

SANDOZ' LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION OF INDIAN SUBJECTIVITIES IN CHEYENNE AUTUMN

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this research is in the area of literary studies. Such a study is important in order to shed light on the use of a specific language style and perspectival representation in Mari Sandoz' *Cheyenne Autumn*. She conveys an approach to the Indian universe in an authentic and a different manner. The research approach adopted in this paper carries a linguistic and a stylistic analysis of the written discourse the novel displays by the provision of some examples from it. The finding from this research provides evidence that Sandoz' style conveys a holistic examination of the Indian universe that enfolds a wide cognizance of it. The main conclusions drawn from this study are first, the author shows the interaction of the Indian world with the contending White one approached by means of syntactic, semantic, and perspectival devices. Second, her style shows her inclination to the Cheyennes' cause and promotion of their viewpoints rather than confining to the Anglo-saxon opinion which misrepresents the Indians.

Keywords: Cheyenne Autumn, language, perspectival representation, Indian world

INTRODUCTION

Learning about the American Indian and his culture is part of the larger human experience. He has a unique local folklore but, the little knowledge about them have pushed the historians and literary people to dive into their universe and, in different extents, provide us with interesting cultural background. Due to the fact that, Native Americans were casted throughout the past centuries according to contemporaneous social, cultural, and political conditions, value judgments associated with them influenced that casting. As far as literature is concerned, it has played a pivotal role in propagating and intensifying racially-oriented theories and constructed a biased image about the Indians. Thus racial segregation, politically oriented history records, and one-sided perspectives continued to pervade both Western literature and history. However, in opposition to the prior misrepresentations, Mari Sandoz (1896-1966), the descendent of Swiss pioneer settler in the American west, wrote a set of novels among them: *Cheyenne Autumn* (1953). In which she tented to deconstruct stereotypes and fulfill another approach by generating a new style and vista.

Sandoz' Literary Profile

Literature is considered as body of written works of a language, a period, or a culture. Rebecca West states: "literature must be an analysis of experience and a synthesis of findings into a unity" (cited in Cunningham& Cushwa, 1943: 151). Besides, written works should be related by subject-matter, by language, place of origin, or by prevailing cultural standards of merit. In this connection, Mari Sandoz employs her pen to voice the oppressed Indians (colonized) who suffered of physical and psychological devaluation practiced by the

oppressor the Whites (colonizer). Sandoz's experience growing up in the Great Plains¹ influenced her writing significantly. She observed different responses of its natural environment, and saw the Indian relation to this environment (Sandoz, 1959: xvi).

Sandoz advocacy for the Indian which was obvious through her writings which made some critics consider her literature as "*littérature engagée*"² (Rippey, 1989: 1). Stauffer stated that Sandoz is particular in the selection of words. The western dialect and Indian idioms and some vocabulary are present in many passages (Stauffer, 1982: 187). The publishers used to term the use of these colloquial expressions as "westernisms" (Shirley & Parezo, 2008: 109). Oliver La Farge once claimed that "*Cheyenne Autumn* has gone inside the Cheyenne" (Stauffer, 1982: 192). Thus her vision was closer to the reality of the White-Indian relations during the story the novel narration.

Sandoz' narratives' focus is not on distinctions between White and Indian but, on the intersections between these people and their cultures, on their mergers, fusions and mixtures, on divided loyalties and internal differences, and on the "convergence of cultures that led people to compete for power and agency" (Butler & Lansing, 2008:6).

This also means that this author writes about the West "from the inside out" (West, 1991: 108), a perspective which is without shame or embarrassment engaged and subjective. Eventually, these features show that Sandoz' literature is unique, transgressive and calling for a change. Besides it serves the Indians' cause by voicing their history according to their locution and perspective.

Sandoz's Syntax and Diction in *Cheyenne Autumn*

This section is devoted to the study of Sandoz's use of language to present the Indian universe. Instead of portraying it following the conventions of the Anglo-American standard English, she uses its idioms and rhythm to supply it with an authentic prospect. Thus, she opts to specify her depiction of the Indigenous through peculiar stylistic and linguistic devices, which she considers to be relevant to portray this Indian perspective.

Moreover, she gives a great significance to the linguistic medium of these representations because, she is conscious about the importance of language that achieves and mirrors the human comprehension, reflections and experience. Thus her approximation of the Indian universe enables her to approach her English to their idioms. Certainly, since the Cheyenne *Algonquian*³ language is totally different from English practically, it is somehow impossible to accomplish an identical projection of the Indian universe using English. But Sandoz's great fulfillment is in the creation of a powerful poetic evocative piece of literature that serves to remind people of the Indian unique character. It also provides the beauty to the novel that plainly surpasses the Standards of classical English. As a result, she supplies the audience with a new literary tendency that familiarizes the reader with an uncommon world.

¹ Great Plains, a large area of land located in Middle America from Mexico to Canada (the Great Lakes) and from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains. The plains cover a dry grassland area, important for its agricultural and mining industries. Farm products include wheat, rye, oats, barley, and alfalfa, and cattle, goats, and sheep are raised. The region is rich in coal, oil, and natural gas (Bartlett & Van Ackeren, 1980:221).

² Littérature Engagée: The French equivalent of Committed Literature

³ Algonquian is the family of languages spoken by North American Indians (also Algonkian)

According to Villiger's view point, Sandoz's main perceptible trait of the Indian idiom is in its robust rhythm. It is appealed by the utilization of what Villiger terms the *parataxis* which means juxtaposing rather than superimposing of single sentence elements (1994: 102). i.e., the resulting rhythm of this special use of syntax is a powerful sense of continuity and circularity and connectedness that the Indian universe is confined to. This pulse is obvious in many passages in which the author is describing the Cheyennes' quick arrangements before holding a battle with the enemy. She recounts:

More horses came in, captured ones, whooped along with waving blankets, those with saddles and collar marks turned over the women, the horse-breakers taking charge of half a dozen wild ones, manes long and shaggy, the noses round and snoring.

(Sandoz, 1953: 101)

By lessening the amount of words to a lowest degree, Sandoz evades using relative pronoun and conjunctions. She only juxtaposes separate elements to one another altering the conjunctions and pronouns by commas. Consequently, the nearness of these sentences denotes the closeness of horses, women and men. The second fragment of the sentence is nearly a complete amalgamation. The beating result mixes the way the sentences are said with the current situation of the hasty movement of the people and their compelling demands.

Additionally, the thing that supports Sandoz's Indian rhythm, which denotes the successive flow of movement, is the extensiveness of sentence. The latter is different from that of the Standard English. Sandoz's employs this stylistic device to convey the usual rhythm beyond the sentence border, in that connection transmitting the effect of motion in Indian existence. This passage illustrates this idea:

Just ahead of the thin scattering of rear guards were the drags of the people, straggling women and the weak and sick on poor horses, the boys and old men whipping them along until, the animal fell, doubling the people up on the horses that were left. They lifted the old, the worn, and those very heavy with child soon to come, all the singing stopped now, the breath and the hope for it gone.

(ibid: 142-43)

In this excerpt Sandoz's styles successfully joined to give specificity to this scene, where the Cheyennes are forced to rush and every action done by the characters is mentioned in a meticulous manner. The form and content are made equal each one completes and sustains the other harmoniously. This procedure is a step to keep the reader far from the Anglo-American language use of sentence and to bring him closer to the indigenous idioms and world.

The "Indianness", as Villiger tends to term, in Sandoz's Cheyennes' story manifests in her use of vocabulary, either in literal sense or in figurative one, always serves the style of speech of the Indians' own experience and entourage (1994: 104). Expressions are chosen to convey the Cheyennes' affinity to their natural surroundings. For instance days are usually referred to as "suns" and they are calculated by the position of the sun and stars in the sky in the afternoon, for example the afternoon is expressed as: "the sun was past the standing feather" (Sandoz, 1953: 102).

The author tries to evade the expressions and concepts that are not used in the indigenous universe at the time of the story events. This is done on purpose to maintain the authenticity

of the narrative. Contrary to writers who record history according to Turners' Thesis⁴ ideas, Sandoz avoids anachronisms in order to suggest a faithful access to the Indians' world. Even its individuals' reflections are depicted to arouse a poetic sense. This figurative image shows Sandoz's mastering of Indian ways of using words: "The veho has long spun his web for the feet of those who have wings but are too foolish to fly" (Sandoz, 1953: 18). This expression is over loaded with pictures displaying Cheyennes' typical use of words in both figurative and literal meaning which Sandoz successfully conveys to us.

Sandoz's reference to the space is done in accordance with the Indian comprehension and expression, and even if this expression is somehow abstract or shown with unclear denominations, she is attentive to display its strangeness as if an Indian person is speaking: "within two hundred of the veho yards" (ibid: 105). The greatest amount of the space terms describing the nineteenth century Indian universe are blurred by the stereotypes loaded with the fuzzed images. Sandoz describe the position of Cheyennes' lodges in "Small pocket of a valley" (ibid: 32). And the movement of the Cheyennes' people on the: "ladder of the dry canyons and creek beds" (ibid: 53). These two expressions are instances of such fuzzy description of space which may impede the readers' comprehension of the space and time in Indian terms. Some prominent landmarks such as: "As the first sun climbed into the sky, it dried the little clouds that had slept in the west like the quiet swans on that briny lake up long the Big Horns" (ibid: 55), and "Lost Chokecherry Valley" (ibid: 108), these expressions are more defined and help to orient the reader to locate the fleeing people's movement. And we read also: "it is true that the soldiers are thick as blackbirds up beyond the Running Water" (ibid: 148) here the Running Water refers to the White River country from which the troops are coming.

Except for her use of names of forts, army officers, and agencies, Sandoz's text comprises no signs of Whites civilization even things and products coming from the latter are labeled according to the Indians' conceptions and experience: "The bitter white powder" (Sandoz, 1953: 27). This expression denotes the medicines of the Whites. And "The talking wires like the spider ropes all through the morning grass" (ibid: 54). This expressed the telegraph which is used for distant communication. And the "brown water" stands for the Whisky, which is a hated drink for the Cheyennes that brings destruction and dissolution of human values to their universe (ibid: 22).

In addition to her specific representation of Indian universe, Sandoz uses a countless number of images of Indian locutions denoting the Indian life. Here metaphors and similes, for example, are her favored tools to express Indian interrelatedness with their natural milieu. To name few, we read, for instance: "his eyes cold as the blizzard wind" (ibid: 50) she compares the character to natural phenomena. and in: "Yellow Swallow was nine years old but spindly, thin as a winter weed stalk" (ibid: 41), she parallels his weak physical appearance to a plant of winter. Then in: "He (the Cheyenne chief)...Soft-spoken but like a wounded grizzly in anger" (ibid: 11) she is comparing his mood to an animal character describing his serenity and anger. After in: "...soon the taunting against them as agency sitter came bold as spring snakes when the rocks grow warm." (ibid: 25) and in "Dull Knife sitting a silent gray rock in his blanket..." (Idem), these sentences implicitly show his steadiness and calm comparing to

⁴ This famous thesis was put forth in Turner's address to the American Historical Association at Chicago in 1893. In its essence it stated that the Character of the American nation has been shaped decisively by the westward expansion movement of the frontier

a rock which a natural phenomena. After that in: “Today we are a crumbling sand bar in the spring Platte, with the flood water rising all around” (Idem), this image displays the Cheyennes’ weakness which makes them easy to destroy and shows also the danger that comes all around them. Then in: “There were no friendly clouds to run before the face of the climbing moon” (ibid: 32), and when the Cheyennes are fleeing smoothly “like a smoke from shadow to shadow toward the little pass in the hills” (Sandoz, 1953: 34).or when the conflict among the southern Cheyennes flares up after having “been hanging like prairie smoke for a long time” (ibid: 150).

We notice that most of the images are taken from nature since the Cheyennes are tightly connected to their nature, thus their locution is inspired from this nature. *Cheyenne Autumn* is overloaded with this type of expressions that show Sandoz’s artistic skill employed in coordination with her large knowledge about the environment (fauna and flora) and the Cheyennes. The use of their locution demonstrates also her fascination and love she felt for them.

Besides the natural elements, Sandoz borrows ideas form plants and animal life to transmit some features of the Indian mentality like in “He had been like a great wounded bear in his fury and fearlessness” (ibid: 35). In the same vein, characters are often compared to animals’ features as: “Silent as field mice” (ibid: 39) This image shows the prudence and cautiousness of the Cheyennes. And the hostility and courage of the Cheyennes is portrayed for example in: “bold as the gray wolf who stalks the ridges with his tail straight up in the air” (ibid: 36).

Among the most important springs of Sandoz’s imagery are the Indian belongings. Their blankets, robes, moccasins, flute, parfleches⁵ and arrows are, in repeated manner, hinted to encircle the aspect of the Indian life. Thus the blankets are signs of pain and tragic movement of the Cheyennes and their poverty we read: “Their faces covered with the blankets of sorrow and anger.” (ibid: 23). The arrows show the readiness of the warriors for death as in: “with arrows poised for the silent song of death if any departure was detected” (ibid: 33). However the flute shows the nostalgia and emotional grieve: “Up along the hills the flute still rose and fell like a sad-winged bird” and in: “As the flute lifted its thin cry”(Idem).

Definitely, Sandoz’s *Cheyenne Autumn* is firmly interlaced with images that evoke the Indian world, its life hood and also its people connection with their universe. Natural elements, animal and plants and human belongings tend to produce a complex net in which the human being is located. Additionally, Sandoz’s notion of the Indian unity is demonstrated in her elevation of the poetic character through the use of imagery that pitches harmoniously with the rhythm that her discourse suggests. Finally, the principle themes treated in *Cheyenne Autumn* as a narrative text are emphasized in two main ways. First, the peculiar use of syntax is strongly rhythmical and suggestive of continuity. Second, the special Indian idioms allow her to accomplish her objective of recreating and remapping the Indian past within its own universe.

This remapping is done through another device that Sandoz has adapted to her narratives. She shows the particularity of the Indian historical version of the Cheyennes’ flight which is different from other versions told from a non-Indian perspective. Here, the author manages to find a way of transmitting their view point. The following section will provide the manner in

⁵ Parfleches are bags made of buffalo skin frequently used for the storage of pemmican or cured dried meat

which Sandoz convey the Cheyennes' perception of the flight from the two protagonists Little Wolf and Dull Knife and other characters from Cheyennes' tribe, in relation or in contrast to the Whites' perspective for the Indians and their flight told by white characters.

Indian Texts vs. White Texts' Perspectival Representation

Despite the fact that in *Cheyenne Autumn* the story action rotates around two protagonists, Dull Knife and Little Wolf, Sandoz's account does not tell the story exclusively from their opinion. However, she regularly interchanges her concentration between several characters. And sometimes from the Whites' point of view. Despite that these characters are indefinitely depicted or the reader is not fully informed about them, except in giving the account about their role in the event being narrated, their opinions still remain important to the heterogeneity of her narratives.

Besides, the author focuses on the whole group, in which no individual is totally centered. Therefore, the Cheyennes are depicted as a strong unit, whose role and destiny are more important than that of one member. Instead of emphasizing individuals' destiny, she brings into focus the collective perspective. Therewith, the author represents the Cheyennes' society as a connected body, where there is no limit between the whole group and the individual. For more enlightenment, the following illustration from the novel approaches the political situation of the Northern Cheyennes compared to one member's interest:

The Wolf's two wives were Quiet One and Feather on Head, with guest following them, an uninvited guest, the Thin Elk that Little Wolf had warned away from his wives twenty years ago. Now once more the Elk sat at his fire, but as an old man chief and the bearer of the Sacred Bundle, he must think only of the good of the people and not see a man there with his women.

(Sandoz, 1953: 12)

In this paragraph the reader is told about the prominence of the collective interest of the Cheyennes as a whole over the members' issues which are put in secondary position compared to that of the tribe.

In other passages some facts are narrated from Whites' points of view. Sandoz sees that from that perception the idea will be better conveyed and put plainly clear to the reader. As when a doctor visited the Cheyennes' reservation in Oklahoma and commented: "this is a pest camp, a grave yard" (ibid: 29). Here, the white's opinion is performed in the white man's locution. Actually, the author's specific use of language denotes the Whites' perception and extends also to what the publishers call "westernism". Besides, she employs the western dialect when the speaker is a white soldier or settlers. Sandoz narrates the speech of one infantryman:

We'll rake them Cheyennes in at the river like grizzly rakin' in berries, leaves 'n' all, "we'll toss what's left'a them in with the bunch the seventh's holdin' down to the post, let 'em herd the whole outfit back to the territory"

(ibid: 151)

This drunkard infantryman is exaggerating in underestimating the Cheyennes and promises that the soldiers will throw them. Here Sandoz uses this locution to show the recklessness of the soldiers and also to depict their perception toward the Cheyennes. We read an old timer's words: "yeh, make 'em bust out so's they kin be eeliminated 'fore the land jumps in value" (Sandoz, 1953: 152). Here, he encourages the confinement and execution of the chiefs. By

these words we are acquainted with the opinion of the settlers that conforms that of the soldiers.

Sandoz's implementations of the Indian style with the inclusion of some Whites' texts make rhythm, diction and perception changeable. Indeed, it is this stylistic heterogeneity that grants her work a special appeal. Although, much of *Cheyenne Autumn*'s text is stylistically homogenous, it is broken at several points. Certainly, Sandoz inserts a White' text with notably different attributes, as in the above mentioned quotations. She wants to demonstrate whites' perceptions. when she portrays the armies' effort to interrupt the movement of the fleeing Cheyennes, she narrates:

From Arkansas general pope wired his plans. Lewis of Fort Dodge would take command when the southern troops neared there, and the two companies of infantry from Hays, to be joined by over a hundred civilians, mostly Texas trail drivers, cowmen, and old Buffalo hunters gathering at Dodge. A special train would take mounted infantry to west Kansas, while troops from Lyon were to scout the trail line east and west. Washington ordered that, unless the intercepted Indians surrendered at once, they were to be attacked.

(ibid: 53)

Differently composed from the general text of the novel, the rhythm, diction, and perspective are extremely changed in this passage. Sentences show to be more complex and heterogeneous and thus less rhythmical than the paratactic Indian ones. Villiger highlighted that an impression of 'non-indianness' or 'Whiteness' is displayed in Sandoz's enunciation of particular diction. Her selection of words and place names such as: wire, order, command, intercept, company, troops, dodge, Lyon and cowmen, conveys Whites' conception and displays the general atmosphere that governed the Whites' world of that period. It accentuates the notion of Whites' power and control over the land. Moreover, the sudden absence of imagery prevailed in other passages signaled the absence of the Indian stance.

The difference of the White text form the Indian one prevents their fusion but rather cause their distinction in the novel. Therefore, the reader faces the portrayal of the white world as destructive by both the actions of the Whites and by the manner Sandoz depicts it. She employs a double perspective in order to achieve more comprehensive views of both the colonizers and the colonized.

CONCLUSION

In a nut shell, Sandoz linguistically succeeds to represent the Indians authentically. her descriptions of space and time and human being are set in conformity with the context and environment from which they come into view. These descriptions emphasis the themes treated in the accounts to improve the readers' impression on Indian world. Both form and content of the Cheyennes' space and time are skillfully incorporated to produce a unity by the specific employment of language according to the rhythm and meaning of connectedness. Eventually, Sandoz's White text in *Cheyenne Autumn* opposes her Indian one in terms of rhythm and imagery which are drastically changed. Their difference is obvious through diction and perspective that suggest alienation instead of closeness.

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