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MARI SANDOZ'S SLOGUM HOUSE

GREED AS WOMAN

GLENDa RILEY

In her 1937 novel, *Slogum House*, Mari Sandoz turned the usual stereotype of greed and cupidity on its head. Instead of presenting a voracious male rancher aggrandizing his land holdings to the detriment of hard-working homesteaders, Sandoz created Regula Haber Slogum, a grasping woman who eventually owns nearly an entire county, which she has managed to have named after her family. Although Gulla, as she is known, controls most of Slogum County, she continues brutally to foreclose mortgages and force sheriffs' sales, even during the depression years of the 1930s.¹

Despite this depiction of what Katharine Mason has called "a caricature of motherhood,"

few analysts or critics have analyzed Sandoz's portrayal of greed as female. Those who have done so have had little to say. Barbara Rippey, in a parenthetical comment, remarked only that a woman who mistreated men and children was "an unlikely thesis" for Sandoz's era. Scott Greenwell hypothesized that Sandoz had made her antagonist female because she realized that "in the animal kingdom the female is frequently the aggressor with an instinct for acquisitiveness."²

These superficial probings leave several crucial questions unanswered. Why did Sandoz choose to portray evil as female rather than male? What did Sandoz convey to readers in making her Devil a woman? Could a Gulla Slogum have, in fact, existed in the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century West?

SLOGUM HOUSE

To answer these questions, one must look first at Sandoz's basic theme. In *Slogum House*, a novel set in two fictitious counties on the Niobrara River in northwestern Nebraska during the 1890s and early 1900s, Sandoz pursued

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her favorite moral motif—evil (as seen in the corrupt rancher) versus good (as personified by the homesteader). Sandoz's novels, as many commentators have remarked, iterate one complete concern: that the once free and open American West has fallen into the hands of a few selfish and unscrupulous people. In *Slogum House*, Sandoz made it particularly clear that she deplored what she saw as the pillaging of the West—and the “dispossession” of the farmer—by a powerful few.

On the side of evil stand “mortgage holders and landlords,” namely Gulla Slogum, who maintains a semblance of womanhood, and her sons, Hab and Cash, whom Gulla uses as her thugs. As *Slogum House* unfolds, the trio build their empire by stealing supplies from hapless settlers and by rustling cattle. Later, they misuse the Homestead and Kinkaid land acts, which Sandoz believed to be “the hope of the poor man.” The unscrupulous Slogums file on plots of land in the name of each family member and even of hired helpers at Slogum House.³

Representing the presence of good is Gulla's amiable but ineffective husband, Ruedy, whom Gulla has tricked into marrying her. Although Gulla had hoped to gain position and wealth by marrying into Ruedy's family, its members have shunned her, and Gulla determines to outdo them. Along with two of Gulla's and Ruedy's children, Libby and Ward, Ruedy symbolizes kindness. Neither he nor the children has the fortitude to interfere with and halt Gulla's nefarious plans, yet they refuse to act as her pawns.

Because Gulla, Hab, and Cash represent immorality while Ruedy, Libby, and Ward epitomize virtue, the Slogum family stands divided, but Gulla tips the balance in her direction by subverting two more children to her purposes. She goads her twin daughters, Annette and Cellie, to prostitute themselves to local officials, notably the sheriff and judge, to protect Hab and Cash from prosecution and to pick up any information that might hint of legal trouble for the Slogums.

Gulla also keeps several upstairs “girls” as prostitutes for the cowboys and freighters who board at the roadhouse called Slogum House. Late each evening, Gulla skulks through a specially built passage-way so she can monitor the conversations of family members and freighters alike, gleaning information useful in her rise to power.

Gulla and Slogum House earn disrepute throughout the Sandhills region, yet no one seems able to stop Gulla Slogum. For example, she frees Hab and Cash of a murder conviction by ordering the slaying of a key witness. She eliminates others who oppose her and hires shady lawyers to pursue her causes. Whenever Gulla's own children resist her edicts, she backs them down. When Cash stands up to her, Gulla intimidates him with a bald show of authority mixed with intimidation. She insults him, seizes his rifle and empties it of shells, and threatens to reveal his deeds to the sheriff. After Libby runs away from Slogum House, Gulla fetches her back. When Ward courts a Polish girl, Gulla tells falsehoods that turn the Polish community against Ward. She seems unconcerned when a group of Polish men attack him and maim him for life. And the night Annette tries to run off with her lover, René, Gulla arranges for Hab and others to beat him.

Throughout these events, Ruedy remains miserable, yet acquiescent in his wife's schemes. Increasingly, he works his own sparse claim and lives in a soddy he has built there. Only when he learns that René has been castrated does Ruedy lash back, killing the castrator, skinning the man's horse, tanning the hide to use as a rug before his own fireplace. Ruedy keeps his deeds secret, however, and fails to confront Gulla.

The outcome of this morality play is much what one would expect. The evil players pay for their sins. Gulla, Hab, and Cash are unable to enjoy what they have acquired, continuing to intimidate and steal long after their corrals overflow with cattle. For Gulla, punishment comes in the form of a lingering death, caught in her own massive flesh and dependent, at

last, on Ruedy and Libby. For Hab and Cash, death comes swiftly yet horribly.

Sandoz rewards the forces of morality. Sandoz explained that because she would never emphasize "hopelessness of the struggle in the sandhills," in *Slogum House* "the meek do inherit the earth."⁴ Ruedy prospers and builds a larger home, where he lodges family members as they desert Gulla. He also turns his blooming claim into a sanctuary for the very people whom Gulla has driven off their land.

In addition, the "good" Slogum children achieve their own sorts of victory. Libby finally flees Slogum House and takes refuge in Ruedy's calm valley. She remains strong and stable, a fine woman of good character. Ward eventually dies of his beating yet attains glory in death. Because he had helped poor homesteaders, Ward's funeral draws everyone in the area—except Gulla, his own mother.

Still, in a sense, Gulla is the victor. Her greed has dried up the Sandhills for everyone but the Slogums. She has disabled her children and made them unproductive, for not one of them marries and has children. Her three sons eventually die. Of her daughters, Libby remains alienated from the man she loves, Annette becomes a religious fanatic, and Cellie withers into an aging, faded shell of herself. Gulla's children are as incapable of happiness and peopling the land as the homesteaders.⁵

RESPONSE TO SLOGUM HOUSE

Of course, when *Slogum House* first appeared in 1937 it spoke to a generation of poverty-stricken Americans, battered by the worst depression in the nation's history. Numerous farmers especially begged the U.S. Congress and state legislatures for emergency aid. Sandoz herself had watched as more than four thousand farmers silently marched in Lincoln, Nebraska, pleading for state assistance.⁶ Many such farmers, as well as numerous factory-workers, blamed powerful financiers for their misery. Because *Slogum House* analyzed financial

disasters and indicted the acquisitive and corrupt Gulla, Sandoz became the voice of numerous Americans. Her publishers reprinted *Slogum House* twice in November and again in December.⁷

Slogum House received enough favorable reviews that Sandoz termed the critics "very grand," dismissing those who were less approving. She said that Clifton Fadiman's dislike of her work constituted "rank flattery," while she diffused Howard Mumford Jones's comments that the book proved "fatiguing" and full of "artistic monotony" by referring to him as Mummy Jones.⁸

Other criticism was more difficult to scorn. Eastern readers failed to embrace *Slogum House*, apparently because they objected to Sandoz's blaming eastern capitalists and entrepreneurs for the West's predicament. Sandoz made no secret of her belief that the "entrenched East" had treated the West as a colony to be exploited by financiers and speculators.⁹ Before publication, Sandoz's editor had tried to soften her anti-eastern theme, but to no avail. Sandoz had replied:

I realize you are looking out for your eastern readers and the critics . . . I don't give a good goddam about the whole raft of readers and critics. . . I'm in the writing business for the writing and the rest is certainly very incidental.¹⁰

It was one thing to talk about writing for writing's sake, but when fewer readers purchased *Slogum House* than Sandoz had hoped, she was forced to take notice. Besides resenting Sandoz's anti-eastern bias, readers took umbrage at her dark view of the West and the novel's explicit language and lurid situations. One reviewer suggested that many readers would see *Slogum House* as "sordid and obscene" although it was "free of any gratuitous intention in these respects." Another judged that it was "written with power" yet "overburdened with violence to a point that occasionally touches burlesque."¹¹

Readers themselves wrote to Sandoz, some pouring out their disappointment or chagrin. To one of these, Sandoz replied that a person might dislike *Slogum House* and still "see its serious purpose," adding that she would not waste her time on anything without a larger purpose.¹² Some libraries and bookstores, especially in Sandoz's home state of Nebraska, boycotted *Slogum House*, presumably objecting to Sandoz's representation of Nebraska to the rest of the nation—the reviewer for *Time* had referred to the Nebraska sandhills as a "wild environment." Early in 1938, Omaha Mayor Dan E. Butler banned *Slogum House* from Omaha Public Libraries. The McCook County Public Library placed *Slogum House* on its "rotten row" of books judged objectionable because of their language or slurs upon groups.¹³

This mixed reception discouraged Sandoz, who had hoped for more comprehension from the reading public. She may have had difficulty communicating her ideas because she had configured *Slogum House* as an allegory. She had recently discovered Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of the will-to-power individual and had decided to present her social criticism through one person, Gulla Slogum, and one situation, Slogum House.¹⁴ Complicating the allegory further, Sandoz characterized northwestern Nebraska as symbolic of the entire nation, which "was so short a time ago the land of promise." In Sandoz's view, the country now lay "paralyzed, all activity halted except foreclosure and eviction and the lengthening lines of those who had no roof and no bread." To reinforce her point, Sandoz invoked the words of Jeremiah: "And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof: but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination" (p. 394).

Sandoz was disappointed that most readers missed the allegory. It seems easily understandable that someone like Sandoz, from a struggling homestead family in western Nebraska, would raise questions about the plight of farm families living in the once-golden West, but

her analysis seemed to go over most readers' heads. According to Sandoz, "it seemed over-obvious when I planned it, yet only a lawyer or two got the idea."¹⁵

Not only did Sandoz baffle her readers with allegory, but she also confused them by choosing a woman, Gulla Slogum, as the symbol of greed. During the 1930s, most Americans continued to idealize women as mothers, keepers of home and families, and inculcators of virtue and morality. To many, a Gulla Slogum would have been incomprehensible and inconceivable.

WOMEN IN THE DEPRESSION

In addition to Americans' long-standing propensity to romanticize women, the depression years largely cast women as sympathetic figures, unfortunate victims of hard times. Although working women often supported themselves and their children, or helped support their families, they were fired at a terrifying rate. Three out of ten white women workers lost their jobs, while more than half of African-American women workers did so. Those who continued to work held low-status, often menial positions that paid on average only half of what men earned, \$525 compared to \$1,027 for men per year.¹⁶

Married women lost their jobs at an even greater rate than single women. Because many Americans still believed that women worked primarily for "pin-money" rather than to support themselves, they argued that all available jobs should go to men. When the Economy Act of 1933 prohibited two members of the same family from holding positions with the federal government, such groups as the League of Women Voters and the National Women's Party protested, but a significant number of workers, three-fourths of them women, had to leave their jobs. State and local governments soon instituted similar policies.¹⁷

Women professionals lost their jobs as well. Three out of four school boards refused to hire married women and the percentage of female teachers dropped from 81 percent to 75.7

percent by the end of the decade. In professions as a whole, the number of women fell from 14.2 percent in 1930 to 12.3 percent by 1940. Accordingly, women's college enrollment dropped from 43.7 percent in 1930 to 40.2 in 1940.¹⁸

The prototype for the powerful, grasping Gulla Slogum was someone other than the average American woman. Those few depression era women who did occupy positions of authority were usually admirable. Rather than amassing resources and authority for themselves, as did the corrupt and voracious Gulla, they devoted their energies to helping the distressed nation. Among these women were First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, director of the Division of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration Mary McLeod Bethune, head of women's and professional projects for the Works Progress Administration Ellen Sullivan Woodward, and a horde of social workers called to Washington as members of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal programs. On the level of the common folk were such labor leaders as Ella Reeves "Mother" Bloor, Luisa Moreno, Emma Tenayuca, and Meridel LeSueur.¹⁹

Of course, one might argue that depression-era Americans feared women's increasing power, and Gulla may have been an indictment of such might. Depression-era women did exercise some leverage. Many supported their families because they could get part-time, menial labor while their husbands could get nothing. Eleanor Roosevelt was the first politically active First Lady; Frances Perkins the first female cabinet member; Nellie Tayloe Ross the first female director of the mint; and Ruth Bryan Owen, minister to Denmark, the first woman ambassador. Among American laborers, women of all races, especially Latinas, served as union activists and strikers.²⁰

Still, it would be difficult to construe Sandoz's theme into a warning about women's inability to manage increasing power. The

women mentioned above were not only effective at their jobs, but they refused to use them to enlarge their authority or causes. Frances Perkins avoided utilizing her position to further feminist agendas, while Mary McLeod Bethune seldom used her considerable influence to challenge the existing policy of segregation.²¹

On Sandoz's Great Plains, lived thousands of poverty-stricken, despairing women. Certainly, the national image of rural women was Dorothea Lange's touching photograph *The Migrant Mother* (1936). There were also a fair share of female government officials, lawyers, reformers, writers, and social critics such as Sandoz herself. Other women fought the effects of the depression through union activism. During the 1930s, Manuela Solis Sager organized garment and agricultural workers in Texas and in 1935 helped form the Texas Agricultural Workers' Union. Sager also collaborated with San Antonio organizers, notably Emma Tenayuca, who played a crucial role in the Pecan-shellers' Strike of 1938.²²

Fear of women's changing roles did, however, show itself in insidious ways, especially in the market and media. For example, the 1930 Sears Roebuck catalogue, widely read and utilized in the West, frequently reminded women to remain "feminine." Its illustrated advertisements emphasized long, flowing skirts and dresses, indented waistlines, molded bustlines, and corsets. In media, motion pictures spread a similar message. Jean Harlow bleached her hair and became the screen's first blond seductress. Marlene Dietrich, Bette Davis, Greta Garbo, and Mae West paraded women's sensuality with their "bedroom eyes" and painted lips.²³

Advisors and teachers also warned women to remember that they bore special responsibilities to American civilization. Etiquettes and guidebooks focussed on the need for women to maintain moral standards, especially now that automobiles carried dating couples away from home and provided mobile bedrooms. Meanwhile, the marriage and

family courses rife in high schools, colleges, and universities, advocated wife- and motherhood for the nation's women.²⁴

None of the women leaders resembled Sandoz's Gulla Slogum in acquisitiveness or selfishness, and while the movie vamps and the emphasis on training girls to be ladylike showed some unease, nothing like Gulla Slogum was apparent in American life, media, politics, or film, either nationally or on the plains. From where, then, did Gulla Slogum come?

Claire Mattern has suggested that Sandoz's hostility toward her mother, Mary, led her to portray Mary as Gulla and herself as the independent Libby, who was even an accurate shot and frequent hunter like Mari. The opposition of Gulla (Mary) and Libby (Mari) thus played out the mother-daughter struggle that had shadowed Mari Sandoz's life.²⁵ It is true that in 1933 Sandoz had written harshly of her mother, who had opposed her career as an author. She added that "there's no discounting the antagonism the average woman feels for the eldest daughter."²⁶ But by the time Sandoz wrote *Slogum House*, she had largely reconciled with her mother and dissipated a great deal of her hostility toward both her parents in *Old Jules*, which had appeared in 1935.²⁷

IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE WEST

Other explanations of Sandoz' decision to portray greed as woman are more likely. Sandoz, a westerner herself, was realistic about myths of the American West. Seeing both the bright and dark sides of the region and its peoples, she frequently tried to dispel mythology, as evidenced in her debunking of Buffalo Bill Cody. Sandoz not only set out to reveal the chaos in the American West but also to show how adherence to myths of the West and its inhabitants could blind people and keep them from action.²⁸

For another thing, Sandoz demonstrated a long-standing interest in western women, by which she meant female Anglo settlers. Al-

though Sandoz later wrote several books concerning American Indians, she had little to say specifically about Native women.²⁹ Nor did Sandoz write about other women of color, although her biographer Helen Winter Stauffer pointed out that Sandoz came to see herself as a writer interested in "destruction of discrimination between economic levels, between nationalist levels, between color levels and so on."³⁰

In describing western women, Sandoz, like most writers of her time, focused upon white female migrants. Unlike most authors of the era, however, Sandoz observed the entire spectrum from drudges to professional women. While historians Emerson Hough and Everett Dick presented women in highly stereotypical terms as the salvation of the frontier, and writer Hamlin Garland often characterized them as broken in body and spirit, Sandoz took an even-handed view.³¹

Because Sandoz could see the problematic features of the West and its myth, she could also see the dark side of western women and their images. Some were staunch pioneer mothers while others gave in to a variety of pressures. In Sandoz's *Old Jules* for example, some women crumbled, but others persisted. Henriette, Jules's second wife, asserted herself by pursuing a career as postmistress and eventually divorcing Jules. In addition, a Mrs. Surber guarded her daughters against early marriage and urged them toward careers. Twenty years after *Old Jules*, in 1955, Sandoz restored a long-overlooked group—women frontier doctors—to the limelight when she depicted Dr. Morissa Kirk in *Miss Morissa*.³²

Sandoz clearly believed that western women could be good or evil, weak or strong, submissive or aggressive. She noted that "the many women" among Nebraska settlers often vied with their menfolk for the role of boss and some "plainly ran things." Sandoz also found women resilient: "nor were the women, bossy or not, always easy to drive out. Some clung to the homestead even after their husbands were shot down by ranch-hirelings." Thus, in her

view, western women could be civilizers who also added "gaiety" to the scene or could be forces of destruction, greed, and despair.³³

Sandoz did not automatically impute evil to one gender or the other. "I cannot think of people as divided into sexes," she wrote, "so much as into types. To me there are only people, varying a great deal among themselves." She added that, "because I think men with dictator complexes are not sufficiently male, I made my will-to-power individual an ambitious woman."³⁴

In choosing to liken greed and woman, Sandoz imparted—purposefully or not—certain messages to her audience. Gulla defied every western convention of the times—and, in doing so, probably further perplexed a goodly number of readers. For instance, many Americans thought of the West as female, a ripe, fertile source of abundance often defiled by rapacious men. Sandoz's Gulla ran counter to this image. Not only did men defile the West, but women pillaged it as well. And what of the widespread belief that woman settlers civilized the West, making it good, kind, and gentle for all those who came after them? Sandoz presented "bad" women who cheated, lied, and prostituted themselves to amass wealth and influence. If women weren't the force carrying virtue to the West, what was? How would readers react to the concept that greed was not equated with gender? Even at the end of the twentieth century, many Americans continue to believe that women are gentle and giving, while men are rough and selfish.

And what about *Slogum House* as metaphor for home? Americans usually thought of the home as a female preserve, a calm, virtuous, refuge, yet Gulla had turned her family's home, Slogum House, into a nest of voracity, power, corruption. The implications of Sandoz's ideas—whether she intended them or not—were that women, home, and family were not necessarily pure and sacrosanct. In *Slogum House* everything was corruptible: women, home, family, farm, the West, and, through allegory, the United States itself.³⁵ Even if

Sandoz did not plan it, the ramifications were staggering; *Slogum House* forced readers to question the validity of their beliefs regarding a large number of their most sacred institutions.

Such personal inquiry was all the more frightening in 1937 because the West obviously *had* sunk to a low point. Millions of Americans would have agreed with Sandoz that the West appeared increasingly bankrupt. A combination of over-cultivation and drought had made such states as Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas vulnerable to ravaging winds that stripped the soil and left a Dust Bowl. Despite relative prosperity in the Southwest and the Pacific Northwest, tragedy after tragedy raked the Plains. As a result, thousands abandoned worn-out fields, while western states applied for one federal subsidy after another.

MODELS FOR WICKED WOMEN

Despite all this, however, *Slogum House* would have lacked impact if, in fact, a Gulla Slogum could not have lived and breathed in the American West. Thus, the critical question is: could there have been a Gulla? Did women and situations like those Sandoz described exist?

The answer to these questions is an unqualified yes. Sandoz was far too diligent a historian to create a false character. She had spent twenty years taking notes for *Slogum House*, and a family who appeared in *Old Jules* clearly provided the prototype for the Slogums. Mollie Schwartz not only ran a roadhouse, but her sons acquired supplies through nighttime raids and her two daughters prostituted themselves with local officials.³⁶

People all over the West wrote to Sandoz, claiming they personally knew the woman who had served as Gulla's model. According to them, she lived in a neighboring town or in the next county.³⁷ Six years after *Slogum House*, Minnesota/Manitoba writer Martha Ostenso published *O River Remember*, a novel that also portrays a tyrannical matriarch whose greed

blights her family and community. It is, of course, possible that Ostenso was familiar with *Slogum House*; at any rate she thought this kind of character plausible. Like Sandoz, Ostenso had grown up on a homestead frontier, and her first book, *Wild Geese* (1925), portrays a tyrannical patriarch not entirely unlike *Old Jules*.³⁸ Despite contemporary idealizations of women, many North Americans knew an individual woman or two who failed to fit the romanticized model.

Historians of western women have indicated that Sandoz's female antagonist and specific situations were common. For instance, in *Slogum House* Gulla trapped Ruedy because she was pregnant, a circumstance she blamed on him. Even though popular culture deified female settlers as highly virtuous civilizers and helpmates, thousands of them "fell by the way," as a German woman of the 1870s phrased it. "Rush" marriages were far from uncommon and paternity suits appeared in the courts. In 1881, the defendant—an unwed mother—in *Caverly v. Canfield* charged seduction, in that she had no prior knowledge of sex and had been drugged. Popular westerns like Zane Grey novels also contained subplots of girls seduced and abandoned, only to be vindicated in the end. It is conceivable that Gulla became pregnant and the seemingly weak-willed Ruedy succumbed to her accusation rather than challenge it.³⁹

In *Slogum House* Gulla also created a troubled marriage and a dysfunctional family, hardly *Little House on the Prairie*. In truth, however, dysfunction could, and did, occur with bewildering frequency. The rising divorce rate during the late nineteenth century distressed many Americans, who became even more troubled in 1908 when Commissioner of Labor Carroll D. Wright reported that "the divorce rate increases as one goes westward."⁴⁰

Everything from divorce records to novels reveals that many western divorces resulted from verbal and physical abuse, some as heinous as Gulla's.⁴¹ For a range of complicated reasons, the accused abusers were usually male,

but even during the Victorian hearts-and-romance 1880s and 1890s, some women abused family members. For instance, J. Dayton Thorpe testified before an Oklahoma territorial court in 1895 that his wife, Abbie, had struck and beat him on more than one hundred occasions, had pointed a revolver at him which she repeatedly snapped to intimidate him, and had thrown a pair of scissors at him. Thorpe added that Abbie had regularly called him a "damned old fool" and a "damn son-of-a-bitch" and had told him to "go to hell" although he had asked her "civil questions." According to Thorpe, Abbie had eventually abandoned him and their daughter, saying "she did not want the child that it looked too much like its father, she had no use for it."⁴² If Thorpe's testimony was accurate, Abbie developed some ploys that Gulla Slogum might have found useful.

Besides helping create a miserable home life and mistreating family members, Gulla Slogum was also responsible for hiding outlaws from the sheriff and for rustling cattle. Could a woman combining *all* these deviant behaviors have existed in the American West? The case of Belle Starr suggests that, again, the answer is yes.⁴³

Belle Starr was involved in at least two marriages, both highly dysfunctional, and she cohabited with other men of questionable reputation. Also, like Gulla, Belle controlled her daughter for her own purposes. In 1880, when Belle—then known as Myra Maybelle Reed—married Sam Starr, she took the name Belle. She also changed her eleven-year-old daughter's name, Rosie Lee, to Pearl. Belle had been training Pearl for the stage, but Pearl developed incapacitating dizzy spells. Thus, Belle decided that Pearl—like Gulla's daughter Fanny—would be a "lady" who would represent the family favorably.⁴⁴

Because Belle intended Pearl to help the family by marrying a man of substance, she refused to let Pearl wed the man she loved. When Pearl became pregnant by her sweetheart, Belle advocated abortion and banished

the girl when she refused to comply. Pearl took refuge with her grandmother and gave birth but eventually agreed to return to Belle without the child. After that, mother and daughter attended dances, rode in public, and appeared at other public functions together (220-29).

If Belle Starr's public appearances with Pearl resemble Gulla's with Annette and Cellie, the two women are also similar in their private harboring of outlaws. While not as notorious on this score as legends suggest, Starr admitted that "boys who were friends of mine," including the notorious Jesse James, "visited" her for weeks at a time (147-48). Even Starr's primary biographer, Glenn Shirley—who, like Belle, belonged to the Shirley family and was determined to dispell myths—noted that there was "some basis in fact" for the many stories about Belle hiding outlaws in Robbers Cave (151). Shirley added that other wanted men sought refuge with Belle and Sam Starr. In 1884, John Middleton, who had a price on his head for murder, came to Belle, who probably took him in (177-85). The following year, local authorities who found several outlaws in the Starr home accused Belle of being a "gang" leader. As was the case with Gulla Slogum, the charges failed to stick when witnesses proved either vague or absent, and the court released Belle (188-202).

Like Gulla Slogum, Belle Starr was a rustler of sorts. In 1882, she was charged with horse stealing in Fort Smith, Arkansas. In this, her first arrest and hearing, Belle—like Gulla—took charge. She guided the defense by sending frequent notes to her attorneys, who reportedly paid close attention to her missives. In addition, one of the key witnesses fled to Texas and was never heard of again. Still, the court convicted Belle and sentenced her to two consecutive six-month terms in a workhouse (151-65).

In 1886, a Fort Smith court issued a writ for Belle's arrest for stealing a mare. She turned herself in and put up the required bond, claiming she was innocent. After hearing conflict-

ing evidence, a court eventually released her (188-202). A scant two years later, a rancher named Hi Early complained that Belle had run off his horses and cattle. Belle confronted Early on a trail, firing her gun past his head and threatening to kill him if he made any more charges. Undaunted, Early offered a seventy-five dollar reward to anyone who would kill Belle Starr (246-47).

Like Gulla, Belle emulated ladylike demeanor, presumably to improve her image. Gulla used corsets and styled hair, as well as plucking her facial hair, and Belle wore long skirts, gold earrings, and hats with feathers and rode sidesaddle. When traveling alone, Belle wore a Colt .45, which she called "my baby" (171-73). On occasion, she shot at a man to make him pick up her hat or get out of her way or demonstrate whatever action she thought was her due as a lady. She also frequented Fort Smith saloons, where she played the piano and gambled for high stakes, yet refused to smoke cigars because it was unladylike (194-97).

Despite her affectations of civilized behavior, Belle Starr, like Gulla, eventually fell victim to her own greed and meanness. To improve her lands, which she held under questionable title, Belle exploited sharecroppers. In 1889 someone shot her dead, and a sharecropper with whom she had had a dispute was charged. He was never convicted, but officials gave up the search for Belle's assassin (230-45).

It appears that Gulla Slogum surpassed Belle Starr in only one way: Gulla kept "upstairs girls" as prostitutes and even prodded her daughters to exchange their bodies for goods and favors. Gulla's behavior, however, was not altogether unusual. Prostitutes and madams of all races, creeds, and ethnic backgrounds abounded throughout the West, not only in mining camps, cattle towns, and near military forts, but in such agricultural centers as Grand Island, Nebraska, and among such pious groups as Utah Mormons.⁴⁵ It would not take long for someone as ambitious as Gulla to recognize

that providing sexual services to western men would turn a fair profit.

Gulla was only one of numerous western mothers who condoned or even initiated their daughters' profession. Some mothers worked side-by-side with their daughters. According to historian Anne M. Butler, "the presence of children, often fully involved in the mother's occupation, manifested itself as a common frontier occurrence."⁴⁶ Motherhood did not necessarily deter women from prostituting their own daughters. Butler observed that "some young women came to prostitution . . . as the result of deliberate actions by the mother." In 1875, for example, the owner of a Denver cigar store provided her twelve-year-old daughter as a prostitute for customers and later added another twelve-year-old girl to her offerings.⁴⁷

Even Belle Starr's daughter, Pearl, ultimately blamed her mother for her own entry into prostitution. Shortly after Belle's death, Pearl married and divorced, then took up residence in a brothel at Fort Smith. She soon opened her own "boardinghouse," which boasted a string of pearls and electric lights across its front, defending her choice of profession by saying everyone knew "the conditions" under which she had lived.⁴⁸

GREED AS WOMAN

It appears, then, that Gulla Slogum was a true-to-life figure, genuine in her machinations and transgressions. Sandoz offered her readers a reprieve from Gulla and her avarice by allowing Gulla to triumph only in the amassing of her fortune. Gulla was never able to take pleasure in her wealth or her family; she had no grandchildren to sustain her in old age. And, perhaps most significantly of all, Gulla never returned to Ohio to best the Slogums who had once shunned her. On the other hand, greed will not necessarily die with Gulla. Sandoz does not indicate who will inherit Gulla's vast holdings. The optimistic reader might conclude that at least a portion of Gulla's land will revert to Ruedy, who would

use it wisely and well, but, with her sons dead, most of Gulla's landed empire is likely to fall into the hands of one of her daughters. Perhaps Fanny, absent throughout much of the novel, will rise in Gulla's place and become another base, will-to-power person.

Clearly, Gulla Slogum is forceful and even frightening. Sandoz had observed widely and well, recognizing that people could be good or evil despite their gender. In the same way Sandoz saw the negative aspects of the American West, which had turned from a dream to a nightmare in her own day, she could perceive the contrary side of women. By presenting woman as greed, Sandoz may have offended or confused conventional minded readers, but greed as woman probably proved more effective in shaking people's beliefs than yet another covetous male rancher or entrepreneur would have done. Although most readers missed Sandoz's allegory, they could not escape its impact.

NOTES

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