after newspaper clipping, written transcripts of interviews, notes, photographs, postcards, her personal travels, and calculations of weather patterns. That detail, though, allows readers to feel fully immersed in an actual history, a real event. If money were her primary goal, there would be faster and less detailed ways to go about writing a text that most certainly would take less time. Sandoz’s primary concern was not money; she had an agenda.

Few works discuss Sandoz in depth as an author and even fewer works address her from a perspective beyond biography. Scholars have neglected significant aspects of her work. Even the Sandoz archives show her continual displacement, extending her metaphoric academic displacement to tangible space. The archival space devoted to her at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln shows neglect of this important author. Some listed elements in the finding aid are incomplete or missing from the microfilm reels. Sandoz’s archival space was further diminished during a 2013 visit. As I visited, the former Sandoz room was reallocated to another depth of the Special Collections and Archives in the UNL Love Library, while the Botkin collection retained the former Sandoz room. As one archivist librarian shared privately, no more of Sandoz’s relatives are alive, and probably no one would be too upset. Her materials are stored, yet this event showed just one more place in which Sandoz’s work is shelved both metaphorically and literally into the further recesses of the spaces in which they occupy.

Is this problematic? Why do some find such significance in Sandoz’s work while others readily dismiss it? The way in which the reader approaches Sandoz accounts for this. Those who read Sandoz looking for a lighthearted, unserious read about the Plains are
usually disappointed. The work is too meticulous, too detailed, too mired in facts at the risk and probability of losing narration. Those who read her work looking for a historical account, however, find those details useful and important. While the casual reader does not really care that the moon sequence described in *Cheyenne Autumn* is correct, a historian would appreciate that Sandoz’s research shows evidence of her collecting moon cycles and calculating the 1800’s moon so as to be sure to represent the night sky correctly. Her version of *Crazy Horse* would not dare mention an out of season flower or non-native tree—her research files show that she detailed what plant would bloom when and where as well as how each Native American tribe may have used them differently. A casual reader may not care, but the historian or precision-oriented reader finds the details important since they heighten her credibility. In a world where Willa Cather’s work is readily elevated, Sandoz’s stake in the western literary and historical canons should not be dismissed. This work attempts to situate Sandoz as a Midwesterner, American author, and historian.

The historian, however, could (and should) take issue with Sandoz. Sandoz, despite her meticulous research and data to support her details and assertions, neglects to footnote her work, usually doing so sparingly and even then only to clarify a point, rarely for documentation purposes. Historians and critics have long taken issue with this. Vine Deloria concludes, “[the facts] seemed to blend together into a homogenous mass containing many extraneous details but difficult to use because of the lack of footnotes” (v). Did Sandoz feel that these aspects of her works might put off the casual reader? Probably. Sandoz capitalized on the tension that existed then and still exists for historians and their readership(s), which vary widely from the academic historian to the recreational history buff or general public. It appears that Sandoz was trying hard to merge the two markets of fiction and history and
ultimately failed in some capacity to both genres, probably due to the wide variety of possible audiences. While her writing choices may not have yielded her much success during her time, those who realized then and even now what she was attempting to do—ultimately bring history to the masses—can see she worked for something significant. She attempted to write non-fiction that was based upon history, yet occasionally blurred the lines between fiction and non-fiction, writing in a narrative manner. This is similar to that of historian Simon Schama or fiction writer Amitov Ghosh. Schama was lauded for this “innovative” technique in the 90s. I argue Sandoz more effectively utilizes this method and had done so more than half a century before Schama, Ghosh, or others, yet has never been credited for having done so. Specifically, it is comparable to what Simon Schama does with Dead Certainties—it is history with a fiction. As historians critical of Schama rationalize:

Schama is no subscriber to the doctrines of structuralism with its anti-humanist denial of the role of individuals. Instead of arcane jargon, Schama prefers the dramatic class of real human beings. He, in fact, a champion of the revival of history as narrative storytelling and of what he calls the “thrilling, beautiful prose” of the great nineteenth century historians such as Jules Michelet and T.B. Macaulay. He is also a scathing critic of the dull, fact-grubbing pedantry that he regards as dominating academic history writing today. (Windshuttle 253)

Sandoz, too, found historians’ writings dull and uninvolved. Moreover, she found that varied versions of history could exist, a revisionist idea. Sandoz wrote:

I hear eastern rumblings of disapproval of some of my versions of American history. I should hope so. There should be practically as much difference between the Atlantic seaboard version of the western expansion and ours, of the region overrun, as there is between the British and the Colonial version of early American history. I took my Frontier history under John Hicks who refused to follow the humbling path of [Frederick Jackson] Turner. (Sandoz, “Letter to Mr. M.S. Wyeth, Jr. 6 September 1961)
Thus, Sandoz was interested in revising history in order to make it a compelling story for readers. She and others who apply this historical fiction technique found common ground in the conceptualization that history could rivet. As Schama stated, “Entirely missing from these productions [other history texts] are the great narratives of history […] capable of stirring the imagination, feeding the immense hunger for historical drama” (qtd. in Windshuttle 253).

Yet, as many historians and readers are sure to have critiqued, the problem with this type of writing is the difficulty to assess what is true and what is not, as “Once the writer admits that some of what he or she has written is fiction, the reader not only feels a justified sense of betrayal but is bound to suspend judgment about the credibility of everything the writer has written” (Windshuttle 254). Sandoz discerns this as an issue, but pointedly chose to disregard it at the potential of gaining more readers and more interest, although most likely alienating some serious scholars of history. Sandoz represents a popular history. On the one hand, readers and scholars are hesitant to find value in this type of work. However, her work serves as the building block upon which other histories have been written. Further, her work brings awareness to issues and peoples that had been disregarded. This does not discount historians’ sound arguments about Sandoz’s work. Her work provides few citations, even though the archives show her historical material extremely accurate and well researched. Still, it seems academic historians have been quick to dismiss Sandoz’s contributions without a moment’s consideration of her work. It is time to evaluate Sandoz’s work and see the way in which this strong-willed, slightly obsessive and mildly paranoid, left-leaning author was able to rise as a progressive reformer influential woman in Nebraska. It is time to give Mari Sandoz her due by looking at the evidence from the woman herself and evaluating it with a critical eye.
Sandoz judges Americans reading history astutely. Difficult history books are a hard sell. The American Historical Association’s *Perspectives* magazine featured an article on thinking historically. The authors note:

Historians who excel at the art of storytelling often rely heavily upon context. Jonathan Spence’s *Death of Woman Wang*, for example, skillfully recreates 17th-century China by following the trail of a sparsely documented murder. To solve the mystery, students must understand the time and place in which it occurred. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich brings colonial New England to life by concentrating on the details of textile production and basket making in *Age of Homespun*. College courses regularly use the work of both authors because they not only spark student interest, but also hone students’ ability to describe the past and identify distinctive elements of different eras. (Andrews and Burke)

Thus, it is through this particular storytelling style that students are able to become “spark[ed]” and the public’s need of excitement met. Sandoz weaves a story of intrigue and suspense, telling more than just the facts but the story of history. Sandoz has a desire to pass her love of history and the region on, and their storytelling allows them to achieve this. Even more recently, Jan Goldstein, 2014 AHA president, lauded Amitav Ghosh’s recent works as historical texts that, albeit fiction, “could be assigned in good effect in an undergraduate course on world history. In a graduate course on historical method, they could be analyzed in terms of the boundary between history and fiction, between the truths of the archive and those of the imagination” (6). Goldstein argues, “As I realized all the unfamiliar history that I, as a Europeanist, was effortlessly absorbing by reading Ghosh, I didn’t enjoy the novel any less” but then began to question its historical accuracy (5). Goldstein found Ghosh’s work was backed in evidentiary support: “The books deserve to be [considered] as superlatively good reads and as pedagogical tools for both our students and, quite possibly, given the advent of global history, ourselves” (5). Goldstein affirms the concept that history, veiled
through the lens of fiction, serves a valuable role in educating the general public about history.

**Sandoz’s Background**

Sandoz’s life on the plains cultivated a gendered youth and adolescence, which was integral in the formation of her thoughts and values. She was obligated to raise her brothers and sisters since her mother was needed as an additional farm hand. Serving as a motherly figure rendered Sandoz witness to the struggles of Plains women. She learned to appreciate the plight of a woman, abandoned by her husband and living alone with children, or of the educated woman trying to get past stereotypes about her knowledge. As a young girl, Sandoz was also forced to homestead a claim on the Nebraska plains with just her brother. Her childhood and adolescence allowed her to see how often hard work went unrewarded. Still today in that region, farmers put in countless hours in a job that pays little, offers little respect, and little by way of advancement for one’s family. In Sandoz’s time, too, this was the case. Farmers and ranchers spent hours on their farm and ranch only to have it destroyed with one early frost, a tornado, dust, grasshoppers, hail, fire, or tragedy. Sandoz’s familial situation presented her the opportunity to witness the vulnerability of hardworking people. Her history ultimately yielded her awakening and enabled her to utilize her plucky and occasionally insolent realism in conjunction with romantic depictions of the West to construct a more representative picture of the Plains that still resonates today. She was motivated to show her Plains through the lens of the people that lived there. In doing so, she found herself serving as a representative for disenfranchised groups. Her activism was important, and the effect is that it changed some attitudes and presented a more factual, historically-based interpretation of the past in both her fiction and non-fiction. Sandoz
became a determined, vociferous voice for these outsiders. Moreover, her works provided them the positive feedback and image to represent themselves more effectively. Her novels maintain discursive spaces that allow readers to develop their conceptions toward these issues. Sandoz creates indefinite endings in her works to allow readers to arrive at their own conclusions; this style of writing means that they are not programmatic in nature. The novels and pieces Sandoz writes are both a learning exercise and experimental activity. Readers can choose their own adventure from the material that Sandoz presents. She does not tell reader how to think about the subjects she brings up; she merely sets forth the data for readers to draw their own conclusions. If she was prescriptive, it would easily drive her readers away. She read her audience well here in using format, tone, and narrative structure that allowed readers to learn and absorb information and draw conclusions. If Sandoz had come out with Western guns blazing, many who initially disagreed with her may not have taken the time to read the narrative and absorb her new perspective. Thus, Sandoz’s work is not a flight of fancy, throw-away fiction novel; it is a carefully constructed political narrative that interweaves narrative in order to draw readers into the issue, usually one of great significance.

Sandoz’s youth was not idyllic. Her father, Jules Ami Sandoz, homesteaded the hardened Nebraska plains and cultivated a home in the midst of the Nebraska Sandhills near Gordon, Nebraska. He married three times before settling with wife number four, Mary Fehr, and Mari was the eldest of their six children (Stauffer, Mari Sandoz 20). She was schooled at home, speaking mostly German and French, before Jules sent her to a local rural school. Her experience with country school education was short lived, as Jules withdrew her from the school when she was needed to help homestead another plot of ground with her younger
brother for the family. Although her father was renowned for his brusque manner, he was well known and respected. He ran a post office out of the Sandoz homestead, served as a locator during the Kincaid Act, trapped and traded with travelers, and was well respected for his knowledge of agriculture and the Great Plains region. Through Jules’s contacts and her home location, Sandoz was introduced to people she would continue to fight for the rest of her life, including Indian traders and trappers, hardworking farmers, and women struggling to get by (Sandoz, *Old Jules*).

Sandoz’s experience in education was limited due to her father. She did pass the county eighth grade examination at 17, but received no additional schooling in her youth (Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz* 36). Later, she obtained her teaching certification and attended secretarial school (Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz* 43). Sandoz wanted to write, though, and knew she needed more education, so she attempted to enroll at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Problematically, she had no high school education. Dean William E. Sealock felt for Sandoz’s circumstances and believed in her. He took a chance on this Nebraska farm girl, “observing that she could do no more than fail” (Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz* 44). Although she had received Sealock’s permission, she still enhanced her transcripts, creating a fictitious high school to augment her application. Sandoz did not fail, but thrived in courses in history and literature. Her work with historians Fred Morrow Fling and John Andrew Rice influenced her for the rest of her life, as Sandoz used these historians’ historiographical methods and engaged in research methods they advocated, according to her letters and biographer, Helen Stauffer (Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz* 50-51). These influences are reflected in all of Sandoz’s works, but most especially in her approach to research for her texts.
Despite the fact that her own experiences afforded a great amount of workable material for a text, Sandoz expanded her writing vision beyond her personal tales of intrigue and focused most of her work on others that had experienced injustice in their lives. In fact, Sandoz’s *Old Jules* is the rare text that does, in fact, deal with her family, telling the history of her father and the settling of the Plains. Notably, Sandoz’s work does not weave idealistic tales about the Plains, as some more prominent Western authors do. She replicated the experience on the Plains in a grittier and often more controversial way than other popular writers of the time. She includes stories of murder on the plains, castration, a Plains brothel, fascists, and verbal and physical abusers of spouses, children, and others. Sandoz is not afraid to shy away from issues that might cause her readers discomfort, rather, she attacks those issues and refuses to back down from explaining the situation or point in full detail. Her ability to interweave historians’ realism with the storytelling of a romantic produced works that engage and cleave to readers’ consciousness.

While Sandoz’s intricate work invites critique, analysis, and commentary, her work has remained obscure to scholars in either a historical or a literary sense. Helen Winter Stauffer published commentary on Sandoz’s literary contributions in *Story Catcher of the Plains* in 1982. In 2009, Kimberli Lee published “I Do Not Apologize for the Length of this Letter” *The Mari Sandoz Letters on Native American Rights 1940-1965*, a compilation of the letters Sandoz wrote on behalf of Native Americans. Other than standard literary reviews of Sandoz’s work and short articles, no scholar has performed a comprehensive literary and historical analysis of Sandoz’s writings and papers in relationship to her advocacy. Furthermore, in most of the writings that assess Sandoz’s works, there is disconnect between the literary analysis and historical significance of her advocacy. There is a wealth of
information that has not been explored about Sandoz. For example, while Stauffer briefly mentions Sandoz’s work with the FBI, there has been no additional research which explains what Sandoz did for them and the other pro-Ally committees she worked on while in Denver, including the Citizens for Victory and the William Allen White committee. Stauffer notes that she “provoked anti-fascist groups” but nowhere does she or others detail how or why (141). Probing Sandoz’s past further establishes her historical significance by providing clear evidence for how she worked and how her ideologies reflect across her entire canon and grounds her contextually.

My research ascertains how Sandoz’s historical fiction comments on issues of her time more accurately and, more importantly, the effect of her writing on those issues. Sandoz effectively comments about social injustices and utilizes her texts and letters to promote her advocacy. In an environment that was characterized as misogynistic and close-minded, her ability to transgress the oppressive economic- and gender-based forces as a poor woman adds a level of complexity to her work. Few scholars have examined Sandoz’s role and the accomplishments that she was able to achieve. She was awarded for her research and literature with an Owen Wister Award and several awards from Nebraska associations, yet she has been disregarded critically on a national level. Her work was influential but largely overshadowed by fellow Nebraska author Willa Cather and by the difficulty and denseness of her prose. While Cather’s plains were typically saccharine, Sandoz’s representation was more authentic, judging from sales records and current curriculum featuring Plains writers, but most readers wanted to read the fairy tale and not the historical truth. Sandoz not only wanted to reflect historical reality, but also attempted to represent life in a dystopic vein in an attempt to motivate her readers for change. In a way, her work falls clearly in line with other
early twentieth-century reformers. Sandoz never reached the critical acclaim that some of her colleagues achieved, perhaps because she was writing at a level that presented difficulty. As Sandoz wrote, “Sincerely, and don’t mind if you don’t find my work salable. I won’t” (Sandoz, “Letter to Nowell”). She wrote about what she believed, rather than what was most popular or successful. This perhaps explains some of why Sandoz was disregarded critically during her time, but why have scholars not realized the import that Sandoz has now? Conceivably, they are not considering the context in which Sandoz was writing, how different she was from her contemporaries, and the forces she was up against in writing.

The primary goal of this work is to present Sandoz as a figure of note in history and detail her motivations. I explain why Sandoz is more important than critics have previously noted. Sandoz has been misunderstood and misrepresented, but more importantly, she has been underestimated. Her work allows for a fundamental reconsideration of history and the writing of history during the thirties. Moreover, she was significant in her attempts for reform and the writing strategies and research methods she used to obtain this reform. Her work in utilizing primary source materials in writing her fiction and non-fiction at the time she did so is notable. Further, her advocacy for these groups at a time when women’s voices were not as prominent or powerful is remarkably significant. I demonstrate how Sandoz took on a challenge to speak for the disenfranchised and show the innovative ways in which she did so. My analysis is interdisciplinary and inclusive of both historical aspects and her written texts, setting it apart from all scholarship that exists about Sandoz, which is scanty at this juncture. This comprehensive analysis considers historical events, Sandoz’s own texts, her archival materials, and invokes critical theory in evaluating the success of Sandoz’s work as well as her motivations. Further, my use of critical theory illuminates the philosophical challenges of
her work. Understanding Sandoz through feminist and queer theory provides the base for Sandoz’s understanding of women in chapter two. Utilizing both political Marxist theory and deconstruction helps in understanding Sandoz’s notion of the worker in chapter three. Chapter four discusses Sandoz through a deconstruction lens in conjunction with her Native American focused works. These chapters focus on specific textual examples and historical primary documents and establishes the effect of her advocacy. In these chapters, I will focus upon *Slogum House*, *Miss Morissa*, *Crazy Horse*, *Capital City*, *Old Jules*, and other shorter stories.

Throughout the work, I consider the theoretical components that lend depth and demonstrate the larger stakes of Sandoz’s work. One important component is Sandoz’s interest in the community as a tool by which to challenge the prominent ruling class. In many of her texts, she examines various social units that can bind together to achieve justice. What are the results of these social units and what do they attempt to achieve? While these groups were often accused of communism, they simply were trying to agitate for the betterment of their community. Here, engaging Jean-Luc Nancy’s conception of the “inoperative community” will be important. Nancy explores how the idea of community can neither be individuals working independently nor as fascists. He is interested with how society can develop knowing this information. As Nancy states, “The first task in understanding what is at stake here [understanding the importance of community] consists in focusing on the horizon behind us. This means questioning the breakdown in community that supposedly engendered the modern era” (Nancy 9). Sandoz, like Nancy, finds examining past examples of failed communities useful in determining how community will develop in the future. In *Capital City’s* Franklin, with Rudy and the community in *Slogum House*, and in *Crazy
*Horse*, readers can begin to see this different sense of community take shape: those unified against those in power working together. As Nancy further explains in his examination of the inoperative community: the goal of achieving a community of beings producing in essence their own essence as their work, and furthermore producing precisely this essence as *community*. An absolute immanence of man to man--a humanity, -- and of community to community -- a communism (2). These units struggle to work together but, as Nancy also explains, “these same voices that were unable to communicate what, perhaps without knowing it, they were saying, were exploited” (8). Nancy is critical here, showing how the creation of a new community can expose and undo an unjust community. He focuses on the community that is underlying the existing community. Sandoz, however, considers the community beyond. This is not entirely problematic, but it limits her conversation in that it does not fully explicate the issues at stake with the current communities she critiques. Although there is the potentiality for this new community to fail as well, it still also has the potential for success and does go about the right of rectifying the wrong in the community that previously existed. Many of the disenfranchised in Sandoz’s texts work and strive for a change from the corrupt status quo. They are able to successfully critique the problematic aspects of their society and evidence a potential for change through the new communities that they create.

Sandoz developed a sense of confidence that could not be shaken. The sharp criticism of literary agents she treated in much the same way as she did her father’s disapproval. She would not be bossed around regarding projects and revisions and disliked if an agent gave her attitude. She banters in a number of letters to the multiple agents she cycled through; these letters evidence her condescension for their attempts to manipulate and control her. For
example, she writes to New York agent Margaret Christie: “Your violent reaction to ‘Victorie’ is exceedingly gratifying to me. Evidently, my evaluation of the story is correct. I suspected that it would not appeal to an agent who must, by necessity, be guided by commercial value of a story rather than its artistic value. And that’s that. Of course, I shall not change the story, nor put it aside” (Sandoz, “Letter to Miss Christie”). She was assertive and let no one manipulate or alter her text in a way she was not comfortable with. They needed to understand that she had already often spent years doing historical research, months writing, and months meticulously revising. It was quite difficult for Sandoz to receive some of the critique from the agents, especially when she often felt they did not realize the extent of her research, nor the culture and language of the West.

In gauging the effect and appeal of Sandoz’s work, it is important to evaluate her personal papers. Two archives contain most Sandoz primary source material. The Mari Sandoz Collection at the Archives & Special Collections at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln Libraries contains the bulk of Sandoz’s research materials, which includes over 45,000 handwritten note cards, copies of most of her correspondence in their entirety, research files, notes, hand drawn maps, and Sandoz’s personal library. The collection also includes other Sandoz artifacts including: articles, books, interviews, microfilm of all of Sandoz’s research files and cards, manuscripts, galley proofs including handwritten notations, maps, correspondence, and a list of her personal library holdings. Sandoz was a productive writer and much of her advocacy work to reach government groups is contained here. Her detailed research files reflect her historical method and provide useful data for a study of this scope.
The Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center, affiliated with Chadron State College, in Chadron, Nebraska, is the second research facility that holds biographical and personal Sandoz data. The holdings of the facility include Sandoz manuscripts, unpublished titles, Sandoz sound recordings, and carbons of her correspondence from the Caroline Sandoz Pifer Collection of Mari Sandoz Papers. These papers include carbons of Sandoz’s letters, letter thermocopies, financial records, drafts of unpublished short stories and published novels, clippings, letters, and photographs. Her letters and photographs provide evidence of her advocacy.

There are additional resources at the Denver Public Library at the Western Historical Collection that are contained within the Caroline Bancroft collection, including letters from Sandoz to Bancroft. There are additional useful letters that Sandoz’s sister, Caroline Sandoz Pifer, wrote to Bancroft discussing Sandoz’s work and intent after her death. The Syracuse University Library also contains some letters from Sandoz to a former literary agent. While not plentiful in number, these letters provide additional examples of Sandoz’s introspective thoughts as well as how some responded to her work.

Sandoz’s letters and archival papers provide detailed explanation of Sandoz’s writing methodology and her advocacy strategy, which centered primarily upon traveling, writing, and speaking. Sandoz travelled extensively through the Great Plains, southwest, and Rocky Mountains in order to become more familiar with the areas she was writing about. She travelled to multiple Native American reservations to learn more about the tribes and to accurately tell their stories. She viewed her work as a historical project; she wanted to tell the history of the people, not necessarily examine them from outsiders’ perspectives as a sociologist or anthropologist. This is difficult as an outsider because of the racial order that
exists. She knew she could not undo the order but wanted to attempt to challenge it and present an alternative representative that could challenge the dominant discourse. Further, she wanted to help a write down and understand a history that was losing primary first-hand interview sources with each day. Where Sandoz went, how she was able to gain access to her sources, and what she attempted to do or uncover in these regions is significant in my explication of Sandoz’s achievements. This analysis reflects Sandoz’s ability to permeate the borders that existed between the parties she studied and her own subject position. This evidence demonstrates that Sandoz was able to successfully represent the groups she encountered, particularly the Lakota Sioux, through her use of primary source material in a way that had not previously been done before or as successfully since. Her work allowed this tribe a voice and an anchor point in which to ground their own voices, even if it was to disagree with Sandoz or provide a clarification point.

In addition to examining Sandoz’s travel, it is important to examine Sandoz’s prolific writings; this work establishes the significance of some of her published and unpublished materials. Sandoz was staunch in her belief that her writing should accurately represent those she wrote about, thus, she included western colloquialisms in her work, much to the dismay of her publishers (Sandoz, “Letter to Nowell”). She wrote texts that blurred the line between fiction and reality and attempted to listen and recount the stories she heard with a goal in mind, almost as a folk teller or storyteller. I discuss the specific texts that she wrote as well as provide an analysis of her letters, discussing who she wrote to advocating for rights, e.g. her letter to Harry S. Truman. I also review her publications in essays, books, and newspapers as well as her speaking engagement material. Sandoz’s copious preparation notes for these speaking engagements, including radio and later television, as well as transcripts from the
events provide an additional perspective about how Sandoz attempted to convey her viewpoints.

The third, most important, primary document components are Sandoz’s texts. These include *Capital City, Slogum House, Miss Morissa,* and *Crazy Horse* in addition to some other smaller works. The close textual analyses of Sandoz’s own written history and fiction texts coupled with an examination of her archival materials will demonstrate how she addressed the rights of farmers and laborers, women, and Native Americans.

Secondary sources that discuss Sandoz are few and limited. Helen Winter Stauffer, a long time Sandoz scholar and former English professor at the University of Nebraska at Kearney is Sandoz’s most dedicated biographer. Her works include *Letters of Mari Sandoz.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992 and *Mari Sandoz: Story Catcher of the Plains.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982. Other recent scholars include Kimberli A. Lee’s *I Do Not Apologize for the Length of This Letter: The Mari Sandoz Letters on Native American Rights, 1940-1965.* Stauffer has put together the most comprehensive evaluations of Sandoz and Lee has produced the most recent.

**Historiography**

Helen Winter Stauffer wrote the most relevant histories of Sandoz in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Since then, only few articles have discussed Sandoz’s work. These articles have tended to focus on one particular work of literature, rather than synthesizing the ideas that Sandoz was espousing and collating the evidence from across her work. My work diverges from the current historiography in that it veers from a traditional biography or traditional literature analysis. My dissertation synthesizes biographical and literature aims, using her personal effects and printed works to reconstruct how Sandoz was influential in
shaping Nebraska and federal politics with her stance and advocacy. Further, I utilize several theoretical works in examining Sandoz’s texts, including Jacques Derrida’s “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority,’” Fredric Jameson’s Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions, and Jean-Luc Nancy’s The Inoperative Community. This application serves to show the depth of Sandoz’s analysis of social issues and adds in concepts previously unconsidered. There is no study that focuses on the multitude of Sandoz’s works collectively rather than unilaterally in a single focused work and also considers current theoretical frameworks. Further, this combination of theorists contextualize Sandoz best as they address alternative communities and how people engage with one another in those spaces.

Sandoz, according to sister, Caroline Sandoz Pifer, regarded Nebraska and the Sandhills as a sort of “Shangri-la” (Pifer, Gordon 79). As a result, she was always linked to the land of her youth and upbringing. She fought tirelessly for those she viewed as part of her history and her heritage, and achieved results because of it. Regardless if she ever reached the critical acclaim she deserved, her works and letters clearly evidence her relevance as an influential writer, historian, and change agent for the early twentieth century.
CHAPTER 2

CONSTRUCTING WOMEN: “WELL-KNIT BONE AND NERVE”

“I’m not used to seeing pioneers in the flesh and Hollywood’s version had not prepared me for this one. Mari Sandoz is not strapping, she is wiry; her strength is not that of muscle but of well-knit bone and nerve. She is painfully thin, with her high staccato Midwestern voice,” Edward Weeks, from *Atlantic Monthly Press*, said of Mari Sandoz: (Weeks 98). Mari Sandoz’s physical body yields many comparisons with androgynous characteristics that she regarded as beneficial for success and that help aid in questioning those in power. Her appearance works against any stereotypical notion of the frontier feminist and her attitude is reflected in her appearance. She cared little for frivolities, ate for sufficiency rather than indulging, and dressed for utilitarian purposes. Her discussion of pioneers and the Nebraska plains is similar to her appearance; it is nervy, unembellished, and just as efficient. Her high staccato voice is a mirror reflection of how her literary works resonated – with sharpness, crisp assertion, and command. She instructed readers and directed them in ways to act. Specifically, her hands demonstrate an abundance of androgynous traits she valued: “They were the hands of a farmer- broad, calloused, knobby. When you looked at her hands, you knew Mari Sandoz had worked mighty hard in the fields and the barns” (Smith, *Mari* 98). Her hands are so significant – showing she valued difficult, consistent hard work and physically demanding labor – demonstrative of both conviction and perseverance.

Sandoz’s attitude can present as cocky and off-putting. Yet, these hands are problematic for that reading. They show Sandoz was not just another Midwestern farm
woman out to publish a few books and papers to fire up her community and make a name for herself. She was not a polished Omaha debutante representing at the Ak-Sar-Ben ball, nor was she a figurehead rodeo rider from the western counties. Her hands told her story; she was a hard working woman, striving to subsist as a single woman in the 1930s. Seeing Sandoz as only an impudent voice does her work and the woman a disservice. It misses what drove her as well as what she was able to drive to, which is what is most significant about her work. She established a redefinition of gendered behavior in her literary works which called to action a constructed ambiguous gendered identity.

Mari Sandoz used her literary characters to serve as social change agents. She first molded her characters in an androgynous fashion, showing how women that did not fill the traditional mold of being apologetic and meek could achieve success. She used traits such as hardiness and dirtiness as a way to achieve empowerment. She also shows how women can take this advice too far and become overly bold and ruthless. Sandoz’s characters reflect how a balance of certain characteristics can lead to success for the individual and the community.

These traits neither be masculine or feminine, but characteristics of androgynous success. Her gender ideal was that there need not be an ideal. While Luce Irigaray later postulated in *The Sex Which is Not One* that women were not a sex, rather, a “female imaginary,” Sandoz postulated in the early 30s that women should not have an inscribed sex through her manipulations of the characters she wrote about (Irigaray 28). Her writing reformulated the notion of gender and reduced its importance so that the most capable individual achieved success because of his or her abilities, not because of an innate characteristic. Sandoz showed women succeeding outside of the traditional Midwestern gender roles of the 30s, allowing for room for women to become ruthless power hungry
dictators, autonomous frontier doctors, or assertive authors. She created real characters without gender constraints in order to develop a dialogue about gender roles.

In the same way that Judith Butler negotiates how “it becomes impossible to separate out “gender” from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariable produced and maintained,” Sandoz shows how an ambiguous gender identity can be beneficial (Butler, *Gender 3*). Butler affirms:

> If one “is” a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of is gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. (Butler, *Gender 3*)

Thus, just as Butler confirms that gender cannot be explicit, Sandoz shows how gender can be manipulated and, even more interesting, performed. Sandoz’s gender agenda lies in demonstrating how her vision of womanhood can permit women to achieve more personally and as a part of the larger community they operate under.

Sandoz understood the perils of power; in her girlhood, she had seen first-hand the suffering of Plains’ women, both frontier women and Native women, because they were female. Seeing her mother, family, neighbors, and other women suffer injustice infused the soul of her writing, where she conceptualized revised gender constructions based upon androgynous characteristics. Sandoz constructed this notion of gender by creating an androgynous identity for herself. She contested prevailing gender ideals in her acerbic writing, as evidenced in her letters and her fictional texts. Contesting this gendered identity allowed Sandoz to show that women could achieve more; she did not rely on the fallacy of tradition that women were substandard thinkers or contributors. She strove for equality.
Some critics chastised Sandoz for her work, with one *Capital City* critic noting, “One should pay her the compliment of saying that she thinks and expresses herself with the untrammeled vigor of a man, but would have to add that she thinks and expresses herself like an angry and not particularly well-balanced man” (“Mari Sandoz’s Big Political Cartoon”). This shows the bias against female authors and intellectuals as well as the tongue in cheek “compliments” she received that attempted to silence her. It also does demonstrate the inability Sandoz had to remain tactful and efficient. She continued writing with that “vigor,” as she wished to show that just because women had formerly acted in a certain way or participated in an event in a particular capacity, gender alone would no longer serve as an adequate reason to explain or proscribe behavior. Sandoz argues that attributes of masculinity and femininity required an equalization in order to keep society in balance and from tipping into corruption and injustice. Further, identity need not be identified by gender stereotypes. Identity appeared separate from gender. What is more interesting to Sandoz is when the characteristics attributed to masculine or feminine nature became unbalanced. This is when she saw problems emerged.

Sandoz presents some women on the plains as ruthless, but does so in a way to provide an explanation for these women. She is writing from a number of different strains: correctively, instructively, and methodologically. Her protagonists are diverse and include a writer, a Sandhills’ plains brothel owner, and a frontier doctor. Her works span from the lowest of respected positions to the highest. Sandoz’s writing does not blatantly show her presenting a morality tale or passing overt judgment on her characters and what they did; she primarily wants to present the text to the reader to allow them to respond and to evaluate the methodological reasons for their choices while at the same time reading into the
instructiveness that Sandoz’s works subtly suggested. The stories serve as explanation or instruction so readers can understand the motivation of Abigail, the writer who exposes an unjust government body in *Capital City*. Sandoz wants her readers to become metaphorical visitors to Old Gulla’s brothel in *Slogum House* and understand what motivated this driven and hardened woman. She wants readers to know they can aspire for a position such as a doctor, as Miss Morissa does in the work of the same title, following into that instructional vein. In *Miss Morissa* and *Slogum House*, however, Sandoz cautions readers about the inherent difficulties in maintaining these balances through quandaries and challenges. Here, she warns correctively and methodologically. She tries to explain the positions of these women to both explain and perhaps motivate other women to their level as well as provide a deeper level of understanding from women readers. The effect of this work is to motivate other women to succeed and provide awareness about their success and the inherent difficulties that come with such success. Further, she is subtly correcting the historical record by exploring the representation of women in the past. She rejects the Turnerian notion that women were not a part of the frontier development, just as later New Western historians did. She interrogates her sources with a depth and degree, even as a fiction writer, that matches preeminent historians and scholars of today.

Sandoz constructed an androgynous identity for herself and contested prevailing gender ideals in her acerbic writing, as evidenced in her letters and her fictional texts. The texts *Capital City*, *Slogum House*, *Old Jules*, and *Miss Morissa: Doctor of the Gold Trail* evidence how Sandoz conceived of a gender ideal and what values she advanced. The identities in these texts ran the gendered gamut from motherhood to masculine and feminine to feminist. Sandoz’s life and the women in her works demonstrate that Sandoz valued such
androgynous attributes as a strong identity, integrity, convictions, intellectualism, independence, perseverance, and agency. Sandoz’s historical fiction and personal history evidence her belief that a strong woman maintained androgynous characteristics, aiding them in rectifying injustice and inequality. She considered certain attributes of masculinity and femininity required equilibration in order to keep society in balance and from tipping into corruption and injustice. She strives to provide models for emulation, such as in the case of Abigail (Capital City) and Marie (Old Jules). A model representing the difficulty of balance emerges in the tale of Morissa (Miss Morissa). Mary (Old Jules) and Gulla (Slogum House) represent models to avoid. Old Jules, Capital City, Miss Morissa: Doctor of the Gold Trail, and Slogum House evidence how Sandoz conceived of a gender ideal and what values she advanced. As a result, this chapter is structured with Part I examining Sandoz’s life and Part II focusing on her women characters in Old Jules, Capital City, Miss Morissa, and Slogum House.

Sandoz’s life and the women in her works demonstrate that Sandoz valued such attributes often ascribed to men, such as a strong identity, integrity, convictions, intellectualism, independence, perseverance, ingenuity, and agency. Her works show that these characteristics are not gender based. Sandoz advocated that androgynous traits were imperative in order to help effect any type of change in one’s sphere. She demonstrates that maintaining a balance of feminine and masculine traits allows a woman to improve society. Thus, these androgynous traits are imperative to maintain if one wishes to be most successful in political activism and social change. Sandoz was a determined, vociferous voice for female outsiders; she provided them the positive feedback and image to represent themselves more effectively by constructing a more masculinized notion of their gender identities.
Scholars have neglected to fully recognize her contributions because of the limits of her popularity, her gender, and lack of prestige, however, her novels maintain discursive spaces that allow readers to develop their conceptions toward gender issues. Sandoz readers find frontier women are not always disciplined helpmeets, but are active change agents for their families and society, a concept not delineated in any western history monograph effectively until Sandra Myres’s 1982 *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915* (Myres 239). Myres states, “So diverse were Western women’s interests that one analysis of the 1900 census revealed that in addition to the expected milliners, dressmakers, laundresses, and teachers, Western women were employed as bank officials, wholesale merchants, butchers, blacksmiths, lighthouse keepers, and ‘boatmen’” (268). In effect, Sandoz argues a similar thesis through her fiction, utilizing a format that would reach many more readers in the 1930s than a non-fiction work would. Yet Sandoz is not credited with this assertion. The proof of this lies not only in the letters praising Sandoz for her success in doing this, but also in the sales evidence she collected about the novel. *Slogum House* joined Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* and James Cain’s *Serenade* (“What America…” 9 January 1938), Ernest Hemingway’s *To Have and Have Not* (“What America…” 23 January 1938), Sinclair Lewis’s *Prodigal Parents*, and A.J. Cronin’s *The Citadel* (“What America…” 13 February 1938) on the *New York Herald Tribune*’s top 20 “What America is Reading” in 1938 list. United Press reports from Lincoln, Nebraska, state that after her book’s banning at the Omaha and McCook Public libraries, her work gained in popularity. Magnus Kristofferson, assistant librarian at the Lincoln library, reported people were turned away after 300 visitors overwhelmed a public review of the book on January 18, 1938. Similar events, Kristofferson reported, usually drew 25 people. The library’s waiting list for their
copies drew into June (United Press, “Untitled,” 19 January 1938). After the Omaha ban, the city library had 122 holds for *Slogum House*, with the next highest request for Cronin’s *Citadel* with 39 (“Censorship…”).³ She broke through to the masses with her work, ultimately spreading historical knowledge in a more palatable way, even if the reading audience didn’t anticipate that knowledge.

Literary and history scholars have not comprehensively evaluated the representative women characters Sandoz writes about, nor has there been consideration of Sandoz’s stake in promoting women in these ways. Sandoz imparts a utopian model of femininity and womanhood for her readers’ consideration and identifies troubles that befall flawed societal models. This allowed her to create identifiable communities to experiment with gender norms and ideals. Although this could be interpreted as a feminist agenda, in Sandoz’s case, it is more so a humanist agenda: advancing equal rights for all regardless of gender. ⁴ Sandoz remained detached from the women’s rights movement. In fact, when friend Estelle Laughlin wrote to her about her support of the Equal Rights Amendment, Sandoz decried the response of government officials. She asserted:

> I recall my run-in with the Woman’s Party, Washington, very well. I spent Sunday afternoon with them. One of their big ideas was to get me to talk before a senate committee for the repeal of the 48 hour restriction on women workers. When I refused, saying that the way to further the cause of women was not by breaking down favorable legislation but to get equally favorable legislation passed for men, they didn’t understand, nor did they understand why men like Senators Bridges⁵ and Burke⁶ were for their idea of lengthening the working week for women. I tried to give them a lesson in practical politics but I don’t think I succeeded. Truly restrictive legislation against any group, sex, color or religion irks me and on that sort of thing Mrs. Babcock⁷ could count on me to face even the menial fuzz-buddies in the senate. (Sandoz, “Letter to Estelle Laughlin,” 27 March 1940)
Sandoz advocates for rulings that promote men and women, not specific legislation that only serves to separate them. She argued that some legislative language only served to point out special treatment over another party and did not serve to equalize. In Sandoz’s works and in this letter, Sandoz suggests at a simpler government that does not isolate individual parties, but works to cement the notion of equality on a communitarian level. If legislation needed to be written for women, Sandoz argued, write in “equally favorable legislation” for men. (Sandoz, “Letter to Estelle Laughlin,” 27 March 1940). The act of exclusion and isolation created problems, she argued. She was a proud promoter of women, but did not want a particular gender treated specially or called out individually; she wanted only equal treatment. In a libertarian move, Sandoz argued that differentiating between the sexes only served to divide society further rather than unite. This binary created dual and often battling agendas with cross purposes. Sandoz saw how class separation was dividing the country and thought separation by gender would only create further divides in the United States. She saw the debate between male and female equality limiting intellectuals and the nation from advancement. Men and women were so involved in proving the other wrong, they were preventing one another from achieving more together on a higher plane. Her empowered female characters embody the role models that Sandoz sees thriving in an ideal societal construct: strong, forceful, opinionated, and enterprising. These women do not claim to be feminist activists. Her work implies that accepting this title would have gone against her work which stated men and women should be equal. She advanced a humanist agenda. Sandoz was ahead of her time in her consideration of gender politics in that she promotes ideas popular with third-wave feminism and post-modernism. Her colleagues wanted to press
forth for solely women’s rights while she was advancing her idea of equality for all with no separation.8

Placing Sandoz in context, while this conversation evolved, historical events occurred which pressed the women’s movement forward. Women9 entered the workplace more frequently from the 1930s-1950s due to the war, particularly after World War II. This war, was, as William H. Chafe noted, a “watershed in the history of women at work” (qtd. in Woloch 451). Overall, women’s employment remained high: “The proportion of wives who held jobs which had been from 12 percent to 15 percent in the 1930s, now surged. By 1945, one out of every four married women worked” (Woloch 451). The shape of women workers changed over this period. Initially women took more difficult and traditionally men’s roles. They later shifted to more traditionally associated female roles toward the end of the 40s (Woloch 429).

The women’s movement was not moving forward aggressively at this time. Women were more attuned to the idea of survival for the war and less focused since the vote was already won. Those that still inspired the women’s movement noted the lack of community, as Eleanor Roosevelt states in Good Housekeeping, “Women must become more conscious of themselves as women and of their ability to function as a group. At the same time they must try to wipe from men’s consciousness the need to consider them as a group. . . especially in industry or the professions” (qtd. in Woloch 458). Sandoz’s mindset echoes some of this idea; she felt that community, rather than individualism, would help enable change. She takes Roosevelt’s ideas a step further, though, asking that women and men work together as one community to improve society on equal footing.
In Nebraska, particularly, men and women were not unified in their view of women’s function or what they could be allowed to do. Even at the latter part of the World War II, women were still hesitant to advance women’s rights and would most likely not have been heard anyway. As historian Deborah Fink writes:

Women did not write the primary agrarian texts that shaped rural policy and formed the ideological charter for white settlement in rural Nebraska. No women’s voices sounded in the state and national legislative debates on farm policy…[rural women] identified … as wives and mothers…she was a helpmeet for her man. (189)

Fink argues that the “agrarian myth,” which promoted that farm life was successful even as it was dissolving, continued to expand during the latter 20s into the 30s in Nebraska. Farms began failing, primarily because of non-stable farm prices prior to the creation of the Federal Farm Board, which worked to regulate farm marketing in 1929 (Olson and Naugle 319). Even as the farm failed, women tried to harder to be that helpmeet on the farm rather than to seek employment outside of it (Fink 190). At the same time, men were called to war and those that were left to farm had to make do with limited, broken, and subpar equipment. In order to meet the needs of local employment demand, as seen in the remainder of the United States, women would take on dangerous jobs, such as bomb construction at the Grand Island (Nebraska) Ordnance Plant (Olson and Naugle 319). Matthew Schuyler astutely notes these empowerment successes’ complications, “Wartime social change was the result of accident, not design. . . . [The war] did not produce a broadly based reform movement to improve the status of women, blacks, or the poor. The ingredients for significant reform were missing” (5). Women were used to fill the void but had not effectively altered the mindset of those in positions of power. When the need for them was gone, they, too, would be gone from these advanced positions on the front lines.
Theoretical Considerations

As she watched these women’s experiences, Sandoz’s life experiences drove her to strive for women’s equal rights. She grew up on the plains with an abusive father and forced to fend for herself and her brothers and sisters. After escaping her father through work and marriage, she found herself in yet another abusive situation, which ultimately leads to her divorce. She saw no reason why women couldn’t do as much, if not more, than men in some instances did. Her work clearly reflects this attitude, however, what was her ultimate goal? As a historian and writer, her goal was to shed light on the truth or an aspect of the truth. She often based her characters on living people or a combination of their attributes. She utilized creativity to produce characters for emulation. Perhaps, then, Sandoz is attempting to present an alternative vision for women to aspire to, suggesting that this alternative reality is one that is more feasible and equal and should become the actuality. Sandoz saw women working equal jobs not associated with gender. She felt they were capable of more than what they were getting credit for. This aligns some of Sandoz’s goals with that of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who too was writing about potential futures for women through the lens of utopic and dystopic visions.10

Gilman developed future potentialities and featured critical spaces where varied gendered alternatives cold interact. She built dystopic and utopic worlds as modes for societal education. Similar to Gilman, Sandoz engages with Jameson’s notions of utopias and communities. For Jameson, utopia is a “political issue” and “literary form,” which moves beyond its previous connections to Stalinism, he argues, to examining counterrevolutions (xi). He sees the analysis of a utopia important for understanding “the dialectic of Identity and Difference” (xii). This understanding leads to understanding, “imagining, and sometimes
even at realizing, a system radically different from this one” (Jameson xii). Sandoz attempts to challenge the currently existing space in order to create a new space for her characters and thus creates a new space for readers so they can evaluate its success. They, in turn, are able to envision how they, too, might challenge gender norms.

Just as Jameson is interested in utopias, dystopias, and alternative visions, Sandoz amplifies an alternative reality of life on the plains. Rather than a utopic and idyllic representation like Cather and other contemporaries, she demonstrates the Plains as rough and corrupt. As Jameson notes, “It suggests that at best Utopia can serve the negative purpose of making use more aware of or mental and ideological imprisonment…and that therefore the best Utopias are those that fail the most comprehensively” (xiii). Through this failure, readers find understanding. For example, in *Slogum House*, Gulla, as an individual, and her collective of Slogums maintain different values and standards than the society around them. They have no determinate future, yet the collective around her follows Gulla into a sad state of despotic failure. They do embody the Jamesonian “commitment to closure (and thereby to totality)” (4). Gulla creates this closure by way that Jameson understands Thomas More to say: “[utopian] closure is achieved by that great trench the founder causes to be dug between the island and the mainland…a radical secession further underscored by the Machiavellian ruthlessness of Utopian foreign policy … bribery, assassination, mercenaries and other forms of Realpolitik” (5). Sandoz questions the relationship of power between individual and community in that she depicts a woman dependent to varying degrees on her immediate community. Yet, she strives, as an individual, to wield power over that direct community and the surrounding communities. Gulla reflects the Jamesonian idea of the program (Jameson 4). She is reactionary to the system in place and sets forth an alternative.
She revolts against law and order and implements a system that solely benefits her at the head. Gulla attempts to take complete control of a frontier county through her trickery and escapades. Ultimately, she realizes her goal of “changing it all to a Slogum county” when the county is renamed Slogum County and the county seat renamed Slogum City “in Gulla’s honor” (Sandoz, *Slogum House* 171; 261). She represents how a corrupt individual can ruin an established community and create a dependent, enclosed (impermeable) community. In a way, then, Gulla re-envisions a closed utopian system for herself on the plains in her closed system on the ranch. On first glance, it appears she has achieved the Jamesonian ideal of a closed and totalitarian system. This is not a successful utopia, though, and one that Jameson might reflect serves only to show a system failure or “the lure and bait for ideology” (Jameson xiii; 3). This system is free of legal constraints and social mores and promotes greed. Her personal utopia yields a public dystopia, as those in Dumur County do not maintain a comparable values system. It is within these closed systems, or personal utopias, where we see fatally flawed characters refuse to see their imperfections. Gulla attempts to operate this closed system within the parameters of another functioning system. Because of this, her society cannot be accepted as a fully functional system, as it operates underneath and within a system that preexists with enough support to permanently eliminate her system.

Sandoz explores another closed system in *Old Jules*. *Old Jules* presents an alternative possibility for readers to consider emulating. Women were not considered as significant contributors, although, as Elliot West notes, “upon their loins depends the future destiny of the nation” (qtd. in West 19). While important to the family, women felt pressure: “Besides their enormous load of work and the many other pressures of their new lives, these women, the central figures of the first families, faced the added burden of becoming models of
tradition and decorum” (West 20). Willa Cather’s stories or Laura Ingalls Wilder’s tales of frontier intrigue neglect to mention these grittier aspects of the Plains. The glorious myth of the West presents the cowboy fighting to protect his maiden, beautiful Native American maidens, or Buffalo Bill’s lady riders. Some authors chose to depict daily life and represented women as the attentive help-meet, attired in proper bonnet and high-waisted skirt, attending the front door of the spotless soddy with a broom and five freshly scrubbed youngster apprentices at her side. Yet, this was not the reality. Women were harried and frustrated by expectations and men could be abusive and demanding; Sandoz pointedly addresses this issue of abuse in her works.

Others that attempt to represent women did so in a way to entertain, yet still keep women in their place. As Louis Warren notes of Buffalo Bill Cody’s Show: “the Settler’s Cabin scene as a symbolic constraining of women for anybody who still had doubts about the ‘proper’ place of women […] Cody’s[…] show harbored deep suspicion of the Progressive Era’s New Woman […] the woman in the Settler’s Cabin was prisoner to masculine whim” (Warren 56). Thus, depictions of women served to constrain women; presenting an assertive woman ran counter to keeping women in their diminutive place and space. Even Annie Oakley only had power in what was allotted to her by men. Sandoz operates in a space that has consistently rewritten the historical narrative to fulfill self-serving needs to keep women in their current space.

When Sandoz rewrites the narrative, attempting to clarify this erroneous frontier myth, she asks her reader to identify with her characters and possibly gain a sense of empowerment for her own situation. Young Marie is able to carve a space in which to cultivate her empowerment, which ultimately leads to Sandoz’s publishing of Old Jules.
*Capital City* presents an alternative as well, in that after exposing the corruption of Franklin, Sandoz sets up her woman protagonist to lead the charge of intellectuals against corruption. *Morissa*, similar to *Old Jules*, attempts to right the historical record. In doing so, it demonstrates women’s abilities and power in an attempt to help augment the historical record of women’s accomplishments. One *Morissa* novel reviewer stated, “The charm of Miss Sandoz lies partly in the complete absence of sentimentalizing and moralizing. She presents people as she has found them, after prolonged research into the past. Her characters live with their faults and their virtues, equally real and inescapable” (Lasch). Sandoz utilized these texts to demonstrate how women could gain empowerment as well as the inherent dangers that come with that empowerment. She wanted women to play off these texts and find power and autonomy. Following Sandoz’s lead would enable women the power and ability to change the status quo. Further, it would lead to the potentiality to join other likeminded individuals for change.

**Response to Her Work**

Her contemporaries most likely looked at Sandoz aghast, unsure of just what this uncultivated and quiet western Nebraska woman might be trying to do. Sandoz was understood to be an obscene author by contemporaries of her time, both local and national, who wrote scathing reviews in papers ranging from the locally circulated *Omaha World Herald* to the national *New York Times* regarding her subject matter. Although some categorized her work with perfunctory interest, it is quite clear that her work is not “obscene;” if anything, it established her reputation as a critical, controversial writer who pushed the envelope of social conventions. After publishing *Slogum House*, Sandoz would be ostracized from her community. She would be further alienated from the public with her
apartment ransacked multiple times and scathing reviews in local newspapers. As Sandoz noted: “There was a good deal of whispering, evidently, with one kindly-intentioned advisor coming to me, in great embarrassment, to suggest withdrawal of the book before its appearance. ‘For the good of your reputation as a writer,’ I was told” (Sandoz, “Letter to Mr. Weeks”). One librarian wrote Sandoz, “I just can’t put the book on my library shelf and see my boys and girls take it out to read […]. I just call it a bad book. We need clean reading for both old and young” (Hummel). *Slogum House* would even be banned by the mayors of Omaha, Lincoln, and McCook, Nebraska (Mattern 230). At the McCook Public Library, the book would be put on “rotten row” (*Omaha World Herald*, 17 January 1938).

Sandoz maintained a degree of pride in this and often relished alienating some of her readers. She wanted to incite rage, response, and intellectual discussion about the issues she presented in her works. As noted, she cared little for salability but more for the ability to ask readers to engage in a conversation with her, through her text, about issues she found concerning in day to day living. She further hoped that those readers would continue the conversation with other readers and colleagues. In one response to a letter of criticism she writes: “I’m sorry that profanity offends you. Many things in life offend me, man’s inhumanity to man, for example, but as a writer dedicated to the portrayal of life as honestly and as wholly as I am able, I cannot cavil at profanity, or at anything else that I find intrinsic in human nature” (Sandoz, “Letter to Mrs. Richard K. Brenneman”). Sandoz would not be silenced or deterred by bad press or reviews and hoped that she could inspire her readers to think about the reality of their situations. She wanted them to continue the conversation further or be inspired for some type of action, otherwise why bother with alienating the
reading public or write? How can one effect any change if no one buys a book? This is naïve and stubborn.

As Sandoz constructed her narratives, she cared about representing the historical record, not for what was expected of her which, although altruistically admirable, may have been her downfall. Sandoz’s historical fiction, loosely constructed from some aspects of her personal history, evidences her belief that androgynous characteristics can effect social change as when groups were able to get together they were able to establish the women’s vote or protest for more workers’ rights. Her research files reveal that characters were composites of real people, including her mother, herself, neighbors, and others. These characters became “real” people to Sandoz. Examining the traits Sandoz deems important involves analysis of Sandoz’s life as well as examination of her female characters.

**Part I: Understanding Sandoz’s Personal Beliefs**

**Apropos Women’s Advocacy**

In considering Sandoz’s female characters, her personal beliefs are fundamentally important. Sandoz valued political activism and political awareness, which she may have deemed as a masculine quality due to her location. As Plains historian, Deborah Fink, notes, women were absent from decision-making processes and relatively absent from politics in the Midwest. The political sphere was a masculine sphere (Fink 189). Other modernist writers, particularly men like Sinclair Lewis, John Steinbeck, or Ernest Hemingway, sought to spotlight aspects of American culture in order to change it. Sandoz joined them. Her work was influential but largely overshadowed by fellow Nebraska author Willa Cather and by the difficulty and denseness of her prose. While Cather’s representations of the plains were typically saccharine, Sandoz’s critique was more acerbic. While both represented the Middle
West, they represented the region in two very different ways. The term Middle West is as “much a stage in the settlement process as it was a fixed location” (Shortridge 213). By the time the term reached its peak, around 1915, areas of Nebraska were characterized as “stable and prosperous […] possessing] an ideal mixture of youthful (or Western) and mature (or Eastern) cultural traits” (Shortridge 213). Cather wrote along the lines of other popular writers of the time, featuring Nebraska as an ideal pastoral landscape. Shortridge confirms that popular writers focused on pastoral appeal. This neglects that, “Weak-willed settlers left the region. Those who stayed and weathered the bad years were humbled” as a result of the watershed event of the depression (Shortridge 213). The increased sales of Cather’s works over Sandoz’s indicate that most readers wanted idealism and not a more unbiased or unrepresentative history. These types of pastoral frontier narratives did not depict the follies of the frontier people, rather, they presented an ideal for others to emulate and “the Middle West came to symbolize the nation, to be seen as the most American part of America” (Shortridge 216). Readers sought the text that offered hope.

Some argue that Cather later did take on the changing Midwest in her works from the 1920s, as Shortridge suggests when he notes Cather’s One of Ours, My Mortal Enemy, or The Professor’s House. Yet, Shortridge does not consider the actual function of the texts. These works are not quite reality and illustrate a falseness or a “superficial air” in that they don’t represent the actuality of the Midwestern experience (Adams 142). Thus they never achieved what Sandoz was able to do with her hauntingly real novels.

Contrasting with Cather, Sandoz challenged the notion of the individual’s battle versus the community. She features numerous characters, particularly women like Gulla and Abigail, who tread against the current of community thought. Although Gulla and Abigail are
clearly on opposite ends of the moral spectrum, it is clear that the individual fails without support of the community. Sandoz’s exploration of community and how it interacts with the individual sets Sandoz’s work apart. She questions ideology and, at the same time, weaves a narrative.

Sandoz failed to achieve the critical acclaim that some of her colleagues achieved, perhaps because she was writing at a level that presented a challenge to those she was trying to mold and model. Perhaps her contentious subject matter provided a block for some scholars and readers of her time period as well. Her content combines history and fiction and some readers are particular about cross-genre expectations. She challenges readers because of the difficulty level of her prose, rigorous critique, language, and often times extensively thorough explications. Some did not favor this type of thoroughness, finding it at times redundant, and preventative of a quick read. Also, she addressed controversial topics. As reader and Gordon, Nebraska librarian, Grace Hummell, wrote, “Now you and I are good friends but I don’t like your new book Slogum House … I just can’t put the book on my library shelf and see my boys and girls take it out to read … I just call it a bad book. We need clean reading…” (Hummel). Sandoz replied:

I appreciate the friendliness of your letter and your reluctance to find a book of mine ‘bad.’ Unfortunately, I am not as disturbed as I might be. You see, I know what good company the charge of badness in writing in the sense of the shocking and the immoral puts me. No writing of sufficient power to disturb the reader at all has ever escaped. Not the early tellers of tales such as *The Arabian Nights*; not Dante, Shakespeare, Byron, Hardy, not even the world’s supreme stylist, Flaubert. … The howlers are forgotten and the works they decried endured. (Sandoz, “Letter to Mrs. Hummel”)
Sandoz did not care to alter her work just for the sake of censors or salability and some of her readers recognized this feature. A prominent Omaha, Nebraska lawyer, wrote in a letter to editor at the *Omaha World Herald*:

I believe Mari Sandoz is justified in showing this class of citizen to the world, as she has seen the, and in interpreting them. So many of them are so pious, as was Gulla and her brats. In one sense of the word it would have been immoral to have glossed over their filthiness. I have heard that the author refused to do that, when requested by her publishers to soften some of the language of the book. (De Lamatre)

However, she was chastised by both her publishers and readers for her language and topics. Other authors received similar critiques: Hemingway is writing just as “obscene” works, but even he realized there was a line he could not cross if he wished to have salability. Although he, too, had a number of works censored, he ardently attempted to prevent it by eliminating some profanities. Yet his work was also censored widely due to content. Other popular writers of the time were caving to censorship pressure. Upton Sinclair accused Sinclair Lewis of censoring his novels “to remove any hint of his radical views in order to sell more books” (Lingeman 324). Authors realized what they had to do in order to be published: be scandalous enough to draw some censors’ ire but not enough to be banned and cost sales.

Sandoz chooses to forge forth with her ‘offensive’ literature in order to achieve her goal; she is attempting, in a nuanced and subtle way, to ask her readers to consider ways in which they might amend or reconsider their thinking about women’s roles in the West.¹³ She asks her readers to consider ways in which these androgynous characteristics serve to keep society in balance. Her life, political convictions, and literary contrivances derived from the duties and deprivations of her atypical girlhood experiences on the Plains. As the eldest child (Stauffer, *Mari* 20), although only six years old, she looked after her siblings so that her
mother could perform farm work (Stauffer, *Mari* 22). By the age of seven, she was given the sole responsibility to care for her brother, Fritz. Her job was: “to keep him quiet in order to escape Jules’s fierce temper and heavy hand” (Stauffer, *Mari* 22). While expected to perform this traditional daughterly role, Mari also learned to trap, hunt, skin, and bake (Stauffer, *Mari* 22, 27). She later cared for her other younger siblings as well.

Sandoz witnessed the struggles of other Plains’ women like her neighbors, friends, and herself, who, like her mother, had been abused by their husbands. At the same time, she had a contentious relationship with her mother that would last through adulthood. As a child, Mari’s hair was chopped short, while her sisters’ hair was allowed to remain long (Stauffer, *Mari* 24). Mari “felt she was less loved and more overworked than the other children, and was alienated from both parents, an outsider in the family” (Stauffer, *Mari* 24). This familiarized her with an outsider position, which she maintained her entire life. This could partially account for Sandoz’s valuing of an independent attitude. She isolated herself through her work and by the subjects that she wrote about; she knew her controversial texts would marginalize her further, yet she continued to write these types of texts because she believed in her goals. She often predicted the difficulty her work would have in publication, as a result, she told editors she would not change these disruptive aspects (Sandoz, “Letter to Nowell”). She stood staunchly in support of *Slogum House*, writing to her editors at Atlantic Press that they should employ writers, “whose meat is not ‘strong’ with the natural flavor of my bitter prairie sage” (qtd. in Stauffer, *Storyteller* 117). She was confident in her ability to tell the story and believed in the way she was telling it. She had the experience and knew how on her side and was not about to let some Easterner who had never set foot in Nebraska the chance to tell her how to rewrite her novel.
Some of Sandoz’s confidence, occasionally mule-headed confidence, derives from her experience growing up in western Nebraska. As a young girl, Sandoz was forced by her demanding father, Jules, to homestead a claim on the Nebraska plains with just her younger brother. In addition to his farming and horticulture work, he ran a post office out of the Sandoz house, served as a locator prior to and during the Kincaid Act, and trapped and traded with travelers. The Nebraska Sand Hills were sparsely populated, reporting less than 300 people in 1883. Thus, Nebraska Congressman Moses Kincaid proposed a method to establish more homesteaders. The Kincaid Act of 1904, applied to northwestern Nebraska, was the first legal establishment of reapportioning federal ground to the public for grazing (not cultivation farming). The act permitted applicants to register for a 640 acre tract for homesteading and stock (Donahue 13). The success of this act led to the more widely applicable Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909 (Donahue 13).

After the act was passed and applicants from the east trailed into Nebraska, a new occupation developed to help these naïve and undiscerning easterners with the navigation and selection of good ground and water sites. Although often stern and harsh, Jules was well respected for his knowledge of agriculture and the Great Plains region. Jules made use of his local network to introduce Mari to Indian traders and trappers, hardworking farmers, and women struggling to get by – the people with whom she would identify and advocate for later on.

Mari’s girlhood experiences enabled her to see how often hard work went unrewarded, especially “women’s work.” For Sandoz, her life experiences as a woman echoed the generalized experience of many women on the Nebraska Plains as monotonous and dreary. Further, the challenges of everyday life for Plains’ farmers led Sandoz to develop
a deep sense of empathy and camaraderie with them. Her education further influenced her decision to write about those in empowered and disempowered situations and what kind of people they were. She struggled to get an education because of her dictatorial father, limitations on her knowledge base, and strict requirements at the university, and other factors outside her control (Stauffer, Mari 36). Sandoz’s education at home, informal education, and formal schooling influenced her ideas about societal roles and expectation. She felt that all citizens had a right to fairness and equality and should be able to freely endeavor to achieve better for themselves while not limiting others’ rights.

Mari did attend rural school when she could and was encouraged to write while attending. It was during her early years that she wrote her first short story, which was published by the *Omaha Daily News* in the Junior Writer’s Page (Stauffer, Mari 30). Her “enraged” father beat and berated young Mari and banished her to the cellar with mice and snakes (Stauffer, Mari 30). It was a punishment she never forgot. Jules’s opinion of writers did not change over the years. After Mari published a short story in *Harper’s* in 1926, her father wrote her a letter saying, “You know I consider writers and artists the maggots of society” (Sandoz, *Old Jules* viii). Undeterred by his sharp criticism, Mari found the confidence to write and reach a larger audience (Stauffer, Mari 30). She fought through these issues and still became educated because she maintained certain characteristics, namely conviction, perseverance, and intellectualism. It is ironic these characteristics are what best served her, particularly in dealing with her father, as many of these characteristics she observed in both him or her mother (Sandoz, *Old Jules* 291, 196, 261).

After innumerable educational delays, Sandoz passed the county 8th grade examination at 17 (Stauffer, Mari 36). Later, she obtained teaching certification attempting to
teach rural school, a typical career path for young women in this area. Unfulfilled, Sandoz attended secretarial school; still, Sandoz appeared unsatisfied as she moved from a typist’s job to teaching while moving from one end of the state, near Sidney, Nebraska, to the other, back to Lincoln (Stauffer, Mari 43). Sandoz wanted to write and knew she would need more education to do so; she also thought she would be able to obtain her state teacher’s certificate, which would enable her to teach in more places and make more money (Sandoz, “At the University” 107). She lamented that she did not have enough educational credits to attend college. After meeting with an advisor, she was informed that she would have to attend a local high school, rather than enroll in college level courses: “I was to go to Temple High School of Teacher’s College. I join highschoolers! Not likely, so I asked around who was the softest-hearted dean on the campus” (Sandoz, “At the University” 107). She could not fathom this suggested option and sought an alternative.

Sandoz attempted to enroll at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln in the summer of 1922, but without a high school education, had little chance at admittance. According to her cousin, Martha Sandoz, who went with her to visit the dean’s office, “they sat and sat, only to return next day to sit and sit. Always there was a secretary shielding the inner office” (Pifer, Making Volume I 24). The dean himself ultimately noted her persistence and finally agreed to meet Sandoz. Dean William E. Sealock felt for Mari’s circumstances and believed in her. He took a chance on this Nebraska farm girl, “observing that she could do no more than fail” (Stauffer, Mari 44). Although she had received Sealock’s permission, she still enhanced her transcripts, creating a fictitious high school to augment her application and noting her attendance at another school where she had never attended (Pifer, Making Volume I 24). This action, while unethrical, demonstrates how far she was willing to go to ensure she could
receive more education. She lied about her history, possibly complicating her already tenuous acceptance, in order to appear more educated. She did not want to be thrown out before she had the chance to show her intelligence. This action shows she had confidence in her ability to present as an educated student. Although she had not been trained formally, she thought she had the ability to contribute to the literary world and deserved the chance for more education in order to do so.

Sandoz did not “fail,” as Dean Sealock had told her was the worst that could happen (Stauffer, Mari 44). Rather, she thrived in courses in history and literature. Her work with popular and well-respected University of Nebraska at Lincoln historians Fred Morrow Fling and John Andrew Rice influenced her for the rest of her life, as Sandoz used these historians’ research methods and abided by their notion that history should be based upon primary research (Stauffer, Mari 50-51). Further, she gained valuable work experience while she was employed at the Nebraska Historical Society during college. She also established a network of other scholars and colleagues.

Her education and life experiences shaped her opinion that intellectualism was often associated with males and androgyny, despite women’s ideas and contributions. She saw how intellectualism paved the way to effect social change, but saw in society and her personal relationships how women could be stymied from doing or instigating similar work to men. This led to her understanding that the notion of intellectualism, as it appeared in Nebraska and the Middle West, as well as other valued androgynous characteristics could allow a societal member to effect change.

Sandoz was a loner. She was married and divorced once, maintained few relationships with men or women, and struggled to fit in with the unpopular views and
staunch activist role. In 1924, Mari married Wray Macumber, but the marriage ended in divorce after only five years. She cited “mental cruelty” as the reason for the divorce, but little is known about their married life (Stauffer, Mari 39). Her failed marriage may have contributed in some ways to her depictions of men in her texts and works, as many are not model male characters, but instead engage in deception, trickery, and moral corruption. After leaving him, she changed her name back to Sandoz, a notable act of female assertion after the divorce in 1929 (Bristow 1). She does not mention him in correspondence, write to him, or mention him in her papers or literary works. At the same time, she changed her name — and identity — once more, changing her first name spelling from Marie to Mari, to adapt “the European version of Mary and the way her father pronounced the name” (The Storycatcher 1). She shifts from a name which pays credence to husband to one that pays tribute to her father. Her complete alteration of her name, both first and last, indicates a desire to shed the identity of married woman she had been and establish herself as a new woman, at the same time, she holds on to her identity from before Macumber. She even went so far as to delete those years from her life span. Beatrice Morton observed that Sandoz “moved her birth date up five years to accommodate for the discrepancy” noting her birthday is listed as 1901 in Who’s Who, in Contemporary Authors, where she is also listed as unmarried, not divorced (Morton 40). She carved her independent life with a new iteration of her name, still maintaining her roots, but creating a new personality and personhood: Marie.

In adulthood, Sandoz cultivated her androgynous attitude and maintained an almost fatherly like role to her family. Despite her father’s callous demeanor, when he passed away, she selected the flowers (Pifer, Making 100) and sold four thousand dollars’ worth of fruit the summer of 1929 in order to pay Jules’s debts (Pifer, Making Volume I 114). Mari developed
sympathy toward her father and empathy toward her family. She served in almost a fatherly role to her younger sisters, sending money, gifts, and huge baskets of Christmas gifts to her family at home, even when she did not have all that much to give. This shows Mari stepping into the traditionally masculine role of a father figure, caretaker, and family provider. She did not appear to fill a conventional motherly role providing emotional support. As her sister Caroline reminisced, “Mari came home occasionally during these years in Lincoln, always laden with gifts for the family” (Pifer, Making 21). She further served as a guiding force for her sister, Caroline, who recalled, “I brought home failing marks in my eight grade examinations. Mari took me in hand like a drill sergeant and the next Fall I was in the ninth grade” (Pifer, Making 28). Here, Sandoz becomes the ethical and instructional guiding light for her younger sister. She also allowed her sister Flora to live with her in Lincoln when she entered the university, serving again as a provider, offering shelter and supervision for Flora (Pifer, Making 91). These and other examples clearly demonstrate that Sandoz maintained an atypical masculine caretaker role for her siblings and mother through her lifetime.16

Her nonconforming masculine characteristics extend beyond her caretaking for her siblings. Yet, she also had a strong sense of confidence that was rare for women at this time, as “for all the rhetoric surrounding women’s equal contributions to the farm and the essential nature of their work […] patriarchy was persistent in the Midwest throughout the twentieth century […] women did not feel comfortable, or even traverse, because of their gender” (Devine 54). Sandoz developed a sense of confidence that could not be shaken. She treated literary agents’ sharp criticism in much the same way as she did her father’s disapproval. She would not be bossed around regarding projects and revisions and disliked if an agent gave her attitude. She banters in a number of letters to the multiple agents she cycled through;
these letters evidence her condescension for their attempts to manipulate and control her. For example, she writes to New York agent Margaret Christie: “Your violent reaction to ‘Victorie’ is exceedingly gratifying to me. Evidently, my evaluation of the story is correct. I suspected that it would not appeal to an agent who must, by necessity, be guided by commercial value of a story rather than its artistic value. And that’s that. Of course, I shall not change the story, nor put it aside” (Sandoz, “Letter to Miss Christie”). She was assertive and was resistant to let anyone manipulate or alter her text in a way she was not comfortable with. She was very proud and very protective of her work. She felt they needed to understand that she had already often spent years doing historical research, months writing, and months meticulously revising. It was quite difficult for Sandoz to receive some of the critique from the agents, especially when she often felt they did not realize the extent of her research, nor the culture and language of the west. Sandoz wrote a friend, Mary Pfeiffer:

I was particularly annoyed by this hadophilia in a book told largely through the mind of an Indian youth, not a priggish old grad of Harvard in the Barrett Wendell days—when Barrett Wendell was already outmoded even for the formal essay. There should be a course in the presentation of the elements of description for copy editors. Good description presents the elements of a scene as they appear to the eye, in the sequence of actuality. Close adherence to this principle gives my writing its high sense of actuality and immediacy, in spite of undiscerning copy editors. This principle holds true for the presentation of thought, and arbitrary rearrangement of the parts by copy editors is fatal to the studied effect the writer has produced. (Sandoz, “Letter to Mary Pfeiffer”)

Sandoz believed in her writing and knew that its ability to reach outsiders depended heavily upon her ability to represent the area accurately. She weighed even small things carefully, as verb construction or language choice could misrepresent an occurrence. On the small scale, that misrepresentation might change the moment’s reading, but, on the large scale, might change the reader’s interpretation of the text’s integrity.
Sandoz’s actions also indicate her ability to transgress 1930’s gender boundaries and expectations. Sandoz and her colleague, occasional research partner, and friend, Elinor Hinman, traveled across the Western Plains in 1930 where they aimed, according to Sandoz, to “interview all the Indians, scouts, and military men available who were in any way connected with the killings [of Crazy Horse] or the incidents leading up to it” (Sandoz, “Letter to Kenneth Wilcox Payne”). She called the journey, “Stalking the Ghost of Crazy Horse in a Whoopie [the Model T]” (Sandoz, “Letter to Kenneth Wilcox Payne”). As an image from the trip indicates, the women were not traveling in a luxurious manner, but camped and roughed it across the West. Their camp accoutrements, dress, and poses in photos from the journey indicate a masculine attitude and depiction. Eli and Mari enjoyed no fine hotels and fancy meals on their journey. They foraged for fruit and berries and often fished for protein sources (Sandoz, Making 68).

In considering Sandoz’s appearance on the trip, it is important to consider Sandoz’s overall appearance and how she presented herself to the public. She transgressed the norm of what female appearance consisted of and dressed in a masculine style. Her hairstyle was short and simple. Her frame was slight and not overly sexualized and her clothing was efficient and utilitarian. When the opportunity for riding arose, she wore a cowboy hat; when camping, trousers and a cotton shirt sufficed. She did not appear to be overly concerned with frivolity. Although gender roles are fluid, Sandoz’s consistent masculine appearance serves as an endorsement for women’s equality in gender roles and her appearance and presentation embodied this androgyny.
Sandoz’s female characters demonstrate that Sandoz valued such androgynous attributes as a strong identity, integrity, convictions, intellectualism, independence, perseverance, and agency. Sandoz’s characters run a spectrum from ultrafeminine Mary in *Old Jules* to supermasculine Gulla in *Slogum House*. Sandoz does not advocate for either end of the spectrum, but demonstrates how a cohesive balance of these characteristics is the ideal to obtain success and yield productivity, as well as serve as a better functioning unit of society. This success and productivity includes personal successes, such as Morissa’s achievements on the Plains, Morissa’s and Abigail’s career successes, and Mari’s improvement in self-esteem in *Old Jules*. These successes show how Sandoz reenvisioned the way in which women could and should interact with the changing world around them. Her autobiographical character Marie and intellectuals Abigail and Morissa embody role model behavior, or an alternative feminine ideal.

**Ultrafeminine Mary – *Old Jules***

The biography of Sandoz’s father, *Old Jules*, is based upon her life and her family is represented in the text. *Old Jules*’s Mary, Sandoz’s mother, filled the role of the farmer and helpmeet on the Sandoz ranch (Sandoz, *Old 219*). She maintained a consistent worry about the farm and food on the table, a feminine attribute (Sandoz, *Old 204-5*). Her work was never done; she had a number of responsibilities for the household in addition to her numerous frequent pregnancies: “She would gladly stay indoors if she could, but there was wood to be carried, traps to look after, the three cows to be fed” (Sandoz, *Old 219*). She maintained a
consistent worry about the future, about the crops, and success of the ranch, worrying about the production of potato crop and if they would lose their home (Sandoz, *Old* 204-5). Since her father’s leg was crippled in an accident, she was forced to take on a brunt of the physical labor outside, “Her hands blistered, calloused, and then grew horny; her back ached, but if she worked hard enough and long enough, she could sleep” (Sandoz, *Old* 196). Jules, her father, seldom acknowledged or thanked Mary for her work and seemed concerned only with his own accomplishments (Sandoz, *Old* 248). After Jules was made director of the eighth district, in recognition of his horticulture work, he said, “‘Well, Mary, you married an important man,’ he boasted. ‘Yes, but I still have to wear men’s shoes and carry home the wood’” she replied (Sandoz, *Old* 248). Mary understood her place in the family structure and embodies a stereotypical female submissive saintly figure as she struggles alone and endures beatings and a general lack of disregard for her human condition.

Sandoz joins other current historians, Susan Armitage, Sandra Myres, and Glenda Riley, in questioning how women fit into the western history that is dominated by men. At Sandoz’s time the perspective of women on the west was not well fleshed out. Frederick Jackson Turner didn’t deign to discuss minorities or women. Historians did not jump onto the movement of explaining Turner’s omissions in a peripheral way until the 1940s, including Nancy Wilson Ross and William Forrest Sprague. These historians attempted to better explain women’s history, but did not provide detail or really delve into detail. Ross, for example, does explore Northwest Pacific women, but does not delve into the sources necessary to make broader claims or explain the significance of frontier women in a sufficient way. These early works are still important in moving history forward and getting at a more accurate representation of the West, but they did not fully examine or utilize available
resources, leaving voids in their works. Offering more of an appraisal and wider ranged analysis, as Sandoz did, did not occur until much later with Dee Brown, David M. Potter, Walter Rundell, Jr., or Ray Allen Billington’s works in the 50s. Sandoz’s fiction based in history was well ahead of its time, starting in the late 20s and early 30s. As Sandoz wrote in 1955, even at that date:

> few writers ‘have even scratched the surface of the real West’ […] ‘In most of the stories,’ she said, ‘the West is just a backdrop for a love story. You tear away the romantic trappings and what do you have left?’ Miss Sandoz said she was more interested in the settlement of the region and in ‘how man made a living. To me the rootin-tootin-shootin is incidental.’ (qtd. in “What was Real West Like” 3)

Sandoz moved beyond stereotypes and known salable book styles and wrote a history-based fiction to attempt to grab her readers’ interest. Despite the aforementioned problems with this altruistic goal, it is impossible to disregard her enthusiasm and commitment to the effort of realism. She seems more in align with the first women’s historians of the 70s like Christine Stansell and John Mack Faragher’s early “Women and Their Families on the Overland Trail to California and Oregon.” These historians and others like them suggest that gender mattered and that their experiences were much different than men’s perspectives. There were, of course, debates within the developing field of women’s history after this wave of the 70s. Out of ascertaining the way in which women functioned on the plains came the myriad histories that looked at individual groups of people. Historians crafted works at this time that also featured women’s own voices, such as Christiane Fischer.

Sandoz begins to examine the ways in which the frontier setting itself seemed to cull weaker men and women. This culling led to a similar outlook amongst residents. As Betsy Downey notes, many of these women “were ambivalent about their husbands’ violence and
‘did not seem to believe that they had a ‘right’ to freedom from physical violence’; they accepted it even though society publicly condemned it” (Downey, “Battered” 33). Downey continues by claiming that “patriarchal attitude, immigrant status, and a do not tell attitude” further propagated this violence (Downey, “Battered” 33-34). The Plains experience both allows and propagates violence, yet condemns it simultaneously. Characters balk at and condemn violence in Sandoz’s novels, but show limitations in their ability to incite action about it. As Melody Graulich notes, “Although the community knows which wives are victims of battering, it never interferes. The legal system, such as it is, sides with the male” (114). This is something Mari saw echoed in her own life, as many knew of Jules’s poor treatment of Mary, but did nothing to stop it. During Sandoz’s youth, many understood that conditions were so hard that they bred unspeakable anger. Families existed in extremely destitute positions, and these families were afforded some leniency in acting out: “The experiences of the Sandoz family were not unique. […] In the 1862 report of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Dr. W. W. Hall, citing alarming statistics on the expanding population of rural insane asylums, asked why American farmers, and particularly farm wives, were ‘more liable to insanity’ than other Americans” (Downey, “Battered” 44). As Downey noted in her study of violence on the plains:

The hardships, and even the physical abuse, that Mary Sandoz had to endure were shared by many women on the frontier. Women coped with them, sometimes successfully and sometimes not, in a variety of ways. Glenda Riley has concluded that women’s ability to deal with harsh frontier and domestic conditions was not dependent so much on their own feelings toward themselves and their men as on three factors of their situations: “their ability to create a rich social life from limited resources, the tremendous reward they derived from their roles as cultural conservators, and their willingness and ability to bond to each other.” While Mary Sandoz clearly emerges from the pages of her daughter’s book as a survivor and as a silent hero, she is also portrayed a victim who had virtually no control over her own life. (Downey, “Battered” 40)
Mary was alone, friendless, encumbered with child, and forced to work. Readers and critics has dismissed her life’s story and goals as well as those of women on the plains her entire life, but Mari finally puts Mary’s voice to the page: “One writer wrote to Mari, ‘For a long time […] I have thought there was a need to tell the story, not only of the heroism of the frontier but of its dreadful and needless cruelty to women’” (Downey, “Battered” 45).

Sandoz illuminates this horrific plains violence through sharing Mary’s story, which she feels other historians had unaccounted for in the historical record. Downey concurs, “Though there are significant indicators that violence was an important part of the frontier experience for many American women it is difficult to find documentation […]. Frontier women seem to have been as reticent […] in discussing this aspect of their lives” (“Battered” 17). Graulich confirms this assertion, “Jules Sandoz is no more brutal than most other men in the book and is, in fact, most representative when he is beating his wives. Jules’s conversations with his friends show that they believe women are to be used and controlled, their individuality of little consequence” (Graulich 113-114). Sandoz represents the actions, but allows readers to see the depth of this abuse. It demonstrates that permitting this type of coping behavior as a mechanism was harmful on a macro and micro scale.

On the micro scale, Mary was not always beaten down and defeated, rather, she was quite independent. Mary came to the United States from Switzerland. She had initially settled at an uncle’s home in Arkansas, but her health was poor and she was forced to recover at a hospital in St. Louis (Stauffer, Mari Sandoz 19). After remaining there for a time, her physician told her to seek a “dry climate,” so together with her brother, Jacob, she made plans to homestead the Nebraska plains (Stauffer, Mari Sandoz 19; Sandoz, Old 183). At their intended meeting location of St. Joseph, Missouri, Jacob did not meet her, so she
proceeded on with Old Jules, the locator who was to help them find land, all alone (Sandoz, *Old* 183). What a frightening concept, to leave behind all she had known, without the protection of her brother, and leave for the uncultivated plains with a stranger.

While independent to some degree, she still relied upon the locator Jules to see her to the end of her journey. During the process, she agreed to marry this ragged and tough stranger. After Jules took her to his homestead, she realized, according to Helen Winter Stauffer, “as a city-bred woman she could not make a living on a claim or find work in this rural area,” thus marriage was her only alternative (Stauffer, *Storyteller* 20). Why she would marry him remains somewhat shrouded in mystery. She did not take favorably to him when she initially met him (Stauffer, *Storyteller* 20) and he was known not for Astor-like wealth nor his personal caretaking and hygiene. Jules was a violent, abusive, and controlling man. He also manipulated Mary; she had told him, “I would never marry a drunkard or a divorced man!” (Sandoz, *Old* 189). Yet, he had never told her that he was married three times before the marriage (Sandoz, *Old* 189). Charles B. McIntosh, historian of the Nebraska Sand Hills, reports, “If Mari had check in Hot Springs, she would have learned that no marriage license for Mary Fehr and Jules Sandoz was ever recorded in the Fall River County courthouse. Jules apparently provided this marriage misinformation [to Mary]” in order to get her to come out and stay with him until his previous divorce was finalized (McIntosh 171). In addition to his manipulative nature, he was protective and would not allowed her to integrate with her neighbors. After attending a dance without his permission, he met her at home with “a rifle across his knee. […] She never went to another dance” (Sandoz, *Old* 189). Clearly, Jules required Mary to behave in this feminine and submissive way and expected no type of insubordination of his wishes.
Sandoz’s motives for depicting these characters in these particular ways are important. She is recreating her mother’s and her childhood experiences and is striving to agitate against abuse: both child and domestic. Clearly, Jules was a violent man. One neighbor discussed his treatment of Mary, “Somebody ought to talk to Jules, it was thought. One woman in the insane asylum was enough” (Sandoz, Old 229). The neighbor here references his former wife, Henriette, who Jules had relegated to an asylum after their divorce. Many blamed Jules for Henriette’s descent into madness due to his difficult nature and demanding ways.

Then, on the macro scale, Sandoz used Jules as a way to warn about rough and tumble men on the plains and the kind of mistreatment that women were enduring and had endured. One less harmful, but still hurtful, example of this mistreatment is when he left Mary when shopping in town and forgot about her, “Oh hell, I forgot about you. I can’t remember one wife. I’ve have so many” (Sandoz, Old 200). Mary thought, “One more resentment to be stored in her heart against him” (Sandoz, Old 200). Here, Mary does not confront Jules; she merely silently stewed about the mistreatment and frustration she had just endured. Sandoz’s interpretation of her mother’s treatment is the only view scholars, both of history or literature, can begin to conceive of Mary’s thought processes as she did not leave written documentation behind. Thus, the lens through which we view her mother is subject to Sandoz’s inherent bias as her daughter. Potentially, all of Sandoz’s writing contains such bias, as she writes about subjects so close to her. Although she tries to overcome this through interviews, solid historical research, fact checking, and combining these multiple points of source material, readers must be conscious of the possibility of skewed perspective.
Jules was difficult to live with. He rarely, if ever, praised, required extra tending due to his leg handicap, was presumptuous, perfectionist, and expected his way. At breakfast, he wanted three eggs, regardless of how they were acquired. As Mari noted, her mother “fed her hens hot mash, hoping for an egg or two a day for Jules’s breakfast. He always ate three, complaining at the rye coffee instead of chocolate. He never noticed what the rest had” (Sandoz, *Old* 222). Sandoz used Jules as a warning about the kind of mistreatment that women were enduring. This is a warning for the problems that occur in a marriage with such a hypermasculine male and warns women to avoid such union. We see this in Sandoz’s own reticence to marry, despite her father’s cajoling. Jules insisted that marriage brought respectability and, according to sister Caroline, he made “acid remarks about getting herself a husband and leading a respectable life” (Pifer, *Making*, 101). Sandoz never did lead the “respectable life” he wanted her to, maintaining her status as a single, divorced woman until her death.

Perhaps one of the harshest examples of Jules’s treatment was his physical abuse of the children: “When the little Marie was three months old and ill with summer complaint, her cries awakened Jules. […] 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” (Sandoz, *Old* 216). Although Mary was demonstrably afraid of Jules, she took her child away from him to safety, despite perhaps incurring his further wrath when she returned. Yet, she did return to Jules despite this violence, indicating that her reliance upon men and her ultrafeminine nature cannot enable her to escape this social injustice and appalling treatment. Mary does not see leaving as an option. She believes she needs a man to help her to raise a family and to survive on the
plains, even if that man is abusive and may kill her. At one point, she considers suicide as a reasonable alternative: “Mary avoided crossing him or bothering him for help in anything she could possibly do alone. But there were times when she must have his help” (Sandoz, *Old 230). Once, when she asked Jules to help her with some of the cattle, one kicked Jules. He took his anger out on Mary in response, beating her severely. Her daughter describes her response:

Mary ran through the door, past the children and straight to the poison drawer. It stuck, came free, the bottles flying over the floor. Her face furrowed in despair, blood dripping from her face and her hand where she had been struck with the wire whip, the woman snatched up a bottle, struggled with the cork, pulling at it with her teeth. The grandmother was upon her, begging, pleading, clutching at the red bottle with the crossbones. (Sandoz, *Old 230)

We can see here how this ultra-feminine woman did not see a way out against the man in power against her and she felt that taking her own life might be her only way of survival.

A Balanced Androgyny – Perseverant Mari – *Old Jules

While Mary represents how an adherence to stereotypical feminine roles is problematic, Marie, her daughter and Sandoz’s autobiographical doppelganger, demonstrates a balanced androgyny in *Old Jules*. In contrast to her mother, Marie maintained a balance of characteristics, which allowed her success. Marie was taught to hunt, skin, and identify plants: “Jules taught them useful things” that allowed them success (Sandoz, *Old 284).

Marie was not just trained as a useful tomboy outside; she served as official mother-in-training at the Sandoz household. She was responsible for food preparation and collection as well as the children’s caretaking. After Fritz was born, Jules said to Marie: “‘Keep that damned kid still’ Jules commanded. Marie shrunk from him and carried the child on her hip until the boy’s head reached almost as high as hers, making a funny two-headed animal
shadow in the sand” (Sandoz, *Old* 264). She quickly understood that this advanced role was required for survival in her family home: “Marie, no one’s pet, learned conformity early and developed a premature responsibility. She was expected to look after the boys, keep James from building fires, Jule from breaking his father’s delicate tools, both from fighting, and the baby from crying while the parents were in the field or repairing fences” (Sandoz, *Old* 266). Marie’s increased role, one would think, would have garnered more respect within the household. Yet, the young Marie struggled to assert herself and was often underestimated. Although her family never paid her many compliments, “Even strangers immediately put her in league with the elders, saw her as the watchdog of the place” (Sandoz, *Old* 296). She was respected by others for her tenacity, perseverance, and responsibility.

There are numerous references to Marie’s ability to transcend her environment through intellectualism. Marie strived to achieve more to leave the West and become more productive. When kids would play at recess, Marie stayed and studied: “‘You should run out and play. You’re so peaked-looking –‘ the serious young schoolma’am tried to tell her kindly. ‘I got to study,’ Marie defended fiercely” (Sandoz, *Old* 293). Further, when Marie was sick with yellow jaundice and forced to stay home she said, “I got to go – they’ll all get ahead of me” (Sandoz, *Old* 294). She struggled to keep up and catch up with her peers, especially since when she got to school she spoke Swiss German and only a little English and Polish. Yet, she thrived in reading. Marie began to acquire a reputation all around the Sandhills for her desire for further learning (Sandoz, *Old* 340). The young Marie was known all around the region for this:

[as far] as Rushville it became known that Old Jules’s girl was hungry for reading. “Takes after him.” Even strangers sent her books, too be returned any time. If Jules was gone, Marie sneaked them to the attic until her straw tick was lumpy. At first,
they were girls’ books, then paper-backed novels, and finally old volumes of Poe, Hawthorne, or perhaps Melville, and finally Hardy. Here, in Hardy, she found life as she saw it about her. [...] Jules banned novel reading as fit only for hired girls and trash. (Sandoz, *Old* 340)

Marie took her studies seriously and managed, despite spotty attendance, illness, snowblindness, having to care for the children, and numerous other deterrents, to pass her eighth grade examination. After passing, she snuck to Rushville to take the teacher’s examination. This was not something that Jules permitted or was pleased about, “When Jules heard what she had done he was violent: ‘I want no goddamn lazy schoolma’ams in my family. Balky, no good for nothing!’ But after Marie got her certificate, he bragged about it when she was not around. ‘That’s what comes of living with an educated man!’ And none denied it” (Sandoz, *Old* 366). Jules was willing to take credit where credit was not due. It was Marie’s fortitude and determination which allowed her to pass the examination for which she had almost no formal preparation. Even young Marie shows a streak of this independence when she plays by herself, farms the second Sandoz homestead alone, and even in her smart aleck replies to her Mother. When she discovered, sheerly through observation, that her mother was pregnant again, she said, “I should think you’d be tired having babies- I’m tired watching them—” (Sandoz, *Old* 341). She was not afraid to share her opinion.

Marie demonstrates an independent streak and autonomy and shows how these androgynous characteristics of independence yield successes. Further, she is able exert agency against her mother and others that try to enact injustices against the Sandoz family. Balanced Marie serves as an example of how perseverance, conviction, and intellectualism can enable success and the ability to ultimately question the social structure.
Capital City’s Abigail Allerton maintains a balance of androgynous characteristics as well. Abigail mirrors a Sandoz composite in many ways. One of Sandoz’s earlier texts demonstrates the effect that a woman intellectual can have on societal change and attitudes. Allerton, an intellectual and history professor at the Franklin University, writes an exposé novel, Anteroom for Kingmakers, exposing the dark world of government corruption and graft in Franklin and back alley politics. After the book’s release, Abigail receives plentiful inflammatory comments from the public. The university forces Abigail to resign her teaching position and she resides in seclusion in order to escape the hecklers’ abuses. In Capital City, we see Sandoz placing herself in a position allied with her characters’ activism. In Franklin, Abigail, the intellectual and writer is able to successfully expose the ills of this corrupt society. Sandoz, too, attempts to expose injustice by publishing her book amidst others that asked similar questions about society and government at that time, such as John Steinbeck’s Grapes of Wrath. Sandoz utilizes this writer and intellectuals to fight for workers’ equality and government accountability. Abigail fights as both an individual and as a part of a larger unit and communities. Abigail’s motives in the text are to utilize her writing ability to demonstrate the ills that have befallen the community. She reflects how government corruption is pervasive through the entire society. Sandoz herself “spoke of two of her characters as representing not two people, but two aspects of the artist in decaying society” (qtd. in Stauffer, Mari 129). This woman artist wants to show others what this decaying society consists of in a truthful and factual way.

Once Allerton’s novel was released, the Christian movement leapt at the opportunity to discredit her. Then, many churches preached Sunday sermons against her work and she is
accused of communist behavior (Sandoz, *Capital* 150). Sandoz proves prescient in anticipating the second Red Scare tactics that would occur in 1945- and beyond and echoed the Red Scare endemic in 1919-1920 (Woods 20). During this time, the government meticulously examined anyone with communist or left-leaning sympathies and was profoundly suspicious of intellectuals and free thinkers. Moreover, her work alludes to the current temper of the Christian movement. Sandoz was concerned with the lack of attention paid to those masquerading under the banner of a Christian front movement, a group that propagated fascist anti-communist views. Sandoz wrote to the editor of *The Forum* after reading an article printed about this issue:

> Of course those of us who are concerned with the preservation of American democracy have been vaguely aware of the situation but it should be less easy to dismiss the various ‘Fronters’ and the shirt boys as harmless exhibitionists and their leaders as futile crackpots after the bit of calm daylight Mr. Irwin turns on them in his article. (Sandoz, “Letter to Mr. Henry Leach”)

Sandoz strove to do work similar to Theodore Irwin in his article at *The Forum*: she wished to show in a concrete example what these types of groups had done and were capable of doing. Her work in displaying the potentiality could serve as a way to eliminate the threats these groups provided.

The result of government ineffectiveness and contaminated traditional and religious media creates tension for those that desire more for their city. Different social structures, ethnicities, and job positions create spaces in which to function within the confines of the corrupt city. In *Capital City*, Sandoz places herself in a position allied with her characters’ activism. In Franklin, Abigail, the intellectual and writer, successfully exposes this corrupt society’s ills. After her writings gain prominence, a fellow agitator’s home was set on fire. It
is this fire that begins to shock some of the elite into the realization that corruption destroys Franklin internally: “By the evening after the fires there was considerable anger in the local papers. […] Somebody important seemed to be pushing a demand for a real investigation” (Sandoz, Capital 305). Sandoz, too, attempts to expose injustice by publishing her book. Sandoz utilizes this writer and other intellectual characters in her text to fight for workers’ equality and government accountability. Hamm and Stephani advocate for workers’ rights and Abigail exposes government injustice and media corruption.

Abigail fights as both an individual and as parts of larger units and communities. Her individual fight stems from her ostracized position directly created by her ideology. She exists on the societal fringes while she attempts to expose the corrupt power structure, thus, she feels more ardently that she must right injustice. This concept reflects Jean-Luc Nancy’s examination of the inoperative community, when he states, “But the individual is merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community” (3). Her lack of community creates their individual endeavors for justice. In creating an individual agenda though, she ultimately regains a sense of community, although this is a different type of community that has transgressed the boundaries of the former community. Abigail strives to make her public aware of the atrocities that the farmers and laborers are experiencing. Her individual attitude is created through the problems that the community presents her and she attempts to rectify these wrongs through her own work and through inspiring other individuals to action. This creates a new configuration of the community, carving out a reputable community from the original and flawed one. This new community isolates itself from the larger group as it sees problems in the way the community operates. Through this isolation, this new community has found a way to prevent the entire community from total self-destruction.
The effect of Abigail’s roles is that she is able to effect change. The evolving government and some of the potential electorate and candidates maintain fascist ideas and attempt to stomp out any form of equality for the working class. Yet, Abigail and others attempt to create equality and are instrumental in promoting workers’ strikes across the state and in forming and encouraging cooperatives that combat the emerging fascist, reactionary government. Sandoz’s character approach allows her two characters to fight her own fight in the novel, which is that strong women can, in fact, fight the injustices that exist in society. They are responsible for righting injustices of equality, but, at the same time, hesitate to offer any solution or elevate one government over another.33

It is notable that Abigail releases her work into a public environment that believed, “Women shouldn’t be allowed to drink, they told each other, or to see such things as the parade today. They ought to be protected, for they were never really civilized, always hankering for the brute male no matter what their cultural background, training, or intellect” (Sandoz, *Capital* 58). As a consequence of this common positioning of women and her attitude toward the government, her work was immediately rejected as a wasted women’s tome. Yet, she found supporters in the community that wanted her to speak and some of those in communities outside of the corrupt Franklin city reveled in its honesty. At the end of the book, Abigail receives a telegram from Goldwyn, a motion picture company, confirming their purchase of her book (Sandoz, *Capital* 327). She has been a success in effecting change through her strong convictions, intellectualism, and agency. Abigail also serves as a model for women readers to emulate. Overall, the text implicates Midwesterners as a corruptible force with seemingly unstoppable power. Yet, this individual is able to join other intellectuals to rise up against a seemingly omnipotent force.
Morissa: Battling the Sexes – Balanced Androgyny - *Miss Morissa*

Sandoz’s frontier doctor tale features a woman capable of transgressing gender boundaries fluidly. Her tale features Dr. Morissa Kirk, a doctor whose fictional life is a composite of three Midwestern, frontier doctors, Dr. Mary W. Quick, Dr. Phoebe A. Oliver Briggs, and Dr. Georgia Arbuckle Fix (Sandoz, *Morissa* cover). This text is significant in that it represents Sandoz’s opinion of women in 1955, whereas the characters in *Slogum House*, *Capital City*, and *Old Jules* represent her opinion of women’s rights and observation in the early part of both her career and the continuance of the women’s rights movement.

*Morissa* allows Sandoz the opportunity to reflect on the role of womanhood throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s and how that led to the status of women until her present day in 1955. Her fictional text provides a lens through which to consider women doctors on the frontier plains, how they were received, how they responded, and the effect of their existence. She demonstrates how women of the frontier plains were not totally without agency and these women paved the way for future women, such as Sandoz, to obtain more rights and responsibilities. Sandoz’s stakes are larger than the individual; she is concerned with the societal understanding of these historic women and the way they fit into shaping the equal rights community of activists.

Sandoz believed that these women, unnamed and unrecognized by society, carved the path for women activists. Morissa stands as a representative model of those nameless, yet fundamentally important women. Sandoz utilizes this part historical, part fictional format to tell the history of women’s rights – that it was not just a few women in the 20s that all of sudden brought the right to vote to American women; it was the pioneers fighting for equal rights back in the 1800s and on the frontier of the Midwest that helped lay the foundation for
these later successes. As Sandoz researched women of the Great Plains, she realized the importance of the region in shaping the women’s movement. In research files, she notes:

Once this region furnished most of the nation’s Bad Women as well as its Bad Men, and some of our most energetic crusaders. Carrie Nation come out of Kansas, and the women who managed to get the first state-wide suffrage came from Wyoming, which gave them the vote in 1869, fifty years before the Nineteenth Amendment. To a considerable extent this region has kept up its crop of women who raise the dust, but the yield has changed. Instead of Cattle Kate there are Florence Sabine and Perle Mesta. Belle Starr has given ways to the ladies of the mint and the treasury. The ravages of Calamity Jane have become the satins of Ann Sheridan. (Sandoz, “Ladies of the High Country”)

This same research document lists all of the fiery and influential women including Baby Doe Tabor to Calamity Jane. In the telling of this female doctor’s story, Sandoz establishes the long history of women activists, famous, infamous, and unnamed. Sandoz deems these Dr. Kirk-like women in history most significant and she shows how by depicting their influential, inspiring, and extraordinary actions. Even though the women these characters are based on are often not even known outside their geographical area at this time, Sandoz chose to focus an entire text on telling one of their stories and perhaps motivate the reader to consider other influential frontier women. Other female frontier doctor biographies were not written until the late 1900s.35

There are a number of similarities between Sandoz and Morissa. Sandoz wanted to be a doctor as Morissa was. Sandoz wrote: “Disillusioned with writing, I registered for a science major, took engineers’ physics, and geology for a year. But the English profs finally got me and after doubting that my papers were original, told me I had writing ability. (Me, who’d been doing it since I was nine and hoped I’d broken the habit!)” (Sandoz, “Letter to Estelle Laughlin”). Sandoz similarly grew up in a rough childhood home, teased about her
background, and took care of her siblings. Morissa, too, had a rough childhood. She was raised as a single mother and spent time on the poor farm. She, like Morissa, had a difficult marriage, one that she never referred to in any archived papers or letters. Sandoz is also similar to Morissa in that she gradually wins some of her community over to her side as she demonstrates proficiency in writing, just as Morissa did with her doctoring. Sandoz’s connection to the Morissa character influenced her retelling, as it problematically shows little of the fallibility other strong female characters maintain. In this case, then, Sandoz is not staying true to the historical record, as she always claimed to do. Other critics noted the absence of Sandoz’s usually critical eye. Beatrice K. Morton asserts, “The novel fails as a novel, in part, perhaps, because of a possible identification of the author with heroine. Even its failure, though, it has a strength. The strength is in the theme of the modern woman confronting frontier society” (Morton 37). This closeness prevents Sandoz from reflecting critically on Morissa in the text and highlighting her flaws, rather, she is depicted somewhat idealistically. Her closeness with the character allows for some benefits to the novel’s crafting; her character is more likable and memorable, however, there is less to learn from in this idealized character than other Sandoz protagonists. A possibility for her rushing in the case of this text may have something to do with her hopes that this story would be featured on film. Greer Garson was interested in the role and Sandoz seemed excited at the prospect of its production. The project did not come to fruition, however, as Garson transferred from Warner studios before the script was completed (Stauffer, Letters xvii).

Despite this criticism, as evidenced throughout her oeuvre, Sandoz is concerned with telling her tales with historical accuracy. She was not looking to recapture the epic western history by repeating tall tales and outlandish reports of female achievements. For example,
Calamity Jane is a real woman, with flaws and shortcomings, not a larger than life, fictional character. Morissa, the main protagonist, is based from true stories, and the medical remedies and high profile surgeries that Morissa successfully administer and perform are actual treatments and events that Sandoz read of and researched. Sandoz strives for historical accuracy. She talks of treating a child with rhubarb root, scalded milk, and other unique remedies that were used on the frontier (Sandoz, Morissa 141). It was important to her that the story be rooted in fact.

This work’s historical significance lies in its representation that women on the plains were more than meek helpmeets in the West. Morissa is the complete opposite of these stereotypes in that she is strong, speaks her mind, cares for her own well-being single-handedly, and attempts to grow her own identity without relying upon anyone else. Here, Sandoz suggests that women are not just followers without assertion, something Sandra Myres explored in Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915. Myres argues that women are more than the gentle tamer, fearful and in need of protection (3-4). Sandoz and Myres are in direct opposition to John M. Faragher’s argument in Women and Men on the Overland Trail and Julie Roy Jeffrey in Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West 1840-1880 that paint Western women as passive and without any type of abilities or self-direction (Faragher 87; Jeffrey 8-9). Faragher argues that all women as passive and concluded that the West did not provide opportunities for women. Similarly, Jeffrey failed to find advantages; however, Myres argued they are empowered in a way. Robert V. Hine and Fargher argue in their later 2007 work, Frontiers, that women could take over men’s work on the Plains, “taking over day-to-day management” of ranches because of familial deaths, opportunity, or circumstance (126-7). They also explain how children on the ranch,
particularly girls, “worked outside with their fathers [which] helped to develop women of strong and independent character” (127). Sandoz showcases these types of empowered women through her representative female doctor. She strives to describe what Hine and Faragher’s 2007 work describes and what earlier women’s histories like Faragher’s earlier work and Jeffrey disputed. Sandoz shows how women could and did do the work of men. Morissa and the women she represent are not gentle doves, as Sandoz describes her title character, “But this girl who had pulled herself up from her days as a woods colt on a poor-farm was no dove or even a grouse, no matter what the wounding” (Sandoz, Morissa 13).

This reflective story evidences that Sandoz’s mindset about androgynous features remained the same over the course of her life. It is when Morissa maintains a balance of traits, a seemingly androgynous personality, that she is most successful. It is only when she wavers to one side of overpowering strength\textsuperscript{36} or weaker acquiescence\textsuperscript{37} that problems arise. Sandoz employed this similar concept most prominently in Old Jules, Capital City, and Slogum House.

Sandoz outlays the case for this androgynous behavior immediately in Miss Morissa. The novel begins with Morissa’s arrival in western Nebraska after her relationship to fiancé, Allston Hoyt, ends. He discovers she was raised by a single mother and thus, without a pedigree, and breaks off their engagement (Sandoz, Morissa 18). The plains challenge this proper, eastern-schooled woman, one with a green riding habit and trained in domestic chores properly. Yet, she meets her challenges with aplomb—diving onto a borrowed horse within the first pages of the novel to save a drowning miner. She evidences strength, fortitude, and brazenness. When she arrives in North Platte Valley, Morissa found herself needed immediately, “Grabbing up her wide skirts […] she swung herself up on one of the
horses at the hitchracks before anyone could stop her. [...]. [...] into the cold snow water in one splashing leap, the shouts of anger and warning lost behind her” (Sandoz, Morissa 5).

She managed to assert herself, steal a horse, take control of a situation, and rescue a man, all within the first thirty minutes of arriving in the valley. She acts assertively, in what her fellow community members might term a masculine nature, yet confounds them by appearing feminine in her attire and manner she presents herself. She challenges the public’s perception and stereotypes of women, but not to a state of alienation. Morissa presents a balance of femininity and masculinity which allows her to thrive.

She was pushed to succeed and surpass women’s roles. When she was needed and the horse she was going to ride was not “woman-broke,” the man who came to get her said, “You better get into some a Robin’s work pants, and I fetched you a pair of chaps to hold off the rain, ‘n spurs. This ain’t the night for no lady sidesaddlin’—(Sandoz, Morissa 47). She had ridden “astride” during her youth on the poor farm and the night indeed was not a night for riding sideways, otherwise, she would have been perilously thrown from her horse (Sandoz, Morissa 47). Without having these skills, she would not have been able to save the patient.

She also demonstrates male characteristics of assertion and takes charge and control when threatened on the plains by male figures, while other characters seek protection under men. She defends herself and a wounded patient against someone trying to attack a home where she was helping an injured man, and “with the butcher knife she dug gun slits through the sod near each corner” (Sandoz, Morissa 106). Even if she was in the company of other women, she still maintained a role of protectress. When Morissa traveled with Yvette and Aunt Clara, Yvette had to wear a proper veil to shield her beautiful pale pink skin (Sandoz,
Morissa 73). She is a notable contrast to Morissa, with her brown skin. This suntanned look indicated Morissa’s work outside and her unpampered lifestyle. Morissa shows her toughness on the trip; she counts herself as the ladies’ protector and carries her own rifle and looks for raids or robbers throughout the journey (Sandoz, *Morissa* 70).

Another positive trait Morissa maintained was her ability to see innovative solutions, and most of this derived from her gender. Because of her weakened physical ability and lack of help on the plains, she had to be resourceful in how she treated patients. For example, when she found Eddie Ellis alone in a dugout, she could not lift him to the wagon, but “With a shovel she always carried she sank the hind wheels almost to the hub, made a ramp with the door from the dugout, and drew Eddie up into the wagon a blanket” (Sandoz, *Morissa* 139). Her clever and resourceful responses to these types of situations made her a better doctor as she was able to employ the same type of problem solving to her practice. Serving as a Plains doctor required an ability to develop solutions with limited supplies, assistance, time, or advanced care facilities. When a man injured his head falling into a well and was retrieved “with a hole in the side of his skull almost as big as her palm,” Morissa employed a dramatic rescue method (Sandoz, *Morissa* 155). Here, Sandoz told the true story that Dr. Quick had experienced, who had seen a patient with these exact circumstances:

she was one of the first in the west to mend a skull, laid open by a well accident, with a hand-hammered silver plate from a silver dollar, the whole emergency operation carried out in a homestead shack without even a nurse to help. She even hammered the plate into the shape from the coin herself, on a piece of rail iron and a fencing hammer. The man lived to be eighty, the plate still well in place. (Sandoz, “Letter to Elizabeth Otis”)

Sandoz used Quick’s ingenious response as the basis for this Morissa scenario, as it represents the way in which the frontier challenged the doctor to develop innovative
remedies and cures. It further illustrates how innovation and assertiveness were character attributes that Sandoz valued. Morissa repeatedly comes to the rescue of men, women, and children with her creative solutions to medical quandaries and also has the assertiveness to follow through with her ideas.

*Morissa* encourages readers to see the land and geography as a character, just as it is in *Capital City*, *Slogum House*, and *Old Jules*. The land forces Morissa to adapt her perspective and try on new roles of assertion. Immediately, she is forced to fend for herself. As her stepfather, Robin, said, “There’s no law here for anybody, you know, except what you make” (Sandoz, *Morissa* 13). Morissa takes the gun Robin presents to her with the cartridge belt—the frontier forcing additional masculinity on this feminine girl. These experiences render Morissa more confident and independent and she ultimately felt legitimized to register for her own “Lone homestead in the wilderness instead of a good life in Texas as Mrs. Polk” (Sandoz, *Morissa* 65). Morissa had a plan for her ranch (Sandoz, *Morissa* 84). She hoped to bring in cattle, develop a hospital, and establish her ground. She was the first homesteader to select a plot north of the river; this was an area local cowpunchers discouraged settlement upon, as they did not want to see their endless grazing fields blocked up by fencing. Yet, Morissa was an intelligent woman and knew that this land would be near where a railroad may ultimately pass and where travelers would come by, thus needing a doctor and her help.

Her selection of land in this region made her a target and she required fortitude in rebuffing those who were angry at her choice of land. When stray cattle were coming on to her land, she accosted the cattlemen. The man threatened her and said, “Why don’t you grab you a man and quit this switching your skirts around?” (Sandoz, *Morissa* 118). Morissa, “was determined to laugh at that because it was funny” (Sandoz, *Morissa* 118). She was not
afraid to stand up for what she believed in and to challenge the typical representation of frontier women, even if the locals mocked and shunned her for her choices and decisions, which ultimately drives her to work even more independently.

Significantly, Morissa sought to dominate and control her environment. This is immediately clear when Morissa begins to settle her own ranch, but most particularly, we see her assertive control in her relationship with Eddie. Morissa does need a man to discourage others from approaching her. It is in this need that she makes the largest mistake of her life and married Eddie on an emotional angry whim (Sandoz, Morissa 248). She tries to discourage herself from feeling romantic love after her disastrous first engagement. After allowing herself to love, she was shattered by their breakup. This stereotypically feminine response that of a woman pining away for a lost love, rises to the surface occasionally when Morissa is out west. At one point, she sees someone similar to Allston Hoyt, her first fiancé, she felt she could have given up her “virtue” just as her mother had, “too weak to resist the pressing lover and must have the constant presence and protection of a strong male hand, father or husband” (Sandoz, Morissa 101). Yet she resists finding someone as a pressing lover, only someone who could interrupt any other men that attempted to have her hand in marriage. In this way, Morissa still maintained control of herself and the relationship.

Morissa’s view of marriage is paralleled when she attends a horse breaking with Tris. When she was on the ranch with Tris and saw a horse being trained, “she saw something wild and incorruptible that brought a smarting to Morissa’s eyes, and anger running through the breast, anger against the rope too, and the tormenting humans” (Morissa 61). As Morissa watched the mare, she shares that she felt camaraderie. As the horse was trained, Tris noted she would “have been gentled with a bucket of oats, and a patient affection hand;” Morissa
disagreed, “Such brightness, such wild spirit was not to be betrayed, not the saddle, the rope, and the bit and spur” (Sandoz, Morissa 62). Morissa, too, was not to be tamed. She found the paraphernalia of conformity too much for the horse and too much for women. The horse’s bit, rope, and saddle could be equated to the proper woman’s word, how she was led around, and what she wore or how she presented herself. She exhibits her desire to let the horse just organically be as opposed to presenting itself as something other than its spirit intended. She maintains a similar attitude toward her own identity.

Despite this viewpoint of marriage, Morissa warms to Tris and his pursuits, finally agreeing to be his wife after many refusals and deferrals. Yet, when she realizes that Tris is involved with those that were warning her off her land, she is torn. She storms from him and marries, literally, the only available and perhaps worst prospect in town. Is this a protective measure to put off Tris and anyone else in the future? She marries a man she knows she can control and then she won’t be bothered by other men. This effectively puts her at a resolved distance from others.

Morissa, sadly underestimates Eddie Ellis. When he was ill, she served as a caretaker, “fretting about him like him like a mother over a weakling son” (Sandoz, Morissa 201). When she evaluated Eddie, she “was glad to see him, to have his inconsequential talk to divert her thoughts from their foolish self-concern” (Sandoz, Morissa 137). She hoped to marry someone foolish she can control and who would not challenge her identity. Yet, he undermines her and ruins her reputation.

Although this unwise betrothal arose out of Morissa’s need for a husband, a seemingly female dominated thought, Morissa quickly assumes the leader position in the family. This begins immediately, with Morissa proposing to Eddie, buying his wedding suit,
and asking him to marry her after she jilts Tris (Sandoz, Morissa 171). Later, Morissa quickly squelched any illusions that Eddie may have had as running head of household. When she told him to file on a homestead claim, Eddie said, “You have to kiss me if I am to take orders from you;” “Morissa treated such talk as a joke” (Sandoz, Morissa 172). These power plays surface again when Eddie was trying to pay for a new horse, team, and buggy and had not consulted Morissa. Morissa came to him, “her step firm. ‘I think you should know that we have no funds for race horses, and one buggy is all we need’ she told the man” (Sandoz, Morissa 175). Eddie got upset, “‘By God, I’ll show you who’s boss—’ he shouted. But Morissa took the whip from him as from the clutching hands of a child and put it back into the whip stock. Motioning the man toward the road, she went back to her task” (Sandoz, Morissa 175). Eddie furiously calls her a “damn bitch! I’ll kill her, the bastard!” (Sandoz, Morissa 175). Yet, the buggy was sent back and Eddie’s desires are left unfulfilled. Morissa here acts in an androgynous manner. She asserts her feminine side when she treats Eddie as a child, caretaking and resolving his childlike actions. At the same time, she makes an assertive conscious choice for the family as head of household and finances, a chiefly masculine role.

Morissa had a clear desire for control from the start of her foray west. She realized she had to be in control of herself and her choices in order to survive and thrive in the West, where “Standing before her sign Morissa realized that for the second time in two days she had committed herself to a life here, where no sheriff shadowed the murderer or the lynch, where the gun on the nail in reach of her cot was to be her sole protection” (Sandoz, Morissa 25). Eastern women had it easier; they could rely on men or the law from protection. Here, Morissa could only rely on herself.
Although her personality most definitely tends toward the masucline or more balanced, Morissa does maintain some female characteristics, some that overwhelmingly end up with her dissatisfaction. Morissa is expected by many to maintain more female characteristics than she exemplifies. Other women are aghast by the travails of the west, one woman exclaiming to her husband after her daughter had had an accident, “Bringin’ a woman and child to such a country!” (Sandoz, Morissa 45). Others expected her ability as a doctor to suffer because of her gender, “As Dr. Aiken at medical school once told her: ‘Perhaps women make bad physicians. Their emotions involve them in the simplest physicking’” (Sandoz, Morissa 85). Morissa acts like one of the boys so much that the men begin to treat her with a limited sort of equality and respect and diminish her feminine nature. They do not act as if she is a fragile anomaly riding a horse, but one of them, and they encourage her to ride split legged, as they know she can handle the horse (Sandoz, Morissa 47). It was not really until Morissa let her guard down and was weakened horribly by a horse riding accident, “the men seemed to faunch about her, almost finally realizing this woman doctor’s feminine and gentle nature anew” (Sandoz, Morissa 56). To them, she had just become Morissa, an androgynous friend. This character represents what Sandoz was articulating to friend, Estelle Laughlin, that there should not be differentiation between the way men and women are treated (Sandoz, “Letter to Estelle Laughlin,” 27 March 1940).

Whenever she is engages in actions that are associated with the feminine nature, she seems scripted and forced, almost as if she is playacting. When the sheriff comes over, she appears to turn on the kindness as a tool to get what she wants. When the sheriff would not listen to her report about being shot and threatened, she brings him coffee and gingerbread to try to soften him up (Sandoz, Morissa 112). This idea of playacting femininity is reprised
when Morissa doctors Calamity Jane, treating her alcoholic delirium. When Jane was feeling well, they drank tea with Jane “suddenly playing the lady,” but Morissa too, acting the part of a proper lady as nowhere else in the novel does she engage in this feminine act of refinery (Sandoz, *Morissa* 142).

These female actions are stilted. After she agreed to marry Tris, she methodologically completed a checklist for femininity: engaged, dresses, proper attire, etc. She ordered dresses, evening gowns, and planned her trousseau and later wrote about her “happy” betrothment (Sandoz, *Morissa* 148). Yet, she did not plan the wedding or exhibit excitement about the prospect of a husband, rather, she seemed quite impassive about the whole affair. She notes she must switch her mentality to think about Tris in this capacity: “And now, with a woman’s eye, Morissa Kirk appraised the man who was to be their father, and smiled within herself, a woman fulfilled” (Sandoz, *Morissa* 151). She becomes this “woman fulfilled” by a man, but only when she shut aside her true nature and looked at him only with her “woman’s eye” (Sandoz, *Morissa* 151). Thus, she struggles with her new configuration of gender, which she envisions necessary to adopt as a married frontier woman. She presses forth although she has spent so much time and effort becoming an autonomous, respected woman, who is known for her intellect and not stereotypes or gender. Yet, she feels compelled to marry, not necessarily for protection, but to get others to leave her alone. She appears troubled in her reconciliation of male and female attributes. When she acts according to her desires and true wishes, there is less of an internal struggle, whereas when she is trying to meet others’ expectations, she fails her community, herself, and ultimately her readers’ goals for her.
Throughout the story, Morissa balances her female and male traits and, in doing so, becomes a character that echoes of Sandoz’s earlier role model of balanced Marie or intellectual Abigail, doppelgangers of herself. Rather than rely upon other men to support and her fulfill her, she seeks to balance her characteristics. Although Beatrice Morton summarily asserts, “Her identity is not proscribed by a man. But she is still a woman, possessing the feminine principles of nurturing, tenderness, mercy, compassion, care, and concern for human relationships. The conflict between these principles and her independence and need for self-fulfillment are the root of the problems faced by today’s woman” (Morton 41). While Morton equates Morissa’s struggle with that of “today’s” woman, she neglects to realize the impact of frontier life in the shaping of gender identity. Morton argues the problem of today’s woman is self-fulfillment, but Sandoz’s stakes are larger than the individual; she is concerned with the societal understanding of these historic women and the way they fit into shaping the equal rights community of activists. Some Sandoz scholars have not realized the impact of the region on Morissa’s gendered identity. Morissa is shaped by the land and in turn shapes the public around her, both of which are significant for Sandoz. Sandoz demonstrates how personality and character can be shaped by environment at the same time she shows how a one person can affect and shape others. Sandoz makes a strong argument here for nurture over nature, implying that one’s attributes are garnered more so from the experiences around the individual.

Sandoz writes Morissa as a better representation of an alternative gendered ideal. When Morissa was warned against travel, since she was “the only white woman for two hundred miles along the Platte” Morissa replied: “I’m the only doctor for those two hundred miles,” it simply didn’t matter that she was female (Sandoz, Morissa 67). This reflects
Sandoz’s perspective that men and women should be treated equally and are equally adept at handling a task. In this novel, at the same time Morissa engages in activities typically assigned to men, some men undertake activities that are often perceived as more feminine in nature, like cooking or caretaking. Sandoz demonstrates how the gender of the character doing the action did not matter; what was more significant was the intent of the party doing the action.

Despite the fact that Morissa had positive intent and was gifted at healing and practicing medicine, the public still questioned her integrity and ability. Most questions centered on her lack of female identity. When Tris asked Morissa to attend a picnic with him, she was noncommittal in her response, “‘A doctor can’t be too definite in her promises —’ ‘A doctor? — How about the woman?’ Tris Polk asked, his eyes searching the girl’s flushed face until she wanted to shout a defense against him, cry out the pain and hurt the woman had endured for being a woman, but she was silent” (Sandoz, Morissa 31-2). She is forced to accommodate her own gendered expectations, the expectations of her profession, and the changes forced upon her by the land. These gendered expectations were further complicated by insensitive and ignorant townspeople. She tried to be respectful of their opinions, introducing them gradually this newly configured gendered identity of androgyny formed in the West. Many times, she attempted to ease them in to seeing her challenge these standard expectations of gender: “Morissa’s head felt sore again from the fall last week and her back was stiff after the long ride in the sidesaddle today. She wanted to accustom the people here to seeing her ride astride, forked, so much sager and wiser, but she had larger ventures in mind for the future and so must make the little conformities now” (Sandoz, Morissa 62). She knew to pick her battles carefully, as she wanted to still attract patients, while at the same
time promoting her skills confidently, but not so assertively they put people off. She struggled internally with this battle of “practical” androgyny:

Yet even in this she wavered between the two sides of her nature, the feminine and the practical: whether to start with the curtain for her finery or with her doctor’s sign announcing her presence. She remembered a quip from medical school: Any jackass who can drive one nail can hang out a shingle against the patient but a shingle against the rain takes the ability to drive two nails. (Sandoz, *Morissa* 23)

Even the simple act of moving into her home advanced a gender-based decision. Should she sew first or hang her sign? Both are seemingly trivial acts that carry weighty significance. Yet, she vacillates between announcing her profession to the public or purchasing finery to announce her gender. She is interrupted by a patient and after he leaves, hangs her sign without further consideration, almost as if the former choice of sewing she realized no longer mattered (Sandoz, *Morissa* 25). Her decisions come more easily as she becomes comfortable in her environment and with herself, but readers can see the struggle that Morissa endures in her gender identification, particularly at the beginning of the text. Sandoz demonstrates how identity is not a constant, but can evolve based upon needs, environment, and experience. Particularly, Sandoz demonstrates how situations shape one’s gendered identity.

It is when Morissa “leans in” to either her femininity or her androgyny too much that trouble befalls her, similar to Gulla Slogum (Sandberg). For example, when she fully accesses her femininity too much, marrying Eddie, this ultimately leads to her disapproval from townspeople, who neither respect her decision nor understand it. They view her whimsical marriage critically and begin to shun her in public situations. When she becomes too androgynous, she is threatened by the local cattlemen, who view her infringement on their ground with anger. She is nearly killed many times, on horse or by gun, when she will
not listen to her intuition and blazes ahead. Sandoz uses Morissa’s androgynous character to show that this androgyny allows her to achieve the most success and reward.

Other characters support this attitude. While the more effeminate Eddie, and supermasculine Tris and Calamity Jane never seem to get what they want in the end, Morissa and Charley and Ruth seem happiest with their decisions, as do all characters who evidence balanced traditional gender character traits. Eddie wants cared for and soothed, refusing to take ownership and responsibilities for his actions. Tris ultimately begins to realize how the cowboys’ hypermasculine conquer-all attitudes had destroyed the plains, “Eight years ago … had been buffalo country. Then suddenly the herds were gone…, and now the Indians, too” (Sandoz, Morissa, 153). Tris sees what the cowboys’ aspirations had done to the land and native people. He continues, “‘somehow we let the ground here be bloodied by the buffalo we destroyed, and now the Indian killed and run out. The weeds from such fertilizer should grow mighty sprangly.’ He spoke a little sheepishly, a little embarrassed and uneasy, as though caught out with a branding iron at midnight” (Sandoz, Morissa, 153). Although Eddie does not realize his character flaws, Tris does, but not in time to make any change about it.

On the other hand, Charley, Ruth, and Morissa demonstrate how a balanced androgyny can serve one’s self well. Ruth can “peacefully feed hens” just after leaving a smart aleck note in the post office that addressees the prankster or threat-maker who left a noose out on Morissa’s property (Sandoz, Morissa 212). Ruth can be both feminine and masculine or, as Sandoz described her, “bold as a longhorn in a pansy patch” (Sandoz, Morissa 212). Charley can both work for Morissa and help care take for her. These characters, as well as Morissa, show how balance yields successful results, rather than irreparable damage.
Gulla: Masculinity Gone too Far – Trait Imbalance – *Slogum House*

Sandoz also portrays a character evidencing how too much androgyny can go too far. *Slogum House*’s Gulla also features some of the intellectual skills and abilities that Sandoz features in most of her fiction. She maintains some characteristics similar to Morissa, but goes beyond assertive to dictatorial. Gulla takes over the land in a smart way, utilizing the girls from the brothel for her land acquisition purposes.

Gulla’s androgynous traits are shown as she attempts to gain more land on the frontier plains. On Gulla’s ranch, all of the girls in the house, “could each file on a quarter-section homestead for the fourteen-dollar fee—eight hundred acres for seventy dollars before the spring run of settlers was on” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 177). Later, she had the girls file again, “each entered five more quarters, using their names over and over: Eulia Jones signing homestead application as Eulia Belle Jones, E. Belle Jones, Belle Jones, Belle E. Jones, and Belle Eulia Jones, at five dollars a filing” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 183). In 1862, Senator William Borah announced the opening of the frontier, offering 160 acres to anyone who paid an entry fee and lived five years on the land (Patterson-Black 67). Later, the Kincaid Act of 1862 and Homestead Acts also enabled women the opportunity to claim land (Black 68). As Sheryl Patterson-Black notes:

> Since land ownership equals economic power in our society, [the opening of the frontier for free land] had implications that have not until now been considered: that is, for the first time in American history, working-class women had the possibility of access to land ownership, because the land was free if certain conditions were met. […] The law did not restrict homestead entries to men. (67)

Women could apply for land ownership the same as men, “requiring only that they be at least twenty-one years old, single, widowed, divorced, or head of a household” (Smith, “Single”
Gulla took advantage of this act to feed her individual megalomania. Gulla quickly and speedily bought up as much land as she could in a quick amount of time, “By the time the Slogums were in the region two weeks, Gulla controlled four sections of land: a timber claim, pre-emption, and homestead apiece for the four of them, and a school section under lease from the state. They put up little shacks – cattleman backhouses, the settlers called them – on each of the homesteads except Gulla’s, the site of Slogum House” (Sandoz, Slogum 43-44). Sandoz’s uses Gulla as a counterpoint to the worries of the Nazi regime and the raging war. Just like Hitler, Gulla sought power and land with no worry for consequences. Gulla has an unfettered desire for land acquisition and she acquires this land through power. This power leads to her acquisition of more and more land. Gulla seeks more because of greed, desire for more power, for autonomy, and the chance at running an autocracy. As Sandoz described Gulla in a letter, “She prostituted such beauty as fell into her hands, and destroyed the most promising individuals of the opposition. That’s good dictator practice” (Sandoz, “Letter to P.S. Heaton”). She wanted control and to be head of her frontier feudal territory. Sandoz’s Gulla served just as she’d hoped, “a study of a will-to-power individual and the development of the techniques of facism” so that others could learn how these individuals rise to power and control their environments (Sandoz, “Letter to Alfred R. McIntyre”).

Her roles and positions on the plains indicate that Gulla was an independent woman. She did not rely on any outsider for work on the farm, even going so far as to employ her twin daughters as prostitutes in the brothel on the second floor of Slogum House. She did not want to have anyone else coming into her space and attempting to usurp her or gain deleterious information about her. She used her physical body to intimidate others into falling
into line behind her, but not alongside her. Gulla’s attitude and characterization are quite masculine. She is described having a “line of healthy down on her lip” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 36) and a “huge jelling body” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 280). She displays independent qualities even in her marriage; she pays for the wedding ring, thus emasculating Ruedy even before the wedding had begun (Sandoz, *Slogum* 37). Ruedy is a kept man. This clearly echoes Morissa and Eddie’s relationship. Gulla is a megalomaniac and adapts roles as overly masculine and manly in her role as a rancher/cattlewoman and owner of a Plains brothel. Her job position and position within the household demonstrate Sandoz manipulating traditional gender conventions for women. The effect of placing Gulla in a position of independent power allows Sandoz to ask interesting questions about law and justice, greed, and the role of women within the private and public sphere. For example, Gulla is the primary head of household, controlling the money and recording of accounts (Sandoz, *Slogum* 333). She even forces Ruedy to put most of his money into her account\(^{40}\) (Sandoz, *Slogum* 49). The effect of her position on the plains allows her to attempt to seek more and more and she is never happy with where she is. Yet, the end of the novel demonstrates how this ultimately works out for Gulla; she barely fits her “billowing flesh into her old corset” at the end of the novel—indicating that she has been swollen with greed and that the path to independent dictatorial control she maintained was unsuccessful (Sandoz, *Slogum* 283).

Gulla’s independence shows what extremes will do to a person in power. Her position is of great import amongst the neighbors. “Gulla always sat in the center” of the table a metaphoric position that she places herself in as matriarch of the Slogum Ranch (Sandoz, *Slogum* 23). Slogum House lies in the center of the county where she has methodically acquired or has plans to acquire ground around her (Sandoz, *Slogum* 32, 299). Throughout
the text, she serves as a mediator of power and manipulated control over the local sheriff, the townspeople, and her own family. When anyone steps out of line with her goals, she quickly moves in to assert her power. For example, when she felt her family was overstepping their roles, she notes, “Yes, it was time she corralled the Slogums once more” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 103). Her assertiveness is also demonstrated in her treatment of her husband. When she argues with him, she emasculates him. Gulla’s character warns how unilateral focus can lead to destruction. While Morissa used her androgyny for good, Gulla’s unilateral focus upon strength and power forces her daughters into prostitution without any thoughts of the consequences, including venereal disease and forced abortions (Sandoz, *Slogum* 228, 66).

Later, one of her sons ends up sick, the other dead in an automobile crash. She also becomes complicit in the castration of one of her daughter’s suitors as well as the switching of a dead body that was evidence at her brother’s murder trial (Sandoz, *Slogum* 130, 168). Through her bad example, Gulla’s character can effect change. Sandoz demonstrates how, indeed, great success is possible on the Plains, but one must be careful in how one pursues that success.

Sandoz agitates here for female empowerment, but wise female empowerment, all at the same time encouraging men and women to work together to improve society.

Gulla’s character also effects change because she shows how to manipulate the current system of gender biases for her own needs. Gulla’s prostitute daughters are able to exert some influence when they later rebel against their mother and try to marry their own choice of husband. Gulla utilizes the system for her own benefit: to gain more acreage.

Although her methods and actions are questionable and wrong, she does show that a woman can seek empowerment on the Plains and be master of her own domain, however, there needs
to be a balance of force, more comparable to Morissa’s character, otherwise self-destruction or failure is inevitable, as in the case of Gulla from *Slogum House* and Mary from *Old Jules*.

**Chapter Conclusion**

Sandoz’s stakes for writing include not only pointing out the fallibility of the current system for women, but also attempting to provide women with a method by which to succeed. Moreover, she demonstrates how men can support women in this endeavor—thus leading to an overall stronger society. Sandoz’s motivation is similar to Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who similarly posed an alternative reality for women. This vision saw women and men living together with totally equal power. Gilman explores this in her novel *Herland*, where Terry, Jeff, and Vandyck appraise the women on the constructs from their world and known systems of value, thus imposing an external system of judgment upon Herland and its residents. The men believe that the women are incapable of creating Herland’s world, inferring that there “*must* be men here” since the advancements are not, to them, indicative to be that a woman’s capacity (Gilman 16). The men are initially unable to give credence to the women’s work, as they are judging the women’s system based upon their own world, not in Herland, where both men and women do coexist. Later, they realize that the women were able to create this utopia. The utopia that Gilman creates attempts to accomplish what Jameson notes, that a, “Utopia can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment” (Jameson xiii). Gilman’s text functions to display the imprisonment of women in her era's society and provides alternative ways in which to conceive of women.

Similarly, Sandoz demonstrates the type of women’s traits that thrive. Considering Gilman’s activism on behalf of women and for suffrage, her work comments on the fact that
women were lumped into one essentialist group in the United States. When women were engaged in suffrage, politicians and anti-suffrage supporters wrongly assumed women would all vote as one bloc (Goss 29). However, as subsequent elections after enfranchisement demonstrated, this was not the case. Gilman’s Herland women evidence that not all women are alike, just as Sandoz’s work shows. The trouble with Gilman’s vision, as applying Jameson shows, is that “in imagining ourselves to be attempting contact with the radically Other, we are in reality merely looking in a mirror and ‘searching for an ideal image of our own world.’ This is why there is a way in which the operation is not merely self-defeating but even suicidal […] we must somehow do away with ourselves” (Jameson 111). Sandoz, too, attempts to show the varying capacities of frontier and modern women rather than just representing them as one-dimensional women. She is looking into Jameson’s mirror and looking for an “ideal image” but finding she must destroy that very image in order to allow this new genderless society to progress. It is “suicidal,” as Jameson suggests, and a necessary eradication of the former nonfunctional society so that a more ideal iteration can attempt its hand: “Here as elsewhere in narrative analysis what is most revealing is not what is said, but what cannot be said, what does not register on the narrative apparatus” (Jameson xiii).

Sandoz is more moderate than Jameson. She is not as deliberate, rather, she suggests and tries to educate and connect people through her writing, not necessarily force resistance. Although Jameson is very explicit in Archaeologies of the Future what is being said in the science fiction utopias he analyzes, we see Sandoz allowing her reader the space to see what is said. She leaves that space deliberately, but does not fill it; she wants readers to come to their own conclusion about what was or was not said in order to reflect on the nature of the utopia.
She forces readers to question if their conception of the past is correct and if who they are today is based on the advances of these more recent activists, or if it is the work of these earlier forebears who settled the Plains. In her works, Sandoz breaks down the conception of the effectiveness of women activists. Her works archive women in history who already achieved more rights and challenged their dictated roles. In doing so, she lengthens the history of women’s activism and shifts the effectiveness of suffrage in earlier hands. Sandoz identifies how these women have been misunderstood and, in telling their stories, attempts to right the annals of history. Yet, in righting the history, she is also presenting a utopic ideal, albeit one with real limits, or a dystopic possibility. While Gilman and other often projects into the future to present utopias, Sandoz uses the past as a way to show women of present day how they, too, can be empowered, independent, and ultimately influence future generations.

Men are an integral part of the subtext of Sandoz’s works. In *Miss Morissa*, the men change their minds about the function of this frontier doctor, deciding that perhaps women can be successful in this role. Their approval seems to motivate her to further challenge gender roles. This may appear as a contradiction, in that Morissa thrives off positive reinforcement from men in order to gain confidence and challenge their perspectives, yet these men respect her ability to carve her own identity. Women also show a favorable response as they begin to know her. As all community members show more faith in her, Morissa obtains self-worth and the sense of accomplishment and feels more comfortable inhabiting her own skin. They all begin to work together to achieve a better frontier community and fulfill the roles. Similarly, in *Capital City* and *Slogum House*, it is through the unification of the men and women intellectuals and townspeople uniting that they are able
to achieve successes. Sandoz articulates how an imbalance of power or strict adherence to gender roles only serves to hinder a community, whether that power is based on class, race, or gender.

Sandoz was not setting out to be a feminist, in fact, that is a charge she would vehemently deny. As Sandoz wrote to one of her editors, “In such editing as you find necessary in this review will you please save me from the charge of feminism? I have always been against dividing the human race against itself” (Sandoz, “Letter to Mr. Van Gelder”). She believed in the advancement of women to equal status as men, but did not feel women needed special treatment, should agitate for equal rights, or create a unified group. She argued that politically splitting women from men only serves to separate and isolate women further. Rather than isolating specific women’s only legislation, she thought that everyone should be treated equally under the same laws. Sandoz did not support women’s only legislation as she felt it served to only divide, rather than unite, thus Sandoz strives for male power and privilege’s extirpation. In theory, this sounds logical; men and women would be on equal power footing. However, Sandoz neglects to address how the power is dispersed from those currently in power, men, to those out of power, women.

Despite the fact that her own experiences afforded a great amount of workable material for a text, Sandoz expanded her writing vision beyond her personal tales of intrigue and focused most of her work on ways in which women could learn from her gendered spectrum of characters. As Betsy Downey notes, “As usual, Sandoz is not analytic—she does not offer any interpretations of a “women’s West” or “female frontier” – but she does present women as experiencing the frontier in ways different from the “realwestern” mythology” (Downey, “Historian” 18). Downey suggests that Sandoz does not judge the interpretations,
merely tried to repaint them as a historian. She hoped to impart her value of androgynous attributes to her readers, showing them how to attempt to combat societal balances of force, but not doing so in a prescriptive way.

Notably, Sandoz’s work does not weave idealistic tales about the Plains, as some more prominent western authors do, such as Willa Cather. She replicated the experience on the Plains in a grittier and often more controversial way than other popular writers of the time, including Cather or Steinbeck. Further, her portrayal of history is more accurate than other historians of the time, even though she was writing fiction and not history. She sought to correct the bias that western historians had propagated for years and to begin to include those who had been marginalized, forgotten, and disregarded until the late 1950s with Brown and others. Some historians of her time simply attempted to tell a sketch story of women in western history and fell prey to the gentle tamer iteration of women in western history; they did not focus on what women were really doing at the time.

Not everyone understood Sandoz’s motives, including the women she was attempting to expose to this representation of history. As friend, Dorothy Nott Switzer wrote Sandoz:

Irritated as I have been by the carping critics [...] by the smug, hypocritical ‘ladies clubs.’ [...] It always seemed ridiculous to me that your motives should have been misunderstood. For a long time I wasted a lot of time and breath arguing with the prissy old gals until I finally became convinced that once an ostrich, always an ostrich. (Switzer, “To Mari Sandoz”)

Sandoz, herself, held no illusions about her writing and its effect. She wrote friend, Annie Chalkin:

Frankly, being an historian, I don’t give a damn if all the parents in the world nurse and coddle their children into sanitariums, prisons, stone or barbed wire, or into chambers of commerce. I’m only interested in recording the results for the amusement of generations to come, preferably in such places as Historical Societies.
In my own work I try to select those who have escaped without too much dulling of their sensitiveness. And being an historian, I know that, even if I were given to evangelism, no generation recognizes its messages, even the major ones. So what the heck! (Sandoz, “Letter to Annie Chalkin”)

Sandoz maintained an ability to interweave historians’ realism with the storytelling of a romantic; she produced works that engage and cleave to readers’ collective consciousness and changed attitudes about past female representation and writers of her time period. She demonstrates that androgynous characteristics are key in keeping society in balance and to fight against force and injustices and advocate for future equal rights. As the Omaha World Herald book reviewer astutely judged Sandoz, “[The book] stamps Mari Sandoz not as a biographer of her father alone, not as one-book writer, but as one with something definite to say and the power to say it with force and clarity and sweep” (“Among the New Books: Slogum House”).
Sandoz looked beyond just working to address inaccuracies in women’s depictions. Sandoz was not limited in her discussion to women’s rights; her experience on the Plains conferred her unique perspective in viewing the working man’s and woman’s struggle on the Plains. Her work discusses the tragedy that can befall a frontiersman in *The Tom-Walker* and *Old Jules*. She discusses the unjustness of capitalism against laborers and farmers in *Capital City*. *The Cattlemen* demonstrates ranchers’ limits in protecting and cultivating their herd. These texts portray working people in a sympathetic way. For example, Sandoz describes the farmers’ plights as, “chaos that will always be inconceivable to all those who do not realize how long our farmer has staggered along under the heavy load of tariff discrimination” (Sandoz “Letter to M.A. Le Hand”). Sandoz wanted to help these workers by writing the story of these hardworking men and women who often weren’t heard, despite their numbers. Despite this positive goal, she problematically incurred the wrath of those who disagreed with her politics of supporting community interests over individual interests and rooting for the underdog. She took care to represent these parties accurately as she understood the responsibility speaking for others involved. This responsibility was self-driven, but nevertheless high stakes for Sandoz. She understood the importance of representing her characters as close to real-life as possible. Her sister, Caroline, noted, “She simply could not abide the ‘happy ever after’ formula … because she did not feel that life was like that, and to write in such a manner would be misleading to the readers” (Pifer, *Gordon* 39). Thus, she
was involved in careful research in order to ensure that the primary sources supported her critical assertions and speculations about the government or other bodies. That is to say that her argument, whether right or wrong, was at least supported by research.

The public and academic scholars have marginalized her literature regarding the working individual. Yet it is here Sandoz is at her best, with her vitriolic criticism and astute understandings of political and government bureaucracies. She was an uneducated, rural woman, facts which make her work all the more remarkable and significant for its intellectual perspective and successful estimation of society.

Sandoz’s *Capital City* and *Slogum House*, alongside her letters and personal correspondence to laborers and farmer’s rights groups, evidence her desire for advocacy. In these texts, government ineffectiveness and contaminated traditional and religious media creates tension for those that desire more for their society. Sandoz’s works explain how different social structures, ethnicities, and job positions create spaces where people can function within the confines of a corrupt environment polluted by greed. Sandoz exposed injustice, publishing her books amidst others that asked similar questions about society and government at that time. She hoped for better working conditions for society, equal treatment and pay, as well as a better relationship between laborers and employers as well as amongst the laborers themselves.

Considering Sandoz’s viewpoint on justice and legality through the lens of Jacques Derrida is significant in this chapter, particularly “Force of Law: ‘The Mystical Foundation of Authority,’” which clearly demonstrates the slippage that exists between what determines law and justice. He studies the negotiation between law and justice. As Derrida concludes, there is “equivocal slippage between law (droit) and justice” (4). Law and justice work
inextricably with one another, thus their shifting definitions and meaning affect one another. Justice determines the regulation of law and also determines the law itself. Further, law is managed by force, which enforces law, thus laws help regulate what is deemed as just is enacted in a formal court system. Thus, force, laws, and justice are all shifting in play with one another. As is clear in the subsequent section that compares what Sandoz is doing in *Slogum House* to Derrida, justice is deconstructive and law is constructive. In the moment that we begin to analyze what is fair, what is legal, what is operable, we begin to break down what it means to be just. However, in setting up laws, we (society) set up a construction of what we think to be fair or “just” law. Despite these intents, no doubt, law can only be enforced in a moment. The future laws depend upon the law to be upheld, but in order to see if the law is upheld, through deconstructing if justice has been met, we are breaking down the very law we set up to uphold. This circle can be problematic, however, it is the only way in which to ensure that laws move forward with times and evolve to suit the society. This will be explained more clearly after a more thorough examination of the basic layout of the novel. In *Slogum House* and *Capital City*, injustice and abuse of law produce new interpretations of what becomes acceptable by law.

**Fascism on the Plains in *Capital City* -- “A Microcosmic Study of the Macrososm that is our Modern World” – Mari Sandoz**

Proletarian novels of the 1930s explore issues that the individual finds in negotiating the corrupt community or state. These novels attempt to uncover injustices while simultaneously inspiring readers. Mari Sandoz’s 1939 *Capital City* depicts Franklin, Kanewa, a corrupt allegorical city. The novel captures the ways in which the individual, as part of a larger social unit, fights for power in the community and for equal rights against a
corrupt state. Franklin’s capitalist structure deters the proletarian force that attempts to implement cooperatives, fair farmers’ initiatives, and labor unions. The corrupt, seedy Franklin government lays exposed through the process of the proletarian fight for these changes for equality. Within Franklin’s corrupt structure, several collectives and individuals utilize varied tactics to strive for change to challenge the government. Men and women of varied class positions and employment work together in order to achieve equality and fairness for the working class and impoverished. The diverse ways they approach the corruption problem are unsuccessful, but the novel explicates how individuals with a common ideology can function within a community or social unit to achieve social change. Ultimately, although the battle waged against Franklin is unsuccessful, the novel challenges the corrupt Midwestern politics subsequent to the Great Depression. Further, Sandoz’s choice to have reformers lose shows readers that battles are long fought, even when they are able to rebel. This justice remains a hard won battle fought over and over again.

Sandoz observed the ways the individual could operate within the fascist-like government she believed was forming in the heartland. This group was anti-community, pro-individual, and promoted totalitarian government reminiscent of other fascists from Sandoz’s generation, Mussolini and Hitler. As Stephen Greenwell affirms in his critical assessment of Sandoz’s two allegorical novels, *Slogum House* and *Capital City*: “[…] Sandoz deals with subjects of great and enduring concern to her – the will-to-power individual and the threat of fascism to modern society. It is significant that they were conceived and written during a period of acute economic crisis in the United States and political and economic instability abroad” (Greenwell 134). Even more significant than when Sandoz’s works were written is what the effects and intended effects were. Many novelists endeavored to explain and detail
the social wrongs they witnessed and experienced: “As in the earlier Socialist fiction, a number of ‘motifs’ or themes appear in so many of these novels that they soon become predictable from book to book” (Rideout 199). As Rideout argues, “Then into this world comes knowledge of the revolution. With knowledge comes power, the power whereby the prisoners of starvation may arise and bring a better world to birth” (207). These novelists attempt to bring knowledge to the forefront to better society. This similarity in content results from the political climate of the 1930s, which evidences much tension in America, particularly the Midwest.

In her research for the Capital City manuscript, Sandoz noted the similarities in news disseminated across the Midwest: “In preparation Mari subscribed to newspapers from ten capital cities between the Mississippi and the Rockies, from Bismarck to Oklahoma City” (Stauffer, Mari 125). In examining the newspapers, “The similarity of both thought and content in these papers amazed her. In fact she claimed that if she not labeled the clippings she would have been unable to tell them apart” (Greenwell 141). This is not to say that rural members of the nation were crazy or unintelligent. They simply were ill-informed and did not know better. In Sandoz’s estimation, the rural heartland’s media, most of which was locally owned, did not offer varying viewpoints for its readership (Nebraska, “Nebraska”). The idea that no one outside the enclave of rural America knew of the political climate and that these common sentiments existed in the heartland prompted her to write this novel: “She believed that in the future more attention would be paid to man as part of a social unit, the community” (Greenwell 140). With additional knowledge, Sandoz saw area residents becoming more empowered to make decisions about how to rectify societal wrongs. Capital
City shines through its careful examination of the social and individual units that interact to challenge the prominent ruling class.

What are the results of these social units and what do they attempt to achieve? While these communities of individuals were often accused of communism, they were not promoting ideology, but rather, trying to effect change for community betterment. As Jean-Luc Nancy writes discussing the inoperative community:

“communism” stands as an emblem of the desire to discover or rediscover a place of community at once beyond social divisions and beyond subordination to technopolitical dominion, and thereby beyond such wasting away of liberty, of speech, or of simple happiness as comes about whenever these become subjugated to the exclusive order of privatization. (1)

For Nancy, community can be a negative. Nancy believes that “the community that becomes a single thing … necessarily loses the in of being in-common” (Preface, xxxix). Yet, he also notes that there can be a “cult built around an individual” which leads to “tyranny” (3). Nancy traces the idea of the individual as the “dissolution of community” (3). It is clear why he sees the community as a problem. The community lost the identity that joined it together and dissolved into a tyrant and dysfunctional individual. Where this applies to Sandoz is that we see her examining the community that rises back up after that first community failure. How does it work and function? Can it achieve its goals and aims or is it destined to repeat the cycle of failed community before it? Sandoz does not conjecture here. We see her setting up the explanation of how this new community forms (from the failed community and individual tyrants before it) and the problems it faces.

In Franklin, we see this communism begin to take shape. This term, although usually affiliated with a negative connotation, is referenced positively here. As opposed to the
ideology the term is affiliated with, Sandoz references communism as a sort of community empowerment. Thus, although those that are working together against the fascists are not communists, they are working together solely to create a community. Nancy asks questions about community versus communism and here, too, the elite seems to struggle to understand what the proletariat was doing (8). He states:

> these same voices that were unable to communicate what, perhaps without knowing it, they were saying, were exploited—and covered up again—by clamorous declarations brandishing the flag of the ‘cultural revolutions’ and by all kinds of “communist writing” or “proletarian inscriptions.” The professionals of society saw them … nothing more than a bourgeois Parisian (or Berliner) form of Proletkult, or else merely the unconscious return of a “republic of artists.” (8)

The individuals’ attempts at forming stronger community bonds are misinterpreted as communistic ideas, although they are simply trying to work together. This is reminiscent of John Goodwyn Barmby’s communitarian ideals, which was applied to utopian socialists. As Nancy explains in his examination of the inoperative community: “the goal of achieving a community of beings [is] absolute immanence of man to man--a humanity, -- and of community to community -- a communism (2). The groups in Capital City struggle to work together but, as Nancy also explains, “these same voices that were unable to communicate what, perhaps without knowing it, they were saying, were exploited” (8). They work and strive for a change from the corrupt status quo, but are unable to posit any new real solutions or achieve any tangible goals because of corrupt officials and a lack of clear mission and identity (except as workers). They are able to successfully critique the problematic aspects of their society, but do not put forth any type of solution. As Sandoz notes in a letter discussing the individuals in her text: “Abigail and the artists are not 2 people but represent 2 aspects of the arts lost in a decaying society – one type makes the compromises necessary in order to
get physical escape, the other withdrawing into her own little world of history and the
business of mother confessor so she need not face the world going to pot around her” (qtd. in
Stauffer, *Mari* 182). The individual, then, is limited in what they are able to accomplish
successfully.

Isolated from larger cities and ideas, Midwestern Americans read from scarce news
sources, and those sources they obtained contained ill-informed news articles regarding
fascist forces. Although the first radio broadcast came to Nebraska in October, 1921, this was
a luxury not everyone could afford (Nebraska State Historical Society, “Nebraska
Trailblazer” 8). Thus, local newspapers provided a bountiful amount of news, “The growth of
the newspaper industry paralleled the development of the state. [...] By 1920, 623
daily newspaper were being published in the state” (Nebraska State Historical Society,
“Publishing”). Sandoz saw how these newspapers began to craft narratives that were
monolithic and unchallenged. Sandoz maintained that one of the capital cities she based her
text on, Lincoln, Nebraska, was a “parasite” (qtd. in Stauffer, *Mari* 126). She explains this
derogative term further in her text: “parasites were natural born fascist[s]” (Sandoz 257). The
fascist viewpoint was consistently depicted in newspapers and its prominence helped
promote this sentiment across rural America as the limited viewpoints and exposure served to
isolate this area.

Sandoz uses Franklin, Kanewa, to comment upon the workings of government and
classism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, and most notably, Sandoz’s residence while writing
the novel, Lincoln, Nebraska. Franklin’s capitol, as Lincoln’s does, features a prominent
figure atop the capitol building and the street layouts in Franklin mirror Lincoln’s municipal
layout. Lincoln is not the only city represented by Franklin, as Sandoz claimed this was a
composite city illustrating not only Lincoln’s ills, but also those of the entire Midwest. Her publisher, Atlantic Press, was concerned about the possibility of libel, and their lawyers mailed Sandoz a letter addressing their concerns. Sandoz replied to her publisher in a letter:

“Kanewa and Franklin are wholly creatures of my mind. They are broadly general to the trans-Mississippi region” (qtd. in Stauffer, *Sandoz* 161). Sandoz’s novel provided timely commentary after the Great Depression on Nebraska and other Midwestern states represented by her composite city.

While the novel is arguably Sandoz’s most political, it received little critical acclaim because of the blunt way it depicts the sullied government, which materialized out of the Great Plains during the Great Depression, and the extremism that emerged as a possible alternative. Reviewer Arthur Rhodes affirms in a 1939 review, “The white fires of bitterness flare through … [Capital City]. They create a pungent glow …. And they illuminate the shams of the prairie country as few novels have since Sinclair Lewis’ ‘It Can’t Happen Here.’ …But her plot is not alone boiling fitfully at times” (Rhodes). The few contemporary critics that have commented on this aspect of Sandoz’s work concur, as Phillip Castille notes:

In *Capital City*, Sandoz’s goal is to alert readers in the Northeast to this rightward shift in the heartland. In letters to her New York publisher in 1939, Sandoz described the widespread admiration for Hitler among her fellow Nebraskans and warned, “You people in the East are probably not aware of the real danger of a growing fascist set-up in the middlewest.” (133)

This concept is notable in the canon of proletarian literature, as Marcus Klein asserts:

“Proletarian literature was a literary rebellion within a literary revolution, to which it was loyal. It had as its aim refreshment of that revolution by way of bringing it to a knowledge of current realities” (Klein 137). Sandoz’s novel belongs with the proletarian classification as...
she, too, wished her work to inform and edify, as Sandoz writes in a letter to friend Vida Belk: “Some day Capital City may be recognized for what I meant it—a microcosmic study of the macrocosm that is our modern world” (qtd. in Stauffer, *Letters* 182). Her novel’s appeal lies in its applicability across the nation and even the world. In another letter, Sandoz noted its themes extending in relevance to other cities, especially after World War II, and Sandoz claimed she received many calls and letters stating, “Yes, we have Capital City all over the world” (qtd. in Stauffer, *Mari* 182). Her work touched a sensitive nerve.

Sandoz negotiated the tension and relation between the individual and the community through the intersection of the city itself as the primary protagonist/antagonist character. As Sandoz scholar Helen Stauffer asserts, “She wanted to experiment with an approach in which the main character was the city itself; the people were not to be individuals, but rather units in society” (Stauffer, *Mari* 129). The city plays a prominent role as a character, especially through its government and classist control structure. In considering the effects of the individuals and units in this society, it is imperative to first examine the ways in which Franklin functions and what operational units function within it.

Franklin’s corruption runs deep, and the extent of this corruption peaks during the ten week buildup to the November 1938 election, the period detailed in the novel. In fact, its corruption originates in its inception as a capital city. In claiming the capital city crown through “wrangling the capitol from Grandapolis,” unscrupulousness grows exponentially with each new politician and militia (Sandoz, *Capital* 144). Fascist sentiments proliferate, and government officials accept bribes, threaten challengers, and, in some cases, torture and kill to achieve their goals. Sandoz’s plot in *Capital City* is one that could be compared with many other proletarian writers at this time period like Mike Gold, Sinclair Lewis, or John
Steinbeck. Gordon Milne argues that the looming prospect of fascism incited many 1930s writers: “Fascism abroad and the possibility of dictatorship at home aroused […] writer[s]” (Milne 128). Sandoz, too, expresses concern for the possibility of fascism on the plains and her work stands out for its application of region to fascism. In Franklin, the current governor retires, the lieutenant governor is indicted for crimes, and now only corrupt politicos step into the governor and senatorial races. The Republican candidate, Johnson Ryon, has a son involved with the Gold Shirts, a pro-Nazi group that Sandoz utilizes to represent the Silver Shirts Legion, a group based upon Hitler’s Brown Shirts which “sought to ‘save’ America by turning it into a Christian state” (Castille 135). The independent candidate, Charley Stettbetor, runs on a Christian platform and speaks throughout to “thunder against the immorality of the students and ‘the devilish plans of the International Jew bankers and Jew Reds, aided and abetted by the Scarlet Woman of the campus!’” (Sandoz, *Capital* 314, 152). There is no legitimate, uncorrupt candidate until farm-labor candidate Carl Halzer steps forward. The electorate’s options are limited as most of the candidates are either incompetent or corrupt, and tensions escalate over the growing labor movement, farmers’ lack of support, and inequality between the working, destitute, and elite classes.

The primary characters of import include Dr. Abigail Allerton, a history professor at the university, and Hamm Rufe, a social outcast living in seclusion despite his wealth and former elite status. Sandoz utilizes these two characters to battle individual fights against the corrupt state. Alongside these individuals are the farmers’ association and labor strikers. The farmers’ association, with member and senatorial candidate Carl Halzer, and the labor strikers, led by striker Lew Lewis, also attempt to combat Franklin’s elite and corrupt ruling class in power that eliminate any morality left in the capital city. These two individuals and
two social units attempt to right injustices and find a sense of camaraderie with others hurt by the system.

The Franklin government is wrought with over-expense and frivolity. Yet, most of the public is not aware of this corruption. Some are not able to conceive of the corruption; others are simply not willing to see it. These two types of ignorance involve different levels of agency, however, for Sandoz, and is not clear that this matters. Ultimately, she would expect her audience to move beyond limitations in order to understand the truth of the situation. On the one hand, the newspapers, public presentations, and lectures articulate skewed stories that obscure government activities. Similar to *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, the 1939 Frank Capra film with a theme of graft in a rural state, when the newspapers are corrupted, it is difficult to get information to the people. This newspaper corruption is illustrated in *Capital City* when Purdy Wilson, a Vigilant Taxpayers organization representative, visits Hamm. During the visit, he spies on Hamm’s house at Herb’s Addition, a small hooverville shantytown in Franklin, and spins a story suggesting Hamm’s belongings were extravagant. He captures a photo of a backless *Godey’s* and notes Hamm’s small radio during his visit to Hamm’s shack and skews the story he sells to the *World*, claiming that all residents in Herb’s Addition were relaxing in luxury on the taxpayers’ dimes: “But the next day the *World* carried a front-page story of government waste: single men living in luxury on relief, with fine radios, collecting art works and rare books” (Sandoz, *Capital* 193). Hamm’s small shack is not extravagant and he has few personal belongings in it. The article disseminated to the *World’s* readership, primarily the elite, receive the story that the poor are living well. In reality, however, they are struggling to get by. As a consequence, it is difficult for the public to see truth and to reconcile the news they hear with the reality of the situation. This is just
one example of many that illustrates how the newspaper reports skewed the public’s perception.

At the same time that this government corruption occurs, religious zealots develop as a right-wing splinter faction in support of the current government’s methodologies and utilize a Christian platform to advance the government’s fascist leanings. Christian movements, under the guise of improving social conditions, function to limit discussion conducive to solutions and silence those that veer from traditional discussion and viewpoints. One particular demonstration of this occurs after Abigail writes an exposé novel decrying the government’s back-alley politics. Once the novel had been released, the Christian movement leapt the opportunity to discredit Abigail. Other churches followed suit, which provided an astonishingly effective methodology by which to spread misinformation to the rural, primarily Christian, masses:

When the church notices came in Friday there was scarcely a one that failed to list a Sunday sermon against Abigail – one opportunity for contemporary comment that would enrage no organized group. Several of the sermons were listed by the book’s name; one was on “Realism versus Godliness in Current Books,” and one on “The Viper in Our Bosom.” (Sandoz, Capital 150)

The Christian right movement harasses other activists in the community in different ways. The Christian Challenger, the right wing Christian newspaper in Franklin, begins to pick out other activists as potential “Reds” in Franklin. Sandoz predicts the second Red Scare tactics that would occur in 1945-1950 and echoed the first Red Scare movement in 1919-1920 (Woods 20; Murray). In addition to these strategies, the Christian movement further continues to harass Hamm and others that speak to labor rights activists. They claim the activism that Hamm is involved in is a fight against God: “under the door of his shack
appeared the first issue of the *Christian Challenger*… but it was Jews and Reds this time who were the antichrists instead of the Catholics, and among them Hamm found his name and Carl Halzer’s” (Sandoz, *Capital* 123). This splinter faction attempts to utilize religious scare tactics to bring the elite under their umbrella of ideology in order to fight against the uprising of the working masses.

The result of government ineffectiveness and contaminated traditional and religious media creates tension for those that desire community change. Different social structures, ethnicities, and job positions create spaces in which to function within the confines of the corrupt city. In *Capital City*, we see Sandoz placing herself in a position complicit with her characters’ activism. In Franklin, the intellectual and the writer are able to successfully expose the ills of this corrupt society when they work together as a social unit. After their writings gain prominence, a fire is set destroying one of their homes. It is this fire that begins to shock some of the elite into a realization that there is corruption destroying Franklin internally: “By the evening after the fires there was considerable anger in the local papers. … Somebody important seemed to be pushing a demand for a real investigation” (Sandoz, *Capital* 305). Sandoz, too, attempts to expose injustice by publishing her book amidst others that asked similar questions about society and government at that time. Sandoz utilizes two writers and intellectuals to fight for workers’ equality and government accountability. These two characters fight both as individuals and as a part of a larger units and communities. Their individual fights stem from their ostracized position directly created by their ideologies. This is a concept explored by Jean-Luc Nancy in his examination of the inoperative community, when he states, “But the individual is merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community” (3). Their lack of community creates their individual endeavors for justice. In
creating these individual agendas though, they both ultimately regain a sense of community, although this is a different type of community that has transgressed the boundaries of the former community. They are working for justice for a larger cohort that may not know they exist. Even though the two work in the shadows, they are a part of bettering society. Their choice to engage gains them entry into this community or society, unknowing it needs support and guidance. Here, they solidify their leadership roles.

Knowledge and power are pivotal in effecting social change and guidance. Both Abigail and Hamm utilize their writing abilities to demonstrate the ills that have befallen the community. Sandoz herself “spoke of two of her characters as representing not two people, but two aspects of the artists in decaying society” (qtd. in Stauffer, Mari 129). Sandoz uses Abigail and Hamm allows her to project her authorial intent. It is important to examine the characters that utilize art to effect change and to see the ways they are able to reveal unjust treatment of their fellow residents. Class, gender, and race all play into the effectiveness of those attempting to effect a change in societal consciousness. As Ezra Pound said in 1922: “One ought to say it is the job of a great art to keep government in its place” (qtd. in Aaron 115). Pound also indicated that this art should not “[tout] one form of government in opposition to some other” and Sandoz’s characters do not posit any solutions either (qtd. in Aaron 115). Sandoz’s character approach allows her two characters to fight her own fight in the novel. They are responsible for righting injustices, but, at the same time, hesitate to offer any solution or elevate one government over another. Why does Sandoz stop at this? Her hesitancy to develop a solution might be that she is critical of those with agendas. By not pushing an agenda here, she allows the problem to be the star of the work as opposed to her solution. Her purpose is education, thus, she wants merely to show that there is a problem
and to have society come to terms with this idea first and for them to work together to
develop a solution. Moreover, Sandoz mostly considered herself a historian and a historian
would not attempt to place an artificial construct on history to rectify the solution, rather, she
was interested in presenting facts through her filter of fiction. Thus, her interest is not in
solving these problems, merely presenting them for viewing. The significance of stopping
short shows extreme humility on Sandoz’s part; she shows her diffident Midwestern roots
through this action. She realized that she might not have the most clear and effective
solution, thus she presented the problem so that her community of readers could establish an
approach. She points out the problem so that others can work together to troubleshoot a
possible solution. This again brings to mind the idea of a communitarian working together to
achieve greater societal peace and achievement. The problem remains that society won’t
understand her concept. Further, she could be viewed as hypocritical. Since the writing of
history involves narrative choices, Sandoz also could and did make choices later scholars
disagree with. She seems abundantly overconfident that her choices are best; this attribute
could help a writer. Yet, it could also blind her to aspects of the narrative that she missed or
misinterpreted.

Sandoz sets up the novel so that the evolving government and some of the potential
electorate and candidates advocate fascist ideas; they attempt to quell any form working class
equality. Yet, these two intellectuals, Hamm and Abigail, and others attempt to create
equality and are instrumental in promoting workers’ strikes across the state and in forming
and encouraging cooperatives that combat the emerging fascist, reactionary government. As
Joseph Blotner asserts, “The fascists’ failure in America sprang from several causes.
Although they had friends in Congress, industry, and finance […]” (Modern 238). He quotes
Nathaniel Weyl’s *Battle against Disloyalty*, “Their crude, garbled, and savage philosophy had little charm for the intellectuals” (qtd. in Blotner, *Modern* 238). Franklin’s intellectuals, too, attempt to defeat the fascists as they see through their dishonest ways.

While there are several distinct functioning units that pursue this operative community, two intellectual characters are characterized in more concrete and distinct terms in the text. Sandoz distinctly outlines Abigail and Hamm, perhaps since Sandoz shared their attitudes or felt camaraderie with them and their fight. Franklin’s Allerton writes the exposé history novel *Anteroom for Kingmakers*, delving into the dark world of government corruption and graft in Franklin. After the book’s release, she receives plentiful inflammatory comments from the public. The university forces Abigail to resign her teaching position, and she is relegated to seclusion in order to escape the hecklers’ abuses. Hamm seeks out Abigail in order to combine forces, and they begin a friendship that brings their issues of interest to light. It is notable that Abigail releases her work into a public environment that believed, “Women shouldn’t be allowed to drink, they told each other, or to see such things as the parade today. They ought to be protected, for they were never really civilized, always hankering for the brute male no matter what their cultural background, training, or intellect” (Sandoz, *Capital* 58). As a consequence of this common positioning of women and her attitude toward the government, her work was immediately rejected as a wasted women’s tome. Yet, she finds supporters in the community that want her to speak and some of those in communities outside of the corrupt Franklin city reveled in its honesty. At the end of the book, Abigail receives a telegram from Goldwyn confirming their purchase of her book (Sandoz, *Capital* 327).
In considering how Abigail functions in Franklin as a member of the larger female intellectual community, it is important to consider other women’s roles. A minor female character, Stephani, also emphasizes the importance of the fight of the individual. Joseph Blotner examines the roles of women in study of the political novel and determines, “As we have seen, women consistently appear as guides for the male protagonists. They act as spiritual and cultural mentors, attempting to infuse idealism into these creatures of coarser clay than their own, giving them books to read, exposing them to new ideas, and trying ‘to turn their thoughts to higher things’” (Blotner, *Modern* 172). Stephani, who is actually Hamm’s separated wife, operates in this function as a helpmeet to both Carl Halzer, the farm-labor candidate known as the Bellowing Bull of Bashan, who is involved with the labor strikes. Yet, Stephani operates beyond Blotner’s roles set forth for women. She contends with political movements across the country, fighting for laborers’ equality and farmer’s rights, even though her enthusiastic activism ultimately destroys her marriage to Hamm, which ended before the events of this race in 1938. Thus, she does capture what Blotner asserts is the “helpmeet” or “Woman as Guide,” but in a more assertive role than Blotner characterizes women in the political novel at this time (Blotner, *Modern* 173). Sandoz creates a character that is beyond what the historian captured, showing a different type of representation of the modern woman at this time. The way Sandoz pushed boundaries here shows her challenging stereotypical notions of the Midwestern 1930s woman.

Women function in a great degree to bring to light the political corruption that fights against the proletarian workforce. Hamm’s character strives to help the workforce, and his actions and attitude provide a perspective of great interest. He is a representative of numerous social units simultaneously: as Hamm Rufe he is a social outcast and as Rufer
Hammond he embodies upper class elite, as heir to a Franklin newspaper fortune. Rufer had been involved with the labor movement and received a blow to the face during one violent protest march that rendered him almost unrecognizable. After recovering from the disfiguring wound, he returns to his hometown, assumes the name Hamm Rufe, an alternate identity, and abandons his roots and his family name: “Hamm Rufe who lived out at Bums’ Roost and wrote dirty articles about the employers for the labor papers and the Nation” (Sandoz, Capital 190). He moves to the Herb’s Addition shantytown and lives minimally and unrecognizably while working in a cooperative store owned by Samuel Tyndale, a local businessman. His ability to blend in with other outcasts creates a community he can operate out of to share his writings about working class abuses. He abandons his privileged position, or runs the risk of alienating those he hoped to enlighten or have taken him seriously in order to inspire change. As he wrote items as Hamm, commenting on the societal situation, he realized he couldn’t even take himself seriously. As Rufer Hammond, he recognized, “more and more his inability to identify himself actively with his fellow man, to be anything but an outside observer” (Sandoz, Capital 119). Thus, he chose to adopt his second name and relocated to Herb’s Addition, representative of the shantytowns that emerged in 1907-1908 where “children [were] slipping into tuberculosis” and “grown men and women grey-skinned and listless from chronic malnutrition” (Sandoz, Capital 195). Sandoz uses this example to talk about what was happening at these places while at the same time pointing out the stereotypical notions associated with them, such as “People are like that because they want to be” (Sandoz, Capital 195). In creating situation that Hamm has to deal with, she forces her readers to confront their own stereotypes.
Although he assumes the role of a social outcast, his work thrives from his outcast position. He submits articles to the Nation and sends scoops about labor movements and activism to the Grandapolis newspapers, despite being a major shareholder in the corrupt Franklin World newspaper: “So he kept on writing about the workingman, the growing unemployment that brought wage cuts, strikes, organized strikebreaking, and violence” (Sandoz, Capital 118). His position as a social outcast allows him more freedom than the other elite depicted in this novel, in that he operates outside of their social world and constructed rules.

To illustrate the world of the leftist elite, one needs only to examine the world of Hamm’s mother, Hallie Rufer Hammond. Although she pleads for the rights of the impoverished and working classes, she is unable to publicly make such statements. She praises Abigail’s book quietly and not publicly, just in a personal letter that strives to “apologize or the stupidity of her townsmen and say how sorry she was that her father, George Rufer, could not have lived to see the fine job Miss Allerton had made of the old Frontier House story” (Sandoz, Capital 152). She also helps the residents of Herb’s Addition after the Gold Shirts burn the entire shantytown down, but does not claim any credit for doing so. Only Hamm knows that she had done so, as he was aware that the donated ground for the rebuilding site had previously belonged to his grandfather (Sandoz, Capital 313). Thus, his mother ultimately shows some compassion toward the impoverished working classes and the fight against corruption, but she is constrained by her class position and gender and unable to publicly admit her position or risk her status as an elite woman in the community.
Hamm shows pride in those that challenge the common misperceptions the Franklinites hold. After Abigail’s book release, “Hamm Rufe was pleased with the book, amazed to see so much that he vaguely knew brought to such reality by an outsider. Abigail had made a sound protagonist of the hotel and its three main employees” (Sandoz, Capital 146). Hamm fights for his city, founded by his grandfather in a more moral time, and wishes for its best. Looking in from the outside of the elite class, Hamm’s position provides depth of understanding to the inner workings of that circle. As Greenwell argues, “he is able to give the reader the advantage of seeing the town through the eyes of one who knows the people but is no longer part of them” (Greenwell 142). It is Hamm’s informed position that the reader trusts in dissecting the inner workings of this corrupt community. Hamm’s experience in transgressing the classist boundaries in his thought process allows him to create emboldened articles that reach the audience he seeks to motivate the most. His inside information also helps to serve his argument, as he can provide firsthand accounts of what he witnesses in elite circles. Blotner asserts that there is a differentiation between individual and group behavior in the political novel: “It is hard to draw the line between individual and group political behavior. A man may be a mirror or conductor of political forces as well as a discrete individual. His motivation is perhaps the most individual aspect of his political experience” (Blotner, Political 79). Here, we see Hamm operating primarily outside of the group but working to motivate that group. His position allows him a unique perspective and ability and one that boosts the labor movement to action. He hunts for stories, searches for evidence, and writes stories about what he observes (Sandoz 35, 38, 190). He is, as Blotner would term, both the “mirror” and “conductor of political forces” (Blotner, Political 79). He reflects society through his position living at Herb’s Addition and conducts by writing
articles and motivating others. Hamm is inextricably tied to the labor movement as he fought for their rights throughout his life and continues to so do after adopting his new identity. His roots in fighting for the labor unions derive from his Grandfather, the original owner of the World and one of Franklin’s founding fathers. Hamm fights for the labor unions, and his actions, combined with the labor movement members, show how individuals band together to form a more successful social unit. He conducts and pushes the community in a direction for social change.

The individuals’ fight is relatively ineffective unless joined with a community, which Sandoz demonstrates in her communities of individuals that operate as a unified unit for social change. Sandoz wants independent thinkers to join together and work for a united cause so that it has a chance of success. While Sandoz sets out two individual characters as primary protagonists along with the city itself, other activists in this work function distinctly as units. The labor movement is represented heavily throughout the text and, we see the ways individuals work as a unit to effect change with this group. Initially, the labor unions are restricted by the anti-picketing provision and are hesitant to fight for fair working hours and rights. On Labor Day, Lew Lewis decides to initiate a strike parade where banners proclaim: “ANTI-PICKETING LAW IS POISON TO LABOR MILLIONS FOR THUGS, NOTHING FOR TRUCKERS, SAY BOSSES KANEWA: BLACK SPOT IN TWELVE STATE REGION PAY LABORER SO HE CAN BUY FROM FARMER” (Sandoz, Capital 35). The government is not receptive to this uprising, and police are called in to handle the striking workers. During the ensuing mayhem, police shoot Lew and maliciously club and strike the other workers. This scene demonstrates the ineffectiveness of the strikers and how social class and position limit them. They have a different conception of what justice is from the
state and city. The strikers feel their rights have been disregarded; yet, at the same time they are advocating for fair rights and justice, they are breaking the city’s rules and expectations of justice by convening en masse to riot. They struggle to establish themselves as honest, hardworking individuals; despite newspaper accounts and reports to the contrary. Lew announces: “‘We’re no hoodlums and rowdies making trouble. We’re good American citizens, only asking what’s our right’” (Sandoz, Capital 254). They attempt to call out to public sympathy by asking only for equality and justice.

Throughout the text, the strikers attempt to alter their strategy. Their new approach is to advocate from a safety perspective. In a later strike, the placards proclaim, “Your LIFE is in the hands of one doctor and in the hands of every TRUCKER on the highways. Help him keep it SAFE by giving him a decent WAGE for decent HOURS” (Sandoz, Capital 130). The strikers, through working in concert, do end up demonstrating that they are an important body to consider: “‘There’s no sense in fighting labor,’ Bill Colder, for fifty years a bridge builder in Kanewa, often told the rest. ‘When you once get your eyes open so you can see your nose before your face you’ll know that a well-paid workingman is your best guarantee of a steady customer. His money is the circulating kind’” (Sandoz, Capital 256). Despite these small, auspicious gains for their rights, the striking truckers never do see equality in the text, and the novel ends with their ultimate defeat and Hamm’s tragic death in the arms of his mother.

The proletarian workforce is clearly disempowered in this text, and they achieve little success in their quest for equality. They consistently fight for equality, but achieve little gains. As Lew says at the second parade, “Hold it, fellows, hold that line,” they never achieve fair working hours and wages (Sandoz, Capital 341). They fight for equality and
their plight seems reasonable, as workers have died due to long working hours and unfair wages. Several truckers fall asleep at the wheel, and one is involved in a devastating accident that kills four: “The trucker was accused of sleeping at the wheel and he admitted that he must have, but he had been driving sixteen hours steady and two-thirty in the morning was a damn treacherous time for a tired man” (Sandoz, Capital 129). Yet, the strikers witness no change to their wages or hours, and the fascists end up overpowering the strikers yet again in a violent victory that yields Hamm’s tragic and violent death. Even though the truckers are fighting for something reasonable, the fascists turn the focus away from the symptom and more toward the final result. The fascists seem unwilling to see what is causing the situation and stay unilaterally focused in on their goal. This is a problem that Sandoz wishes to tease out. After the tragic accident where the trucker killed four, people were outraged. Of course, people were outraged by the death, but also outraged that the trucker felt he needed to work those hours. The trucker explained that he felt he had to work those hours to keep his job, even though it was against the law: “Not no law that’ll feed my wife and kids when the boss says go and I don’t go” (Sandoz, Capital 129). Results are caused from actions, not just spontaneously generated. She wanted to show how the problem of denying accountability ultimately caused a family to die in vain, workers to continue to be employed in slave labor like positions, and Hamm’s death. The fascists marched toward their goal, leaving the trucker’s family without a father while he spent time in prison for manslaughter (Sandoz, Capital 129) and while Hamm’s mother “wiped the blood from [Hamm’s] crushed temple…everything across the avenue seemed much the same as always” (Sandoz, Capital 343). With no one held accountable, the fascists continued taking over.
Sandoz continues to push her readers to think about the cause and effect of actions. Farmers work hand in hand with labor workers to strive for better equality. In contrast to labor workers, the farmers work individually to fight for the injustices against them. Even in working individually for their fight, to advance their own farm, they serve to advocate for all farmers with the laws they attempt to pass. In a way, then, their work independently serves to add to the community fight. Some farmers do not feel as though they are able to make changes, and do join an official unit of farmers. The united faction of the Farmers’ Association can begin to move toward equality. Cash Overtill, Hamm’s favorite neighbor in the addition, was a former farmer: “Although he was a good farmer, he was permanently blacklisted because he marched on the capitol back in 1933 with the rest and could not get any free land or any company owned land” (Sandoz, Capital 115). Although Cash realizes the injustices done to him, he realizes he has no effect on the elite class and their decisions in government. Other farmers attempt to silently fight their unjust treatment. Most of them do not have the will to fight against the injustice as they realize their battle will be fruitless.

Some farmers attempt various quiet rebellions. Chuck Overtill, a farmer challenged by a group cooperative, did not revolt, but simply walked off his farm and left his share. This action occurred after Gilson, the farm representative for the Kanewa Investment Company, told Overtill that they were shutting down its 2500 farms unless the farmers voted for keeping Dunn Powers⁴, a former governor, out of government since the investors needed to be protected. Overtill did not want to farm for corrupt people: “I moved off and left my share there. They always get the cream anyhow. By damn, says I, let Gilson, the old tripe-gut, bust his own back getting the corn out” (Sandoz, Capital 296). In this way, the farmer realizes his commodity is important, as is his skill, but the only way to achieve any type of recourse is to
simply stop doing the work. There seems to be nothing that the farmer can do to right the injustices done to him. For context, Sandoz witnessed American farmers who saw the need to organize with farmers’ organizations and achieved a modicum of success in the early 1900s; however, the devastation of the Dust Bowl and poor crop value in the early 30s called for more intervention than the farm bureau or government provided.

Carl Halzer, another local farmer, remains the exception to these cases, and stands up for farmers’ rights on his own. Carl’s family struggled throughout their life to maintain on the farm: “They were right, for the east never let the land pay us enough for a decent birth and dying, and a decent living, too” (Sandoz, Capital 164). When a new Kanewa senatorial leadership position opens, Carl steps up as the farmer’s representative; this only occurred after prodding from Victor Heeley, one local farm group leader. Carl realizes that the corrupted “moneyed interest” voters would vote against him, but Heeley argues:

[these voters are] the same ones that are always against the laboring man. And against every damn dirt-scratching farmer too. That’s why we don’t think you could do much in the statehouse, with our reactionary legislature selling themselves out without even knowing it. Washington is the place for you. And I believe it should be in the senate – get that son of a bitch of a Bullard out. (Sandoz, Capital 74-5)

Carl, “looked into the sunburnt faces of discriminatory rates and legislation capped by ten years of depression, drouth, hot winds, and grasshoppers. […] ‘I’ll try it—’ he said” (Sandoz 75). Finally, a farmer steps up to address the unfairness and ill treatment against the dictatorial forces controlling his community. He sees himself as a voice represented of the Kanewa people authentically. Carl finds empowerment through language and community. He attempts to right the injustices the farmers are experiencing and is willing to step into a leadership position in order to begin to activate the community.
Carl’s ability to stimulate change or win the election is an implausibility. Some of the farmers are even against him, as even though he runs on a platform that advocates for a federal farm program, his farm colleagues are unpersuaded that the “Bellowing Bull of Bashan” will be effective at the federal level (Sandoz, *Capital* 36). The farmers are upset that previous initiatives had yielded them no greater opportunities or assistance in years of trouble: “They had been burned once by listening to a Washington outfit, Hoover’s Farm Board. Millions of dollars had been handed out, but did the farmers ever see a red cent of it? No, by God. ‘If you want to help a tree grow you got to get the water to the roots’” they proclaimed (Sandoz, *Capital* 164). In addition to the brewing agitation resultant from previous initiatives, Carl’s struggle is complicated by the association he hopes to advocate for at the federal government level. Stephani, Carl, and Hamm suspect that both the Farmers’ Association and the *Midwest Farmer* are backed by the Associate Manufacturers of America (Sandoz, *Capital* 313). The *Midwest Farmer* “was violently anti-administration, anti-labor, and anti-Semitic, too” (Sandoz, *Capital* 257. Thus, even though Carl has the farmers’ best interests in mind, not only will his associations hinder his path to winning the election, but his previous initiatives foment discontent amongst the group he hopes to represent (even though his goals and plans are innovative and have the farmers’ best interests in mind).

It is hard to challenge the status quo, especially an ingrained status quo. This is a similar problem in Sandoz’s reality. The Farm Association often attempted to make the best choice for the farmers, but were so far removed from the farms that their decisions were somewhat laughable, where they created “discriminatory rate and legislation” (Sandoz, *Capital* 75). Farmers still accuse the government of this discrimination today, claiming, for example: 1) government programs paying farmers not to produce a crop at a loss, rather than
to grow alternative crops or increase production 2) farmers currently pay high real estate taxes on irrigated ground, but the government now allows authorities to take the right to irrigate away or, 3) there are several programs that are offered for land conservation, but are quite lengthy in application process. Thus, Sandoz picked up upon a significant, consistent problem in government regulation. Even today it reigns as a problem in farmers’ eyes, but not as much so in other officials’ and non-farmers’ perspectives. Sandoz took issue with this because she saw the farmers and laborers as integral societal components fighting for survival. She wrote to the editorial office at *The Forum* and *Century*: “How can he tell what to plant, spring or fall, when there’s no telling what the government may do to interfere with prices. I was raised on an experiment station, in a community where the better farmer asked only a fair shake in the world market” (Sandoz, “Letter to Gentlemen at *The Forum* and *Century*”). Sandoz wanted a fair fight for these farmers, not just a payoff or an easy way out. She continued, “Even today our bankrupt farmers don’t want bonuses and crutches. They want the right to battle the elements and the earth with some promise that all this post-war helping of agriculture will cease so they can pull themselves out of a decade of poverty and pauperism” (Sandoz, “Letter to Gentlemen at *The Forum* and *Century*”). Thus, Sandoz was fighting for equality, not just a stop-gap method at delaying failure. Sandoz wants more than relief for those in this industry. She wants them to have fair laws established politically so that they can engage fairly. As the system was set up, it only served to force farmers into a downward spiral of debt and more debt with little or no way out. Simply giving handouts was only a stopgap measure, according to Sandoz. The government feels that it is helping through its involvement, but this over-involvement, Sandoz argues, prevents the system from autocorrecting. As she notes above, giving them the “right to battle” will be the only way to
“pull themselves out … of poverty and pauperism” (Sandoz, “Letter to Gentlemen at The Forum and Century”). She champions the idea of government’s involvement in setting up laws in order to provide equality, not price fixes which alter the market so that corn could be worth cents on the bushel one week and dollars the next.

Although Sandoz is quite clear in her positioning regarding agriculture, other aspects of society are more ambiguous. In her later works, she takes on racial and ethnic inequalities with fervor, but this work is not as pointed in that regard. Sandoz’s work provides little reference as to how race and ethnicity integrates into the politics of Franklin. The references to race and ethnicity only indicate the disempowerment these individuals maintained in this city governed by Gold Shirts and active klansmen. Sandoz’s only mention of ethnicity demonstrates the little power those categorized as “other” have. The city’s two “refugee” children are adopted by a doctor and local academic. José is a young boy from Spain taken in by Dr. Russ Snell, and Professor Walfords adopts Isaac from Germany (Sandoz, Capital 125). After the two boys are adopted, the local newspaper claims these two and others promoting the adoption of these immigrants are: “‘Flooding the country with undesirable aliens and taking the bread out of the mouths of white men!’ they said, and ‘Bringing in Reds and Jews to cut the throats of our sons and rape our daughters!’” (Sandoz, Capital 126). The treatment of these two orphan boys evidence how diminished a role any person singled out as ethnically different must have had in this homogenous community. The elite community acts as if immigration will threaten their positions. Their mistreatment of these “outsiders” attempt to keep them disempowered. In addition to these references to those ethnically different, a particular poignant reference to race is made when fourteen-year-old Sadie Cooper falls from a hotel window after drinking inside of the Buffalo Hotel. No one made
any movement to help the young woman, except for one person: “For a moment everybody stood away from her, only the doorman thinking to help the girl inside; then, remembering his color, he dropped his dark hands from her arm and stood helpless too” (Sandoz, Capital 205). The man’s response to this situation illustrates how any person of any other race already knew they had no power amidst those in the ruling party. The doorman realized that his position in society as well as his race did not afford him the opportunity to provide interpretation on the situation; in fact, he was not to have an opinion at all on the matter as it was just the way things were. Further, in the eyes of the white majority, his lack of voice was the right way. The doorman was one individual against a mass, thus demonstrating the limiting effect of the power of the individual.

The idea of race is most directly addressed by artist, Lou Rickert, in Capital City. When his art show opens, the World newspaper denounces his Bereaved Madonna painting “But calling a Negro woman, with Glen Doover’s Franklin Creamery plainly recognizable in the background, a Madonna, that was sacrilege” (Sandoz, Capital 216). The World also takes issue with the painting of two homeless children in front of the Capitol Vista. “But they are there, you know,” Rickert claims, and his work movingly depicts how homeless, impoverished children, and those of color are denigrated in the community (Sandoz, Capital 217). The concept of this artist attempting to challenge the traditional notions of Christianity are discussed by Milne: “Do they succeed in delivering their message- artistically or otherwise- and in causing people to act upon this message” (Milne 183). Milne disagrees, quoting Charles I. Glicksburg, “Readers have been awakened but not pushed into action” (Milne 184). This idea could be applied not only to Rickert’s painting, but also Sandoz’s work as well. The artist in Franklin attempts to depict real life in order to develop alternative
view, yet the public viewers shut his viewpoint down. Similarly, Sandoz is chastised for this work by her community, despite its basis in fact.

Ultimately, the questions that Sandoz asks in this novel were largely ignored by critics of her time. Her apartment was ransacked and she was driven from the community as a result of this work, which many of her Lincoln, Nebraska, community members took as inflammatory: “Driven by conviction, she also believed a door was closing on the possibility of real democracy” (Kocks 91). Her work succeeds in considering both the individual and collective in considering social protest. She instigates an idea of communitarian development in order to make change. In a way, this is an application of a fantasy-theme, wherein Sandoz is promoting the idea of an alternative reality or possible utopia by pointing out the flaws inherent within her current reality. While her work succeeds in pointing out the blatant corruption and demonstrates clear methods for attempting to right injustices, her work does not succeed in pushing people into action, as she’d hoped. Yet, perhaps Sandoz could and did find value in the awareness that she spread, which is ultimately the precipitating force to action. In her later texts, she is not as forward with her political views as she is in *Capital City* and *Slogum House*. Perhaps her stepping back from political views in later texts results from her lack of quantifiable success with these early political novels.

**Barely Legal: Call Girls and Cattle Thieves-- Slogum House as a Warning Tale in Understanding Law and Justice**

At the same time Sandoz advocates for action of an alternative future reality, she comments on the current state of law and justice as well. Law and justice are not homologous, especially as evidenced on the frontier plains of Nebraska in the 1800s during the period of western settlement. Sandoz tackles this slippage between law and justice in her
1937 novel *Slogum House*. Although reflecting back to an earlier era, the topic was timely, as it allows her to utilize her text as a lens to reflect concerns and questions she had about contemporary law and justice in the 1930s. She carefully negotiates and unpacks the difference between law and justice on the plains in the nineteenth century as a way to reflect upon the notion of how power works in an individual. The Slogum ranch house serves as a cautionary closed system, demonstrating the effect of corrupt law. Further, her work explains how justice can possibly be achieved within a corrupt system.

Sandoz is interested in the philosophy of justice in her earliest proletarian literature, and *Slogum House* evidences these tensions. Her concerns lie with evil, greed, sins, and, according to Sandoz scholar Helen Winter Stauffer, individual “megalomania” (Stauffer, *Mari Sandoz* 112). *Slogum House* introduces the indefatigable Regula “Gulla” Slogum and her family of outlaw children. Gulla Haber married Ruedy Slogum and uses him to fulfill her ambitions of power and wealth in the West. They homestead on the Nebraska frontier plains, where she raises seven children, serves as matriarch of the household, and attempts to exploit her children in order to expand her wealth. This dysfunctional household is held together by Gulla at the center. Two sons, Hab and Cash, violently ride through the West, laying claim to land, stealing cattle, and abusing men and women on their mother’s behalf. Butch, Gulla’s troublesome brother, also plays a prominent role as a Slogum hoodlum. Annette and Cellie staff the family brothel on the upper levels of Slogum House, while sharp-tongued Libby, clearly Ruedy’s favorite, runs the kitchen as a maid-servant. Only Ward and Fanny avoid serving as their mother’s employee. Sickly Ward spends most of his time in his bedroom ill; he recovers there after his brother’s beatings and while enduring lovesickness. Fanny was
sent away as a youngster to boarding school, but even this did not allow her to escape the
destruction that accompanies the Slogums.

Sandoz’s motives are important to consider in evaluating *Slogum House*. Sandoz’s
despotic Gulla is a cautionary character who shows the effect of a unilateral focus and
totalitarian power. As the text shows, Gulla’s one-dimensional thinking gives little
consideration of the effect upon her family and other Dumur County residents. Her daughters
are employed in prostitution without any thoughts of the consequences, which ultimately
includes exposure to venereal diseases and multiple forced abortions (Sandoz, *Slogum* 228,
66). Her sons do not escape unscathed either, with one deathly ill, the other dying in a
reckless automobile crash, and the other corrupted beyond repair. Gulla demonstrates how
untempered greed leads to self-annihilation. On a larger scale, this is reflective of Sandoz’s
contemporary situation. With the tumult in Europe and Germany at the time, she analogously
reflected how unchecked power could lead to devastation of grand magnitude with long
lasting and far reaching effects.

Sandoz’s authorial choices are not well received or understood; *Slogum House* was
banned by the mayors of Omaha, Lincoln, and McCook, Nebraska, with the McCook Public
Library putting it on “rotten row” (*Omaha World Herald*; Mattern 230). Considering that a
foremost goal for most writers is salability, why would Sandoz advance such a controversial
text? She knew her conservative audience was bound to resist, as evidenced in a *New York
Times* book review: “The writing is racy enough to make your Aunt Prudence jump. It’s the
talk of the cow county, and it wears chaps. At intervals you may have the feeling that it was
written on sandpaper with a piece of barbed wire. Yet it rings true” (Poore 15). While

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critical, this article succinctly arrives at a reason for Sandoz’s intent—she writes because it is true. It reflects the people of Nebraska, both the good and the bad, without omitting the details of corruption, uncouthness, and barbarity. Sandoz distinctly has an agenda by so vividly portraying this type of character here. Considering Sandoz’s work as a whole, Sandoz wrote this and most all her fictional texts with a mind not for salability but for change and representation of truth. As Sandoz noted, “Suggested originals for Gulla herself have reached fifteen entries, seven from Nebraska, the rest from Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, Wyoming and South Dakota” (Sandoz, “Letter to Anne Ford”). She had witnessed gross injustices transpire on the Plains and saw her pen as a tool by which to fight and combat corrupt societal ideals and to represent a slice of the Plains which heretofore had not been explored. Sandoz’s fiction strove to change and improve society. She made her work relevant and applicable to her readership. She idealizes how effective this strategy would ultimate work in action.

It is important to consider Sandoz within the larger historical context in order to better understand how her texts diverged from other Plains writers. In her work, she points out critical issues of her time and strives to do so by depicting a realistic and factual representation of America. As other modernist writers were attempting to do, she sought to spotlight aspects of American culture in order to try to change it. As critic L.H. Stimmel argues in a 1942 review of the state of contemporary literature, “it is hard to deny [the modern American fiction writer] the distinction of introducing into his stories more ugliness, in quantity, and probably in degree, than has any predecessor” (454). Sandoz, too, introduces a depth of ugliness in her early works. She recreates representations to provide commentary
on the state of society in a vivid manner that sparked uproar and controversy. Sandoz is attempting, in a nuanced and subtle way, to ask her readers to reconsider ways they might amend or consider their thinking about law injustices and power structures, while at the same time inciting them to action. However, it is up to the reader to take any next steps: to continue reading, to correct a neighbor’s errant interpretation of social justice, or become more educated about the situation. With a careful commentary and pointed character development, the reader is forced into a position as both evaluator and evaluated. Thus, the reader feels at the same time judged and judgmental. These seeming contradictions in terms force the reader to reconcile with hypocritical notions of ideology and force them to perform an act of contrition and blame as they are reading – if they care enough to do so.

Readers were able to see Sandoz’s 1930’s world reflected in the work, where her characters were concerned with the Depression, the last Great War, the Dust Bowl, the looming threat of World War II, the plunging economy, and Hitler’s rise to power. Sandoz uses Gulla as a counterpoint to the worries of the Nazi regime. Just as the Nazis sought totalitarian power, control, and more land with no worry for consequences, so did Gulla. She has an unfettered desire for land acquisition and she acquires this land through power, which leads to her acquisition of more and more land. Gulla seeks more because of greed, a desire for power and autonomy, and the possibility of running an autocracy. Sandoz work allows her to effectively comment on these issues in a manner similar to how later activist writers such as Upton Sinclair or even Oscar Zeta Acosta do. In a 1938 review of *Slogum House*, Sandoz is compared to Sinclair Lewis and Upton Sinclair. The reviewer argues:

Undoubtedly, “Slogum House” has been one of the most potent favors in social and individual self-analysis that American literature has produced […]. In so doing, [Sandoz] is showing not only a rare literary ability, but what is more signal, a spirit
which, while not new in American literature, has seldom been so vigorously presented. [...] It is the spirit of frank and honorable national self-analysis. In all seriousness we think it is good for the soul of America. (“Feminine” 21)

Similar to Sinclair’s or Lewis’s works, Sandoz points out the possible threats and issues facing the country; she hopes that her work can effect some type of enlightenment for her readership.

Sandoz was proud of her book: “Just now I’m still in the dog house here [in Nebraska], […] But I’m old Jules’ daughter in that I could walk through streets running ankle deep in disapproval and not give a good western damn. I’ve always […] been most indecently sure of it” (Sandoz, “Letter to Paul Hoffman”). Thus, Sandoz was confident in the direction her work had taken and was conscious that it did have implications beyond that of mere fiction. Although, as Charles Poore concluded in his 1937 review, “there’ll never be a statue to her in Nebraska,” Sandoz did not care about the negative feedback some commentators gave (15). Her work was representative of something larger at stake, and she was willing to fight for and defend the text.

Sandoz particularly focuses on the concepts of law and justice on the frontier in this text to highlight and consider America’s system of law and justice in the 1930s. At the same time, she critiques the history of injustices on the plains during the nineteenth century. During this period, frontier justice and “trials were simply an amusement and diversion,” according to David J. Langum in his analysis of Plains justice (423). Sandoz critiques this history of injustice and further shows how law and justice are permutable terms that depend greatly on the source of the originating power: those in control of the wielding force of power and those who the law is enacted against. Some aspects of the West were a consequence of
the unformed nature of the area which attracted so many. Of course, the promise of free land, forming a new identity, and freedom from some previously constricting social norms is attractive. At the same time, however, these aspects also allow for unchecked balances of power, greed, corruption, and duplicity.

This is a notion echoed by Jacques Derrida in “Force of Law: ‘The Mystical Foundation of Authority,’” which clearly demonstrates the slippage that exists between what determines law and justice. He innovatively examines the fine negotiation between the effects of law and how justice is determined. As Derrida concludes, there is “equivocal slippage between law (droit) and justice” (4). On the one hand, law and force are enacted and mutually co-exist, but that does not mean they align with what is just. Similarly, justice is not always served through law. At the same time, ideally, law and justice work inextricably with one another, but not always hand in hand, thus their shifting definitions and meaning affect one another. The new law that is created emerges out of one that has been destroyed: “The fact that law is deconstructible is not bad news. We may even see this as a stroke of luck for politics, for all historical progress” (Derrida 14). Out of the deconstructed law comes a new law. As Derrida argues, “Deconstruction is justice” (15). Deconstruction/justice determines the regulation of law and also determines the law itself. The law, as Derrida argues, is constructed or “constructible” (15). However, this is not always the case. Extralegal justice emerges when the system fails and a party feels outside justice or extreme force must be implemented in the present. Ideally, laws help regulate what justice is enacted in a formal court system, but if the courts or those in positions of power are corrupt, an unstable law and justice system emerges. This occurs on top of the already tenuous position that justice holds
in the present tense, as justice is something that occurs in the future and it is impossible to know in the present what is just. A judge follows rule of law so it can “in its proper moment if there is one, be both regulated and without regulation: it must conserve the law and also destroy or suspend it enough to have to reinvent it in the reaffirmation and the new and free confirmation of its principle” (Derrida 23). Or, in Vladimir Đokić’s estimation, “it follows that there is never a moment that we can say in the present that decision is just” (453).

Ideally, judges and lawmakers observe the past in order to make present tense judgments that will be reflected as just in the future. Even in an ideal world, this does not always occur. The law is continually regulated by new rulings, decisions, and occurrences.

It isn’t the fact that justice and law are movable that is problematic for Derrida, Sandoz, or others; it is the idea that the justice changes based upon who is making the decisions. These decision-making positions can be obtained through unjust methods and abused. That is a problem that Sandoz wants to explore. In Slogum House, injustice and abuse of law produce new interpretations of what becomes acceptable by law; ultimately, the individual ends up deciding what is just or not. This individual action ends up costing the larger community a great deal. When the system falters, it is important to realize that still the system must be corrected in order for stability to emerge. Sandoz is clearly reflecting on the importance of community again here.

Law and justice are clearly not interchangeable; despite this, a societal ideal exists that attempts to calibrate law and justice. This norming ideal establishes the definition of laws and justice which are not enforced by a specific body, but by the societal norming force. In Slogum House, the community in Dumar County begins to attempt to regulate the out of
control Slogums. Examining this situation through an ideological lens allows readers to further consider the larger societal implications of Sandoz’s work. Derrida addresses uncontrollable characters, such as the Slogums or the rioters in *Capital City*:

> Violence is not exterior to the order of *droit*. It threatens it from within. Violence does no consist essentially in exerting its power or a brutal force to obtain this or that result but in threatening or destroying an order of given right and precisely, in this case, the order of state law that was to accord this right to violence, or example the right to strike. How can we interpret this contradiction? Is it only *de facto* and exterior to law? Or is it rather immanent in the law of law (*au droit du droit*). (34)

This is applicable to *Capital City* in that the rioters challenge the state within the system that the state has set up. That system itself has force, in that the system requires law to maintain enforcement. Within that system, there allows a space in which to protest force, where force versus force works against one another to negotiate what the social rules and rule of law should be. The rioters are able to protest only because their right to speak is guaranteed through that system. Our Slogums, too, attempt to transgress, but do so within the parameters that the community allows. Yet, Derrida argues if someone transgresses, enforcers distribute punishment (34) but does the enforcer necessarily have to be an outside body? As Derrida notes, “Violence is not exterior to the order of *droit*. It threatens it from within” (34), thus, the enforcer could be from within as well. Here, since law is corrupt, society (from within) must fill that role if Gulla goes unchecked. It is only through this sort of “accountability violence” that a new law would come to fruition. Derrida argues, this revolutionary violence “inaugurates a new law, it always does so in violence” (35). Without a formal system of law that is able to enforce rules, society must step in as a shaming force. However, the fallibility of this system emerges when the person being shamed or guilted feels no shame or guilt.
A paradox occurs when one affirms a system that has inherent flaws such as this. How does one reconcile opposite determinants of law and which justice is implemented? These counter determinants feature chains of imbalance and partiality in the configuration of what is justice. This chain of complexity causes the law to vary. Further, different transgressors cause variants. If Gulla or her boys commit a crime, no punishment is warranted. However, when Blackie Daw or others unprotected from the law transgress, the law steps in to force them to face a certain justice. This justice again can vary, as enforcement of the law and when it is enforced depends on the enforcer, their presence, and other mitigating factors. The creator of the law creates the effect or rule of law. As Derrida asserts, “[the law] depends only on who is before it […] on who produces it, founds it, authorizes it” (36). Thus, the law is very dependent—on who interprets the law, who observes the breaking of the law, who enforces the law, and those enforcing the law’s value systems. How can a sense of justice ever be assured? This problem is clearly represented through the corrupt judges, bribable jury, flaunting sheriff, and forgetful court witnesses. Evidently, there is much slippage between law and justice. It is almost as if a transgressor is predetermined to meet a fate based upon the law, the writing of that law, and who authorizes it. Is the act itself the breaking of the rule? Or, is the rule that names the transgression create the act of the transgression?

Even further, what someone else views as just (even if it is outside the parameters of the legal system) creates the zero sum game of a lawless system. In a lawless system, no one can trust that justice will be fair or implemented equally. Still central to this debate is how law can ever be constant or fair and contain such variances. Further, what is just and fair, who decides this, and how are those in society to follow the law and implement justice?
Essentially, there is no enforceability of the law on the plains when corrupt power figures emerge and this lack of enforcement, according to Derrida, renders “no law without enforceability, and no applicability or enforceability of the law without force” (6). Here, Derrida confirms the previous paragraph’s question, there is no breaking of the rules if there is no one to enforce the rules and there is no enforceability possible without force. The law attempts to exist on these plains for some; yet the random applicability to certain people based upon who they are serves to undermine and weaken the already broken system further. The law also serves as a way by which people can claim force over others. If it is publicly accepted law, then force can be enacted to implement it if the participants in the community choose. Further, when some attempt to seek their own desires, they enact force to break the law.

There is context for the significance of “doing the right thing” in Nebraska. Historically, Midwesterners have been affiliated with a stereotype of trusting and ethical, to the point of comedic sadness when taken advantage by others. It is fodder for Hollywood, playwrights, and authors. The Little House on the Prairie series, Sarah, Plain and Tall, The Oregon Trail computer game, and countless other tales promote the idea of pioneers helping others; yet, that helpful countenance often belies sinister ulterior motives. Sandoz attempts to expose these idiosyncratic ideas in much the same that contemporary director Alexander Payne does in his film Nebraska 76 years later (Payne).

Thus, Sandoz’s concerns align with Derrida’s in that she is trying to consider the notion of law and justice and the roles society has in filling and carrying out roles associated with laws and justice. She attempts to understand how individuals create and are produced by a legal system while she amplifies an alternative reality of life on the plains. Rather than a
utopic and idyllic representation, she demonstrates the Plains as rough and corrupt. Gulla, as an individual, and her collective of Slogums maintain different values and standards than the society around them. They have no determinate future, although it is planned, yet the collective around her follows Gulla into a sad state of despotic failure. Sandoz questions how the individual and community work independently and collectively. She depicts a woman dependent to some degree on her immediate community. Yet, she strives as an individual to wield power over that direct community and the surrounding communities. Gulla utilizes something comparable to the Jamesonian idea of the program. She attempts to rearrange the currently existing space in order to create a new space for herself within the territory (Jameson 4). Ultimately, she realizes her goal of “changing it all to a Slogum county” when the county is renamed Slogum County and the county seat renamed Slogum City “in Gulla’s honor” (Sandoz, Slogum 171; 261). She shows how a corrupt individual can ruin an entire enclosed and established community. In a way, then, Gulla reenvisions a closed utopian system for herself (although ultimately dystopian when viewed from an omniscient perspective) on the plains in her closed system on the ranch. This system is free of legal constraints and mores; it maintains itself through Gulla’s control, which upholds only greed and power.

Gulla is the female head of household, mother and caretaker, yet she assumes a leadership role as the primary head of household. This mustachioed, rotund, and engorged woman shows how Sandoz manipulates traditional female representations (Sandoz, Slogum 36, 280). Sandoz sets up comparisons between this plains frontierswoman and men who have similar attitudes toward power by presenting Gulla in this masculine way. At this time, ambitious men that would have been most at the forefront of Sandoz’s readers’ minds
emerged from the fascist movement. Thus, some of Gulla’s traits and ambitions are reminiscent of Hitler and Mussolini. Similar to these two dictators, Gulla, too, seeks to take over land and elevates herself above the established law. She finds ways to overtake the entire county through careful manipulation of land ownership and through bribes and collusion. Sandoz purposefully recognized this significance for her contemporary audience, and, as Stauffer argues; her reading of Mein Kampf “influenced her most…. She had watched him [Hitler] gain power in the early 1930s, and now he was rearming Germany while Italy’s Mussolini was invading Ethiopia unopposed by the civilized world. She thought all too many Americans were attracted to the fascist ideas of those two demagogues, and she feared that Hitler would one day invade the United States” (Stauffer, Mari Sandoz 112). As Sandoz states, “[Slogum House is] a study of a will-to-power individual and all the techniques employed, as they have been since Hitler, in reducing the opposition” (Stauffer, Letters 208). Sandoz includes this character, ever so similar to Hitler, in order to show threats to America. In later evidence, it is clear how she shows the way in which a Hitler-like character could rise to power and be dangerous for the United States.

Sandoz’s characterization of Gulla’s masculinity is not the only important component of Gulla’s character. Her familial role, also, spawns comparisons with dictators and power figures. For example, Gulla is the primary head of the Slogum household, controlling all money and the recording of accounts (Sandoz, Slogum 333). She even places Ruedy in a “kept man” position, forcing him to put most of the money he makes into her account (Sandoz, Slogum 49). Gulla capitalizes on her location and situation. Her position on the plains allows her to acquire more land and power, yet she is never happy with her current acquisitions or position. Gulla does not know when to stop, whether it be with land
acquisition or eating; she barely fits her “billowing flesh into her old corset,” engorged by greed (Sandoz, *Slogum* 283). Gulla’s greed causes her to lose her family’s respect and the stronghold she has over county residents. Gulla evidences herself as a dictator, manipulating all and wielding power until she has become fattened by her greed, physically and metaphorical. She becomes non-functioning; not only is she unable to maintain control of her underlings on the farm, but also society begins to rise up to hold her accountable for her actions.

Gulla is an independent autocrat and does not rely on any outsider for work on the farm. This could be due, in part, to the struggle that women on the Plains endured. As Glenda Riley asserts in her detailed examination of women’s response to the plains environment, women endured great challenges from three primary areas, “the native inhabitants of the Plains territories, numerous aspects of the natural environment, and political upheavals among Americans who often held differing views on such crucial issues as black slavery and economic policy” (Riley 175). While Gulla does not struggle with the first point Riley discusses, she indeed struggles against her physical environment and for her political views. As a result of this tumultuous environment, she strives for self-sufficiency, even going so far as to employ her twin daughters as prostitutes in the brothel on the second floor of Slogum House. Throughout the text, she serves as a mediator of power, manipulating control over the local sheriff, the townspeople, and her own family. When anyone steps out of line with her goals, she quickly moves in to assert her power. For example, when she feels her family was overstepping their roles, she notes, “Yes, it was time she corralled the Slogums once more” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 103). Her assertiveness is also demonstrated in her treatment of her husband as she consistently emasculates him. When some townspeople say that her husband
evolved to a Haber rather than she becoming a Slogum, she says incredulously, “Ruedy had become a Haber! ‘No dead-snake Slogum could ever be a Haber!’ she told them,” implying that Ruedy did not have the wherewithal to become one of her kind (Sandoz, *Slogum* 39). She is the center of power in her domain, literally sitting in the center of the table (Sandoz, *Slogum* 23).

When she begins to conceive of the idea of dominating the entire county, it is Slogum House that lies in the center of a map on her wall. She circles around it a bull’s-eye and identifies all the surrounding ranches she will soon buy or take over (Sandoz, *Slogum* 32). By the end of the text, “her wall [is] a thicket of red x’s denoting Slogum ownership” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 299). Gulla carefully plots her development and usurpation of Dumur County and makes a battle plan as to how to take over the frontier around Slogum House: “all the ranches that remained inside the semicircle of red on Gulla’s map were written in in pencil, and from a string nailed to the wall beside the map hung a large eraser” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 32). She “would not be defeated in her plan to file on as much of Oxbow Flat as possible” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 43). Gulla quickly and speedily bought up as much land as she could in a quick amount of time and:

By the time the Slogums were in the region two weeks, Gulla controlled four sections of land: a timber claim, pre-emption, and homestead apiece for the four of them, and a school section under lease from the state. They put up little shacks – cattleman backhouses, the settlers called them – on each of the homesteads except Gulla’s, the site of Slogum House. (Sandoz, *Slogum* 43-44)

Gulla craftily takes over her land, but does not seize it with mere force. She finds ways in which to exploit the legal system to acquire her dynasty.

Her idea involves conscripting her daughters and the “girls” from the brothel. Gulla is able to do this since, in 1862, Senator William Borah announced the opening of the frontier, 138
offering 160 acres to anyone who paid an entry fee and lived five years on the land (Patterson-Black 67). Later, the Kincaid Act of 1862 and Homestead Acts also enabled women the opportunity to obtain land (Patterson-Black 68). As Sheryl Patterson-Black notes:

Since land ownership equals economic power in our society, [the opening of the frontier for free land] had implications that have not until now been considered: that is, for the first time in American history, working-class women had the possibility of access to land ownership […]. The law did not restrict homestead entries to men. (67)

Data does support that numerous women filed homesteads. While no data specific to Nebraska has been cultivated, Blake Bell, historian at the Nebraska Homestead Monument, estimates that one quarter of homestead exemptions were filed by women (Knapp). What makes Gulla’s case so significant is that she was filling not for a family, but for her own small country of land. Moreover, she solicited others into helping. As a result of the Kincaid ruling, Gulla manipulates all of the girls in the house to register claims on her behalf, asking them to, “each file on a quarter-section homestead for the fourteen-dollar fee—eight hundred acres for seventy dollars before the spring run of settlers was on” (Sandoz, Slogum 177). Later, she had the girls file again (Sandoz, Slogum 183). This allowed the girls to file more claims than allowed. She then took over the lands the girls filed on, taking advantage of her position of power over these girls in order to actualize her dynasty. She further takes advantage of those reliant upon her for money and a way of life so that she can advance her own desires. In a way, Gulla confirms what Riley argues is a reason that most women endured on the Plains: “They hung on because they had hope for the future” (Riley 177).

While Riley discusses a more optimistic future, the concept is the same: progressive optimism for an alternative future. Both Riley and Gulla idealize the future as opposed to the now. Gulla envisions a clear future for herself, one that is grandiose and dependent on her
own subsistence. She needs no one else in her life to achieve her goals, chooses to exploit, and is not content with the current position, monetarily or power wise, she holds.

The way this future is created is through her manipulation of Plains law. The conception of law on the plains is complex. Theoretically, law exists to help society control those with uncurbed values. In examining law in *Slogum House*, law is expected to be upheld with state-granted power. Langum’s analysis of justice on the overland trails examines Plains official law, which he defines as, “formal, tribunal justice, which is taken to mean calm deliberation combined with real punishment in the case of finding guilt,” which is the definition of law applied here (424). The law, or those imbued with official state-granted power, in *Slogum House* is evidenced as corrupt. Tad Green, the county sheriff, is a frequent visitor to Slogum House to partake of Annette’s services on the second floor, and he lets certain Slogum illegalities pass in exchange for service at the brothel (Sandoz, *Slogum* 24). Although married, he is not ashamed in visiting the Slogum brothel when he wants: “Late Sunday afternoon Tad Green brought Annette back to Slogum House, openly, as though he didn’t have a wife at all, or a public office at Dumur” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 61). The Slogums use their friendly position with the sheriff to their advantage; they commit illegal acts without repercussion and Gulla uses Annette to get her to do what she wants (Sandoz, *Slogum* 31). Since the sheriff is on their side, he cannot control them.

Since the officer in power is corrupt, the Slogums begin to transgress the law further, especially since they continue to get away with it. At first, they commit slight crimes: “The trend to lawlessness was a gradual one, beginning with River Haber’s occasional night sack of chickens when the grub pile was extra slim” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 47). Later, they moved to stealing entire cattle operations, with cattle already branded, and were forced to hide the
cattle in the midst of other cattle that had been rebranded until they could butcher them and sell the meat (Sandoz, *Slogum* 47). The Slogums move from stealing chickens and cattle to cleverly stealing fence posts: “The usual Slogum fencing practice was to wait until some settler along the river had cut and ricked several loads of ash poles to dry. Posts, and wire too, are pretty much the same the country over and difficult to identify, or so the neighbors said” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 45). It is when the Slogums steal a group of horses that society forces the law to hold the rapidly uncontrollable Slogums accountable for their misdeeds. They are charged with theft and brought to trial where they are heckled by the crowd: “‘A rope and a cottonwood’s the medicine for hoss thieves!’ someone yelled. But most of the crowd were silent, knowing that any of them might have the bad luck to be a witness to Slogum doings” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 80). A problem with the prosecution’s case was that the Slogums had already figured out how to circumvent the official arm of the law yet again: “As expected, no one came forward to testify to the theft of three colts near Brule or their shooting in a blowout when the Slogums suspected they were being followed. Even the man who lost the stock said they might have wandered away or been stolen by the Indians from Dakota” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 80). The victim changes his story, realizing he did not want to perturb the powerful Slogum clan. The Sheriff even provided an alibi for Hab and Cash, claiming they had been out “riding the hills, probably out looking for strayed stock, like they said” (Sandoz, *Slogum* 80). Since the entire prosecution’s case essentially falls apart, the case is dismissed and the Slogum boys, Gulla, the twins, sheriff, and judge all go to for dinner across the street, indicating the Slogums’ enmeshed affiliation with those in legal power (Sandoz, *Slogum* 81). Before returning home from the trial, the Slogum sons are back at their thievery yet again, stealing two unbranded heifers on the way home (Sandoz, *Slogum* 81).
The Slogums’ lawlessness ultimately escalates to murder. When Tex Bullard goes missing after fighting with Butch, a witness accuses Butch of murder. The witness leads officials to the body which, although badly decomposed, is identified as Bullard. As the evidence seems insurmountable, even with the corrupt sheriff and justice system, Gulla and the boys taint evidence, another way of circumventing the legal system. When the doctors on the stand reinvestigate the body and look at the hair in the box where the corpse was found, they find evidence that appears to exonerate the boys: “The two doctors looked down into the box between them. Their faces changed; they examined the remains more closely, brought out tufts of curly hair, Negro hair. Unmistakable, the dead man was a Negro. ‘Was Bullard then colored?’” the lawyer asks (Sandoz, Slogum 168). Tex Bullard was a white man, so although a body is presented, court ends shortly thereafter, since the trial was for the death of Bullard. With no one except the witness claiming a murder and without Bullard’s body, the court sees no reason to continue the investigation. Some around the hotel wonder about the trial:

calling it a farce, a travesty of justice, conducted like a fall round-up run by tenderfeet and horse thieves. It might be worth the court’s time to investigate the site of the old hog ranch north of Fairhope where a Negro was said to have been buried some years ago, where earth had been turned fresh lately. Was the body still there, or had it been removed? And if so, by whom, and for what purpose? (Sandoz, Slogum 169)

Gulla, the boys, or one of their minions had tainted the evidence so that Cash and Hab could go free. Sandoz incorporates racial tensions into the novel; these tensions show the miscarriage of justice for an African American man. No one seeks to investigate what had happened to the deceased African American man because not only was equality and justice for African American men a struggle in the 1800s, but also certainly on Sandoz’s mind during the burgeoning Civil Rights movement. Here, yet again, justice is applied for some
and not all. Sandoz captures what Shawn Leigh Alexander describes as the “process and system that was being imposed by a reign of terror on black individuals and communities throughout the nation from virtually the end of the Civil War into the twentieth century” (72). Sandoz attempts to show injustice for black men on the Plains and shows this man being doubly assaulted. First, although Sandoz does not state how this replacement body had been murdered, since the body was a replacement body which was murdered, it is probable that the body died in a similar fashion to the victim or was desecrated to look as such (Sandoz, Slogum 169). Secondly, he is used as the evidence that exonerates Cash and Hab. Sandoz complicates the idea of justice for her readers, showing how race was a reason for this puppet court (comprised of the corrupt sheriff and lawyers) to avoid justice. Sandoz’s selection of this narrative strategy to exonerate Cash and Hab clearly brings to light issues of injustice for African Americans in both the late 1800s and during Sandoz’s time.

Ultimately, the law is corrupt and cannot control how justice is established. Since the law cannot be relied upon, how can anyone be held accountable? There is an imbalance of law and justice on the plains, and people begin to respond to this imbalance of justice. They know they are not being treated the same way the Slogums are. This spawns extralegal violence on the Plains, an issue Mark Ellis explores in his examination of legal culture on the plains: “Conventional wisdom holds that in the absence of a criminal justice system, law-abiding citizens in frontier regions oftentimes turned to vigilantism so that the guilty would not escape punishment” (Ellis 186). The Dumur County residents were infuriated by Butch’s release. After the courthouse miscarriage of justice, “That night, before [The Slogums] were asleep, the courthouse had burned to the ground and the next morning papers from the adjoining counties were already in the hotel lobby, smudgy, smelling of wet ink, heavy and
black” (Sandoz, Slogum 169). The Dumur County residents knew the Slogums were getting away with murder and burned the courthouse to signify both their anger of what the Slogums had done and how the courthouse failed to hold them accountable for their actions. Although this is reactionary justice, they are beginning to envision a restructuring of the legal system. Here, they begin to envision a future without the Slogums without corruption, fright, and terror. This marks a turning point in the text, as the community finally demonstrates some agency against the corrupt Slogums realizing:

perhaps the situation was not entirely hopeless. The burning of the courthouse the very evening after the Slogums were released might safely be interpreted as a gesture of defiance, a weather sign of a rising storm by law abiding citizens of Dumur County. Let the coming election bring a thorough cleaning out of the courthouse ring, beginning with the sheriff and the county attorney and not forgetting the district judge. (Sandoz, Slogum 169-170)

The residents did not seek mob style justice against the Slogums. They went straight to the source of the corruption. Residents are not naïve. They know they cannot masquerade that everyone who lives in the community treats everyone equally and gets along in an idyllic fashion. They do, however, hold expectations for their governing bodies. Those that maintain a power-based position which affects the masses must be held accountable to those masses. The residents cannot change the Slogums; fighting that type of corruption would be a losing battle. The residents conceptualize that they can have political agency through their election of their officials. In order to change the system of law and justice, they must be the ones to take initiative and make changes in order for fair and right justice to prevail. Although this does not come to fruition in the text, the residents begin to move for a reconceptualization of a new order, what Jameson or Ernst Bloch would term the “impulse” (Jameson 4). Jameson works from Thomas More’s and Bloch’s work with utopia and creates a binary graph which
categorizes utopia as either a “program” or “impulse” (Jameson 4). While the impulse is more common, the program is total closure and creates a nearly unbreakable utopian vision. The impulse has more fissures at which to engage in the development of restructuring, thus it is does not carry the permanence the programmatic utopia does. In considering Sandoz’s Slogums through this lens, the Slogums envision a Jamesonian “Utopian impulse” to develop their new world in accordance with their hopes and desires. It is a complete system and enclosed, in their estimation. The Slogum residents’ reconceptualization of a new order is more than just hopes and dreams, the new structure is a reconfiguration of the way the law and justice system, capitalism, social mores, and familial ties operate. Thus, Gulla and her family are thrust into this unique positioning that Jameson describes. Considering the Slogums in this way is useful. Although Sandoz does not reference Jameson, she exhibits a prime example of the impulse utopian building framework that he discusses in *Archaeologies of the Future*. Applying Jameson’s work to Sandoz allows readers to begin to conceptualize the depth of problems inherent within a closed system reconfigured with personal aims in mind. It also shows how a community may appear to be complete and total, yet, if it attempts to operate underneath the parameters of another system that does not condone it, it will see complete failure if fissures begin to erupt within the system. This parallels the European front at the same time; Hitler was creating a new program, the other side of the utopian binary, program versus impulse. The danger with his programmatic utopia is that it had no fissures at which to break though, thus it was a scarier proposition.

Other townspeople begin to see that they are complicit in allowing the Slogums’ lawlessness and respond against the Slogums similarly. Some unsuccessfully try to right their wrongs. When Cash and Hab steal Bill Masterson’s horses, Bill “followed the tracks of his
only colt in the soft road after a rain. He was met at the yard fence by Hab and Cash and an older man, one he didn’t know. All three carried revolvers in their holsters and stood around the settler in a dark semicircle. Masterson pounded his gaunt plough mare away as fast as she could lumber, without his colt” (Sandoz 45). Although he leaves without his animals, he at least attempts to challenge the Slogum three. Another instance of public reprimanding comes when Libby goes searching for her tom cat on a neighbor’s ground. Amos Ricker yells out, “‘Git, git, you! I’ll have no whores on my land’” (Sandoz, Slogum 91). She later finds the cat dead near the fence post she had attempted to cross, “the naked carcass nailed to the top of the gatepost, fresh and bloody” (Sandoz, Slogum 91). Although this is a strong response to trespassing, Ricker is fed up by the other Slogum injustices. Thus, those without power seek to implement some type of justice even though they have no authority to do so, again demonstrating reactionary mob-type violence against the Slogums.

Some in the community wield power and lead uprisings against the Slogums, yet, the community is unable to enforce law against the Slogums because they are either scared of the ramifications or maintain morals preventing them from seeking retribution. For example, when Hab poisons Ward’s dog with turpentine, he considers putting a nail in Hab’s horse, Duke’s, foot. But he made himself “sick” considering such a thought (Sandoz, Slogum 88). His own morals regulate the implementation of this type of retributinal or reactionary justice. Other settlers are frightened to say anything at all to the radical Slogums: “The settlers avoided Oxbow Flat when they could […]. At the post office and at Dumur, the county seat, they stood away from the Slogums, without whisperings or nudges, but with dark and silent faces” (Sandoz, Slogum 45). Often, the law, sheriff, judges, enforcers, and lawmakers are corrupt, only serving their own purposes and not providing for the community
as they ought. Because of this corruption, the people are forced into acts of defiance, acts of justice that are unsupported by the state. Derrida discusses this “violence against violence” as “a revolutionary situation” (34). On the one hand, although it is unbacked by the state, sovereignty, and ethics, violence is law that is enacted for the individual’s purposes. On the other hand, though, law that is not supported by government and more through public demand and necessity is more enforceable, as it is not constrained by ethics or societal mores. William Sokoloff discusses Derrida’s argument, articulating how a, “decision creates an interface between justice and legality in order to energize citizenship and make political action responsible” (341). Applied in this context, the public can make the choice for popular sovereign law, or to do what they think is just, rather than law backed by the state, prescriptive law determined by those that are imbued with authority.

An example of violence executed against violence occurs when Butch, Gulla’s brother, oversteps familial mores and societal mores unacceptably. Butch repeatedly tries to sexually assault his niece, Annette: “Butch had walked boldly to Annette’s room and put his shoulder against it until the iron bar creaked. He had his skinning knife out, was ready to dig at the soft wood when Gulla came into the hall” (Sandoz, Slogum 104). Butch, enraged, later seeks retribution after his attempts to violate Annette are continually circumvented. He takes his anger out on René, Annette’s boyfriend, who hoped to take her away from the brothel. Butch enlists the help of his nefarious nephews in his act: “Hab roped him and – Butch, he – Butch, he gelded Rene” (Sandoz, Slogum 130). At this point, Ruedy takes the law into his own hands. His daughter had been threatened with sexual assault and his friend castrated at
the hands of his brother-in-law. Ruedy kills Butch for his horrible deeds, but does so to rectify the wrongs that Butch has perpetrated and because Butch has evaded the law:

And so when Annette missed Butch, Ruedy shot him. Shot him in the back with the shotgun he had fetched. Then he hauled him away in the old slat car through the brush and buried him and his riding gear in the garden, deep in the cabbage patch. Because the bay colt Butch rode got loose he had to shoot it too, down in the cattails of lower Spring Branch. There he skinned the animal to make identification more difficult and afterward sent the hide away to be tanned for a rug for his fireplace. (Sandoz, Slogum 325-326)

When Ruedy confesses his seeking of justice to Libby, she responds to her father’s coldness and, “looked in wonder at the detachment of her father. There was no emotion at all. So he might tell of shooting a weasel that got into the chicken coop, but only a long time afterward, when the story was old” (Sandoz, Slogum 326). Since the Sheriff is not going to hold Butch accountable for his wrongs, Ruedy steps in, even though he does not have official legal authority. However, with no law or fair system of justice in place to reprimand Butch for his transgressions, Ruedy is cornered into his position of defending Annette in the only way he feels that he can.

Important to the consideration of law and justice is force, because it is force which guides both transgression of the law and enforcement of the law. The Slogums use force as a way to bypass law and justice. First, they use physical violence in order to avoid dealing with law and justice, similar to Derrida’s “originary violence” or “violence of inscription” (Hobson 31). The Slogums forcefully resort to killing, trickery, stealing, and even manipulating the justice system. They maintain force through the possession of land, money, and instigation of violence. Specifically, Cash planned to use violence in order to avoid a guilty trial verdict: “Yes, Cash admitted, there were witnesses, three of them, one a greenhorn from Omaha who could be scared out of the country” (Sandoz, Slogum 65). Cash
further indicates that he hoped his mother could control the jury if he had to be in charge of witnesses, “Unless you think you can control the jury,” Cash inquires of his mother (Sandoz, Slogum 65). Yet, Gulla knows she alone didn’t have even pull, “Not with the settlers against her and the ranchers too” and suggests, “Maybe Cellie can do something with her horse-racing, whiskey soaking judge” (Sandoz, Slogum 65). Thus, the Slogums slinked through and around the justice system by utilizing force and intimidation and often times physical violence to avoid legal penalty. At times they even bypass the system by creating their own system.

The Slogums also use trickery in a forceful way too, and admittedly so: “And Gulla, dug in between the invading homeseekers and the cowmen, was ready to profit from the coming struggle, would spread her holdings by every trick known to a Haber” (Sandoz, Slogum 64). The Slogums circumvented legality through legal loopholes and stole horses and rebranded them. As evidenced earlier, the Slogums also manipulated evidence, replacing the murder victim’s body with another. The Slogums also used various tricks of the cattle trade in order to steal horses and unbranded cattle.

The Slogums also used commodities as a proxy force. Their ability to do this is a notion confirmed in Linda Molm’s, Theron Quist’s, and Phillip Wiseley’s study of power and imbalanced structures. They argue: “The mutual dependence of actors on one another for valued resources provides the structural basis for their power over each other. Power is an attribute of a relation” (Molm 99). They continue:

When power is imbalanced, however, an actor’s resistance or retaliation must be a function not only of feelings of injustice, but of their structural capacity to resist or retaliate. Individuals in power-disadvantaged positions may comply with their partner’s power strategies, no matter how unfair they judge them to be, because it is too costly to do otherwise. (Molm 105)
For example, with the girls of the house reliant on Gulla for their paycheck, they know they had to file for land on her behalf or risk being tossed to the wild plains frontier. Gulla also knows she had the “commodity” of the girls on her side, thus enticing men of power to her brothel and then forcing them to abide her command since she maintained control of the girls as a physical commodity. The land Gulla owns also put her in a powerful position; renters and others know they need permission to cross her land, thus they act in accordance to her wishes. Further, she is a wealthy woman and many borrow from her: “Although the courthouse gang at Dumur smelled out Gulla’s purpose early, they couldn’t do much to stop her, not while owing her money, as several of them did” (Sandoz, Slogum 260). It seems few were outside the control of Gulla’s many tentacles of power.

Although Gulla always appeared cool and calm— in control of all those around her and herself—there are some cracks in the façade of her composure. Gulla cedes control to religion and tarot cards, which work as forceful entities in her life. She repeatedly seeks guidance from her deck of her cards and, when they indicate some hidden agenda for her, she acts because they “tell” her to do something. In a way, Gulla obtains authorization to circumvent the law because of this supernatural force— it has been written in the stars and so ordained by a higher power that she act in some ways. This force allows Gulla to enact force on others.

There is also a force of power against the Slogums, which is a force that advocates for the following the law. Guilt and shaming are a force that attempt to keep the Slogums in check. We see the uprising of the force against the Slogums begin to rise as the novel progresses. The neighbor’s and others’ treatment of Libby force her into action (Sandoz, Slogum 106). Similarly, when the Grossmutter, Ruedy’s mother, chastises him, he feels
obligated to stand up to his wife (Sandoz, Slogum 192). Ruedy and Libby begin to feel
complicit in Gulla’s actions and surreptitiously undermine her when they can. Guilt serves to
force them to action and to respect law.

Sandoz writes about her vision for a better America. To return to Stimmel, in his
review of contemporary literature in 1942: “This does not imply communistic revolution. It is
merely an armchair indictment of a society in which only a few - the harmless intellectuals-
are aware of the correctable ills of society and timidly asking that they be corrected”
(Stimmel 459). What Sandoz has done is to present what Stefan Skrimshire calls the anti-
utopian vision, “a suspicion toward the very root narratives of faith that define modernity’s
relationship with the future—how it is imagined and communicated” (232). Sandoz writes
something similar to the “Four Freedoms” discussed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1941
and in essays by Booth Tarkington, Will Durant, Stephen Vincent Benét, and Carlos Bulosan
published in 1942. This book is published in 1937, thus we see Sandoz ahead of her time
conceptually. The essays ask Americans to envision their ideal for America. Tarkington
writes a parable about the Freedom of Speech. In it, the painter says, “many people can be
talked into anything, even if it is terrible for themselves” (Tarkington). Gulla, too, is able to
convincingly sway others to her side with her powerful demeanor and actions. She shows
how some can take the notion of freedom of speech and alter it for ill purposes. Carlos
Bulosan’s exposition about “Freedom from Want” also is relevant to Sandoz’s vision. As
Bulosan expounds, “If you want to know what we are, look upon the farms or upon the hard
pavements of the city” (Bulosan). The more “authentic” American is the one that is on the
frontier, on the farms, just like the residents of Dumur County. They strive to achieve, “the
dignity of the individual to live in a society of free men,” not autocrats like Hitler or Gulla
(Bulosan). Like the Dumur County residents, Bulosan advocates that society “not take
democracy for granted” (Bulosan). Similarly, the Dumur county residents realize this,
knowing they need to take their role as democratic citizens seriously in order to place those
into power people that are educated and willing to stand up for their beliefs. Bulosan ends his
vision with hope, “The American dream is only hidden away, and it will push its way up and
grow again” (Bulosan). Applied to Sandoz’s text, then, it is reasonable to expect that the
vision for the residents that were affected by the Slogums is that they will be able to achieve
their dream if they keep fighting and striving toward it. Further, if they follow Stephen
Vincent Benét’s advice from his “Freedom from Fear,” they will achieve “freedom from the
fear that lies at the fear of every unjust law, of every tyrannical exercise of power by one man
over another man” (Benét). Thus, there is a hopeful future for these frontierspeople.
Similarly, Sandoz, too, is searching for a way to disseminate the idea of a free country as the
“Four Freedoms” writers do. Sandoz notes:

Roosevelt’s order that the fences around all government land in the nation must come
down was spread across all the larger newspapers of the country and condemned as
persecution, the Cattleman Inquisition. But to the land-hungry of all the world it was
the opening of a new continent, the discovery of a new America. They talked of it in
crossroad post offices, in village streets, in smoky saloons, in metropolitan flop
houses, and in the desolate queues of the unemployed. […] Ach, yes, such a thing
was possible only in that far world of wonders America. (Slogum 219)

This demonstrates the new frontier the future for America, a place where land, success, and
ownership are possible. As a review of her Slogum House text in 1938 states, “Make no
mistake- Miss Sandoz is no muck-raker. If she portrays characters and scenes that strike us as
revolting, we have merely to reflect that they are based in fact. A nation should be able to
face its own faults […]. From them, we may learn something of humility and better
understanding to guide us in the present and the future” (“Feminine” 21). Sandoz herself
recognized the importance of her role as a writer. She wrote in an article for the Fairbury School about her impressions of Nebraska, “Fortunately there is no need for words to bring our state to your students, for they are Nebraska, the Nebraska of the future, and in their keeping lies the heritage of a vision followed by their fathers the wide world across, a vision of a land free of intolerance and oppression and want. Let them guard this heritage well” (Sandoz, “Impressions”). Sandoz believed that there was a future that was free of want and allowed for freedom of ideas and beliefs. To preserve that ideal, the Dumur residents needed to practice stewardship. While Slogum House seems to function as a dystopia, her writing of this community allows others to see what to avoid. Sandoz attempts to realize a future here that is based upon the groundings of the frontier forefathers’ visions, but avoiding the pitfalls they encountered or created.

These authors of the 1930s and 40s have a distinct purpose. Stimmel agreed that their message, “is the rumbling of the distant drum. For when they are at their best […] they are suggesting, with their ugliness, that things are not right” (458-59). This idea of the drummer is echoed in Bulosan’s work, in which those with a clear vision are marching; both are rhythmically moving toward a better America. With this suspicion, Sandoz is able to increase awareness and perhaps resistance to those in power. She joins the new left that Skrimshire describes, who suggest, “Under the banners of anticapitalism, anti-imperialism, and alterglobalization, then: appears a powerful new rhetoric: another world is possible” (233). While this text does not imagine a specific future, its absence of a future is perhaps more telling about what Sandoz hopes for her own future. She sets up the characters in Slogum House as strawmen and women, showing that an adherence to this particular lifestyle can only lead to downfall and destruction. Sandoz was assured that her text would be what John
Wunder terms a “pathbreaker” since she “did not appreciate glossy, feel-good approaches to what she personally witnessed as the hardships of life on the frontier. She never met a ‘myth’ she didn’t seek to debunk” (Wunder 99). She sought to clearly depict what happens in a totalitarian system. There is no future for Gulla Slogum and her family because of the actions of Gulla Slogum and her family. Gulla will drive her family to ruin and death. The only characters with a future are those that attempt to right the injustices in the text. Ruedy regains a sense of autonomy and strength, Libby returns as a reigning matriarch figure to challenge Gulla, and poor René maintains his quiet ranch. Yet Gulla continues to experience hardship, and she sees her own destruction and demise. This indicates that those that circumvent legality and justice ultimately have no future.

**Sandoz’s Motivation**

Sandoz was inherently concerned with the idea of historical “accuracy.” In claiming to pursue the “truth” of history, readers can see the lack of formal training in history which would preclude such a statement. Perhaps what Sandoz was attempting to say, as is evident through her work, was that she wanted to correct gross misrepresentations and other historians’ blatant errancies. Most errors occurred because historians contemporary to Sandoz did not rely on primary resources, even though minimal sources existed. So often, it seems that representations of farmers, laborers, and (as will be clear in the proceeding chapter), Native Americans, consisted of surface histories that contained blatant falsities. That is not to say that other historians did not have aspects of the history correct. However, some historians did not choose to engage with the sources as she did at the time she was writing and missed out on important data. As a result of this extra due diligence, her work is better-rounded. Problematically, her work is rooted in fiction; she can’t directly take on the
historians in a head to head battle. She makes this choice, though, as she wants to reach readers first. It is as if she did not want to put herself into a direct comparison with either academic historians or fiction writers. Ultimately, looking at her in this way is tangential to the overarching thesis here: was Sandoz’s representation effective in educating the public about possible societal ills? The history that acknowledges those that were left out of previous histories will “win” that contest, as the historians she attempts to engage with were not including the peoples she felt were left to the periphery.

Sandoz’s representation of the struggling Nebraska farmer asks readers to envision the farmer with more agency and determination. When Sandoz read William Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily” in Harper’s, she lauded their publishing of material with “certain unpleasantness—an unpleasantness very conspicuous in life, it seems to me, and perhaps therefore banned from so many magazines” (Sandoz, “Letter to Gentlemen at The Forum and Century”). She was incensed that publishers were still not looking toward “the taboo and the unpleasant,” arguing:

I still wonder if you can’t dig up someone who doesn’t give a damn about his financial future to write an article on the possible loss of foreign markets through drastic curtailment in the production of wheat and cotton. Yes, of course I know about the international conference on wheat, but does anybody expect much from that? Wheat curtailment seems particularly cruel when half the world is starving for bread. (Sandoz, “Letter to Gentlemen at The Forum and Century”)

Sandoz found the empty gestures and discussions meaningless. No one was doing anything, and she wanted to shine a light on the issue. As she notes to editors at The Forum and Century, “P.S. I do think you might dig up someone to write an article for us that doesn’t pussy-foot around, afraid of disturbing the sleeping agriculturalist. The agriculturalist worth
the rocksalt his cows lick is never asleep” (Sandoz, “Letter to Gentlemen at The Forum and Century”).

Her largest concern seemed to be the underlying support for Hitler and fascists:

The actual situation here, and from the papers and the broadcasts in the other Midwest capitals, is one a weary sort of anger about the slaughter of the Poles and a bored, helpless annoyance with Chamberlain for waiting to declare war until there was no one much left to fight it and no place for the fighting, and then proceeding to it like an elderly boy scout. That is, of course, not the attitude among the stories. I went to the horse show and a couple of the cocktail parties, etc., to find out, and I got the distinct impression of an almost hysterical admiration for Hitler. (Sandoz, “Letter to Edward Weeks” n.d.)

She worried about the way fascism could spread across the region, thus further diminishing the capacity of Nebraskans for advancement, respect, or equality in the national economic spectrum. This would create an even further divide or breakdown between this area and the more financially secure and affluent neighbors.

A second concern was the mistreatment, as she perceived it, of those who labored on the farm:

I think an investigator might find that the farmer is in a desperate state of uncertainty. How can he tell what to plant, spring or fall, when there’s no telling what the government may do to interfere with prices. I was raised on an experiment station, in a community where the better farmer asked only a fair shake in the world market. Even today our bankrupt farmers don’t want bonuses and crutches. (Sandoz, “Letter to Gentlemen at The Forum and Century”)

She felt that Nebraskans and Midwesterners were the backbone of society. They wanted to work, she noted, so let them. Do not patronize them or take away additional rights. She writes: “They want the right to battle the elements and the wrath with some promise that all this post-war helping of agriculture will cease so they can pull themselves out of a decade of poverty and pauperism” (Sandoz, “Letter to Gentlemen at The Forum and Century”). She
advocated that they could add to the community and society if they were just allowed the freedom to do so and their skills were utilized properly. Her opinion allowed the farmers and laborers to see that someone believed in their abilities to serve as productive members of society and to take ownership of decisions, thus she advocated for free trade and community and against regulation and capitalists.

A third concern was the problematic group-think promoted by biased and scarce media sources in Nebraska. She felt media bias and limitation shaped future farmers and residents of Nebraska into weak and uniformed citizens. She had seen society gradually change in Nebraska from that of the hardscrabble homesteader to weaklings reliant upon others and government for their own advancement, rather than working together to promote the entire community. She expresses this in a letter to a fan, Walter Johnson, regarding the intent of *Capital City*: “It’s my idea of what the grandchildren of the builders of the Middlewest have become” (Sandoz, “Letter to Mr. Walter Johnson”). Johnson, a Washington D.C. attorney, referring to her letter of November 2, 1939 asserts and agrees with Sandoz:

> the younger of thirty ago was impelled by a desire for freedom. This in sharp contrast to the present day tendency to huddle and to rely on someone else, particularly government […]. Today people huddle in groups as labor unions, farmers groups, old folks groups, and business groups. They demand security (slavery); they fight to push their own particular group ahead of other groups in our economic struggle; and too often we hear freedom slurring described as “freedom to starve.” We might well wonder if the demand for security will not soon bring on a dictatorship and security under a dictators blacksnake. (Johnson, “Letter to Miss Sandoz”)

Johnson and Sandoz’s correspondence shares a worried concern about Nebraskans’ group think and the possibilities they could be persuaded to yield to a dictatorship. Sandoz concern for this very idea led her to create her *Capital City* characters as those who “have gradually given up all the initiative of their fathers and become parasites” (Sandoz, “Letter to Edward
Weeks” 3 December 1938). Yet she didn’t see becoming a selfish objectivist, such as Ayn Rand suggests, rather, she hope for an ethical and rational community-based approach.

Sandoz expressed these concerns throughout her lifetime. This is clear through her active engagement in reading other agitators’ works and her response with favorable, unabated enthusiasm. When Dr. Robert S. Lynd wrote, “11:59” she enthusiastically responded, so pleased to find another voice of reason in publication. She proffers her concern about the Nebraska farmer in a response to Lynd:

If economic power is political power […] then the public must know the economic forces behind any political issue. Yet what can some little farmer, say, out in the Panhandle of Nebraska, know about an issue like the subsidy, for instance, if the sources of his information are at the best the radio, a county paper, a farm journal and, exceptionally, a daily paper? (Sandoz, “Letter to Dr. Robert S. Lynd”)

Sandoz notes a similar concern in her Capital City in that she felt these rural, Midwestern newspapers maintained bias. Her agitation did not stop there. She continued to rally against others who would not step up for the disenfranchised worker:

Are any of these likely to let him discover the part the packers, the processors, the capitalist and finance farmers and the wide economic ramifications these played in cajoling, browbeating and flattering him into an anti-subsidy stand? Or how is he to know that the radio commentator who speaks with such firm convincingness as public watchdog against government encroachments and incompetence, and who is apparently backed by such a harmless little item as, say, a fifteen cent headache remedy, is really speaking for a great drug cartel economically tied in with a great many things including the spray my little farmer uses on his garden to the bombs that are dropping on his son, a [illegible] that is, at the moment, perhaps, demonstrating its power in the political field by helping upset governments [sic] right in America. (Sandoz, “Letter to Dr. Robert S. Lynd”)

She ends this letter with a seeming anticlimactic acceptance of the situation. Sandoz knew she probably could not change the status quo.
She hoped that pointing out the situation and making all players aware of the situation, would help those she felt had been taken advantage of:

Yet how can this farmer and his neighbors act intelligently without such information; how can they, as democratic men, ‘learn to stand together, everywhere, at the grass-roots, where life’s meanings are big?’ As one of them wrote me not long ago, ‘If a man could just find out who’s really lined up for and against anything it would help him a lot’. (Sandoz, “Letter to Dr. Robert S. Lynd”)

These concerns prompted Sandoz to write about these issues in Capital City and other works of short fiction. Sandoz felt that she was a protector of these Nebraskans, almost in a paternal fashion, similar to how she cared for her younger siblings. When she went out East, she wrote to a letter to Anne Ford, Little Brown publicist:

People were so nice to me in the east I almost forgot my Nebraska role of Big Sister. But not for long. Hard upon my return to Lincoln our mortgage moratorium law was declared unconstitutional and my telephone began to ring, messengers to pound on the door. What was to be done? A thousand farmers would be disposed within a week or two. What was to be done? […] Here men stop to tell me of the maneuvers to sabotage the TVA or wonder who’s going to run for state chief justice or governor, or bewail the difficulties. (Sandoz, “Letter to Anne Ford”)

In a way, Sandoz viewed all Nebraskans as family and had undertaken the role of “big sister” to raise her kin up right, just as she had done so with siblings Jules Jr., James, Fritz, Flora, and Caroline. She wanted to encourage those Nebraskans so they could begin to think for themselves. She hoped they would learn to operate autonomously in the world and be taken seriously on a national stage. She was not just trying to sway people to her opinion; she wanted Nebraskans to be representing themselves in an educated fashion. She felt public education had done a disservice. In a long tirade to Miss Christie, commenting on “What Makes Teachers Cranky” in the August Century, she notes:

Public education in America, I fear, has become the world’s prize voodooism. Its fetishes are many—[e]xtra-curricular activities, exploratory courses, vocational
guidance, citizenship practice, and so on and on. Its voodoo words are impressive – integration, socialization, standardization, individualization—with a visible end. At frequent intervals these are repeated pompously to impress subordinates and the public. […]. But, some one says, this state of things is the fault of the public. Is it? Or is the public at least to a large extent, the product of the community educational leadership, or lack of it? (Sandoz, “Letter to My Dear Miss Christie”)

Thus, her comments indicate that she does not necessarily blame the public for their lack of education or ability to have situational awareness. Rather, she blames the educational system and the society produced from that troubled educational system for their collective ignorance. Her concern for these issues extends beyond agitation; she considered ways to develop solutions. She continued to be concerned with the lack of honest information making its way to the farmer. She argued “if we are to preserve anything approximating democracy in the complex world of the future, the public must have some ready source of information, for who among us can find the time to keep informed, while making a living, for an intelligent vote even on local issues, let alone on the larger ones of national and world import?” (Sandoz, “Letter to Edward Weeks” 25 July 1944). This was something that concerned her all the way back to her experiences at the University of Nebraska. For her “Constitution for a Perfect Republic” paper in John Andrew Rice’s course, Sandoz created a utopian republic with a “Bureau of Public Reminder.” Sandoz described it to her publisher:

Obviously the name was bad, and too limited, but the idea seems to me to have even more pertinently now than during those years of public scandal. I had planned it with three or five men at the head, appointive and non-partisan, membership terminable only by age or public proof of falsification of fact or gross negligence of public duty, the qualifications and ethical standards of the positions to be comparable to the best traditions of the Supreme Court. To my notion, the duties of the office should be to dig up and make public information on every issue or figure that appears on the governmental horizon, the information to be limited to pertinent, factual statement, quotations, and so on, never the opinion of anyone connected with the bureau. […]. With a core of reliable information in the hands of the reader, who can say what the effect upon the press might not be. (Sandoz, “Letter to Edward Weeks” 25 July 1944)
Sandoz clearly maintained a consistent concern with the forthrightness and honesty of the government and press with the people. Her works show how an informed public can serve an uneducated community with positive action as well as how an uneducated contingency can be toxic to the larger community.

In *Slogum House*, her intent differed. Rather than point out how pervasive this erroneous Nebraska group-think was, she set forth an example of the destruction that it could potentially cause. She hoped this would allow her fellow “siblings” to understand the problems of current society. Sandoz proudly asserted:

> It’s an allegory, one of a new variety, which arrives or attempts to arrive at social criticism through the graphic, the concrete, the realistic. The will-to-power people, Gulla and others I could name, prostitute the most beautiful thing in society to their ends, emasculate the most promising of the youth, etc. and, as they mellow, permit their own money to finance puny charities for the victims of their rise – Spring branch canyon and Ruedy’s work. It seemed over-obvious to me when I planned it, and yet only a lawyer or two got the idea. However, that never stopped a writer worth his salt. No, I can’t imagine the prostituted raising a hand against the emasculation of virility in this world. Who, among the poets, the painters, the musicians in the world are stopping it? In America there are some who try, and that means that their prostitution is not complete. To that extent the beauty is still virtuoso, unsold. (Sandoz, “Letter to Russell Gibbs”)

Sandoz wished to see an awakening among her fellow Midwesterners. She hoped they would see the trouble that could befall a will-to-power individual. She also demonstrated how justice could be possible, if only the community would unify in their support against a fascist dictator, Gulla. Although they did not inherit much, the community still inherited something, as Sandoz writes “Of course the meek do inherit the east in it [Slogum House], although it’s in pretty bad shape” (Sandoz, “Letter to Edward Weeks,” 17 November 1937.) This novel was designed to provide readers with a sense of empowerment, how justice prevails over injustice, and why community is important. Without community unification and working
together, a tyrant will continue to gorge him or herself on any and all available resources, stripping away power, property, money, and ideals, little by little, as Gulla did.

Sandoz was also concerned with a correction of the record. Again, Sandoz felt it was important to portray historical events clearly and without bias. In considering her own work alongside others that attempted to explore comparable issues, such as John Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*, Sandoz stated:

> While I don’t suppose there’s much danger of any comparison with *Grapes of Wrath* slipping into the publicity used for CAPITAL CITY, I feel that I’d better speak out. To me the Steinbeck book is a worthy and timely thing but sensationalized. It is having the expected effect: the growing notion that the problem can be met by locating the Okies in settlements, which isn’t true at all. […] The problem is one of land ownership concentration and that must be the point of attack for any lasting solution. (Sandoz, “Letter to Edward Weeks” undated)

She continues with criticism of the text: “The *Grapes* is fine material for a novelette, it seems to me. I’d prefer it with the poetic, pseudo-social-historical portions deleted. Some are nice reading, like the one of the turtle, and that of the boys with the stick candy, -- poignant. But the general effect is misleading” (Sandoz, “Letter to Edward Weeks” undated). Thus, although she respected Steinbeck’s intent, she felt his execution was lacking.

Inevitably, a discussion of Sandoz’s emphasis on the rights of the worker and the idea of community will generate questions concerning Sandoz’s personal politics. Many of Sandoz’s own friends give disputing accounts of her involvement with the Communist Party. The letters Sandoz writes do not provide clear evidence as to her beliefs, but there are suggestions of a leaning toward the left. She sympathized with FBI-identified communist Robert Lynd, subscribed to publications benefitting union activities, and did not shy away from individuals and groups that supported communism. Friends and family dispute her
involvement with the communist party, yet a Senate report described Sandoz as a member of an “affiliation with communist front organization” because of her participation with the League of American Writers (Senate). Like many others of her time, she may have been pigeonholed into the stereotype of a Communist because of her affiliations with some liberal organizations and politicians. For example, she supported liberals for Nebraska’s representatives, referencing concern about Nebraska’s climate in a letter to a friend, hoping for “some liberal candidates or give the state up for lost entirely” in the Burke senate race (Sandoz, “Letter to Ernest Witte” Dec. 29 1938). Yet, Sandoz’s support for Communism seems to be stronger than others. While not a card-carrying Communist, she reveals support through her letters. Friends and family members dispute this, but would Sandoz advertise Communist leanings? Not likely. She did explicitly share that she was against fascism and Hitler. She was less forthcoming about her positioning regarding Communism. Some of her letters indicate a leaning toward their espoused ideals. Stauffer argues that Sandoz had no leaning for the left, but also notes her displeasure with the right and in other places shares an affiliation for communist based ideals. Stauffer notes, “As a historian she was interested in state government. She believed that a Midwestern capital city had considerable influence on the culture of its region, and she saw danger in what she considered the parasitical tendencies of the capitals in the Midwest. She feared the hold of the rightist groups that sprang up in America, patterned on the fascists of Europe” (Stauffer, Letters 39). Yet, Stauffer conflates the anti-fascist/communism movement. Sandoz could have still been practicing both, and many of her letters indicate a leaning toward the allure of Communism. Her texts, too, reveal that she thought that the idea of working together for the best of the community was a good thing. This is an idea echoed throughout her early political novels and one that should not be
dismissed. The evidence discussed here and in her archive supports Sandoz’s leaning toward communism, but against fascism, which is an important distinction that hasn’t been made.

Sandoz expressed an almost fanatical obsession with the offbeat political groups that arose in Nebraska. She notes: “In my middlewest the chief fascist group since the early Thirties has been the Silver Shirts, much more affluent the last three years. They do no open parading here as I have my Gold Shirts do, but the town is honey-combed with them as are the other capitals.” (Sandoz, “Letter to Edward Weeks” 17 and 18 August 1939). As she raised alarm about the political sentiments of those in Nebraska to some back East, she was concerned that they were not truly understanding the reality of the political tenor in Nebraska, she wrote to her publisher, “You people in the East are probably not aware of the real danger of a growing fascist set-up in the middlewest, but let the book appear and see what a stir it will make. I suspect that for my time this is the most important thing I have done or could do” (Sandoz, “Letter to Edward Weeks” 10 August 1939). So, she wrote, attempting to clarify the situation in a format that readers would find accessible. Since the news media in Nebraska wasn’t likely to publish Sandoz’s concerns, she felt that she must take her stories to the masses in the format that was most easily digestible by masses: fiction. Sandoz likely saw how “truth” could be told in different ways through varied interpretation of evidence. As Hayden White claims, “There is an inexpungable relativity in every representation of historical phenomena” (White 375). Sometimes, the same evidence can tell two very different tales, yet sometimes there is space for both historians to be accurate, as the nature of truth can be fluid. It is difficult for that truth to be understood as part of a narrative. White discusses the difficulty and difference that the “‘interpretation’ of ‘the facts’ and a
‘story’ told about them [creates]” (White 376). Yet, Sandoz, forged ahead, and tried to merge the history as best as she could interpret it with the fictional narrative.

Sandoz was attempting to insert her truth, which she thought highlighted a previously disregarded segment of history in conjunction with those other histories. Sandoz writes: “My book is as true as I could make it in situation: the parasitism of the trans-Mississippi Midwest capital dwellers, with their 1880 attitude towards labor, their practice of farmer coercion, their general connivance to sell out the resources of their state, and the encouragement to fascist groups” (Sandoz, “Letter to Edward Weeks” 17 August 1939). Sandoz was not undertaking this endeavor without any sort of backlash, however. She was threatened, her apartment ransacked, and Sandoz was quite preoccupied with these occurrences, writing about it to both friends and to the police in Lincoln: “I’ve already had my warning, telephone calls telling me what will happen to me ‘soon,’ and a note under my door saying I would soon be in a concentration camp. All my manuscripts and files have been completely pawed over twice. And my door was locked, too. So whoever did it had a good key to a Yale lock” (Sandoz, “Letter to Maud H.”). Yet, she continued writing and continued her campaign against injustice. She felt it was her duty to stand up for the ignorant farmers, the ill-informed rancher, or the rural schoolteacher whose situation or circumstance prevented him or her from achieving more or inquiring about the current state of affairs. Moreover, she wanted to stand as an inspiration to the other intellectuals she knew must be outraged as she was.

Writing to friend and author, Caroline Bancroft, Sandoz complained, “What disturbs me much more is the defeatist attitude of the intellectuals. The war will go on forever; all idealism is dead, they say (Sandoz, “Letter to Caroline Bancroft” 29 April 1943). She wanted others, particularly intellectuals, to stand up and fight with her.
Sandoz ultimately received marginal success with her endeavor, but not the changes or effects she hoped would happen. Yet, Sandoz started the conversation. She made a significant effect on those she was able to get through to and exposed the injustices she saw occur. While others were still either in denial about the egregious actions of some in the West at present and past, Sandoz sought to get the truth told in order to make things right. As Omaha lawyer, H.C de Lamatre, described Sandoz’s work in 1938:

[Critics] do not care for the mucky realism, characteristic of the book, the smut, the sex perverted views of the characters, the recurring nastiness. I disagree with the critics. […] Many ignorant persons, cunning, sadistic, suspicions, treacherous and even murderous, went to our frontiers, in considerable numbers. In 1923 I spent ten week in a frontier town of the West. The community was the average—but—One rancher had had stolen from him 200 head of fine cattle. He knew what had happened to them. They were never found—though branded. He was afraid of certain unnamed neighbors. He had to continue to live with them. […] I believe Mari Sandoz is justified in showing this class of citizen to the world, as she has seen them, and in interpreting their sordid lives. […] If it has the impact it should have; especially upon the communities of the west, that of awakening consciousness and shame and the determination of the good citizens not to be bullied by the scum, it is more than justified. (de Lamatre)

Moreover, as she wrote to her agent, she is looking for a “lasting solution” or a way in which to fix the land she grew up on and strove so patiently to protect, preserve, (Sandoz, “Letter to Edward Weeks” undated, emphasis mine).
CHAPTER 4
STOKING WHILE STALKING: SANDOZ INCREASES AWARENESS
WHILE “STALKING THE GHOST OF CRAZY HORSE”

Sandoz’s lithe body extended forward with hand outstretched to meet the young Native American veteran’s strong hand extended toward her. He engaged a double handshake of respect, a handshake of note and significance that did not escape Sandoz. The handshake was a gift for her unfailing advocacy to benefit U.S. tribes; it was one example of how she was respected by the people she most wanted to help. Although not all whites would listen to her pleas, this soldier’s gesture indicated that some she tried to help understood her mission. This author, although small in stature, did not shy from big ideas and controversy. Her tender, weedy look belied a simmering countenance. She took on Native American injustice like an angry calf escaping the clove hitch at a rodeo.

Sandoz’s activism on behalf of Native Americans and Native American rights was bountiful and passionate. In her numerous letters to government bodies and her radio and newspaper interviews, it is evident that Sandoz viewed Native Americans as neighbors and as family (Sandoz, “Letter to President Harry Truman”). Misrepresentations in other texts and in Hollywood film adaptations disenchanted and infuriated Sandoz, particularly the reworking of her own Cheyenne Autumn for director John Ford (Sandoz, “Letter to Walter Frese,” 23 August 1964). She also took issue with Howard Fast’s manuscript on the Cheyenne. Other films like The Searchers embody the stereotypes she fought so hard against. Her frustration stemmed from both historical inaccuracies and blatant intolerance and ignorance of tribal history. Vine Deloria, Jr. addresses these types of inaccuracies in Custer
Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto as do a great many others, such as Phillip Deloria\(^1\) or M. Marrubbio\(^2\). Sandoz, however, was writing at the outset of these earlier reproductions and inaccuracies. She writes, “Why does everyone put those unSiouan head bands on the girls?” or reference the “lazy bucks” (qtd. in Lee 129, 133). She took issue not only with the way Native Americans were represented from a historical perspective, but also with the way erroneous judgments were propagated through these representations. As Sandoz notes:

> I recall nothing of laziness about the Indian boys and girls I knew in my childhood. The Sioux who work in the steel of the sky scrapers of New York are not hired because they are lazy, and I’ve heard no one complain from those who fought alongside the Pine Ridge warriors in the last two wars. (qtd. in Lee 134)

She not only dispelled myths about culture and Native Americans’ ways of life, but also clarified their actual way of life, rather than representing a stereotype that featured the “war whoop,” braids, and a blanket (Lee 134) alongside the ignorant, blood thirsty savage. As Deloria asserts in his introduction to Sandoz’s 2004 edition of Crazy Horse, “Sandoz’s account of the Plains Indians during the 1850s through the 1970s surpasses other such works in terms of its accuracy and clarity…[she] paints a clearer picture of events on the northern plains [in contrast with other historians” (ix, emphasis mine). Native Americans were triply disempowered: by the colonialist, their lack of language mastery, and the government’s limitations. Sandoz sought to shed light upon these issues and unbind the Native American representation from its shackles.

The Craft of the Story

When Sandoz undertook writing about Native Americans, she toured with her friend, Elinor Hinman, to the Pine Ridge reservation to meet the subjects of her work. Later, when she undertook writing Crazy Horse’s biography, she returned cross-country, searching
archives and interviewing Native Americans from multiple reservations. She did not rely on her almost decade-old material from her first trip back West. She lined up new interviews and crosschecked her former sources. During both trips, she was able to break through the barriers that existed between white society and the rightfully mistrusting Native Americans. The Native Americans she interviewed granted more intimate access to their lives, thus Sandoz wrote the story of several Native American tribes utilizing better resources in order to represent a clearer picture of history. She used primary source documentation, as Fling and Rice had taught her. Many of Sandoz’s contemporary authors did not interview or talk to the Native Americans. She did so and took that material along with detailed historical data to write her texts. Sandoz wrote innovatively, which afforded her the most results in sharing advocacy and awareness. Her letters of advocacy also demonstrate her passion toward the issue of Native American empowerment. Sandoz had an affinity for Native American struggles; her beloved Sandhills had once been scene to an incident involving Crazy Horse and she felt comradeship with the Native Americans from the area (Stauffer, Mari Sandoz 135).

This chapter focuses on Crazy Horse as it is the most well-known of her works about Native Americans and the novel with the greatest impact upon its reception. In addition to Crazy Horse, her Cheyenne Autumn and several speeches are significant as are her letters to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, government officials, and President Truman that discuss Native American issues in Nebraska and on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations in South Dakota. Native American empowerment reigns important for Sandoz, though, many of her other texts provide significant bearing upon understanding Sandoz’s Native American perspective. These texts include The Battle of the Little Bighorn; The Beaver Men;
Spearheads of Empire; The Buffalo Hunters; and Hostiles and Friendlies: Selected Short Writings of Mari Sandoz. These texts contain similar elements, as noted in Crazy Horse, but were marginalized due to their placement, sale, and public reception and did not effect as much change or awareness as the Lakota biography. The reasons for this marginalization are varied. Kimberli Lee argues, “Despite her campaign against negative stereotyping, Sandoz at times was given to a certain amount of stereotyping of her own. She sometimes overemphasized Indians as victims of devastating circumstances. It seems apparent that in an effort to gain a sympathetic audience, Sandoz crossed the line into sentimentalism and romanticism” (Lee 129). Some of her works targeted a younger population, such as The Mari Sandoz, for a middle school audience. While changing the youngsters’ views of Native Americans, it was not as if these fifth graders would immediately move to have Native Americans more fairly represented in government debates. Sandoz was moving to change future leaders’ Native American conceptions. Cheyenne Autumn and Crazy Horse still remain most significant for the epic amount of history and background covered as well as the methodology Sandoz employed in writing these texts.

**Contextualizing this Study**

Most analysis of Sandoz material rests uncontroversially in biography and less in analysis. Kimberli Lee does an excellent job collating the Sandoz letters that reference Native American advocacy, but how Sandoz specifically altered her writing or employed a similar attitude in her writing craft is unclear in Lee’s work. An analysis of letters does not show the intent and manipulation employed through her intended public voice. The following close analysis of Sandoz’s Crazy Horse provides use for both literary scholars and historians alike. Literary scholars may find that the close analysis of the text provides specific textual
examples to demonstrate that Sandoz could follow through with what she critiqued others for. Historians may appreciate from the method that she employed. Further, historians may also find value in considering why Sandoz chose to write in the format she did, rather than employing standard historians’ techniques. Other historians can find value in this work by seeing the way in which Sandoz used fictional texts to attempt to change commonly held notions and stereotypes.

During the years after her *Crazy Horse* biography was published, Native Americans would stop and praise her for her work. One time, Native Americans of Flathead and northern Lakota descent, some of them soldiers, arrived at her New York apartment. She describes how the soldiers gave her a double handshake of respect, “first the right hand on top, then the left. She was pleased and a little shaken by the experience” (Stauffer 162). This moment and others like it were so meaningful to Sandoz and help to demonstrate how she was effecting change and gaining respect for the Native Americans in the Midwest. Even today, her work on Crazy Horse is often cited by others researching Crazy Horse, including workers at government sources and historical sites, past and contemporary fiction writers, and well-renowned historians throughout history.3

**Critique of Earlier History**

Sandoz discusses the problems with earlier Native American history. One example she discusses is how the Jesuits recorded history but, by the time of the history’s arrival, things had already changed (Sandoz, “The Plains” 4). She explains how people focus on the stereotype of Native Americans in her criticism of earlier Native American histories:

Dirty, naked savage, although so far as true dirt is concerned, it’s unlikely that any of the Indians were filthier than the early explorers, heavily attired for the heat of summer, without change of clothing, and with a contempt of the Indian’s habit of
bathing [...]. It is easy to suspect that the Indians on the Republican [River] or the North Platte [River] could not have been much more offensive to the nose than the long-riding Spaniards who came there. The common contempt for the Indian nakedness is amusing now—with the bareness of our Bikinied bather of a few years ago, or the strip tease artiste, and the nakedness in the comic strips. (Sandoz, “The Plains” 4)

How true that the colonists were hypocritical in their evaluation of the Natives. Sandoz’s comedic tone allows this hypocrisy to become evident for readers. Her candor finally places readers guilty of this stereotyping in a position of being scolded for their erroneous attitudes, which pigeonholed all Native Americans into this “dirty savage” category. She also points out how Native Americans may have viewed the ill-prepared colonists as they appeared to the Natives. Wearing a long, heavy fur coat in the heat of summer must have greatly amused this country’s first residents. Yet, there is little documentation about the “smelly, stupid whites” primarily because of the lack of extended written record from these primary sources. This continues to show how historiographical narratives are constructed and continue to be propagated throughout history. Sandoz exploits this gap by indicating some of the perspective of the Native Americans on these and other types of issues. She identifies Native American perspectives of abuse, mundane events, as well as events of historical significance.

**Why Did She Care?**

Sandoz felt a kinship with Crazy Horse that predates her work on the novel. Originally, the story of Crazy Horse was conceived by friend, Eleanor Hinman. Hinman had wanted to write a history of Crazy Horse and invited Sandoz to join her on the trip. The two traveled to the Pine Ridge reservation and Sandoz was captivated (Hinman 2). In another article, entitled “Stalking the Ghost of Crazy Horse in a Whoopie,” Sandoz showed how taken she was with his story. She wrote a number of editors seeking publication. As Sandoz
notes, she long held an affinity for the Native American people; she “was brought up to sympathize and to like Father’s friends [area Native Americans], who kept up their visiting long after they moved to Pine Ridge” (Pifer, Making I 276-77). Her letters detail the trip and the experiences she had. She reflects:

I slept out in the sagebrush under the stars at Rawhide Creek and wondered about this Crazy Horse, a silent powerful war chief, “handsome as no other Indian” with soft brown hair and never photographed. Here on Rawhide, he had hope to establish his reservation, and now none knew his birthplace or his grave. (Pifer, Making I 279)

Her letter continues to wax poetic about this great war chief. She was both moved and motivated by the material she and Hinman uncovered. She reflected that, while at Fort Robinson, “Crazy Horse and his people ‘came in’ and surrendered their arms on the strength of promises that were never kept, exposed to all manner of tactlessness and misunderstanding, and finally had to see their chief killed” (Pifer, Making I 280). She was incredulous at the injustices that had occurred, and she felt that this trip allowed her to feel as though she “had stalked very close to the spirit of this fierce, handsome, brown-haired war chief of the Ogalalas” (Pifer Making I 280).

The notion of “stalking” indicates a somewhat unhealthy obsession with this great leader; moreover, the term “ghost,” from the article title, implies this man haunted her as a spirit, just as he has continued to fascinate the American public even yet today. She worked on this story intermittently from 1930-1942 and felt it significant to represent Crazy Horse accurately. Hinman decided to relinquish her claim to the story as early as 1938 after reading Slogum House, as she thought Sandoz could do the material better justice (Stauffer, Mari Sandoz 134). Sandoz initially refused; she was concerned Hinman would change her mind. After another author threatened to preempt Sandoz’s work on the Cheyenne, Hinman again
suggested that Sandoz take on the material (Sandoz, *Mari Sandoz* 135). Sandoz took the opportunity at a particularly difficult time. She eagerly moved to Denver to begin her work on a Crazy Horse story after the negative and threatening Nebraska response to her two capitalist stories (Sandoz, *Mari Sandoz* 135-136). Sandoz notes:

> Yes, truly this was a fine story and evidently many others thought so too, for often I heard of this one or that, sometimes a professional writer, who was working on the life of Crazy Horse. But nothing seems to come of these ventures, perhaps because there was so little in print about the hostile Indians that held up under investigation and nothing about Crazy Horse that bore much resemblance to the gaudy, blood-thirsty Sioux warrior of popular notion. (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* xx)

Sandoz saw the scholarship’s deficiencies and knew she had something new and different to say. Rather than the stereotypical notion of Crazy Horse, Sandoz would show who this great man really was while still maintaining attention to scholarship, research methodology, and sourcing. Still, though, this is a representation and interpretation, one that no doubt holds points of contention with other scholars.

Sandoz was trying to not only write a more complete biography of this Lakota war chief, but also craft a political narrative about Native Americans and their treatment. She wanted to at least create a competing narrative to the traditional narrative of this chief and how he was killed. Sandoz acknowledged that she was providing a *version* of history. In all her materials where she debates how to represent moons and suns and clothing she was engaging with creative license. Still, those “embroideries” around the truth (Prescott, “Books” 2 December 1942), as one reviewer called them, still surround a well-researched narrative and core story about Crazy Horse. She had much respect for the man she had been introduced to through interviews of his family and loved ones. Also, she had political motivations in mind, as how well could she agitate for more fair treatment of Native
Americans if all the representations continued to feature the wild savage notion that had been popularized throughout the history.

**Missing the Mark: “Truly Legendary Material is Important…” and Reconceptualizing the Speakers; Reconsidering Language, Perspective, Location, and Details**

Sandoz was concerned with the accuracy of history and was incredulous at the amount of misinformation disseminated about native people and the native tribes she knew and researched so well, particularly Crazy Horse and the Sioux. Sandoz’s concern with the clarification of history permeates her letters. When discussing the work of W.R. Lewis, she critiques, he read up to “develop a nose for the differentiation between the authentically legendary and the concocted” before moving forward with his writing (Sandoz, “Letter to Dear Verna Elefson”). She continued, “Truly legendary material is important, historically, sociologically and artificially tinctured with the white man’s stories, read or heard, it is nothing, as you know” (Sandoz, “Letter to Dear Verna Elefson”). Here, Sandoz indicates how this important information about Native Americans, which is “truly legendary,” as she claims, needs reporting (Sandoz, “Letter to Dear Verna Elefson”). Yet, reporting just another iteration of someone else’s tall tales will do nothing to advance culture or understanding of these peoples, and Sandoz knew she must correct this and tell the most corrected version of events, not a fantastical one.

Sandoz was propelled by the idea of presenting the Native Americans’ stories from their perspective, thus Sandoz was not paying only lip service to this idea of correcting the record. As Sandoz writes in her preface to *Crazy Horse*:

In it I have tried to tell not only the story of the man but something of the life of his people through that crucial time. To that end I have used the simplest words possible, 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. (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* xxii)

Sandoz indicates her goal and strategy. Not only is she telling the story of the man, but also providing the history of the context beyond and beside him. Thus, this is much more than a Crazy Horse biography, but an attempt at retelling this Lakota war chief’s tribal history so to be sure *his* history was told. Sandoz realizes the epic task before her. She writes in the *Crazy Horse* preface: “I hope I have not failed too miserably, for they were a great people, these old buffalo-hunting Sioux, and some day their greatness will reach full flowering again in their children as they walk the hard new road of the white man” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* xxii).

Sandoz was doing exactly what she mentioned to her friend: capturing the story of the substance of which legend is made. It is no coincidence that John Ford chose to tell stories of Native American intrigue and why *Dances with Wolves* and *The Last of the Mohicans* were some of the most popular movies of their times; the Native Americans were and are awe-inspiring. They are exciting. These texts, although not often based upon historical data, do serve to bring awareness of Native American peoples to a white audience and create changes to society in interesting ways. These film, as Robert Hine and John Mack Faragher argue, show “Indians play[ing] the ‘good guys” (536). This opened up what Ross Baker and other demographers call, “the *Dances with Wolves* syndrome. It has sort of become neat to be an Indian” (qtd. in Hine and Faragher 536). Hine and Faragher argue that film has caused more people to “self-identify” as Native Americans. The romanticized notion of Native Americans in this work and others, even though perhaps not entirely accurate, just as Sandoz’s work, serve to bring about awareness to the Native American peoples. Thus, they achieve what Native American activist Russell Means argues, “We’re still here, and we’re still resisting.
John Wayne did not kill us all” (qtd. in Hine and Faragher 216). The publicity of the Native American peoples, both positive and negative, increased awareness about the Native American struggle and encouraged Native Americans to self-identify more readily.

The Native American experience became a preoccupation for Sandoz. As Sandoz scholar Lee asserts, she felt “American Indian history was essential to the study of American history (19-20). Sandoz’s recognition of this is also suggested in Ward Churchill’s argument regarding Native American boarding schools:

Understanding the situation of this continent’s native people for what it is thus requires that the acuity with which each individual lost was/is experienced by those closest to him or her be extrapolated in such a way as to calibrate the impact of losing all such individuals, collectively, upon our communities, our societies, our cultures, and thus the possibilities inherent to our future. (Churchill xxi)

Churchill clarifies how a community loses out by not recognizing the Native American experience. Similarly, Sandoz showed that without getting the parts all correct, the whole would be immeasurably altered, thus she pressed forth in her quest for getting a clearer version of the Native American experience shared with the American masses; it was of societal importance. It was through the understanding of the past that a society can continue to grow as a community. As Churchill indicates, the “possibilities inherent to our future” as a society are dependent upon our understanding the past.

Sandoz recognized these powerful warriors’ legendary actions as well as the significance of recording their daily lives. Yet, few historians have recognized the craft of Sandoz’s work for what it was, as Betsy Downey states:

unlike the “realwestern” historians, however, Sandoz directly confronted the costs of Western settlement, and in this she is closer to the New Western historians. Sandoz also, like the New Western historians, deliberately sought to correct the biases and to eliminate the omissions that characterized traditional Western histories, particularly in her Indian histories. (Downey, “Historian” 14)
Even as Downey and others begin to note Sandoz’s offerings, what Downey and other scholars have not explained or shown is how Sandoz did this in her works through a thorough accounting of her texts.

Sandoz attempted to understand and explain the heart of a setting and the characters she wrote about. Thus, she researched almost obsessively when writing a book. Each book she wrote has a collection of hundreds or thousands of notecards, some with just a few words or phrases noting an area’s future, others typed full of notes about the topic. The Sandoz collection at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln contains 45,000 of these notecards. Sandoz reported in a talk, “I think of this every time I send my mind back over the Plains Indian and have to admit how little we can really know of them as people, as individuals before there were any influence from this startling creature to come out of the eastern sunrise, or up with the south wind” (Sandoz, “The Plains Indian” talk, introduction). In this talk she discusses religion, derivation, sacred spots, and origination stories (Sandoz, “The Plains Indian” 4). Sandoz was motivated by her passion to learn more about these people. As Downey notes, “Sandoz’s portrait of the Great Plains, perhaps because she was an insider as well as a student of the Plains, is of a largely de-mythologized place of great diversity” (Downey, “Historian” 14). She knew the area well, and she was able to break down the errors history books made in discussing the area. What Downey fails to consider is Sandoz’s intellect. Downey implies Sandoz’s ability is solely derived from circumstance rather than intelligence and research (Downey, “Historian” 10). However, Sandoz’s work involves more than this. If she did not know the history of a place, she was willing to put in the time to understand what she did not know. Downey only gives Sandoz credit for her work describing
a land of which she was a part, “a student of the Plains” and not the full credit for all the research work that she did.

**How She was Different: Perspective**

The main differences that Sandoz sought to employ in her correction of history were concrete historical research and to approach the story from the native perspective. She was practicing revisionist history already in the 1940s. She did establish that she was writing about an area she had spent time at and called home (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* xix). She also was clear in each text and her letters that she had done due diligent research. She worked at the Nebraska Historical Archives, where she amassed a great repository of informational note cards based on the Bettelyoun manuscripts. In addition to this, she completed research at Washington D.C. archives and examined files of the Indian Bureau, as well as the historical repositories in Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, the Library of Congress, and the Nebraska State Historical Society. She often clipped newspaper articles that discussed Natives or her research, highlighting documents and asking questions to herself in the margins or noting places to follow up.

**How She was Different: Disregarded Archival Material**

In addition to her research, she also requested data from clubs and organizations and was a member of some Native support organizations. She subscribed to the *Horizon* from the American Indian Horizon out of New York, the American Indian Fund and the Association on American Indian Affairs, Inc. newsletter, and the State Historical Society of South Dakota newsletter, “The Wi-Iyohi” (South Dakota Historical Society). She saved documents that dealt with Natives (Marriott) and printed out recent government resolutions and underlined and examined them (Blackhoop, “Comments”). She read copious amounts about Crazy
Horse and saved all of her research, even noting in marginalia where the author was not quite right. She saved a copy of a *Nebraska History Magazine* article “How Crazy Horse Dies” which features numerous corrections (Brinstool 1-78). This was a lifelong passion for Sandoz as the archives show these article collections span the entirety of her writing career.

As the expanse of her knowledge became widespread, she was regarded as one of the most authoritative sources to consult regarding Native American history and culture. Researchers, movie directors, authors, fans, and readers wrote to her soliciting advice or clarification about Native American culture and historical facts. She inspired Native American projects including plays, books, movies, and novels, where much of the work was based upon her own work. Numerous groups invited to speak to their organizations as word of her reputation and credibility spread; she spoke at numerous events, including the Annual Indian Seminar, June 2-4, 1962, in Champion, Pennsylvania (Program “American Indian Seminar”), book and author events, conferences, honor society meeting (Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi), radio shows, Wyoming Western Days, Nebraska colleges and schools, and other events. She even consulted with Crazy Horse monument sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski with whom she exchanged numerous letters. She became well known for her ability to provide credible background regarding Native Americans. Mrs. Ruth Ziolkowski, Korczak’s wife, recognized this in a response to a query to her family: “For more information on the life of Crazy Horse, I suggest you read the book, *Crazy Horse*, by Mari Sandoz. After years of study and research, she has written the most authentic account of his life that I have thus far come across” (Ziolkowski). Others echoed her sentiment, including Nebraska author John Neihardt, who reported Sandoz as “peculiarly well qualified” for undertaking the biography of Crazy Horse (Neihardt, “Crazy Horse” 4). Her authority was respected by
many. In fact, most contemporary Crazy Horse works reference her as a primary source, failing to reference the primary sources that she originally had identified and examined. Now Sandoz receives some of the academic success and respect she deserved, as she is now almost treated as a primary source, even though the problems with footnoting still exist in her work. Even though Sandoz may have engaged in several interviews, reviewed books, and performed extensive research to figure out one component of her work, she rarely footnoted her sources. Her archive notes reflect that she heavily researched each and every text that she wrote. Yet, she does not indicate that in the writing of the text. Although fiction readers would not expect strict adherence to genre requirements, Sandoz knew that historians and those reading her work for the non-fiction elements may find problems with this. As she said before, she would not mind if people did not find her work “salable” (Sandoz, “Letter to Nowell”). However, despite the glaring problem that any contemporary academic should have with a source who cites few sources, historians have found it acceptable to use her work now as her credibility is corroborated and well-known, as the previous observations indicate. It is a definite anomaly that her work ended up overcoming this aspect of her writing.

Her methods for obtaining this authority prove her tenacity and organization. As Neihardt noted in his review of *Crazy Horse*, Sandoz grew up among the Sandhills Plains Native Americans, which afforded her particular knowledge having grown up, in essence, with the Natives (Neihardt, “Crazy Horse” 4). Sandoz utilized her circumstances to address Native American concerns. Orville Prescott, book reviewer for *The New York Times*, notes this in his 1953 review as well:

Anyone who recalls Miss Sandoz’ biography of Crazy Horse, the Sioux chief, knows that no modern writer knows more about the plains Indians than Miss Sandoz, or sympathizes with them more intensely. When she was, a child on the high plains of
Nebraska Miss Sandoz heard the story of the Cheyenne flight from one of its few survivors. She has interviewed some of the other survivors and has dug deeply into official reports and contemporary documents. Her book is as authentic as it is possible to make it. (Prescott, “Books” 18 November 1953)

Prescott does see that her circumstances afforded her a unique position as a researcher. She was a devoted researcher; yet, her inquisitive personality, almost as a detective, drove her. For example, she was not content with not knowing Crazy Horse’s final resting spot, so she interviewed farmers, his peers, and others in an attempt to plot out his possible gravesite on a map she had saved in her archives (Sinclair). Approaching problems methodically and scientifically, she attempted to resolve unanswered historical questions. Her meticulous research process involved copious note cards organizing her facts and data. Her note cards, most of which are still preserved, include detailed data, the source, and date, as well as other pertinent information about the source (Sandoz, “Letter to Mr. J.W. Vaughn 2).

Each project she worked on included extensive sourcing. An example of this is shown in a document she typed listing her sources for “Little Big Man’s Heart is Bad.” She cites all local newspapers, government records, Indian Bureau reports, every volume on west and plains Indians available in Nebraska, Smithsonian publications, and first hand research with He Dog⁹, Little Killer¹⁰, Red Feather¹¹, John Colhoff¹², and White Calf¹³ (Sandoz, “Sources”). Sandoz was not content with just one source’s opinion, she cross-checked across many sources. When she talks about a moon rising in the fall of a certain year, she referenced saved weather charts to see if a moon would really have been rising at that time. She researched plants and animals native to an area and their seasons. All elements of the novel were diligently fact-checked. This adds to her painting the historical picture as accurately as possible.
Her interview notes also display her meticulous manner. She reported not only the date of interview, but also who accompanied her, who interpreted, and even the extra activities the interviewee partook in. For example, when she worked with interpreter John Colhoff interviewing He Dog, she noted He Dog’s smoking habits (Sandoz, “Notes on the Village of the Bearded Men”). She also consistently reviewed her notes. For this interview with He Dog with Colhoff, she recorded at least three typed versions of these notes, which were transcribed from her handwritten notes. She refined each set of notes adding things she remembered and explained in more detail.

Sandoz further established credibility by really attempting to understand the people she wrote about and to attempt legitimize their actions; she wanted to show their worthiness of support. This attempt encompasses obtaining translators, living with the Native Americans she interviewed, traveling thousands of miles multiple times to repeat interviews, tracking down old articles, magazine, and texts, and keeping track of oral histories. She took on the task of assembling genealogy records and unraveling the links between familial relationships so that she could describe it accurately in her books. Even He Dog noted the difficulty of linking and understanding his family’s relations. When Sandoz queried him in one interview, he said, “Don’t know – relations all mixed up” (Sandoz, “Interview with He Dog). It is often difficult to unravel the Native American genealogical links because names are often used twice or a person might go by many names. Crazy Horse, for example, is known as Tašúŋke Witkó, His Horse is Crazy, or by nicknames Curly and Light Hair. His father is also named Crazy Horse and has a brother and uncle by the names Little Hawk (Sandoz, Crazy Horse). It would be difficult to keep track of these names through an oral history or to relay them to an outsider. Yet, Sandoz diligently tracked the genealogy attempting to understand
all the connections. It was important that she understand the relations so she could explain them clearly to her readers; she did not give up just because one source did not know the answer. She cross-checked her sources and made sure that she got the story down correctly.

**Activism and Revisionist History**

Ultimately, Sandoz’s drive here derives from her desire to revise history. This was not an easy task. As friend, Charles Barrett wrote, “I can well understand what a historian is up against in his search for the truth. It must be very difficult to sift the facts from the truth” (Barrett, “Letter to Mari”). Sandoz tried to do this sifting. That credibility was later recognized by the tribes she wrote about. She was formally inducted into Oglala Sioux tribe (Bancroft, *Western Writers* 157) and thought of highly by He Dog and others from the Oglala tribe, as this honor and He Dog’s calling her a “granddaughter” indicate (Sandoz, “Letter to Gentlemen at New York Times” 22).

Her Native American works and letters display her concern for racism in the United States. She tracked problems of racism in the U.S. to Congress and other elected officials. In a letter to friend, Hazel Clark, she wrote: “With your concern about the persecution of minorities, these times must be sad ones for you, when we have our Rankins, etc., in Congress, and one of our major parties shot through anti-Semites, the other with anti-Negro prejudice” (Sandoz, “Letter to Hazel Clark”). Clearly, Sandoz sympathizes with the disempowered in society. Yet, she does not write a lot about other races or ethnicities; she feels they have champions of their cause, whereas Native Americans do not. It is curious how she established this position or why she would not advocate for all races. Her advocacy for Native Americans, though, becomes evident in a letter to Mr. James R. Webb criticizing his treatment of her *Cheyenne Autumn* novel for a script. Sandoz fumes:
Your concoction [the *Cheyenne Autumn* script] is something entirely different. Has it ever occurred that you would never have dared take such liberties with the great men of any other minority – not Mexican, Jew or Negro, only with the American Indian? Perhaps this will prove this last time for such libel. I hope so. In the meantime your face must burn with shame. (Stauffer, *Letter* 435)

This letter articulates that Sandoz felt other racial minority groups had adequate support and respect in society. She felt they could emerge from the level of oppression they experienced or were experiencing. She did not think, however, that the plight of the Native American was recognized or understood. Her letters and novels reflect concern with the United States policies regarding Native Americans. She seemed most concerned about American Indian sovereignty and Public Law 280, a law that limited tribal government power. Her concern varied from other movements, which sought to “improve” Native Americans (qtd. in Lee 83). Rather, she believed, “Such movements seem to me incredibly arrogant. What the Indians need I think, is freedom from the hamperings – economic, political, cultural, and spiritual – that the white man has put upon him” (qtd. in Lee 83). Kimberly Lee argues that “Indians were largely perceived as relic from the mist past, tragic anachronisms, ‘vanishing,’ or ‘all gone.’ This idea […] was heavily promoted in films and other popular media” (Lee 146). Thus, most Americans at this time did not advocate for the Native American voice as they had not even reached a point where they recognized the Native Americans as a group, let alone a group to help provide a voice.

In addition to her concerns about the public’s understanding, Sandoz worried that writing about Native Americans during Hitler’s rise to power would cause problems. She was concerned that Hitler would succeed and Nazis would take over the United States. She was concerned that they would not accept her books about “an inferior race” (Sandoz, “Letter to Carl Raswan”). Sandoz was forward thinking. She looked ahead, realizing not only how
whites would be affected by the war, but also how Natives would be treated if indeed Nazi Germany was successful. She was dismayed already at how Native Americans were treated, but knew that Hitler would invoke even more pain upon them. It is interesting that at a time when most were only thinking of how the war would affect them, Sandoz addresses concern about how the Natives would be treated if the war did not go in favor of the United States. This shows evidence again of her empathetic attitude.

Her drive to eliminate Native American racism derives from her opinion that Native Americans were unjustly treated. Sandoz’s story shows Native American injustice. She works to demonstrate the narrative as it unfolds, showing, not telling. The way that readers are exposed to this injustice makes it appear that much more jarring; the unexpected nature of the event creates a startling effect on the reader. She also lets readers come to their own conclusion about the event rather than telling them what they should think about. She lets the events and tragedies speak for themselves. It is important that Sandoz is not lecturing her readers. She does not dictate how they should think; she presents the facts and lets the reader do the analytic work. This is where other previous histories failed. They often told the story but overanalyzed and speculated without adequate data, as was the case with the signs at Fort Robinson.

**Revisionist History: Language**

One way Sandoz strove to correct the record was to utilize the language of the Lakota in telling the story from the Lakota perspective. Sandoz set out examining Native Americans from a position of other but realized this othering is exactly what prevented others from writing an accurate picture of the Native Americans. She noted the difficulty in writing about tribe as she found the complex problematics associated with the relaying of often culturally
sensitive historical events. As Sandoz once wrote regarding a short story entitled, “Giveaway,” “I hope I got a little of the feeling into the story” (qtd. in Lee 34). Moreover, Sandoz knew that there was much inconsistency between the printed historical sources and the oral histories passed down from the disregarded Native American perspective from story tellers. Sandoz saw this as a problem and strove to eliminate or lessen that otherness by talking with the tribes, engaging in their traditions, and attempting to understand and lessen that otherness. This divestment of the othering space between the Native Americans and this white woman allows Sandoz to tell a story that no other author had, especially since the language she utilized was used in an attempt to shed light upon Native American stories. This is an ambitious goal, and Sandoz ran the risk of alienating her audience, her sources, who she greatly respected, and her publishers. She was successful in her endeavor, although success in this venture is something that cannot be valued. Her books sold and some Native Americans seemed pleased with her approach, but some were also probably offended by her brash undertaking of such a sensitive topic. Most sources do not discuss this, although Vine Deloria briefly shares his initial opinion of Sandoz as negative in his preface to Sandoz’s *Crazy Horse*, “it did not impress itself upon me [on his first reading]” (v). However, as Deloria asserts, “Sandoz had presented a masterful and wholly authentic account of the struggle for the northern plains during the 1850s to 1870s in which almost every line rang true” (vi). Thus, despite initial preconceptions, Sandoz ended up proving her intentions.

In evaluating Sandoz’s technique, some of her language is craftily worded and poignant. Other passages sound like a stilted dialogue to a B western movie promoting ignorant stereotypical notions of the Native American other and savage. For example, when Sandoz writes, “The talking wires and everything about them was very strong medicine and
to be left alone” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 129) the phrasing here seems a bit off and reinforces the traditional stereotype of Native Americans’ “fantastical” beliefs in “medicine.” Sandoz scholar Stauffer agrees. In a review of two Nebraska authors’ treatments of Crazy Horse, Stauffer asserts:

> her efforts to approximate Indian phrases and references are often awkward and abrupt: “After much saying of no, Young Man Afraid did what he did not like.” Sometimes she uses terms that do not sound Indian. In describing an Indian’s attempt to spear a buffalo, she says, “inexpertly he overbalanced and went down…” Such words as *inexpertly* and *overbalanced* do not fit Indian cadences. (Stauffer, “Two Authors” 59)

Sandoz’s clear caring for her sources display that she was not trying to poke fun or indicate ignorance with her characters’ word choices, rather, she was demonstrating how concepts could be unfamiliar to Native Americans. At times, she did not get the language quite right, using terms and phrases that Native Americans would not use. However, other times, she makes use of her language effectively, showing how Native Americans would have named an object, as opposed to using an English word that they never would have known or used. For example, her characters called telephone poles “the talking wires […] with the wires strung along the tops, and heard the singing that was in them” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 129). She described the item using the Lakotas’ own words. The way she uses language and metaphor also displays the knowledge of Native Americans in relation to events. She demonstrates the role newspapers played in educating Native Americans. She points out that these papers, a sole news conduit, were printed in another language, on paper not seen before, where translators tell stories: “Often it was Sitting Bull, the Oglala, wanting the man of the talking wires to send more of the papers with the little black marks, the newspapers” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 129). These stories were helpful to him, as “They had wonderful stories to tell of that
far country… It was from these that the Indians knew of the fight between the whites, a big fight, with very many getting killed” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 130). Sandoz’s language choices cleverly show the inquisitiveness of the Native American population, their willingness to learn new technology and language, as well as the fright of the experience of reading about a large war between the white people, which must have terrified the tribes: if the white population would do this to each other, what would they do to the Native population?

Revisionist History: Lakota Metaphors and Word Choice

Sandoz’s metaphors extend beyond telegraphs and newspapers as there were many pieces of technology she had to find language for. She also found ways to describe Native ideas in a way whites would understand. Through her interviews, she carefully noted the language and phrasing that the people she interviewed used. She notes in several letters that “she had tried to say within the Indian language and feeling for words as much as possible” (Stauffer, Storyteller 153). When discussing the idea of petroglyphs, she describes them in this way: “So there was much visiting and recounting of gossip, and many stories of the great hunts and wars of the people to be retold by the picture writers” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 8). This turn of phrase would have been familiar to Sandoz’s audience of the 1940s. They were able to see another instance where the Natives were like them, having documentarians to remember significant events, just as movie makers were in their times. Sandoz serves as a translator here. Sandoz takes on the problem of attempting to speak for another group which can be problematic. Linda Martin Alcoff discusses this problem, “Even ethnographies written by progressive anthropologists are a priori regressive because of the structural features of anthropological discursive practice” (98). Alcoff argues that one issue occurs when a more privileged party speaks on behalf of a less privileged party (99). This theorist even takes
thing a step further when she argues that “speaking for others is problematic, so too must be the practice of speaking about others” (100). Thus, it is clear Sandoz sets out on what could be a losing mission here. She is not a Native American and never can represent the group as a member. Still too, as Alcoff notes, there are problems with speaking for another group. However, Alcoff notes that “the neutrality of the theorizer can no longer…be sustained, even for a moment” (102). Alcoff seems to imply this is the “other” theorizer, however, couldn’t one within the less privileged party, if speaking, also hold a limit to their neutrality? Clearly, this is a complex undertaking, both at the time Sandoz did it and yet today. How can one speak for oneself if one does not have the power to do it? How does that differ from someone who speaks about the less privileged party? Sandoz must have realized these concerns as a look at her archival material show an almost obsessive nature with the Native Americans she researched. She gauged her success by attempting to get the story as neutral as much as possible and as accurate as possible. She also had others read the text through for neutrality. Colorado friend Fred Rosenstock “criticized the liberties he felt she took in assuming she knew the Indians’ thoughts” to which Sandoz replied, “she tried to be as true to history as she could, but in order to tie her protagonist to historical events she had at times to use imagination” (Stauffer, Mari Sandoz 146). Sandoz did the best she could with this, however, by doing as much research as she could. As Stauffer notes “She did not think intelligent readers would be satisfied with the bare story; she wanted to make her book credible, a good book” (Mari Sandoz 155). Therefore, she researched, interviewed, and revised meticulously.

It is with extreme care that Sandoz exercises a new word choice, for instance, with the notion of prison. Sandoz changes this term, “Indeed, as Hump once said, it was better to die fighting on the plains than to live in the irons of the whites” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 21).
This iron term is significant. She also refers to prisons as “iron houses”: “But they have our helpless ones in the iron house” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 82). This term, although more popularized after 1946 with Winston Churchill’s Fulton, Missouri, speech (“iron curtain”), was in popular usage as an extreme barrier used by another in power. Here, the iron term could be significant, as the oppressed Native Americans are oppressed by the whites just as the United States felt a barrier from European countries with the “iron curtain.” To that extent, the Oxford English Dictionary does not list a usage for iron house, although it does reference irons used as a term describing bondage (“iron”). Sandoz uses the iron term throughout the text with negative associations for the Native Americans and represent the white social practices overtaking traditional Native culture, for example, “iron ball” (159), “iron arrow” (117), and “iron road” (215). This iron house term is more significant though, as house implies a place of dwelling for long periods, which is how Native Americans felt they were incarcerated. Sandoz shows how the “situation is very bad,” as she wrote in her letter to President Truman (Sandoz, “Letter to President Truman”).

Other language displays a clear understanding of the Lakota ways. Her references to time also reflect the Native perspective. Rather than say afternoon, Sandoz writes, “When the sun was past the middle” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 24). In fact, all references to time are related to Lakota references, which does put an onerous burden on the reader. Either he or she must look this data up, be familiar with the term, or accept that it is hard to orient to time and space throughout the novel. Most current readers would be hard pressed to know that “these had been dead many days in the heat of the Moon of Cherries Black” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 46) indicates August (Neihardt, 16, 61, 132, 248). She also related time to events happening around them which do not relate to year, but relates to “white man” time. This shows how
significant the white invasion was upon the Native American population. Her characters reference events around things that the whites had done to them, for example, “It was fall of the year When Three Men Were Hanging at the Soldier Fort” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 179) or the “the bad whisky times” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 170). While her readership may not know the exact day of these events, perhaps they can understand the significance of the whites’ presence for Native Americans. The Native Americans reference events around this uncontrollable other of import: whites and whites’ activity. The whites are like the weather and seasons: uncontrollable and coldly stolid. Moreover, they are significant enough to gauge time against, since the whites and their presence changed their lifestyles permanently and with such drastic effect.

Sandoz uses language to attempt to come to a better translation at the Lakota phrased things. Her work might produce a difficult reading, and she does not give readers much notice this will be their experience. She writes with unfamiliar language and phraseology while at the same time challenging the dominant discourse of Native American history and understanding. From a rhetorical theory standpoint, her appeals do not seem to make much sense? How can one attempt to tell a story that will become popular that also uses language that the readership will find difficult and unmanageable. Yet, by challenging the dominant discourse by using the language of the subjected, she simultaneously empowers that language and allows the culture’s history to emerge as accurately as possible without the constraints of traditional idioms and language to constrain it. She calls the treaties they sign, “the white paper signed at the Big Council” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 16). Smallpox, tuberculosis, and others are called by their symptoms, for example, “The white man [who] steals our helpless ones with his coughing sickness!’ he cried” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 181). She calls the white
women that Native Americans saw, “the women with the pale, sick skins and the break-in
two bodies,” which astutely describes the Western women that forged forth across the plains
(Sandoz, Crazy Horse 4). While it is clear whites thought of Native Americans, seeing whites
through Native Americans’ eyes is uncommon. Sandoz does not breeze over these
descriptions but describes how unsuited whites, particularly women, seemed to be in this
environment. Throughout the novel, she does not attempt to force words on her party if they
simply were not there. In addition to language more accurate to Native Americans’ natural
phrasings, she uses playful metaphors to describe situations, mimicking speech patterns she
had observed during trips. Rather than a party described as mad, they were narrated as “still
angry as bumblebees stirred up with a stick” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 32). Further, she knew
the language of the type of herbs they ate or used, including “buffalo peas and wild turnip”
(Sandoz, Crazy Horse 40). Her ethnographer’s and eye allowed her to note even the minutest
detail and, instead of using a crop more familiar to readers, used what the Native Americans
would have been cultivating at that time of year.

While her language choices are selected carefully, some appear contrived. In her
attempt to sound like the Lakota, she sounds like a white westerner trying to sound like a
Lakota. She neither fits in with the American rendering of the situation nor the authentic
Lakota phrasing or word choice. Unfortunately, this type of inauthentic or stilted language
only serves to disengage readers, both Native and non-Native, from the text. Throughout
Crazy Horse, there are several places she misses the mark. Her anglicized notions of how
Lakota would speak are occasionally stilted. For example, she talked of “Bordeaux, long
trader in the Indian country” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 10) or how “easy to do this thing that was
asked” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 11). Some phrases echo too strongly of Western sentiment in
that they are sappy or reminiscent of the John Ford Native Americans’ speech, such as “But all except the Red Cloud story was little more than a coyote’s howl in the night” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 192). This is a problem because Sandoz’s goal here first and foremost is accuracy, and the language errors simply reflect embellishment and not accuracy. It sounds like Sandoz wanted to get that “coyote howl” into the text without really focusing on the intent of sharing what exactly Red Cloud’s story was. Did it really sound like a coyote howl? Does that just sound like a good animal to reference that would make this book sound like a Western? What does that sound like? Why is it relevant here? Secondly, in keeping with her second motivation, it also did not allow people to better understand the practices of the Lakota. She sometimes does not explain clearly in her texts. Third, the change in voice makes the text uneven. There was no other references to coyotes or the significance of them. It seems that the phrase is just tossed in. There are three other mentions to coyotes in the text and none contextualize what this means (Sandoz 68, 77, 136). All these factors serve to alienate readers, who are already alienated in a sense since they are reading Sandoz’s translation of a situation. Some critics commented about this alienation in *Crazy Horse* and her other works. As one critic noted of *Cheyenne Autumn*:

But “Cheyenne Autumn” is by no means objective, because Miss Sandoz has told it entirely from the Cheyenne point of view. She has even tried to write like a Cheyenne, using Indian figures of speech and Indian rhythms of language. She has imagined what various Indians thought and what they said with high-handed fictional daring. Therefore, “Cheyenne Autumn” is probably sound history as to its major facts; but it is poetic and fiercely emotional fiction as to its lesser details. It also is extremely difficult reading. The words are short and the ideas simple. But it is difficult to think like an Indian or, more correctly, like Miss Sandoz’ idea of an Indian. (Prescott, “Books” 18 November 1953)
The critic’s blatant racism demonstrates what Sandoz is up against. First, the critic believes there is a special way that is “difficult” to think like an Indian. Even through this “difficulty” he is sure that Sandoz has it wrong.

The same critic noted:

“Crazy Horse” is an extraordinarily difficult book to read. The writing baffles, bewilders and irritates; it always remains a barrier between the reader and Miss Sandoz’s story of a noble man and the tragic lost cause for which he fought so futilely and well” at the same time he notes, “much beauty in it” and ends with his view that this book was, “in spite of its imperfections in many ways a remarkable book. (Prescott, “Books” 2 December 1942)

Thus, although maybe her method was not totally understood, her larger concept, that of the plight of the Native American, was clear. She strove to educate about the ramifications of the Native Americans’ mistreatment; how this mistreatment was more than just a loss of land and territory, but affected cultural, emotional, and psychological aspects of the native people of the United States. As another more recent reviewer notes:

Sandoz displayed an exquisite sensitivity to the spiritual and cultural impact of landscape and topography, and intensely conveyed the emotional, psychological, and religious universe of the Plains Indians. […] That sensitivity makes this, the most accomplished biography of Crazy Horse and one of the best and most moving books ever written about the American West, a strange, often unsettling work. (Schwarz 114)

Thus, even her failed effort does work; it advances knowledge about the multifaceted way in which Native Americans were affected. She is staking a claim in the importance of accuracy in representation as well as the impact that education can have on social change and social justice. Without knowledge of the Native plight, there was no way the public would have worked with Natives to ensure their fair treatment. She worked on the use of testimony in
fiction, using the testimony to build the fictional narrative Sandoz’s books helped to
personify this maligned group, leading the way for reform that came next.

**Revisionist History: Trust between “Friends”**

Sandoz shows the injustice the Native Americans experienced through a number of ways, but she first shows how the Native Americans explicitly trusted their white neighbors. They had an expectation of whites’ morality and hoped they would uphold their end of the bargain from treaties. For example, the son of Bad Face refused to take part in childhood games of dreaming of big deeds involving war or stealing; he said, “They could never do any of these things because it was against the white paper signed at the Big Council. No horse-stealing, no warpath at all, just peaceful living with their friends, the white man” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 16). Yet, despite this show of faith on the Native Americans’ part, they were not treated with such resolute adherence to the treaty. They were betrayed repeatedly throughout the *Crazy Horse* story, regardless of the treaties signed previously. Other histories did not make this as clear.

Further unjust activity was shown in the way that the Native Americans were expected to pay whites “annuities for fifty-five years” for protection “from every enemy, Indian or white” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 43). This mob boss style mentality of paying for the privilege of protection rarely benefits anyone except the protector, who utilizes scare tactics to force the frightened and submissive group that monetary advancement is an insurance against violence and brutality. In *Crazy Horse*, the Lakota tribe was still under attack by both whites and other tribes despite these false auspices. Sandoz provides evidence as to why this is unjust by showing the whites’ duplicity, violence, and dominance over this disempowered group. She brings the theoretical stakes higher for her readers here by engaging their
historical interest at the same time she is challenging their notions of what justice is and what it continued to be. While readers are engaged with questioning the ethics of the characters of the novel, they may be forced to decide how just their own treatment of Native Americans or other disempowered parties has been (if Sandoz’s aim is met). Sandoz’s novel asks readers to consider hard questions about choices. Whose fault is Crazy Horse’s death? Is it the soldier who bayoneted him? Were the soldiers who rounded him up for his ultimate death complicit? What about other soldiers on base? Was his treatment just? Could such treatment still occur? Where was it occurring? Sandoz does not ask these questions directly of her readers, but the story and the way it is told can put readers in the position of empathy for the underdog, in this case, Crazy Horse. Since readers are presented with the narrative position of the Native Americans, they begin to relate to the Native American perspective and also can attempt to atone for their own behavior, possibly. Although these two things, both empathy and judgment of one’s own behavior might appear to be in conflict with one another. Sandoz does not really take readers to task on their misunderstanding of Native American culture. Her letters do, but her books do not.

Some whites were not only engaged in questionable business tactics with the Native Americans, but also blatantly manipulative. In Crazy Horse, one of the translators tried at every turn to harm the Native Americans he worked with. He would deliberately lie about what was said in order to create trouble: “Worst of all these, as some of the men about him knew, was the one they called Lieutenant Grattan, he who had only bad words for the Indian ever since he came from the eastern soldier town of the whites. Then, too, the interpreter spoke with the crooked tongue, twisting the words of the chief as a bad horse can twist the
best rope” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 14). This interpreter, also known as Wyuse, was well known by the tribe for his inadequacies as a translator:

Even though he was married to a Lakota woman, they had asked many times for another interpreter at the fort, one who knew their language and had a good heart for them. […] But always it was Wyuse, with only a few Lakota words that they could understand—a drunken man, and mean as a thorn in the heel of a moccasin. Today he had twisted the words of both Conquering Bear and the soldier chief they called Fleming until the white man become red-angry, saying all at once that pay was not enough. Straight Foretop must be brought in and locked up. (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 14)

The tribe did not have any other option for communication and depended on this drunk, untrustworthy man to convey important nuances of culture and place, even though he was grossly incompetent. In the exchange above, a miscommunication led to incarceration and confusion. Yet, there was no other option for them to attempt to communicate, even though it was clear to the white soldiers at the Fort that the tribe was not happy with the translator’s work. At one point, his mistranslations turned almost deadly, as Wyuse translated some words for Conquering Bear and, “There was no telling what words Wyuse made of this either, for as the chief turned, the officer gave an angry order” and Conquering Bear was shot (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 28). Thus, his gross incompetence or deliberate manipulation caused great harm. Sandoz almost belabors this situation so that readers can see just how influential one person’s interaction with the tribes could be.

Sandoz also shows how the Native Americans depended on whites not only for supplies and food at the trading post, of course, but also for news. The Lakota tribe was confused about reports of Cheyenne attacks and killings of whites, but it was not until:

A trader’s son in the camp read the white man’s paper they brought aloud in the council lodge, turning the story into words they could understand. But nobody could understand about the killing or the other news of Cheyenne depredations along the
Holy Road. None of their people had been around there since the trouble at Fort Kearny. It must be an excuse to kill more women and children. (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 96)

Still, even when they figured out why they, the Lakota, were being blamed for an action they had not committed, they could not correct the record, as they were bound by the translator of poor ethical and moral character as well as barely marginal translating ability. This shows the triple incarceration the Natives endured, that of colonialist endeavors, as well as their limitations due to language and the government’s refusal to help.

Sandoz chose to focus on the horrific treatment that Natives endured as part of their colonization by whites. Sandoz vividly describes Crazy Horse’s attempt to identify fellow tribe members after soldiers came on them on the Blue Water. Although “worn out”:

he began the search among them, waiting at each one for the lightning, pulling down the dresses of the women that the soldiers had thrown over their heads, leaving their dead bodies bare and shamed. And each time he was afraid that it might be a relative, perhaps even the mother of Spotted Tail, his own grandmother. Then he saw the blue-painted dress of the young girl sister of Long Spear, one of the maidens chosen to chop down the sundance pole this summer, the wide sleeves like flying wings. The skirt of her dress was pulled up too, and she was scalped in a bad place. (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 77)

The treatment was horrific, but not bothersome, evidently, to whites, who made up songs about the various massacres. The soldiers that took prisoners to Laramie sang, “We did not make a blunder, / We rubbed out Little Thunder/ And we sent him to the other side of Jordan” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 81). Sandoz also shows how it was not just killing that the Native American people endured, many were unjustly imprisoned, as she notes on the Blue Water, an entire Teton Lakota camp had been killed, “nearly one hundred left dead on the ground, their women and children carried off to the iron house of the white man” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 86). Sandoz shows the readers that these innocent women and children, grieving
for the losses of many of their fathers, brothers, or friends, were then forced into imprisonment for indeterminate amounts of time. Little Wolf said, “If we give up what is ours of the emigrants’ claiming then nothing will be left to us” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 92). Even though the natives did not willingly give up much, they gradually were stripped of more and more land, power, rights, and dignities. Even history was rubbed out. This violence was not something that Sandoz could abide being misrepresented in the annals of history. She provides testimonials to back up her understanding of the situation. Each speaker attempts to speak to the colonizers, but really, is speaking to the contemporary audience.

**Revisionist History: How the Culture Shifted**

In writing the history, Sandoz demonstrates the way in which the white expansion affected the Native American tribes. This was not simply a matter of small tribal changes or introduction to new trading items; these were broad scale changes that drastically affect the tenor the tribe’s attitude as well as the machinations within the tribe, including culture. Focusing on the tribes without considering the effect of whites leaves out an integral and combustible element from the equation and this is what other histories had previously done.

Culture was changed substantially by whites’ introduction of alcohol to the tribes. Although Sandoz poses no new territory in indicating that Native American drinking was caused by the “poison water brought by the whites,” she discusses it in a way that allows readers to see tangible examples of the effect of alcohol on a community and families (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 50). For example, rather than simply stating alcohol was a problem, she gives specific examples of tribe members within Crazy Horse’s tribe and family who struggle with alcohol abuse and show how drinking affected both their lives and others. There are examples of the effect upon pride, motivation, and changing the tribes.
When demonstrating how drinking has altered the respectability of some tribe members, she utilizes the character of an old woman, someone who is typically treated with reverence in both Native and white population. Yet, this woman is not treated with reverence at all, but with pity. This woman resides near Crazy Horse’s lodge and, “As the sun climbed, some who had taken the whisky of the whites began to live again, to look around them with sick eyes. Near the Crazy Horse lodge an old woman was sitting alone, not as a woman sits, but with her legs straight out before her, a shameful thing even for one so old” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 51). Through Crazy Horse’s eyes and judgment, readers are able to see that alcoholism has taken over even the meek and helpless within society causing them to act in unrespectable ways. She contextualizes the situation of alcohol on the reservation well. She does not just discuss a dominant male’s addiction to alcohol; she focuses on others who often are not stereotypically associated with alcohol consumption. Here again, we see Sandoz attempting to write a clear representation of alcoholism, not just commonly held beliefs or a brushing aside of this big issue. Sandoz need not have gotten into this information if she is just doing a straight biography of Crazy Horse. This is peripheral data, so, why include it? This shows Sandoz is not just writing Crazy Horse’s narrative, but that of his entire people. Making the peripheral central in some aspects allows readers to visualize multiple facets of Native American life that they can assemble into their collage of Native American knowledge. Further, in order to understand Crazy Horse, one must understand his people, but in order to understand his people, readers needed to push aside preconceived notions of Native Americans and understand these peripheral components.

Considering tribe members’ actions further, alcohol caused tribe members who acted in impulsive and unfruitful ways, not sticking with the tradition of helping the tribe and only
looking out for oneself. Sandoz shows the irrationality of intoxicated tribe members: “Slowly the two sons raised themselves up to look where she was pointing, and before anyone could stop her bad talking, one of them reached into the lodge pile beside him and, drawing out his bow, shot the old man through the back” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 51). This shocking killing was a traumatic event for tribe members. Those trying to understand or explain it noted, “‘It was the white man’s firewater—’ Yes, the firewater, everyone agreed” that caused the random killing (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 52). Here, Sandoz uses the character of an elderly person to show how alcohol impairs judgment. These young brothers were not responding to any type of actual threat or one that could be perceived as a threat. The victim was an old man with his back turned, two points that render the boys’ prey helpless and meek. If the victim had been younger or more agile, perhaps readers might see the killings as retribution or an odd manner of competition. However, Sandoz’s careful selection of character allows her comment about alcoholism to emerge, rather than other issues complicating it.

Sandoz also demonstrates how whites’ waste affected the tribes. Again, this is not new territory that Sandoz is exploring, but she makes points from the Native American perspective about the effect of this waste. As Sandoz notes in the short story, “While the Indian was positive of the inexhaustibility of the supply he was never wasteful. That was the prerogative of the white man armed with powder and ball and a mania for destruction and for money. […] Millions of tons of meat were left on the plains to rot—food for maggots and wolves” (Sandoz, “Last” 4). Here, rather than focusing solely on the idea of the buffalos’ depletion, she notes how the overkilling of the buffalo left rotten meat in their living areas. These rotting carcasses brought sickness, disease, parasites, and pollutants. They also increased the proliferation of predators. While the Native Americans quickly and efficiently
made use of meat, thus avoiding these problems, the whites’ buffalo use was not as complete. In addition, the whites also shot significant buffalo that meant more to the tribe than just meat: “Up in the north country there was a stranger thing- several white buffaloes had been shot this fall, more than were sometimes seen in all the days of a man’s life” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 112). These white buffaloes were sacred, yet the whites were killing representatives of religious significance without any consideration on the effect of those who believed in its power. Sandoz makes clear how this waste affects much more than the depletion of the Buffalo.

Sandoz demonstrates how the interaction between whites and Native Americans brought about a shift in attitude toward the Native American population. This was not a positive shift. The whites ultimately brought about a change in attitude. As young Crazy Horse (Curly) notes:

But Curly saw that the people were not as before. Troubled and uneasy, they sat around, talking, talking, when there seemed much to be done for the winter. And those who should be leading them were caught in the net of words like all the rest, caught like fish in a net of sinew that could not be seen in the water. Little Thunder had lost much of his power since the Blue Water fight; Iron Shell was bitter as sage dust, and the younger men were making strange, played-out words [...] his own uncle talking of the many, many whites on the earth, and that their soldiers were thick as the clouds of grasshoppers in the bad years. (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 91)

Thus, the whites’ interaction was bringing about a negative attitude and perspective, something beyond that of other tragedies or difficulties in years before. The Native Americans were anxious because of the changes to their lives, the inability to make decisions for themselves, and the changes to the environment and world around them. Even their day to day living was challenged. As more and more natives were asked to change their lifestyles to become more farmer-like, they could not understand the need to switch from a hunter-
gatherer mentality: “Dig up the earth! The Oglalas pulled the fat, juicy meat from the roasted ribs with their teeth and laughed” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 128). Yet, as history shows, these Native Americans did change from a hunter-gatherer mentality to a farming one. They changed their culture and ways of making a living. Their attitudes may have also shifted because of the effect of the whites on culture: “There were whites along too, and the Bents and other traders’ sons, for now it seemed that their place was surely with the people of their women” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 152). Now, too, the Native Americas dealt with intermarriage and the challenges that presented: where the couple lived, the tradition under which to raise children, or who would care for elderly relations. After hauling Native Americas from home, they did not have access to standard ways of caring for themselves and, “Now who would do for those helpless ones so far from their people” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 183). Intermarriage was a much more complicated problem than most other historians of the time paid credence to, focusing more on the exotic otherness such a union engendered rather than the dramatic cultural confluence within a household.

Essentially, all aspects of Native Americas’ lives were affected by the white migration, and, once it began, there was nothing that the Native Americas could do to retrieve it. Sandoz’s attention to detail in noting all the ways in which Native Americas were affected serves to show the general reading public just how traumatic the white migration was upon these peoples. As a consequence of white interaction, the futures of these Natives were drastically altered. Many grew up with an inherent desire to better the situation for future generations: “Yes, the warpath was a fine thing for the young warriors, Crazy Horse thought, but he would try to make it so Little Hawk need never see the women and children lying on the ground like animals butchered in the hunt” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 139). They
saw that they needed to change things for youth. After seeing the things they had seen, they had no desire for their tribe’s youth to see the same trauma, such as:

the Oglalas heard only of all the people killed and then they heard the names of many they knew, and of the shameful things done – men, even old ones, with their man parts cut off, women scalped in a private place and the scalps showed around in the whisky houses of the white man’s town called Denver, others cut open and the babies they carried laid out beside them. (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 151)

These tragedies and atrocities serve to motivate Crazy Horse and his peers to make things better for their future generations. The tribe wanted to take ownership of their future and attempted to educate their children about how to fight for themselves. “Let the soldiers come,” Crazy Horse thought, after the massacre at Sand Canyon (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 151). They were ready to fight instead of meekly following the rules of trade and action set forth by the whites. They were empowered by the devastation and were not going to take it anymore. This was a breaking point for tribe.

While the Natives were no doubt shaped by whites’ trading, they too shaped the whites. Sandoz’s works depict what whites obtained from Native American culture: “We have been eager to borrow so many tangible things from the Indian, varying from the little prairie turnip to the great wealth-making crops of tobacco and corn. We have, however, been a little less ready to appreciate the dignified face the Red Man was accustomed to turn upon life, or the great idealism innate in him” (Sandoz, “The Noble Red Man” 1). From the Native Americans, whites received monetary gain through trade or exploitation of trade items. They also collected people as friends, spouses, or prisoners. The whites also benefitted from tips, suggestions, and explanations about the land or environment. Although the whites called Native Americans “undependable, incompetent and lazy” (Sandoz, “The Noble Red Man” 2), Sandoz notes the irony that these men and women showed Americans to raise maize and
fight (Sandoz, “The Noble Red Man” 2-3). She notes how others are infatuated with Native American perspectives:

Perhaps we could give our Indians something of the hope and opportunity we offer to peoples all around the world, peoples often no more impoverished and hopeless than many of our Indians – so recently called the Noble Red Men by travelers come from all the world to study [his or their] dignity and [his or their’] wisdom. (Sandoz, “The Noble Red Man” 3)

Sandoz wished they would have taken from the Native Americans the idea of “double responsibility: to his people and to his family” (Sandoz, “The Noble Red Man” 2). In the study of these great people, she hoped they would learn to work the land, understand peoples and the seasons, and respect for both community and all human beings. Sandoz represents the Native American people’s responses as model citizenry and something to emulate for a better societal interaction. She shows how this peaceful people responded many times with peace in the face of hate and racism. Since many of her works are demonstrations of alternate future, she saw these people as models for a future community to emulate. The grace and humility of the Native Americans, coupled with their intelligence and perseverance, are themes she returned to in her Native American texts.

**Reception: Sandoz Remains a Source and Sourcing**

Sandoz corrected or encouraged scholars, academics, and writers that sought her expertise. Many wrote asking questions about Native American genealogy, historical data, understanding of a particular custom or tradition, as well as standard fact checking. Historical signs, city brochures, historical association signs and information, and other travel stops near the Pine Ridge Reservation in northwest Nebraska and southwest South Dakota features Sandoz tributes frequently, although not prominently. Perhaps what is most notable about researching the Native Americans in this region is how local historic sites, authors, and locals
use Sandoz as a source at nearly every significant historical stop. The Crazy Horse monument in Custer, South Dakota, cites Sandoz as an authority on Crazy Horse. The Fort Robinson historical museum in Crawford, Nebraska references her as well. Both tourist sites’ bookstores sell many of the works in Sandoz’s repertoire as well as other historians’ works. Despite the criticism of her work, many historians and visitor centers cite Sandoz prominently. Later authors do not deny that her source material and aspects of her work are the best records of some aspects of Native American material. Further, her work and research is so well done that others often cite Sandoz without giving her credit for her work, as Stauffer argues:

Sometimes Sandoz’s material – great swatches of it – can be found embedded unacknowledged in someone else’s book. Two recent publications about the Midwestern states owe her credit for their information about Crazy Horse, for instance. Authors have been known to insert smaller extracts of her material into their work, apparently willing to accept her information but unwilling to credit her as a source. (qtd. in Lee 23)

She has become the primary source for others citing her interviews with He Dog and other famed Lakota leaders. The detail and information Sandoz obtained in her interviews through her habitation with tribal communities of the West allowed her some of the best information that is still used today.

Even though some authors began to correct the way they referenced Crazy Horse and the Lakota tribe, other institutions have not fully considered their responsibility to telling Crazy Horse’s story as completely as possible. Although some mention the fact that this unarmed man was attacked in the back without provocation, some narratives still today suggest that Native Americans had incited the event. At some historic sights honoring the history of the frontier west, such as Fort Robinson, Nebraska, the historical associations
significantly do remember Crazy Horse. Yet, it is curious how these government institutions honor this great Lakota war chief and his people to a point of blatant disregard (even at a facility that attempts to honor him and his fellow tribe). State Historical Society workers write placards that read negatively; they paint the Native American tribes in the region as aggressive, hostile, and almost deserving of poor treatment. For example, the Fort Robinson Parade Grounds sign reads, “Home of some 13,000 Indians, many of whom were hostile, the Agency was one of the most troublesome spots on the Plains. The camp was named Camp Robinson in honor of Lt. Levi H. Robinson, who had been killed by Indians the previous month” (NSHS, “Fort Robinson”). The placard seems to focus on just the negative aspects of the Native American history and none of what happened to the Native Americans. This patent overstatement about Native American hostility is disrespectful and incorrect. It generalizes all Native Americans due to the action of a few. It continues to promote the Native American savage myth. The historical marker authors continue, “Fort Robinson played an important role in the Indian wars from 1876 to 1890. Crazy Horse surrendered here on May 6, 1877, and was mortally wounded that September while resisting imprisonment. In January, 1879, the Fort was the scene of a major battle as the result of the Cheyenne Outbreak led by Chief Dull Knife” (NSHS, “Fort Robinson”). The marker makes no mention of what precipitated these wars and what happened to the lead up Crazy Horse’s death.

Another placard at Fort Robinson notes a:

faction of Agency Indians, joined with visiting hostiles, harassed Saville and his thirty to forty employees, threatened cowboys, and rode through the unfinished stockade shooting out windows. After the establishment of nearby Camp Robinson in March 1874, the agency remained a powder keg. In October 1874, for example, hostiles chopped down the new agency flagpole and threatened to destroy both the agency and the military camp. (NSHS, “Red Cloud”)
This historical marker shows the typical attitude of those in the region: the Native Americans were at fault, were hostile, and deserving of the harsh treatment they endured. This demonstrates a clear bias against “hostile” Native Americans and representing their concerns, as the historical society did not describe white soldiers in this way. They were “cowboys” seeking refuge from the Native Americans’ “harassment” (NSHS, “Red Cloud”). Even the sign denoting where the chief was stabbed mercilessly in the back spells the name of his tribe wrong, using the Nebraska spelling, “Ogallala” rather than “Oglala.”  

This exemplifies the struggle Sandoz must have had at correcting the record during her time, as even today, visitor information disseminates the misspelling and negative attitudes remain toward the “hostile” Native Americans. They were not trying to attack at all, but were trying to surrender. Her revisionist history attempts to tell of the plight of the Lakota, and how they were blockaded without food or clothing until they were forced to surrender and then lured in to be killed. Even some current historians report Crazy Horse was “resisting arrest” although he had willingly turned himself in for transfer (Olson and Naugle 293). Sandoz thought a horrible injustice had been done to Crazy Horse and his people and wanted to share that narrative rather than the “angry savage resisting arrest” narrative which received a more popular retelling.

Sandoz was not just trying to make political style statements with her text or to present alternate possibilities for societal behavior. As she proclaimed, she was trying to correct the current histories out there by giving detailed description. Her Native American works focuses on presenting things from the Native American perspective as accurately as possible. Thus, one of the most noted aspects about this text is her use of Lakota metaphor. Some find her extended description tedious as she describes and describes again as she wants
to ensure her readers can really see the land and the people. It is easy to be distracted when reading her; this was noted by Vine Deloria in his introduction to her last edition of *Crazy Horse*:

> due to my hasty read it did not impress itself upon me. In retrospect, I understand that I failed to savor the words, sentences, and paragraphs so carefully crafted as a seamless document. At my tender age they seemed to blend together into a homogenous mass containing may extraneous details but difficult to use because of the lack of footnotes. (v)

But Deloria does not maintain this idea today. He was impressed in his later readings that her language allowed him to really see the action of the story.

For example, one short paragraph describes Crazy Horse, brooding over the changing circumstances of his life and worked for his people, as resembling an old buffalo bull, mean and grumpy, standing on a hillside, so tired with the desire to be alone that even the birds dared not land on his back to pick insects and worms. The picture Sandoz creates of the buffalo and the birds is memorable from a careful reading of Standing Bear’s *Land of the Spotted Eagle* and gives the book an authority that cannot be dismissed. It is a tiny and a superfluous detail but one that rings so true that it is almost as if Sandoz had been present. (vii)

Deloria shows an example of Sandoz’s specificity and her ability to write reliable accounts into her texts through representation. He argues that her details allow the work to gain and maintain credibility. While Deloria found Sandoz’s work somewhat cumbersome or arguably, verbose, he realized the importance of the details and the long and expansive narrative sections. Thus, these details, although initially off-putting, are what ultimately make Sandoz such a more comprehensive writer with a more realistic read. She gives details, shows commitment to her craft, and shows dedication and honor to her research subject. Her work crosses boundaries or at least serves to begin to blend them. Her marginalization, both then and today, occurs because Sandoz did not understand that her readership would care about this explicitness.
Sandoz excels in her ability to escape/shroud her own race and ethnicity as well as shirk a white dominance narrative. Sandoz did not approach this task without hefty consideration. She knew she must stand behind her works with aplomb, thus she diligently researched her work and cross-checked her material. Her archival material shows meticulous notes, rewritten transcripts, and multiple interviews with sources. She performed extensive and multitudinous interviews to ascertain Native American beliefs and rituals. She examined the plants they used as well as different tribes’ uses of varying materials. Without relying on general knowledge about these peoples, she went straight to the sources she was writing about herself, inquiring, interviewing, noting, and studying. She did not rely upon the stereotypical representations from other texts, despite their apparent popularity. As Deloria notes, “I doubt if anyone else could tell the life of Crazy Horse as well as Sandoz does. She must have known many Sioux people during her formative years, and memories of those people must have come flooding back when she began writing. How else can we explain how her writing captured nuances that only a few would know and understand?” (xv). She approached the writing of her Native American texts with an anthropologist and ethnographers’ eyes in her description of traditions and actions and a historians’ precision for detail and confirmation in her descriptions of the tribes, history, and environment. She knew the historians could harangue her, but she wanted Native American approval of her work.

**Description of Land and People**

In her description of the land, she expresses it from the perspective of the Native Americans and what they would have noted. While a white frontier settler may have seen free land and acres of farm ground, the tribe saw hunting ground or land for berries. Readers
can see the significance of berries for the tribe just in the language Sandoz employs, the
colors she uses to describe them, and the length at which she focuses on them:

But some day the people would be together again, and now there was much to be
done and his Brule cousins to take up his free time. It was a good fall in the Running
Water country, the chokecherry bushes bending like dark plumes in their shining
fruit, a few patches of late currants still holding their berries, sweet and blue to the
tongue, the wild plums turning yellow. (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 39)

This extended description provides for a more definitive line of sight to Native Americans’
lives. Other examples, too, allow readers to understand more about the Lakota culture. She
shows how the young Lakota girls tanned deerskin “instead of begging for the white man’s
cloth” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 65). She describes their dresses in detail, showing their style
and material of “doeskin and calico” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 7). Every word and description
weighs importantly to explain the culture. Her style teaches about a culture’s mores, foods,
habits, language, and tradition which allows readers to better relate. Sandoz humanizes her
subject.

Her descriptions of culture take a detailed form which allow readers to better
understand living circumstances. She describes how the tribe treated Crazy Horse after an
injury after an incident where a wounded soldier was brought to camp, “But Jim and Little
Thunder ordered him taken away at once, Bordeaux’s wife slipping out to help him in her
Lakota way, wrapping his belly tight in wet buckskin and giving him a little whisky and a
robe and covering him with brush” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 33). Sandoz shows the Native
Americans’ compassion here for others, which was and is not traditionally focused upon
(reference earlier comment about historical signs at Fort Robinson). She demonstrates the
day to living as well as cultural nuances such as the “crossed-arm handshake of respect, first
the right one of the chief on top, then the other way” (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 139) rather than
just saying “handshake.” She also describes the way of coupling or dating. When a young, native man shared his blanket with a young female tribeswoman, he was sharing an intimate, courting moment with her (Monger 488). Sandoz repeatedly shows when Crazy Horse and Black Buffalo Woman share this type of moment. She doesn’t have them hunting game together, or building a fire, or something else. She researched what the two would have done during courting and represented that accurately, as Monger demonstrates. (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 123, 131, 155). The way she describes culture allows readers to see similarities behind races. She continues with this method as she described the community:

Today the great encampment was quiet, a few strings of smoke from the cooking fires twisting into the air, the feathers of the spears and war shields on their stands outside the lodges hanging still. Here and there a horse stomped flies at his picket, a dog snored, or a baby made soft noises in his cradleboard. (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 7)

She provides examples of how the white and Native Americans share experiences and are not different. She describes the tribe’s pets, the way they gather paints, or line cradleboards and behave as good mothers (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 65). Sandoz’s explanation of these daily actions serve to link the whites to the tribe and create a sense of oneness and engender a relationship. Ultimately, she strives for awareness and to get the word out to help these tribes as a brother, sister, or friend. She read about injustices in history and was incredulous they were continuing still in Congress. All these actions show the hidden side of Native Americans or one that readers were unfamiliar with, which ultimately was not all that different from the readership. Readers are forced to engage with their monolithic notion of Native American as violent warrior; rather, Sandoz presents the soft, gentle brother, the alcoholic Grandmother, the backstabbing friend, and the unobtainable girl. These are everyday people that everyone knows, the universal character and narrative types that occur
in fiction. Sandoz’s presentation of the Native Americans in this way allows her to use Native American characters to fulfill archetypal roles in any culture, thus allowing white or non-native readers to see applicability between what they were reading and their respective cultures. These common archetypes are occupied by Native American characters, which then become more familiar and relatable for readers.

While attempting to tell the history, she does falter in the way she footnotes any of this data. She describes battles accurately, using cross-referencing with other history works and general knowledge about topics. Despite this research, she uses only scant footnotes in her works, if any. One footnote in Crazy Horse only states a clarification, “Sioux attack on the Omaha, summer 1855,” but readers never know where this or any specific pieces of her data come from (Sandoz, Crazy Horse 69). If this is done in order to keep the narrative flowing, it does, but loses her historical source credibility. Regardless, these dates can now be corroborated, and it is clear that Sandoz research was correct. The general public must have been her intended audience for this book, and, although she had the documentation to support her argument, she omitted this data. Was this in order to prevent reader alienation? The elimination of this material makes it seem more like popular fiction and less like reading a historical text, which might have appealed to a different demographic. At the same time she is making things “easier” for her readership, she is pushing them with her discussion of race politics. This seems contradictory but may have been an effective strategy in that it eases the reader into considering difficult topics without appearing too didactic. It also affords her the ability to employ special narrative devices that would have been outside the scope of a traditional history text.
Her lack of footnoting does allow her to get creative with her narrative. Instead of noting the passing of time with years, she notes it with elements of nature, such as bird migration patterns or moon phases. The Lakota would also have referred this way to time, which is why she did it. It does, however, complicate things for a current readership as most do not know when, “the geese and sandhill cranes went south and then came back…” and how long that takes (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 110). Switching voices in the narration would have been against the idea that she was trying to get at here, that Native Americans were marginalized, mistreated, and misunderstood. Her application of time serves to bring readers to the Native Americans’ world as opposed to Native Americans to the readers’ worlds. She tries to show readers the way of Lakota thinking rather than inscribing language and words upon their story.

**Purpose**

Sandoz saw her ability as a writer endowed with the responsibility to enlighten.

Readers see this in her passion for her anti-capitalist novels, her work with women, and especially in the case of Native American injustices, where blatant discrimination was clear in the upper echelons of government and power. Sandoz discusses injustice, lack of legal counsel, abuse of oil and cattle rights, and reflects on Native Americans’ treatment (Sandoz, “Indian Looks” 6). In a letter to the *New York Herald* she points out that soldiers were:

> well treated with money in the pocket and no signs anywhere saying: NO INDIANS ALLOWED. They come home enthusiastic over the way the white man lives, and full of plans. Then they find they are once more only second-class citizens, with no market for their newly learned trades, no steady jobs and little or no opportunity to use their G.I. Bill for education or training. (Sandoz, “Congress”)

In a speech to an Association on American Indian Affairs group, she reports that Native Americans are left, “without the rights or the opportunities that would be considered the
civilized due of a convicted felon” (Sandoz, “Brief” 1). She echoes her letter to Congress in the same talk, noting that men in service “sees in many places, as I saw around the great Sioux reservations of South Dakota,” a sign “saying NO INDIANS ALLOWED HERE” (Sandoz, “Brief” 1). Sandoz identified and highlighted the history of injustice toward the Cheyenne, including the promises followed by broken treaties and movements, which were basically forced exterminations. Sandoz felt it was important to note how government officials and society so disrespected Native Americans, who were also representatives of the United States. In her talks with veterans, she noted their clear understanding of needs but saw the government continuing to compound Native American problems by disregarding them. As the Native American veterans told Sandoz, the government stole land, but then refused to adequately support young inhabitants with funding or education. Thus, these Native American children, Sandoz argues in various letters and speeches, couldn’t go to college (Sandoz, “Brief” 3). Yet, as Sandoz strongly asserted, these students were most deserving of an education: “IQ tests rate Indian children equal to the white, even a little higher in the Draw-A-Man tests,” she reported in a talk to the American Indian Affairs (Sandoz, “Brief” 4). The Native Americans had identified clear areas they could use help with: schools, athletics, training and “one good road” and could help with tribal (cattle) herd. Yet, unfortunately, the government continued to compound the problem:

After hundreds of treaties and agreements with the government to establish their status, these Indians [the Northern Cheyennes of Montana and the Dakota Sioux] and most of the rest in the nation are once more helpless before the whims of a few white men. Last summer a bill that virtually turns the Indians over to the states without their consent was sneaked through Congress with scarcely a white man not involved knowing it.21 ‘We were sold off like a bunch of scrub cows,’ one of the Cheyenne ex-GI’s wrote me when he heard what had been done. (Sandoz, “Indian Looks” 6)
The Native Americans knew they were unjustly treated, but had no or little recourse. Sandoz attempted to speak on their behalf, testifying to their honesty and integrity. She wrote in one letter to Congress about a hospital near her childhood home that had been closed. She noted that the blankets that were still inside the closed hospital remained, even though it was a cold winter and the local tribe knew supplies were inside (Sandoz, “Congress”). Although this is a stereotypical and generalizing comment (as it implies that Native Americans would be thieves and might be the only ones to take the blankets), Sandoz thought she was providing proof of Native Americans’ integrity and credibility through this example and show the unfairness in treatment.

Her correspondence with Congress was not unidirectional. Congressional members wrote her asking for help in their evaluation of Native American rights and justice. Sam Ervin, Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, wrote Sandoz asking her to complete a survey regarding Native Americans (Ervin, “Letter to Miss Maria Sandoz”). In Sandoz’s reply to Ervin, she states, “I feel qualified to say that a serious study of the constitutional rights of the American Indian is well overdue. Unfortunately, in large areas it sounds a little like a search for the [illegible – possibly corn-ear] worm in a field long choked with sunflowers, horseweed, and cockleburs” (Sandoz, “Letter to Senator Ervin”). She proceeds to detail that she saw the most important issues for the Native Americans included issues related to economics, home, work, religion, schooling, and aid. She herself attempts to help with schooling:

My publishers do not send my Indian books to the reservations but I do. I always send ten, fifteen copies out to selected schools in the fall, staggering them, so every three, four years I get around the circle. These go to the Cheyennes and the Oglala and Brule Sioux, because Indians like to read about themselves, like everybody” (Sandoz, “Letter to Mrs. H.E. Miller”)
She did not stop with just her volunteer book distribution. Not content with serving as an “idea” person, she took her issue straight to the president. She wrote to President Harry Truman, who had read *Crazy Horse*, on October 18, 1949:

> The situation, Mr. President, is very bad. The people are discouraged, resentful. [...] But there is almost nothing from which the Indians can make a living. [...] For, Mr. President, these Indians need not be in such straits even with all the forces of the elements against them. There is much work that needs to be done on the Reservation [including a highway, timber, saw mill, training program in lumbering so that]. [...] Indians can once more become the independent, self-reliant people they were when they cost the United States government so much in money and lives to conquer. (Stauffer, *Letters* 230-232)

She had thought and considered all this and not just paid lip service to the concept. She conceptualized the way in which the situation could be rectified. This is not just a problem-oriented letter, but also a solution-oriented letter. Sandoz does not cast blame; she just says the Government is responsible for helping and then proceeds to methodically outlay how they can help. She mentions that the Cheyenne gardens were destroyed and that, coupled with no good roads or railroads and exorbitant hay prices, forced the tribe to sell their tribal herds (qtd. in Lee 84). Without that income, Sandoz points out the few opportunities the Cheyenne had for work. She points out that they can’t hunt buffalo and notes sadly: “It is not good to see these people on relief, descendants of a tribe that produced some of the greatest warriors of the Plains, their women among the finest quill and bead workers, women considered by both whites and Indians as the most virtuous of any people on the continent” (qtd. in Lee 85). Sandoz appears to be playing to Truman’s sense that these people want to work, but are unable to. They are not happy with just “relief” and she shares in her letter how the Cheyenne would happily work to improve the reservation, start a saw mill, or build area roads. She scorns the lack of health care and suggests how the Cheyenne could be trained to
run their own industries and become more self-sufficient (qtd. in Lee 86). Sandoz’s 1949 letter predates the active relocation projects on the 1950s, the alternative that was implemented and moved struggling tribe members to urban centers often long distances away from their family and tribal lands. Government officials only allowed perfunctory trainings (Lee 78-9). While an improvement upon the termination policy22, which Sandoz called “extermination” or “unlanding of the Indians,” Sandoz still saw these reorganization procedures as ineffective (Dorman 104; Sandoz, “Letter to LaVerne Madigan”). What’s more, she saw the drastic cut to reservation services appalling. Sandoz notes the Northern Cheyenne reservation hospital’s closing, writing to Colorado friends, Boss and Rose Van Vleet: “Apparently the 1400 Cheyennes here are to remain well until Congress feels generous [and reopens the hospital], although by treaty right they are to have both hospital and doctor facilities on the agency” (qtd. in Lee 83). Sandoz found these cuts and ridiculous plans for Native termination unhelpful and inefficient. Her commentary and letters were a call for social justice, asking the public to step in and hold government officials accountable. She hoped they could use their institutional means to aid the Native Americans.

I argue that Sandoz’s attempt to rewrite the stories of Native Americans allows her a distinctive space as the first author to do so. She is challenging stereotypes uniquely. Yet, she does not consider the fact that her white background, although not one of privilege, might prevent her from being taken seriously by her readership. Sandoz never discusses the problems associated with attempting to write about the Native American world from outside of it, although she does indicate how she is attempting to do justice to these people even if she is not one of them. She observes the Native American peoples she writes about,
researches them meticulously, interviews tribespeople, and repeats her research. It is difficult for Sandoz to write about Native Americans as she will always be a white woman writing from the outside. However, she can be taking more seriously if she does the best work possible and attempts to write the story as intimately as she can. This will never afford her a place from within the tribe. She will never be a Native American woman writing about the Native American experience. However, telling the Native American story through detailed research rather than based on stereotypical assumptions backed in no fact is still a much more clear representation of the Native American people than the former histories written without doing so. She markedly improves the extant literature devoted to Native Americans, calling its accuracy into question, debunking myths and stereotypes, and heralds a call for more research:

Evidently, the time is ripe for a one volume history of the American Indian […]. The problem is that no single writer […] has ever overcome: the cultures and the histories of the various tribes differed so much that no one writer can become expert in more than a fraction, or a region, in a lifetime. I shall tell you what I have been telling publishers for twenty years: The only way to produce a satisfactory volume on all the American Indians is by getting the experts in the various regions and cultures to write the book together, each treating the field that he knows from work much beyond the usual printed sources, which are full of misconceptions and plain lies. (Sandoz “Letter to John J. Simon of The World Publishing Company”)

Sandoz did her part in helping United States and world citizens reconceptualize their notion of the Native American peoples. Yet, her work does not fully correct the record; she retells the history while at the same time fictionalizes other components. In her attempt to weave a story of intrigue, she creates conversations that might not have occurred exactly as she writes it. Although this is seemingly against her moral credo, it is clear that she makes alterations in
the text for the purpose of narrative storytelling. As Prescott said in one review of *Crazy Horse*:

> There is a good deal of what Crazy Horse though, a good deal of what Crazy Horse and others might have said, in this book. They all may be perfectly in keeping with probabilities and spiritual truth, but they are fictional embroideries of exact truth. A biographer’s credentials do not include a poet’s license, no matter how many biographers blandly write as if they do. (Prescott, “Books” 2 December 1942)

Prescott does have a point. While Sandoz shares the story of Crazy Horse with more people than perhaps a traditional history text would have, at what cost to the actual representation does that make? How are we as readers to know what is factual or not? While it is commendable that Sandoz is attempting to share the Native story with the public, her embellishments, which really is a flattering way of saying fiction, could serve to alienate readers or, at best, confuse them. However, Sandoz would not look at this as falsification. Sandoz was asked about her technique in an educational television interview. The interviewer, Rita Shaw, asks, “This is part of your philosophy of writing, isn’t it, that you, you should write the truth whether it shocks or […]” and Sandoz responds, “Definitely […] Oh definitely, yes, You have no right to falsify life, ever, no, never, at all, That I think […] is the cardinal sin of the writer […] you cannot face yourself afterwards, I think” (Sandoz, Interview with Rita Shaw). Ultimately, Sandoz could justify small changes to the story if they were in line with what she thought the party would do or would have done. She could guess at how Crazy Horse would have responded to his wife, even though there was no official historical document that quoted this certain discussion. It is well-researched history with the historian’s best guess at what happened, a technique historians use even today. She was creating a narrative around a core story of his death and the treatment of his people.
Despite Sandoz’s occasional embellishment of truth or fictionalizing some aspects of the narrative, she wants justice for the Native Americans. She did her best in *Crazy Horse* to capture the Lakota people, their difficulties, and the injustices they endured. Yet, as Deloria notes, “Although it has withstood the test of time, it has not received the acclaim that it is due” (xv). Evaluating Sandoz’s goals and intent with her Native American works is important. The archives show that she was an ardent activist for Native American rights, thus, her representations of Native Americans in texts must reflect her notion of the idealized and reconceptualized notion of Native Americans. Sometimes, it seems Sandoz’s affiliation with the Lakota tribe becomes strikingly close, as some of the phrases she uses to describe Crazy Horse might also be used to describe Sandoz. Perhaps she saw a camaraderie with this great war chief. For example, when she describes how Crazy Horse sat “beside the fire that night the father felt something else in the boy that was new – something that one could know without seeing as the sap that rises in the tree is known long before the leafing,” readers might also see Sandoz (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 85). She, too, experienced a renewal through standing up for what she believed in. Also, similarly, Sandoz’s direction in life was clear from the moment she stood up to Old Jules for her brothers and sisters as just a youth. She was forever picking battles and fighting for what was right, and this was something continued through her entire life. As friend Caroline Bancroft noted, “her crusading zeal in many dear causes—particularly for justice and aid to the Indians” lasted her entire life (Bancroft, *Western Writers* 160). She set forth to make things right for the Native Americans by attempting to record their history more accurately. As a Sioux proverb proclaimed (and Sandoz credited Crazy Horse with stating), “‘A people without history is like the wind on the buffalo grass,’ the old man said over his paint stones and his quill and bone brushes”
(Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 109). Sandoz attempted to rectify this for Crazy Horse and his people by telling their history so that their stories would not whoosh and bluster away as a dying wind.
Chapter 1

1 Ritual Native American dance outlawed by Congress in 1881 and not restored until 1930 (Sandoz, These 113).

2 The Benjamin A. Botkin Collection of Applied American Folklore maintained a stipulation in their donation that a private room should hold the collection. Sandoz’s collection was displaced and spread out across the entire archive while the Botkin collection retained the former Sandoz room.

3 Simon Schama, author of Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations), utilized gaps in history as places to tease out scenarios for George Parkman and General James Wolfe and to speculate about these two mysterious deaths. At times, his historical monograph appears to be bordering on fiction, yet it is based on history and uses sources to best conjecture on events he cannot support through research.

4 Amitav Ghosh trilogy about nineteenth century India, China, and Indian Ocean history including Sea of Poppies, River of Smoke, and a third planned for 2015 publication.

5 Sandoz witnessed those on the plains struggle with great difficulties (e.g. the loss of crops, illness, death, economic struggles, poverty, land struggles, feuds, Native American disenfranchisement, and child abuse).

6 Fling and Rice were known for “The Nebraska Method” or source method of historical research and taught at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln when Sandoz was there. These historians were proponents of the use of analysis of primary source documents when writing history. Other historians at that time did not value these primary source documents the same way and neglected to realize the value of these primary sources as evidence. Particularly, the two advocated using first person accounts for research (Stauffer 50-51).

7 e.g. Willa Cather’s O! Pioneers or One of Ours and Elia Peattie’s A Mountain Woman

8 Cather’s tales feature happy marriage endings (O Pioneers!), a woman following her dreams and reaching success (The Song of the Lark), or a man finally realizing his sense of purpose in life (One of Ours). Often, Sandoz’s tales often do not end with happy endings and concrete conclusions. Rather, the reader has to assume what may happen next in Sandoz’s dystopic world. Sandoz sought to challenge wrongs in society in an attempt to change society. Rather than protesting, Sandoz wrote about the stark realities of the situations in hopes readers’ enlightenment would bring chance.

9 Nancy’s inoperative community discussed in more depth in Chapter Two, see page 98 or Nancy (Nancy 1).
These articles are usually short and focused solely on the theme or characterization in Sandoz’s texts. They include Pam Doher’s, “The Idioms and Figures of Cheyenne Autumn”; Scott Greenwell’s, “Fascists in Fiction: Two Early Novels of Mari Sandoz”; Beatrice K. Morton’s “A Critical Appraisal of Mari Sandoz’ Miss Morissa: Modern Woman on the Western Frontier”; Barbara Rippey’s “Toward a New Paradigm: Mari Sandoz’s Study of Red and White Myth in Cheyenne Autumn”; and Rosemary Whitaker’s “An Examination of Violence as Theme in Old Jules and Slogum House.”

Chapter 2

1 The Ak-Sar-Ben Ball is an annual Nebraska celebration held in Omaha, Nebraska. A coronation ball has been held since the organization’s inception wherein a King was selected from an “involved business leader as King and a daughter of a deeply involved family as queen” (Knights 4). Queens typically represent wealthy, upper class families.

2 Women rodeo riders in the early years were not recognized for their rodeo acumen, but for their femininity.

3 The article does note that the comparison could be somewhat skewed due to the number of circulating copies for each text referenced. The city library owned nine circulating copies of Slogum House (“Censorship”).

4 Sandoz’s presentation of a female utopian vision could be viewed as an opportunity to advocate for feminist rights and solely improving the lot of females. Yet, it is clear through her work and the way in which females and males interact that she is not looking to solely improve the situation for females in her society, but also to improve the relationship between all regardless of gender.

5 Senator Styles Bridges, New Hampshire

6 Senator Edward R. Burke, Nebraska

7 Most likely Mrs. J.W. Babcock, a reviewer of Old Jules, and established Hastings, Nebraska resident (Sandoz, “To Mrs. J.W. Babcock”).

8 She does question androgyny, particularly in the case of Hamm Rufe in Capital City, Gulla’s husband, Ruedy, in Slogum House, and with other particularly extraviolent in Slogum House and Miss Morissa. Sandoz’s interpretation of women versus men challenges the status quo of women’s representations, which is why it is notable for this analysis. Other works acknowledged that men had varied gender roles they filled and societal functions. However, most women were pigeonholed into a help-meet representation. Sandoz, however, represents both men and women equally and fairly in her texts, but her analysis of men is irrelevant to her work as an advocate as there was nothing she needed to challenge.
This information primarily relates to white women in the 1930s to 1950s. Native American women were successful in getting jobs off reservation, while African American women actually saw a decline in position availability (Woloch 440). After the war, their employment rose as some white women returned to the home sphere. For the purposes of examining Sandoz, this analysis will focus on the more general statistics from the time period, which invariably will represent the white majority in power.

For example, in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s texts *Herland, The Yellow Wall-Paper, With Her in Ourland, and Selected Writings*. Sandoz’s writings also align with aims of Gilman’s other works, for example, women’s empowerment and roles for women in the private and public spheres in *Women and Economics*.

Sandoz was critiqued for her subject matter, including violent murders, male castrations, and illegal activities.

See *O’ Pioneers* or *My Ántonia*.


Betsy Downey claims that Hicks might not have been as influential upon her, claiming that since there was no indication in university records that Sandoz wrote a paper for Hicks that one did not exist (Downey, “Historian” 10). Further, she continues that Sandoz should have claimed Sheldon as her mentor. If she could and didn’t then, then why didn’t she? (Downey, “Historian” 10) Sandoz reported an extensive detailed account of a project for the class in a letter, so the fact a paper does not exist is not as significant as Downey claims. It is significant that Sandoz studied with Rice and Fling. Clearly, their methods influenced her research and formed the basis for her fortes in writing non-fiction.


Sandoz’s caretaking is more affiliated with fatherhood as opposed to motherhood, as her role in the siblings’ lives is less emotionally based and more monetary and provider based, which is typically associated more with a male caretaker role as father.

Despite Miss Christie’s poor review, the manuscript won the 1929 Omaha Women’s Press Club contest Award (Stauffer, *Mari* 9).
Miss Christie was upset about the language that Sandoz employs. Sandoz believes she has clearly represented the talk. Sandoz was not opposed to making changes and states, “I have no objection to making minor changes in any of my stories if they promise a sale. If the occasion for any such changes arises, fire the mss. Back to me with instructions” (Stauffer, Mari 8). It was just changes that she felt affected the integrity of the story that she refused to change.

Hadophilia – Sandoz quotes Dr. Louise Pound here, describing, “one who has a mania for the word had and sticks it into prose like telegraph poles along a railroad right-of-way” (Sandoz, “Letter to Mary Pfeiffer).

From The Storycatcher, Summer 2009, 3.


See Let the Speak for Themselves, University of Nebraska, 1982.

Their actual date of marriage is unclear. Stauffer cites 1895 as their marriage date (Stauffer, Mari Sandoz 18). Other sources, such as the Nebraska State Historical Society, cite 1894 as their date of nuptials (Nebraska 60).

Jules abused other wives. He left for Valentine, Nebraska and abandoned his first wife, Stella, to fend for herself near Verdigre Creek, in Knox County (Mcintosh 118). He was notoriously hard on other wives as well.


33 See subsequent Farmers/Laborers chapter for more detailed discussion about workers’ rights, fascist government leanings, and cooperatives.

34 Dr. Fix appears on many covers.


36 most often associated with masculinity

37 most often associated with femininity

38 Sandoz personally struggles with the notion of romantic love. In response to a *Pictorial Review* article, she wrote the editorial department: “In my unofficial and unremunerative office as trouble shooter for heart mash-ups, I have accumulated some definite notions of the misery, unhappiness, final disillusionment, and the vitriolic cynicism that can and do rise from a trusting belief in the love myth” (Sandoz, “To Editorial Department *Pictorial Review*). She believed that love could be troublesome and that buying into it only created pain. She continued:

Most American lives are founded upon the fallacious theory of Romantic Love. […] With the mature man or woman I have no patience. The truth is so obvious before their eyes. Let them see. The children and young people – they must be led to face the facts now, to see love, so called, as intrinsically transitory, to that unless its place is filled by something more permanent and substantial; common interests; common responsibilities, friendship, and a tolerance and respect for personality, the attachment will languish and die. Why should the sugary, cream-puffy love myth be unchallenged in an age when the Santa Claus myth has been relegated to the realm of fairy tales and the stork myth has given place to the truth, infinitely finer, more beautiful, and with the virtue of permanence? What misery, doubt, jealousy, misunderstanding, and bitterness might be saved (Sandoz, “To Editorial Department *Pictorial Review*)."

Sandoz’s portrayal of Morissa’s failing marriage is intentional. It is significant in that it demonstrates Sandoz’s belief that marriage or love would only serve to hold women back.

39 “Lean in” applied from Sheryl Sandburg’s nonfiction book title about women in the workplace (Sandberg).
Chapter 3

1 “Will-to-power” is the phrasing Sandoz used in her letters to describe this individual.

2 Rideout references motifs inclusive of religion, racial discrimination, political acceptance, rebellion, philosophic debates, and tolerance for example (Rideout 204).

3 Of course, identifying all of rural America with one monolithic catch-phrase is problematic. My description here is not meant to generalize, only to explicate Sandoz’s thinking on the issues.

4 Powers is “a turncoat Republican, a Red in league with Russia and their Communist labor agitators” (Sandoz 324).

5 Sandoz corresponded with Dr. Robert S. Lynd, Chairman at the Department of Sociology at Columbia University in 1944. She responded favorable to his “11:59” encouraged a working together. Identified as a “concealed communist” in his FBI file (Federal Bureau of Investigation).

6 Ibid.


8 There still exists a contingency of this nature in Nebraska. The Silver Shirts are linked with the Posse Comitatus and NSDAP Aufbau- und Auslandsorganisation (NSDAP/AO), an organization whose publications are sent from Lincoln, Nebraska.

Chapter 4

1 Please see Playing Indian.

2 Please see her work entitled Killing the Indian Maiden: Images of Native American Women in Film.
She is cited by Kingsley M. Bray in *Crazy Horse: A Lakota Life*; Kristine Brennan in *Crazy Horse*; Dee Brown in *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee*; Bill Dugan in *Crazy Horse*; Brenda Haugen in *Crazy Horse: Sioux War Chief*; Carole Marsh in *Crazy Horse*; Larry McMurtry, *Crazy Horse: A Life*; Thomas Powers in *The Killing of Crazy Horse*; and George Edward Stanley in *Crazy Horse: Young War Chief*.

The Bettelyoun manuscript was from Susan Bordeaux Bettelyoun, an interpreter born to a French-American father and Lakota mother. She wrote a memoir, “to correct inaccuracies she perceived in mainstream historical accounts” (“Dakota Images” 249).

“Crazy Horse” a play by Gregory Levin based on Sandoz’s novel to be used only by the Encampment for Citizenship Fieldstone School, New York.

John Ford’s *Cheyenne Autumn*.

Most contemporary authors cite Sandoz’s work in their research including the recent: Kingsley M. Bray *Crazy Horse: A Lakota Life*; Thomas Powers *The Killing of Crazy Horse*; Larry McMurtry *Crazy Horse: A Life*; and Mike Sanja *Crazy Horse: The Life Behind the Legend*.

During her lifetime, the possibility of a Crazy Horse opera was discussed amidst other projects.

Chief with Crazy Horse, resident of Pine Ridge (Sandoz, “Sources”). Last representative of Oglala tribe available at that time (Hinman 3).

Related to Young Man Afraid (Sandoz, “Sources”).

Relative of Red Cloud (Sandoz, “Sources”). Younger brother of Crazy Horse’s first wife (Hinman 4).

Oglala scout at Fort Robinson (Sandoz, “Sources”).

This is true especially since Crazy Horse went by other names: Horse Stands in Sight (early name) and nicknamed Yellow Fuzzy-hair (Sandoz, “Interview with He Dog”)

John E. Rankin, U.S. House of Representatives, Mississippi

Ball and chain, associated with prisoners.

bullet

railroad
19 Other references to this include: “In November, the Moon of Falling Leaves” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 63) and “In the moon of the Cherries Reddening, July” (Sandoz, *Crazy Horse* 69).

20 This references the sign outside the officers’ quarters where one of the members of the guard stabbed Crazy Horse in the back with a bayonet. Fort Robinson, Crawford, Nebraska.

21 This references Public Law 280 in which case the government transferred Indian laws’ responsibilities over to the states without Native tribes’ consent.

22 The Termination policy ended reservations and federal responsibility for the Native Americans and came into popularization in the late 40s and early 50s (Lee 74).
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Sinclair Nebraska Map. Mari Sandoz Collection (MS 080). Archives & Special Collections, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries.


VITA

Jillian Leigh Wenburg was born on March 7, 1983 in Beatrice, Nebraska. She obtained her elementary, junior, and high school education at Arapahoe Public School in Arapahoe, Nebraska, where she graduated with valedictory honors in 2001. She obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree in English from the University of Nebraska at Kearney, majoring in English and minoring in Publication Design and graduated summa cum laude in 2005. She obtained her Master of Arts degree in English Language and Literature in December 2006. Her thesis, which won a best thesis honor in 2007, is entitled “Borders Advocating Agency: A Critical Examination of Fatima Mernissi’s *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* and Sara Suleri’s *Meatless Days*.” Wenburg began study at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in the Fall of 2009, completing her coursework the summer of 2011 and achieving candidacy March 2012. Her comprehensive examination areas covered twentieth century American Literature and History.

Wenburg was the recipient of the following awards and grants: Graduate Teaching Assistantship award, Women’s Council Graduate Assistance Fund grant, Ilus Davis Scholarship, Farnsworth Fellowship, two Fort Lewis College Writing Program travel grants, three Fort Lewis College Faculty Development Grants, Interdisciplinary Doctoral Student Council Travel Grant, two School of Graduate Studies Travel Grants, two UMKC English Department Travel Grants, Western Literature Association travel stipend, American Studies Association Annette K. Baxter travel grant, UMKC School of Graduate Studies Research Award Program, Community of Scholars Top Paper Award, Pop Culture Association/American Culture Association Travel Grant, and a Mari Sandoz Research Fellowship.
She has a forthcoming publication of her essay “How to Train the Grading ‘Dragon’: Synthesizing Technological Tools to Facilitate Grading” with an anthology about *Beyond the Frontier: Innovations in First Year Composition* through London’s Cambridge Scholars.

Wenburg taught as a graduate assistant while at UMKC and currently is employed as a full-time lecturer at Fort Lewis College in their writing program.