STRUCTURAL TECHNIQUE IN THE FICTION OF FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE

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ABSTRACT

An integrated work is meant to be apprehended as such; the artist fails if we do not so see it. Yet artistic unity derives from multiple sources, and no unified piece of literature owes its effect to a single agent. The analogy of a loom with its warp and woof is perhaps obvious, but it captures the sense of major and minor structures weaving the fabric of a novel, essay, or story. This is the light in which I have attempted to approach the writings of Frederick Philip Grove, with sub-themes and motifs woven upon the framework of his major themes. At times he succeeds; at others he does not. But his acute awareness of the necessity, power, and challenge of craftsmanship is ever present. An active intellect in search of himself and his world, Grove could not do other than seek order and meaning in each encounter of pen and paper. The canon of his works testifies to the considerable, if flawed, extent of his success.

In F. P. Grove's best novels only an exacting line-by-line examination can adequately reveal the complexity of the structure underlying and supporting the unified total result. Such a method, aided by the key-sort technique of data processing, has been used in this thesis to analyze the intricacies of Settlers of the Marsh. With that detailed study as a basis, it is then possible to move fairly rapidly through the other Grove novels and eventually the entire fictional canon, generalizing on the weaknesses and achievements of each. By comparison of relative successes in different genres,

major insights into Grove's mind and craft emerge; for example, his need for the breadth of the novel form to capitalize upon patterns of recurrence in achieving his artistic impact. The range of quality is such that few simple definitive statements on Grove's work may be made. But throughout there is constant evidence of Grove's ability through technique to transform content into art.

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INTRODUCTION

To the layman "technique" frequently connotes callous manipulation of material in a process that he would prefer to envision as spontaneous or intuitive. He will applaud a "pleasing style" or "neat turn of phrase" but instinctively recoil from the critical exposure of image patterns, complex symbolism, or structural symmetry. The content is his concern; the form is merely an organizational and presentational tool.

The twentieth century literary critic, by contrast, accepts as truism the coincidence or union of form and content, and regards much-maligned "technique" as the essence of the creative act. Mark Schorer's essay "Technique as Discovery" is surely a primer on this point.

> Modern criticism has shown us that to speak of content is not to speak of art at all, but of experience; and that it is only when we speak of the achieved content, the form of the work of art as a work of art, that we speak as critics. The difference between content, or experience, and achieved content, or art, is technique.[1]

Further,

> . . . technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying its meaning, and finally, of evaluating it.[2]

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[1]Mark Schorer, "Technique as Discovery", Approaches to the Novel: Materials for a Poetics, ed. Robert Scholes (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1961), p. 249.

[2]Ibid., p. 250.

These principles are relatively easily demonstrated in the realm of poetry, but apply with equal force to the task of the novelist, who seeks fully as much as the poet to convey reality and explore the values of his experience through his chosen medium.

Frederick Philip Grove was immersed in the art of the novel long before the explicit pronouncements of the New Critics, but he, of course, could operate upon philosophical precedents from Dickens to James in showing a special concern for his literary technique. That he <u>was</u> a careful craftsman will, I trust, emerge in the body of this thesis; specifically, his techniques of structuring his novels as balanced, organic wholes will be the focus of our attention.

For the moment, however, perhaps as a direction for further studies in the work of F. P. Grove, I should like to suggest a particularly exalted status for technique in Grove's functioning as a novelist. Possessed of a trained and naturally acute intellect, Grove sought constantly in his living and his writing to isolate and interpret patterns, to render order from chaos. Time and again, in his autobiographies and through his characters, he went beyond the "givens" of a situation, pondering and attempting to discern patterns which would make for a coherent reality. If the coherence went no further than the pattern itself, no matter. With tacit acceptance of the value of design in itself as a key to or manifestation of the cosmic mysteries, Grove has assumed his

place among the form-content-reality theorists.

In dealing then with an ordered mind constantly working out an ordered view, there is surely a high degree of likelihood that such an approach would be reflected in the artist's craft, that literary form would be all the more crucial a medium for expression and an expression in itself. The artistic product should be painstakingly economical, so that all facets contribute to the whole, and no word or character mars the unity of the work. Admittedly, as Joyce Cary has pointed out, the artist's situation is delicate.

> This is every writer's dilemma. Your form is your meaning, and your meaning dictates the form. But what you try to convey is reality--the fact plus the feeling, a total complex experience of a real world. If you make your scheme too explicit, the framework shows and the book dies. If you hide it too thoroughly, the book has no meaning and therefore no form. It is a mess.[3]

A mess indeed! but one of which, I submit, F. P. Grove was fully aware and one over which he triumphed on more than one occasion.

The canon of Grove's fiction is sufficiently large to preclude an intensive structural analysis of each work. This study therefore intends to confine itself to a searching examination of the internal and external coherence of only one novel,[4] in what can be little more than an exemplum

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[3]Joyce Cary, Writers at Work, The Paris Review Interviews, ed. Malcolm Cowley (New York, 1958), p. 55.

[4]The rationale for selection of Settlers of the Marsh as the subject of intensive scrutiny derived originally from a comparatively whimsical source. Certain students enrolled in a general Canadian literature course in 1967-1968,

of Grove's art. To the rest of his fiction, no more than relatively fleeting attention can be paid, but it is hoped that useful generalizations on this writer's technique may emerge.

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who had shown little or no interest in the selections of the syllabus, expressed to me great excitement and interest upon encountering Settlers of the Marsh. Thus prompted to a close examination of the novel and subsequent detailed consideration of its nature, coupled with the reading of the rest of his works, I have come to regard this book as Grove's finest achievement. Chapters I and II may give some indication of the justice of this judgment.

CHAPTER I

SETTLERS OF THE MARSH: THE MAJOR THEMES

It is generally acknowledged by devotees of the arts--whether music, sculpture, the novel, or any other branch--that the first encounter with a worthy creation of the imagination tends to preclude a true appreciation of its subtleties. Realization of the complexity, sensitivity, and symmetry of its structure takes a temporary back seat to the power of the initial impact. In terms of the novel, the veil which shrouds such perception is clearly the gripping nature of the story line, which masks the balanced craftsmanship of the author.[1] Thus it is with one's introduction to Frederick Philip Grove's Settlers of the Marsh. Subsequent careful readings, however, bring out the skillfully complex fabric of the novel. A poising, counterpoising and interweaving of themes considered by Grove to be of cosmic significance is executed concurrently with the manipulation of intricate subordinate themes, symbols and images.

Our first intimation of how closely Grove sought to structure and unify his novel comes with a glance at the table of contents. The chapters are titled as follows:

1. Mrs. Lund
2. Niels
3. Ellen
4. Mrs. Lindstedt
5. Bobby
6. Ellen Again

Placing the titles in this format reveals an elementary physical symmetry. But involved are more profound implications

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[1]This is of course a necessity, as Mr. Cary has indicated, if the impression of artificiality and contrivance is to be avoided.

in terms of parallel and contrast. While Mrs. Lund is not usually considered to be the dominant figure of Chapter 1, her name has been given to it. The story is beginning, but she strikes a note of foreboding. So, too, the opening of the second half of the book is another beginning whose omens are made inauspicious through the presence of another wife, Mrs. Lindstedt. One also feels impelled to draw a peculiar significance from their names. The first syllables of the surnames 'Lindstedt' and 'Lund' are almost the same but the former carries on to a second syllable. And Mrs. Lindstedt herself extends immensely the dimensions of calamity, sorrow, and failure which her counterpart of Chapter 1 experienced.

The parallels persist with Chapters 2 and 5. In the former, Niels is the hope of the future, the breaker of land; in the latter, the identical role has been inherited by Bobby. In this simplest of fashions, Grove has captured the sense of cycle which he regarded as one of THE significant facts of existence.

> One single truth can we securely spell:
> For eons men were born, have lived, and died.[2]

Then "Ellen", the apparent source of the problem of the novel, becomes "Ellen Again", the solution of the problem. Through her, the first half of the novel closes with refusal (of love, life, and self). Through her, the second half of the novel concludes with acceptance (again of love, life, and self).

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[2]Frederick P. Grove, from "The Palinode, Part 1", (University of Manitoba, The Grove Collection, Pt. III, no. 5, Box 15, Envelope #3).

The negative promise of disaster and death that Ellen brings is redeemed by the positive promise of happiness and life that she later presents.

There are perhaps four major themes, four structural pillars of the novel, to which the symbols, images, and sub-themes direct themselves and lend support. These 'themes' cannot easily be wedged into tidy little pigeon-holes which will enclose and confine them completely, any more than human experience can be compartmentalized. But designations must be sought which will conveniently indicate the various patterns revealed by close analysis. Speaking in very simplified and sweeping terms, one may say that Grove has built his story of Niels upon

i. Visions and dreams (referring to the double sense of both words, i.e., the phenomena, with all their psychological implications, attendant upon sleep, and the processes and objects of human desiring);

ii. Fatedness and freedom (the eternal paradox of man's position: ruled, responsible, or both?);

iii. Passion and its frequent associate, sin, (This theme is, of course, closely related to the degree of man's autonomy in that self-determination increases his responsibility for self-discipline, for the channelling of his passions into areas of creativity. It is also popularly felt that there is a difference in the dimensions of guilt between facing a free universe and a mechanistic universe. This theme further involves the intricacies of human passions, their inconsistencies and their effects);

iv. Isolation. (By this is meant all physical, emotional, and intellectual elements which serve throughout the novel to demonstrate the alienation of man from fellow man, man from woman, husband from wife, man from nature, and man from himself.)

The task is now set to show that these 'pillars' are indeed structurally dominant.

The most arresting theme of the novel must surely be Visions, with Niels' recurring and subtly altering dream constantly modulated with the visions of others. The first mention of such imaginings comes early in the novel, when, in the midst of a prairie snowstorm, a "vision of some small room, hot with the glow and flicker of an open fire" seizes Niels.[3] The aspiration seems extremely modest and the author soon plays the dreams of others against it, with curious effect. Mrs. Lund hopes for

> . . . everything as it should be. A large, good house; a hot-bed for the garden; real, up-to-date stables; and...everything. And the children are going to learn something. We want Bobby to go to college....[4]
>
> (p. 33)

Left at this, the revelation of her dream would seem unre-

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[3]F.P. Grove, Settlers of the Marsh, ed. Thomas Saunders (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1966), p. 17. All subsequent references are to this edition, #50 of the New Canadian Library series, generally edited by Malcolm Ross.

[4]Spaced ellipses will be used throughout to indicate omissions from the text, in opposition to unspaced periods which are present in the text and deliberately used by Grove for various effects.

lated and meaningless, but the author continues:

> . . . suddenly he understood far more than the mere words. He understood that this woman knew she was at the end of her life and that life had not kept faith with her. Her voice was only half that with which we tell of a marvellous dream; half of it was a passionate protest against the squalor surrounding her; it reared a triumphant vision above the ruins of reality. It was the cry of despair which says, It shall not be so!
> (p. 33)

We now have a dramatic indication of the futilities and setbacks that are inherent in any vision, Niels' no exception. It is also Grove's first suggestion of the Promethean nobility of the struggle in which, he avows, each person must engage.

Olga, too, nurtures a vision which is shown in its promise similar to Niels' and sadly different from Mrs. Lund's.

> . . . her dream was of the future: it was capable of fulfillment, not fraught with pathos as her mother's....
> The whole room was softened into some appearance of harmony by the dark: fit setting for the dreams of the young and the retrospection of those whose dreams have come true: a horror to those in despair....
> (p. 34)

As if in living corroboration of the horrors that unrealized dreams can deal to human dignity, the elder Lunds proceed to strip each other of harmless little illusions they have cherished.

> ". . . I have been to the college myself, for three years. Did you know it?"
> "Don't talk nonsense, daddy," his wife interposed goodnaturedly. "What shall the people think of you?" And, turning to Nelson, she added, "He was at the college all right, but feeding pigs."
> Lund sighed. A sullen expression settled on his face. Everyone except his wife felt em-

> barrassed.
>
> "We've seen better days, that's true," Mrs. Lund went on. "When I was a young girl, I was a trained nurse. I've spent five years in a spital [sic]."
>
> "Yes, scrubbing floors," Lund mumbled spitefully.
>
> (p. 35)

Despite these ominous incidents preceding its flowering, Niels' dream continues to blossom and flourish undaunted, and the author's articulation of it binds Niels' individual longings to the longings of the human race.

> Suddenly, . . . a vision took hold of Niels: of himself and a woman, sitting of a mid-winter night by the light of a lamp and in front of a fire, with the pitter-patter of children's feet sounding down from above: the eternal vision that has moved the world and that was to direct his fate. He tried to see the face of the woman; but it entirely evaded him....
>
> (p. 36)

The mechanics of human dreaming increase in complexity when Grove reveals that the vision of land, house, and wife is rooted in a negative vision of the past: "that vision of himself as a child, as a poor child, [which] had haunted him when he grew up till fierce and impotent hatreds devastated his heart" and planted the seeds of his new-world vision in the ash-heap of aspirations impossible in Sweden (p. 39).

If we are not disturbed by the unpromising derivation of Niels' dream, we certainly are alarmed by his reaction to the very first suggestion of its attainability. Women, he muses, have thus far been only a symbol in his dreams; he sees no specific face in the visions.

Now that he was in the country of his dreams and

> gaining a foothold, it seemed as if individual women were bent on replacing the vague, schematic figures he had had in his mind. He found this intrusion strangely disquieting. [italics mine]
>
> (p. 40)

Is there then something within him that will resist or impede the realization of the very goals he seeks?

The vision theme becomes all the more intricate when closely interwoven with its subordinate theme concerning mothers. Part of the reason that Niels' vision has had no clearly defined woman and that the possibility of a real wife disturbs him is that he has subconsciously filled the position with his mother. This is a judgment immediately borne out by the line "Niels was hushed with a sense of longing for his own old home, for his dead mother..."(p. 42). So, in gazing at Ellen with affection, he interprets his emotions in terms of his mother: "In his heart there was a great tenderness such as he had felt for his mother..."(p. 44). That Ellen does not mother him is the source of "a trace of resentment" against her "unyielding aloofness" (p. 44). For both Niels and Ellen, part of the struggle of life is presented in the process of resolving distortions of the mother-child relationship.

The land and Ellen make their impressions on the young Swede, who finds himself more and more dominated by the vision. The woman in the image becomes Ellen, and Niels finds himself impatient to progress and succeed.

> Niels lived in a continual glow of excitement. . . . Life had been flowing placidly for a year or two. His dreams had receded as their realisation

> approached. But now, in the first flush of reality; now, when all that was needed seemed to be a retracing in fact of what had already been traced in vision: now that vision became an obsession. (pp. 48-49)

In these days of exalted agony, Mrs. Vogel reenters the picture; fleeing her company is, for Niels, like "waking up from a terrible dream" (p. 53). In spite of, perhaps because of, his innocence, he can sense the threat to his dream that she represents. The dream, in a life spent with Mrs. Vogel, will indeed be a nightmare.

Naturally, in retreating from Clara, he aches for security. Again "he long/s/ to be with his mother, to feel her gnarled, calloused fingers rumpling his hair, and to hear her crooning voice droning some old tune..." (pp. 55-6). The vision takes shape before his eyes and a peculiar series of transformations take place. Niels is at his mother's knee. We suddenly become aware that the maternal eyes gazing pityingly at him are the "sky-blue eyes" of Ellen. But the transposition is not yet complete. The vision clarifies and the young Swede is crouching in a childless home before the third female competitor for his soul, Clara. In this single sequence, Grove has granted a glimpse at the close and complex interrelationships of the three women and has given a definite indication of the imprecision of perception that will prove Niels' downfall: the confusion of sexual allure with mother love.

Random encounters with Ellen reaffirm her place in Niels' vision. But even in demonstrating this, Grove inter-

jects an ambiguous image. Niels "sees" Ellen in the home he has built for her, and wonders, "Would she go upstairs? To see the two rooms there, half joined, half parted by a little landing?" (p. 79). Does the author refer merely to the house's architecture, or does he in this subtle manner seek to unify the novel's development? If the latter, the two rooms may become symbols of Ellen and Niels in the ultimate resolution of the problem: a series of inner and outer forces keep them forever half parted; countering these are elements which half join them. Niels corroborates this interpretation in asking Ellen, "Do you think we can live down what lies between us?" (p. 217). And Grove concludes the drama with these words:

> They do not kiss. Their lips have not touched. But their arms rest in each other; their fingers hare intertwined....
> As they go, a vision arises between them, shared by both. /italics mine/
> (p. 217)

As the moment for Ellen's revelation of her abhorrence of sex nears, Niels' sense of vision loses its former clarity, begins to cloud. In the presence of half-mad Sigurdsen he comes to participate in "wild visions", "as if he could have got up and howled and whistled, vying with the wind..." (p. 84). Instinct warns him of "Something dreadful . . . coming, coming..." (p. 85). A confrontation in the field after the summer storm is averted by Ellen, but Lindstedt's dream has been dealt the first of several mortal blows.

> They went on in silence: Niels as through a vacant dream devoid of feeling.
> . . . . . .

> He did not understand what had happened to him. He did not enquire into it. It was final ....
>
> He was hiding like a wounded beast. (p. 100)

Then, just before Ellen launches on the story of her mother, Niels finds that "His vision /is/ a blank" (p. 104).

The profound effect that their mothers have had on Niels' and Ellen's formative years is revealed. The crisis comes and goes, a mere moment in the interminable life cycle of men. Nature fills part of the void created by Ellen's rejection with the balms of time's passage and incessant work. The change events have wrought in Niels becomes the talk of the town.

> Niels had come to think without bitterness of Ellen; but he felt that he could never see her again....
>
> When he glimpsed at his old dream, a lump rose in his throat. His muscles tightened when he turned his thoughts away....
>
> This gradual negation of his old dream had a curious effect on others: it gave him such an air of superiority over his environment that the few words which he still had to speak were listened to almost with deference. They seemed to come out of vast hidden caverns of meaning. His face, scored and lined so that it sometimes seemed outright ugly, held all in awe, some in terror. . . .
>
> The truth was, lightning flashes of pain sometimes went through his look, giving him the appearance of one insane; or of one who communed with different worlds....
>
> A new dream rose: a longing to leave and to go to the very margin of civilisation, there to clear a new place; and when it was cleared and people began to settle about it, to move on once more, again to the very edge of pioneerdom, and to start it all over anew....That way his enormous strength would still have a meaning. Woman would have no place in his life....
>
> He looked upon himself as belonging to a special race--a race not comprised in any limited nation, but one that cross-sectioned all nations: a race doomed to everlasting extinction and yet recruited out of the wastage of all other nations....

> But, of course, it was only the dream of the slave who dreams of freedom....
>
> (p. 119)

Lest we misunderstand the final remark, Grove reintroduces, on the very next page, the widow Vogel, "a dismal dream, almost forgotten". Niels' new vision is as imperilled as was his old. The subsequent marriage immediately confirms this impression. The house, so much a part of Niels' initial dream, becomes "much changed" (p. 127). The sweetish scents and luxurious, even decadent, atmosphere she injects is something beyond the understanding of his fatal innocence. Children, also part of the initial dream, are another victim of the mismating.

> . . . he at last faced once more his ancient dreams. Quite impersonally, with a melancholy kind of regret, with almost that kind of homesickness which overcomes us when we look back at the destinies, fixed and unchangeable, as unrolled in a very beloved book. He thought of that vision which had once guided him, goaded him on when he had first started out to conquer the wilderness: the vision of a wife and children.
>
> The Wages of Sin is Death! I shall visit the Sins of the Father....
>
> What?
>
> Children?
>
> His eye went dim; his head turned with him as he realised it. No....Children would be a perpetuation of the sin of a moment....
>
> He did not want children out of this woman!
>
> (p. 138)

Nor are Niels and the unborn generations the only casualties of that marriage. Clara, too, appears to have thwarted dreams. As the marriage disintegrates further, her eyes more and more frequently hold "a new expression...a dreamy quality", "as if she /wishes/ to erase reality" (p. 141). Her husband is aware thaf "She, a city woman, with

the tastes and inclinations of such a one," is "banished to the farm. . . . /he realizes/ the dreariness, the utter emptiness of her life" (p. 139). Finally, when the "union" has disintegrated to the extent that Clara prepares to leave the farm permanently, "the remnant of a happy dream" (p. 151) that has lain in her eyes dies completely. She falls into the nightmare confrontation with Niels, and upon awaking from that, proceeds to create a nightmare for a Niels totally unaware of the furies he has unleashed.

The area of maternal influences again comes to the fore as Clara ruthlessly exposes the anatomy of their marriage. "I thought you were a man" (p. 155). But Niels is, as discussed before, a chronologically and physically matured child, essentially passive, with a child's lack of insight into the emotional demands of adulthood. He wants a mother; she does not want a child. We are left with the reality of this "mother fixation" until after the murder and Niels' eventual release from jail. Restored to his White Range Line House and farm, Lindstedt will experience a vision which seems to symbolize the final resolution of that identity problem.

> The vision he saw was that of the homely face of his mother. Yet, her features were strangely blurred; as if, superimposed on them, there appeared those of another; and at last he recognised these as the features of the old man, of Sigurdsen, his neighbour whom he had loved.
>
> Long, long ago, in another such vision, his mother had looked at him reproachfully, seriously, warningly.
>
> And the old man, in the wanderings of his decaying mind, had betrayed to him some corner of his subliminal memories....
>
> These two, in vision and memory, seemed to

> blend, to melt together, Both looked at him, in this new vision, out of one face in which, now his, now her lines gained the ascendency....
>
> The wistful face of his mother relaxed in a knowing smile: yes, such was she who had borne him....
>
> The old man's face took her place: he was moving his lips and muttered, "H'm...tya."
>
> (p. 210)

Herein lies recognition at last of Niels' relationship with Sigurdsen; this knowledge subsequently frees him from the need for further dependent relationships. He has embarked upon the self-sufficiency of adulthood.

A third dream of the future develops when Niels and Ellen are reunited.

> He lulled his heart with a dream that was new: the dream of the restful perpetuation of this state of dusk, of mutual wordless comprehension, of dispassionate friendship, brotherly love....
>
> (p. 213)

And perhaps it is artistically necessary that Niels come to this level of sincerely platonic thought before the old dream, the dream of "the summer /rather than the autumn/ of life" (p. 213), may reassert itself in all its creative vitality.

The cycle of vision completes itself as Niels finds himself once more beginning to nurture a "strange, new hope".

> It was a mere adumbration of the thought of a possible outcome, a mere foreshadowing of a state of things that might, might come about like a miracle hardly to be visualised. It was at once suppressed with a beating of the heart, a scarlet flooding of the brain....To face it seemed equivalent to precluding it: it was such a tender, delicate thing of a hope....
>
> Niels felt like a convalescent who has, for many weeks and months, been forbidden to move and who, tentatively, first stirs a finger and then a hand...furtively, almost ashamed of the realisation

> of powers in him returning, re-awaking....He felt as if he must hold still so as not to frighten away what was preparing in him: a new health, a new strength, a new hope, a new life....
>
> (p. 214)

In a final, triumphant confrontation, Ellen too resolves the distorted mother-child relationship under which she has struggled. She shows herself both willing and needing to assume her own role as a mother. With the deliberate caution of people who have suffered, the couple permit their dreams to reassert themselves, and a mutual vision comes into view. It is a dream whose success is not to be perfect, is not guaranteed, for sin and ignorance have precluded that, but it is the hope which always follow on tragic suffering.

Settlers of the Marsh has as a second structural pillar Grove's paradoxical views on man's fatedness and man's freedom. Many of Grove's personal pronouncements such as the following tend toward a view of man beset by the blind whims of an indifferent universe.

> Never again, after Paris, could I see my aim in life in anything but the ultimate working out of what was in me: a sort of reaction to the universe in which man was trapped, defending himself on all fronts against a cosmic attack.[5]

A more specific and poignant statement of the frustrating, impersonal nature of these attacks is presented in Grove's unpublished poem "The Gods".

> 'As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods:
> 'They kill us for their sport.'

---

[5]Grove, In Search of Myself (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1946), pp. 162-3.

Ah, were't but so! Then could I still believe
That there were some sense left in this drear life:
That Atropos, she with the bitter knife,
Knew what she was about. I could relieve

The anguish of my heart by blasphemies
And scoffings against those who sit secure
As lookers-on and laugh as we endure
Birth, life, and death and kindred flippancies.

Were it but so! I could at least rebel,
Defy and rear against the stinging lash,
Provoking them to let their thunders crash
And by brute might my impotence to quell.

But it is not so. They, as we, are blind
And cannot see where leads their unled dance.
Above them, dangling, hangs the spider Chance,
And spins No-Meaning, balm to soul or mind.[6]

Yet Grove also harboured the belief that the human spirit has a responsibility to pit its strength against "the gods", and he often saw the forces of fate operating from <u>within</u> the individual. This moves us over into the realm of human responsibility, an issue to be dealt with both in this discussion and in the examination of another structural element of the novel, the passion-sin theme.

The transplanted Swede has had every reason to feel that he is master of his own destiny in the exciting new-world atmosphere of opportunity and success. "He felt as if freedom had been bestowed upon him in the wild" (p. 27).

> In this country there was a way out for him who was young and strong. In Sweden it had seemed to him as if his and everybody's fate had been fixed from all eternity. He could not win out because he had to overcome, not only his own poverty, but that of all his ancestors to boot.... (p. 39)

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[6]Grove, "The Gods" (University of Manitoba, The Grove Collection, Pt. III, no. 5, Box 15, Envelope #3).

The prairie setting, unconfined by finite spaces, open and honestly challenging, seems to support these sentiments. But the land counters the atmosphere of freedom with a strong sense both of the immense inevitability of timeless natural forces and the tremendous impersonal ruthlessness of the forces which may move against him.

> To Niels his doings seemed inconsequential and irrelevant; such was the influence of the boundless landscape which stretched away in the dim light of the moon....
> Life had him in its grip and played with him; the vastness of the spaces looked calmly on.
> (p. 34)

No individual man can stand against the grinding juggernaut of Fate.

A multitude of details throughout the novel contribute to the aura of fate, of external controls moulding the patterns of a man's life. The countless calamities besetting the Lunds give rise to the thought, "Success and failure! It seemed to depend on who you were, an Amundsen or a Lund..."(p. 36). Frequently the snares set for the unwary are embodied in those around one.

> . . . as he /Niels/ went over and sat down by her /Clara's/ side, he felt as if he were being <u>entrapped</u>: he felt what was almost a foreboding of disaster. Never in his life had he felt like that; and the memory of this feeling was to come back to him, many years later, <u>when his terrible destiny had overtaken him</u>. Had he obeyed a hardly articulate impulse, he would at once have got up again and gone out. /italics mine/
> (p. 51)

It is evident that however predetermined events may appear, there is room for rebellion, for a consciousness of the

ability, at least, to attempt fight or flight. Olga was able to escape; could not Niels? He flees physically, but the horrible new knowledge of his complete vulnerability has taken hold.

> He had been an onlooker so far. But to-night something had happened which he did not understand: he was a leaf borne along the wind, a prey to things beyond his control, a fragment swept away by torrents. (p. 55)

Niels' immediate response to this insight is the one to which he will turn again and again when confronted with the unendurable or the incomprehensible: "That made him cling to the landscape as something abiding, something to steady him" (p. 55).

The author makes his most crucial statement regarding the freedom-fate paradox with these words:

> It was very clear now that the torrent which swept him away, the wind that bore him whither it listed came from his innermost self. If, for what had happened to him, anybody was to blame at all, it was he.... (p. 56)

Without this participation of self in the process, the drama would not achieve tragic dimensions.

This new sensitivity to human responsibility becomes tempered in Niels' consciousness with a counter-awareness of the role of blind chance in the proceedings.

> Niels thought of himself. If he had remained in Sweden, ... He would have accepted what is as immutable and pre-arranged.
>
> How chance played into life!
>
> He had emigrated; and the mere fact that he was uprooted and transplanted had given him a second sight, had awakened powers of vision and sympathy in

> him which were far beyond his education and upbringing. If one single thing had been different, everything might have run a different course....
> . . . . . .
> What, then, was in store for him, Niels? He could not defend himself just now against a feeling of fear: the fear of life....
> (p. 60)

Grove tends to play fate, chance, and freedom against one another throughout his narrative. Niels notes that the townspeople are bound to ennui and dissatisfaction by their own lack of imagination (p. 86). But it is the whims of fortune which persist in throwing Niels and Mrs. Vogel together. And outright Necessity appears to control his relationship with Ellen. Grove drives this home with hammer blows: "it was a tragic necessity no longer to be evaded" (p. 94).

> Then the girl spoke. Her words came hurriedly, precipitately, as if to forestall the arrival of the moment; as if to postpone what was unavoidably coming; as if to plead for a term of grace.
> . . . . . .
> The moment was coming. It had prepared itself. It was rushing along the lane of time where neither he nor she could escape it. Yes, it was already here. It stood in front of them; and its face was not smiling; it was grimly tragical....
> (pp. 94-5)

Yet always, in defiance of the inevitability of fate, the human spirit attempts to forge its own future, to escape the inescapable. "In a common, instinctive impulse they rose, flitted deeper into the thicket, to hide, not to be found...." (p. 96)

"Make your own life, Ellen, and let nobody make it for you!" (p. 112). So spoke a woman with whom, as with Mrs. Lund, life had not kept faith. But with these words she both freed and bound her daughter, who, to obey, had to dis-

tort and suppress her natural needs for home, love, and children. It is in acquiescence to her female destiny that she paradoxically finds final freedom.

The images of slavery begin to make a cumulative impression. Niels, "the slave who dreams of freedom", meets Mrs. Vogel by " a blind chance happening" (but then the Fates are blind!). Like a beast under a yoke, tightly reined, the wedded Niels finds "no way of turning". Ellen asks in anguish, "Niels, how could you!...", but the more relevant question seems to be "How could you not?" Niels is cornered and haunted by

> the feeling of disaster, of a shameful bondage that /is/ inescapable. His doom /has/ overtaken him, irrevocably, irremediably: he /is/ bond-slave to a moment in his life, to a moment in the past, for all future times....
>
> (p. 138)

Then there is Niels' peonage to the land. Time and again we are reminded that "The farm was a law unto itself..." (p. 149). But finally there is the bondage of the ultimate force grinding his fate, Niels' own nature. Repeatedly the solution to a situation lies in following the dictates of intuition or impulse.

> But it was a peculiarity of his nature that, having thought out and laid down a plan, he must go on along the demarcated line and carry out that plan even though circumstances might have arisen which made it absurd. Thus he had broken his land, thus built his house, thus made himself the servant of the soil.... It was his peasant nature going on by inertia....
>
> (p. 152)

As the action moves toward the murder, the references to forms of slavery, a fitting preface to rebellion and self-

assertion, pile up. The paradox of Clara's view of freedom is revealed in the impassioned kitchen scene. An artificial, possessive woman, she desires a similar love. To feel loved, she needs her freedom curtailed. Indeed her three tests of Niels' love all centre on freedom, and he fails in declining to restrict her.

> I came to the conclusion that, like the floor-walker, you really loved me. That you would reconquer me from day to day as he had done.
>
> (p. 155)

True love is traditionally thought to be a sort of absolute freedom; to the perverted mind, true love is signified by bondage, by a master-slave relationship. Once convinced that he does not love her, Clara changes her tune: "I cannot stay here, a prisoner, condemned to a life-sentence. I won't" (p. 158). The restriction she sought when in love has become vile incarceration in hatred.

In probing the raw, painful nerves of the marriage which his wife has exposed, Niels ponders the nature of sin and comes to understand the inevitability of his past course of action as well as the unaltered blame he bears for it.

> He could not help himself; he was he; he could not act or speak except according to laws inherent in him.
>
> What must happen would happen. He had sinned. He saw no atonement. None, nowhere.
>
> (p. 161)

These insights foster a new sympathy and tolerance toward others fallen, now men of his own kind. But the composition of Niels' mind and soul is such that his understanding fails to extend in the really crucial direction: toward his wife.

> Had he made a single motion towards her, had he said a single word, even though it had been a word of forgiveness instead of desire, perhaps the worst might still have been averted; fate might have been stayed....
>
> (p. 165)

This seeming possibility of averting fate is, of course, illusory, for "fate" derives from the self, and Niels' nature determines his "destiny".

In the process of investigating to the full his own bondage, Niels unwittingly reduces his once-beloved Percheron team to slavery.

> Horses know as well as dogs whether their masters feel friendly towards them or not. Unlike dogs, they do not cling to or fawn upon him who does not deserve their love. They cannot but do the work demanded of them; but they are henceforth mere slaves.
>
> (p. 165)

The important point here is the qualitative difference in the types of slavery man and beast endure. Jock enslaved can assume at best only a dramatically stoic stature; Niels enslaved can utilize the human spirit and human reason to challenge his cosmic masters in Promethean, tragic terms. That these masters may issue primarily from within only accentuates the titanic scope of the inner struggle.

One of the agonies of an internal battle is its undefinedness, its ambiguity.

> Are there in us unsounded depths of which we do not know ourselves? Can things outside of us sway us in such a way as to change our very nature? Are we we? Or are we mere products of circumstance?
>
> He felt like a rider on horseback who tries to control his mount when it is under the influence of an uncontrollable panic....
>
> Was he, Niels, going insane?
>
> (p. 166)

One cannot help thinking of the age-old lament, "Whom the Gods would destroy, they first make mad",[7] and the fleeting kinship heightens the tragic universality of this man's dilemma.

In dealing with Niels as he embarks upon the murder of his wife, Grove chose to use a curious image, one of springs and clockwork.

> His muscles tightened and remained tight. It was as if a powerful spring inside of him had been tightly wound and then arrested by some catch, either to snap under the strain or to unroll itself in the natural way by setting up some complicated wheel-work into irresistable motion, grinding up what might come in its way or attempt to stop it.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Then it was as if a cruel wrench had been given that spring inside of him, tightening it to the breaking point. And as that point was reached, he moved.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> A roar of laughter....
>
> That released the tightly wound spring. Irresistably a clockwork began to move. There was not a spark of consciousness in Niels. He acted entirely under the compulsion of the spring.
>
> He remembered later, much later....
>
> (p. 186)

How are we to come to grips with this totally mechanistic interpretation of the impetus to murder? Does the author absolve Niels of responsibility through this device? It would seem more likely, in view of the preceding discussion of fate, that Grove chose this technique simply to dramatize

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[7]It is thought that Euripides was the first to express these sentiments: "Those whom God wishes to destroy, he first deprives of their reason." Such a view has been shared by others, e.g., Lycurgus, Dryden, Boswell, Longfellow, according to John Bartlett, Familiar Quotations (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1955), p. 18.

the power that forces internal and external, working upon an individual, may exert. Niels becomes a sort of puppet, a tool, but controlled by whom or what? Surely the answer lies in the pattern of response previously inspired by the kitchen confrontation with Clara. At that time,

> when his wife's revelations had hit him like so many hammer-blows, he had been stunned. Then, in life's first reaction against injury and death, he had been subject to sudden fits of rage, sudden wellings-up in him of primeval impulses, of the desire to kill, to crush....
>
> (p. 159)

The impetus then is the primeval instinct within. Niels is both guilty and guiltless, in control and possessed, a murderer and victim of a nature he did not choose.

To the end of the novel Grove is consistent regarding the fatedness of things. Chance no longer operates. Niels and Ellen, betrayed once by their and others' natures, move together as inevitably and consciously as they once parted.

> Expectancy is in their eyes, emotion. They see that coming which makes their hearts beat--that which is like a memory of old times, long past. But it is not with fear that their pulse is quickened....It is with an anticipation which neither of them is unwilling to prolong; for behind that anticipation there stands a certainty....
>
> (p. 214)

The now older couple are both free and destined. They deliberately reunite, but the forces which make their union acceptable and promising derive from sources more in the realm of the uncontrolled, the elemental--in a sense, fated. Niels has resolved the maternal dependency and blind morality which bound him and has expiated the sin those produced. El-

len has also freed herself from a legacy of fear and denial, and the indomitable procreative need of all living species has triumphed. In each instance, the integrity of the human spirit has been sustained throughout.

The discussion of fate and freedom has already exposed several aspects of the third structural support of Settlers of the Marsh, the passion-sin theme. Certainly the question of human responsibility has been inseparable from the foregoing examination, but the novelist has made this dual offspring of fate and freedom so strong an element in the novel that its development deserves individual treatment.

Niels is a character completely innocent in the ways of sex, "chaste to the very core of his being" (p. 40). In fact the inspiration for such a person, says Grove,

> reached far back into the past, to a summer day when, in some little lake in Nebraska or South Dakota, I had a swim with a young Swede who, for some reason or other, confided to me that, up to the date of his recent marriage, he had not known of the essential difference between male and female.[8]

For such a man, no mate could be more ill-chosen than "a being that was almost sexless" (p. 38), Ellen Amundsen. Her rejection of natural processes, although based on traumatic experiences in childhood, is nevertheless a violation of nature for which she pays in pain and loneliness. In the rarefied atmosphere of two such unnaturally virgin souls, sensations of passion and subsequent sensitivity to sin and guilt must play an accentuated role. Thus early in the novel, Niels undergoes the stirrings of guilt-feelings without knowing why.

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[8]F. P. Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 320.

> . . . whenever he had been dreaming of her [Mrs. Vogel] and his thought then reverted to Ellen, he felt guilty; he felt defiled as if he had given in to sin. Her appeal was to something in him which was lower, which was not worthy of the man who had seen Ellen.... Though he could not have told what that something in him which was lower really meant....
>
> (p. 46)

Niels can and does experience "the ultimate, supreme, physical desire" (p. 49) for Ellen that he would have regarded with shame if directed toward the cloyingly intimate widow. Thus we find the word "glowing" used in his response to both women, but in the case of Ellen, the tone is ecstatic and reverential, while Mrs. Vogel's environment is one of fear. "His chastity felt attacked. He wanted to get away and looked helplessly at the crowd" (p. 52). It does not seem accidental that "in order to save himself, he slipped out of the door and crossed the yard to where the children were playing..." (p. 53, italics mine). As, in times of trial, he longs for his mother, and seeks to be mothered by Clara, so, upon the instinct of flight and fear of sin, he tries to return to the state of innocence, to become one with childhood again.

The agony of Niels' situation and the mechanics of tragedy depend to a large degree on the Swede's unnatural innocence or ignorance. Gazing at Mrs. Vogel, he puts the nature of sin in the category of the ineffable. "She was incomprehensible." She "looked like sin." Therefore sin was incomprehensible. The syllogism may be reversed, but the significance is the same: by neglecting this and other opportunities to increase his understanding of sin and passion, he

exposes himself to inevitable disaster.

"His world, his workaday world of toil and worry, seemed suddenly so sane as compared with his own world of passion, desire, and longing" (p. 54). It is natural, then, that he would throw himself into work to release pent-up passions and soothe his spirit. In this novel Grove departs from his usual depiction of the land as a nearly personified force with which to fight for survival. The stark prairie scene, for all the hardships it represents, tends to ally itself with Niels in providing an external outlet for the true battle waged within.

Ellen's revelation of her mother's marital ordeals is a soliloquy on lust and its results. The sexual relationship has been reduced to terms of power, and it is almost a foregone conclusion to hear Ellen say, "I vowed to myself: No man, whether I liked him or loathed him, was ever to have power over me!" (p. 112). In thus wanting only the spiritual, she drives Niels to the purely physical.

As Niels proceeds toward his downfall, his feelings of guilt intensify. "I am going to the dogs..." (p. 117). Played against this is his stolid and incredible innocence, as revealed in the discussion of whores with Hahn. An incomplete sentence harbours the information that might have averted tragedy. "There's one like that Hefter woman in every district. . . . There's one in yours..." (p. 118). Ironically, it was unselfish concern with the moral welfare of Bobby that diverted Niels' attention at that critical moment from the

gossip that would have preserved his own moral integrity.

Lindstedt's complex reactions to his first real physical experience encompass all the fragmentary passion and guilt feelings he has previously undergone.

> He had done what he had never done before: he had touched a woman: the touch had set his blood aflame. He almost hated the woman for what she had done to him. He wanted oblivion: he wanted death-in-life; and she had kindled in him that which he had hardly known to exist: she had given meaning and a direction to stirrings within him, to strange, incomprehensible impulses. His instinct urged him to flight: it was impossible that he should see her again. All this was dimly felt, not distinctly told off in thought.
>
> (p. 121)

In literal and figurative darkness, he yields to sin.

The wages of sin are soon apparent. "Already this marriage seemed to him almost an indecency" (p. 125). And the vitality of his responses drains away. He "could no longer respond with any great passion" (p. 125). Yet he has to meet the demands of "her strange, ardent, erratic desires."

> Whenever she came, she overwhelmed him with caresses and protestations of love which were strangely in contrast to her usual, almost ironic coolness.
>
> (p. 126)

A sense of sin surrounds Niels' view of the marriage and his wife, vague and undefined until it crystallizes in the identification of her ways with those of the whores of Minor. A new awareness of lust as "the defiling of an instinct of nature" comes into focus; yet, amazingly, Niels' innate innocence and, probably, aversion to such a truth, prevent his grasping the logical deduction of his wife's inclinations.

It is said that hate is akin to love, and we have

seen the unnatural type of "love" the couple bore for each other in their earliest married days. That unnatural love should gradually turn to unnatural hate is then not surprising.

> A dull, menacing feeling grew up in him, was on the point of flaring into hatred. She hated him, of that he was sure. He hated her. Why had she come back?
>
> He felt as if he must purge himself of an infection, of things unimaginable, horrors unspeakable--the more horrible as they were vague, vague....
>
> (p. 149)

It is convenient for Niels to speak of an infection, since the image shifts the blame for their situation from his shoulders to something external, mostly to Clara. But his wife does not permit him to maintain this fiction.

> "You married me because you were such an innocence, such a milk-sop that you could not bear the thought of having gone to bed with a woman who was not your wife. You had not the force to resist when I wanted you--yes, I wanted you, for a night or an hour...and you had to legalise the thing behindhand. . . . I'm honest. I'm not a sneak who asks for one thing to get another. . . . Do you know what you did when you married me? You prostituted me if you know what that means. . . . After having made a convenience of me, when you married me, you committed a crime!"
>
> . . . That woman was right! That was why he had married her!. Not she, he stood indicted.
>
> (p. 154)

After the first throes of numbness and fury subside, Niels goes "to work, unconsciously, at finding a new path through the tangled labyrinth of his life."

> It never occurred to him yet not to blame his wife for doing what it was her nature to do; not to judge her and to find her guilty....
>
> . . . . . .
>
> He came to see that the real problem was very complicated. Judging her guilty, he demanded repentance and atonement. But he could not demand anything of her because she did not acknowledge his

> right to demand: he had no authority over her.
> . . . . . .
> She was right in reproaching him with weakness: he had fallen. But, once he had fallen, could he have acted otherwise than he had done?
> . . . . . .
> So it all came back to this that he should not have fallen....
> But suppose a man had fallen, what was he to do?
>
> (pp. 160-161)

Incessant musings in this vein produce in Niels the sensitivity to similar failings in others mentioned earlier in connection with types of slavery. The pioneer Dahlbeck is a "slave of passion" ruled by an evil genius of a woman (p. 161). Niels feels himself kin to that man, and realizes at last that he can never again judge others as he has in the innocent arrogance of his youth. Yet, refraining from judging, he does not go the further step to forgiveness that might have proved his salvation.

The extremity of Clara's new passion, hatred, makes revenge her entire raison d'être. The marriage has brought to her the death-in-life that Niels has experienced through the shame of lust. It has also brought her madness. Nor is Niels untouched by deterioration: "the decay in Niels consisted more in a gradual disintegration of will and purpose" (p. 175). His "care for the farm was almost passionate. But it was the last flicker of a dying flame" (p. 172). Lust and its effects, however, have not yet finished with the Lindstedts. Clara, as part of her revenge, chooses to flaunt her lovers before Niels, in a move that contributes to his eventual murderous anger. Niels encounters the Dahlbeck woman, whose lust, when thwarted, turns to vindictiveness and to cruel

revelation:

> "You hypocrite," she hissed, "are you better than other people? I know you, you devil! You can't play the innocent with me! No man can! You least of all! You married the district whore....
> (p. 177)

The immediate sequel to the murder includes two rather provocative facets of the nature of sin. One is the tendency to involvement that a crime effects. Just as philosophers posit that each man loses by another's death, so crime is not an exclusive thing, but spreads like ripples in a pond. Bobby, presumably uninvolved, becomes entangled in the guilt and the tragedy and the ramifications.

> If it had not been for him, Bobby, there would have been no fire-arms on the place....
> . . . . . .
> Bobby had no education. If you had asked him what a tragedy is, he could not have answered. But he felt that a tragedy had been enacted in the house....
> . . . he felt profoundly shaken; he felt shattered in his belief in the firm foundations of life....
> . . . . . .
> He had been happy, constitutionally happy. He would never be quite so happy again; but he would be more thoughtful....
> . . . . . .
> . . . had he been thoughtful in his relation to Niels? . . .
> Bobby, young as he was, came to know the bitterness of regret and repentence [sic].
> (pp. 188-9)

The other interesting aspect of the murder's aftermath is the pattern of ritual redemption and renewal. Niels falls into a profound and death-like sleep that initiates a dormant period for his soul. Although he wakes physically, his spirit comes "from another world" and his "voice, too, sounded as from an infinite distance" (p. 189). Niels then begins an elaborate cleansing ritual "slowly, painstakingly, splashing and brushing for fully five minutes" (p. 189). By the time he leaves prison, he has achieved inward balance, "the peace of resig-

nation" (p. 208).

One sin's weight lingers in his conscience. He "had done a great wrong; he had left alone a human being that had been in need of him" (p. 208). His final peace of mind depends on Ellen's forgiveness. He still regards her through "mists of passion" (p. 209), but will suppress these entirely for the sake of brotherhood with her. The situation acquires delicacy and balance when Ellen meets Niels with "I have been to blame towards you....Can you forgive?.." (p. 213). They are reunited by the sorrows of the past, the needs of the present, and the hopes of the future.

> These two have been parted; and parting has opened their eyes. They have suffered; suffering has made them sweet, not made them bitter. Life has involved them in guilt; regret and repentance have led them together; they know that never again must they part. It is not passion that will unite them; what will unite them is love....
>
> (p. 216)

The fourth major structural pillar is "Isolation", a designation which serves to include both physical or natural apartness and the alienation of mind or soul. It is a theme which informs the novel in an important way from the first glimpse of the vast, depersonalized, bleak prairie setting. By nature a loner, Niels echoes the isolation of the prairie reaches and proves a vehicle as fit as the landscape for Grove's artistic response, tragic and exulting, to geography unlocking cosmic significances.[9]

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[9]For an account of the tremendous response of the

The general isolation Niels feels at Nelson's wedding becomes particularized as he realizes the effect marriage would have on their friendship.

> Somehow Niels felt that a barrier had arisen between him and his friend. So far they had had their interests in common. Nelson had stepped aside; he was going to live in a world from which Niels was excluded. Niels was left alone. (p. 54)

The desire to evade the world becomes "a desire to evade life's issues..." (p. 55), to return to the dependent, one-to-one relationship he had with his mother. One cannot really blame his trepidation, his wish to cut the world out, when one is aware of the almost sinister picture he has gained of human relationships. Mrs. Vogel confuses and frightens him; Ellen is cold and inscrutable; Olga marries to escape; the Lunds and the Amundsens present distinctly appalling views of married life.

The association between Niels and Ellen vacillates between chasms and camaraderie, both heightened by Niels' passionate regard for the girl. For a while "an abyss seemed to yawn /between them/ which nothing could bridge" (p. 65) and loneliness "assailed him like a savage beast" (p. 68). Then , in the context of a more developed relationship there was "no barrier between them: they looked at each other, as it were, stripped of all conventions, all disguises..." (p. 95). But it is a sense of exposure and unity which could be washed away by a summer storm:

> But already something /had/ stepped in between them: as if a distance had stepped between them, a great,

---

author to the stark, dramatic landscapes of the desert and

> infinite remoteness not to be bridged....As he /sat/ there and /looked/, it /was/ as if her face were receding and fading from view.
>
> (p. 99)

The schism sends him fleeing again from society, from house and people, "wishing it were winter and he were out, fighting the old, savage fight against the elements..." (p. 100), a battle for which he is so much more suited.

It is significant that the same image, "the abyss", is used for the pain Ellen encounters in hearing her father force himself on her mother and for all the various moments of alienation that Niels experiences throughout the novel. This device neatly weaves individual incidents into the universal, tragic pattern of human alienation. The sense of isolation controls much of the force of Grove's tragic vision, for it is one thing to be engaged in heroic combat with actively interested and participating superhuman agents (e.g., gods, Nature), but quite another thing to swing blindly and frantically at random, yet inevitable, disinterested cosmic forces (e.g., fate, nature).

The separation of Ellen and Niels finds its objective correlative in the actual road-chasm where the two inadvertently meet after Niels' marriage. It serves also to presage the social and personal isolation that his new wife brings:

> . . . not a congratulation, not an invitation for

Siberia, see In Search of Myself, pp. 149-150, 153-154, and 162. That the author found Canada a parallel, if not more intense, experience is witnessed to by remarks to that effect in his autobiography and by a letter from Grove to Carleton Stanley, dated Simcoe, May 14, 1946: "Yes, apart from the Canadian, Siberia was my deepest experience." (Grove Collection, Box 5.)

> neighbourly intercourse: nothing....
>
> Niels could not but be aware of enveloping reticences; he felt as if he were surrounded by a huge vacuum in which the air was too thin for human relationships to flourish....
>
> (p. 129)

More painful is the grim picture of the future that Niels conjures up:

> They lived side by side: without common memories in the past, without common interests in the present, without common aims in the future. Why were they married?
>
> The worst of it was that there were decades upon decades of exactly the same thing ahead....
>
> He saw himself sitting on his yard, an old man, a man of eighty: and by his side sat an old woman, eighty-six years old: and both followed separate lines of thought: each followed his own memories back over half a century: not a pulse-beat in common....
>
> Each was facing eternity alone!...
>
> (p. 137)

The emotional separation of the couple becomes concretized in physical separation, with Clara's long trips to "the city" and finally complete severance of cohabitation. Each move away from one another is compounded by misunderstandings, absences and reticences into a "demoralisation of all human relationships" (p. 141). Finally, confronted with Clara's accusations and venom, Niels finds himself "walking along an abyss, blind-folded" (p. 157). Their relationship has hit a depth from which there seems no return. The "blindfolded" Niels fails to interpret his wife's penetrating analysis in any other terms than that "She /has/ given her body" (p. 157), and misses the last opportunity for reconciliation in ignoring her proud displays of herself to him "as no woman could show herself to any man but her husband..." (p. 164).

As the impact of the woman's mad revenge takes hold on Niels, he begins to exhibit patterns of insanity. He clings to Bobby as "the last link that connected him with the world of living men: the last barrier between him and insanity..." (p. 167). Yet he contradicts this sentiment in deliberately hiding from Bobby to avoid the judgment that he is mad (p. 166). In shaving and barbering Niels' wild unkemptness, Bobby finally serves as Niels' usher back to some bond with life and with people. It is significantly this shaved "civilized" Niels who decides to destroy the active force in his life for isolation and non-living, his wife.

The final sin which Niels and Ellen have to resolve involves, in both instances, violations of love which have produced alienation and loneliness. She has rejected Niels' pledge of life, love, and secure intimacy, then let him go away without a hint of change to sustain his hopes. He in turn does not return, but leaves her alone to suffer. Through mutual contrition and forgiveness, they expiate their transgressions and bridge the crevasses which have too long held them captive and alien. "There is no barrier between them which would need to be bridged by words. They are not looking at each other; they are one" (p. 215). It is appropriate that the last word of the novel be "both", to stress that they have overcome isolation, achieved unity, and are united through love's power. The past is no barrier, but a bond.

These, then, are the four themes, vision, fate-freedom,

passion-sin, and isolation, upon which Grove builds Settlers of the Marsh. Their impact is total, reaching into and colouring all segments of the work. At various points, one or another of the quartet may appear to dominate, but this illusion evaporates as the novelist works to show that no single theme concerning man's experience is the final issue. In terms of the novelist's craft, this means that no one technique or structural device is anything more than a segment of the whole and to be great art, the whole must ever transcend the sum of its parts. It remains to be shown whether and when Grove's work achieves this goal.

CHAPTER II

SETTLERS OF THE MARSH: FICTIONAL SUB-STRUCTURES

While one or more themes of any novel emerge as the framework upon which all characters, incidents, and insights weave themselves, there are, in addition, certain substrands which strengthen and enrich both the major themes and the work of art as a whole. Examination of Settlers of the Marsh reveals three such secondary elements which contribute sufficiently to the structure of the novel to warrant individual consideration.

The first of these is the life-death theme, whose underlying voice must of course be the land itself, a harsh prairie world versed in the contrasts of lush summers and bleak winters. In the swing between fecund grain belt and archetypal wasteland, the marsh reflects the pioneer mode of existence with its primary concern for survival. It also directs itself to interpretations involving the psyche. As Arthur L. Phelps has stated it,

> the book becomes one more localization of the warfare of the human spirit. Thus it fuses with the universal, and out of Manitoba landscape creates spiritual territory of the soul.[1]

Amundsen is a living contradiction, for his house represents "a future" and "growth", but the man himself is an agent of sterile piety and death. For the sake of his lust,

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[1]Arthur L. Phelps, "Settlers of the Marsh", a review in the Manitoba Free Press (Winnipeg: December 7, 1925).

he brings his wife prematurely to the grave; for the sake of prosperity and convenience, he permits many unborn children to be aborted. It is somewhat to be expected that his daughter is marked by this death force, as indeed she is in her rejection of normal life patterns and procreation. This legacy explains Ellen's stoic and unmoved response to her father's death. Subconsciously aware of the dimensions of death <u>within</u> him, she is not startled by his actual physical death.

Sigurdsen's death has three dramatic values, the first being Niels' statement, "He's dead. Let that go. I am alive. I want to speak about myself" (p. 102). There is tremendous irony in his saying this to Ellen, for could she absorb its philosophy and apply it to her own situation, the whole tragedy might be averted. The second ramification of the old man's death is the meditation on life and death which it provokes in Niels:

> Here lay a lump of flesh, being transformed in its agony from flesh in which dwelt thought, feeling, a soul, into flesh that would rot and feed worms until it became clay....
>
> Once a woman had been, his mother. She had been young, pretty, pulsating, vibrating in every fibre with life: at best she was a heap of brittle bones....
>
> Did she live on? In him, Niels?...
>
> Yes, that was it! The highest we can aspire to in this life is that we feel we leave a gap behind in the lives of others when we go. To inflict pain on others in undergoing the supreme pain ourselves: that is the sum and substance of our achievement.... If that is denied, we shiver in an utter void.... Thus would he shiver....
>
> Niels laughed in the presence of death....
>
> (p. 102)

In thus underscoring the tragic and universal inclination of human thought, the author indicates a cosmic awareness in his

main character that assures his stature as a tragic figure. The final dramatic effect of Amundsen's death is its place just before the doomed confrontation with Ellen; human death presages a sort of spiritual and emotional death.

The death-in-life passage previously quoted presents several tangents of meaning. The first is the one already mentioned, in connection with "mothers", of Niels' desire to escape life. The second is the irony that Niels' wish so clearly comes true; his marriage is definitely a death-in-life situation. The third is the peculiar alliance this establishes between the bachelor girl, Ellen, and the professional lover, Clara. Both represent perversions of normal human love. Both drain Niels of his vitality, Ellen in denying him his motivation to live ("Life was useless; there was no meaning in it...no justification" (p.116),) and Clara in tempting him to the death of innocence and a living death of a marriage.

Clara is, of course, the most overt symbol of death in the novel. Her face is "the face of decay", her complexion and hair colour are artificial, her real face beneath the mask is a "death's-head" (p. 133). Even the seemingly natural act of sex partakes of sterility. "From the beginning there had been about their moments of union something artificial..." (p. 139), and "He did not want children out of this woman!" (p. 138). Through the widow has come sin, and "The Wages of Sin is Death!"

Life becomes an apparent burden to Mr. and Mrs. Lindstedt. Irony bursts from Clara's remark, "I want to live, not

to stagnate" (p. 157), for stagnation is not precisely the alternative she will meet, but rather its extreme, death. As the White Range Line House lies "dead and cold" (p. 142), Niels formulates the only justification for life that he can comprehend: "in helping others" (p. 161). In so thinking, Niels' attention naturally focusses on the one source of pleasure, interest, and reflected vitality left to him; "right by his side Life was lived: the life of children who do not look beyond the hour. The child was Bobby" (p. 172). As the hope and the future, Bobby accentuates the "barely living", even "death", of Niels and Clara. As the saving power of youth, Bobby grants Niels a lease on life in cutting Niels' hair and beard and exclaiming, "You're a young man yet, Niels" (p. 176). Even then the irony cannot be quelled, for it is this renewal of youthful appearance that attracts the Dahlbeck woman and precipitates the revelation that Clara is a prostitute. And, needless to say, that news brings several types of death.

Nature participates in the drama of man with its "stillness of death." Niels has been like an animal, "wounded to death". Clara Lindstedt lies dead, by his hand. And the gelding, Jock, is "convulsively kicking his last..." (p. 182). Niels sinks into the symbolic regenerative sleep which resembles death, but which simply precedes renewed life and a final maturity, manhood. To ascertain that the significance of the long period of dormancy is not missed, Grove refers to Niels throughout the trial as "the prisoner", "the accused"

(p. 192), allowing a reassertion of his identity only when it may be mentioned in conjunction with the life he will again assume.

As hope and vision revive, so do Niels and Ellen. Freed from a view of life as a burden, they feel that "To be merely alive is joy enough." The instinct of renewal is implicit in nature: "...it is spring, not autumn." "They sit and look out, as if in a resurrection of what was dead" (p. 216). In expressing the recognition that her "greatest need /is/ to have children, children", Ellen makes peace with "the shadow of /her/ mother's life" and acknowledges at last the folly of living for the dead. Many cycles of life-death have been enacted in consecutive, concurrent, and overlapping patterns. It bears testimony to Grove's acceptance of moral catharsis and hope in the tragic sequence that he chose to end his drama with Life in the ascendancy.

Many of the points raised in an examination of the life-death theme bear directly on the second supporting motif, success. On this topic, B. K. Sandwell has remarked:

> In a country whose literature so far has been almost entirely concerned with the purely aesthetic values of nature and with the moral values which are associated with a good bank credit, a novelist like Frederick Philip Grove is urgently needed.[2]

A glance at the first few pages of the novel would seem to put Grove in the materialist category this commentator so obviously reviles. A work ethic fills page after page:

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[2]B. K. Sandwell, "Frederick Philip Grove and the Culture of Canada", Saturday Night, 61:18 (Nov. 24, 1945).

> Work felt grateful: this country seemed to have been created to rouse man's energies to fullest exertion....
>
> (p. 24)

The Amundsen "asceticism" represents the future and growth; Lund sloth, the past and decay. Distraction from the goal of home, land, and family is "a side-play, acted in a niche and off the stage..." (p. 52).

Grove subtly undermines this seemingly one-tracked pursuit of material success, however, by making his character painfully aware of spiritual poverty:

> Yet, material success was not enough. What did it matter whether a person had a little more or less wealth?
>
> His outlook [also] had changed. Life seemed irrelevant; success seemed idle. All he did he did mechanically.
>
> (pp. 45, 57)

The death of "successful" Amundsen crystallizes all the half-formed thoughts Niels has harboured concerning the futility of human endeavour.

> Amundsen's impeccability in life, his trivial vanity, his slow deliberation and accuracy: where had all these taken him? To our common goal, the grave....
>
> . . . . . .
>
> He thought of himself and his great strength which had become a marvel to him; of his work on the homestead which he carried on without fathoming any longer the why and the wherefore. . . . Was it really best not to question and just to live on? But living on--what was the use of it if it led him....There? Where?
>
> (p. 64)

With beautiful balance, the author has Niels move on to greater and greater material prosperity as his emotional situation approaches bankruptcy. His house grows; his pros-

pects of attaining the vision which would fill that house dwindle.

> Yes, there could be no doubt. His farm was a success. In a material sense he was prosperous beyond his boldest expectations....He had made his land; it was his....If only....
>
> (p. 93)

Within days, he and Ellen have parted. Niels' conclusion is clear:

> . . . life is the gradual approach, through an infinite number of compromises, to a pre-conceived goal, to an ideal, a dream or a vision which may never be completely realised.
>
> (p. 139)

This closely echoes Grove's own sentiments.

> . . . it is also one of the fundamental tenets of my creed that an ideal realized would be an ideal destroyed. If God revealed Himself, He would be dead. The aim, the ideal, to be of value as a guide, must be unattainable.[3]

So also: "Life proceeds by compromises only."[4]

"Gee, Niels, you're a wizard. You make money even out of hail..." (p. 150). But the more his farm succeeds, the more his marriage fails. "He became aware that this phrase--what did it matter?--occurred more and more frequently in his thought. Did nothing really matter?" (p. 148)

Through Clara's accusations, Niels' various inner inadequacies become painfully counterpoised with the tangible success he has had externally. He is a success as a farmer, but has failed as a husband, as a man, and as an adult. To

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[3]Grove, It Needs to be Said (Toronto: Macmillan an Company of Canada, Ltd., 1929), p. 88.

[4]Ibid., p. 87.

reassert the latter (by killing Clara), he willingly forfeits the former (turns it over to Bobby and seeks execution). In so doing, Niels achieves a compromise success, retaining worldly goods and also stepping into new dimensions as husband, adult, and man.

One unexpected motif which emerges from a line-by-line inspection of Settlers of the Marsh is the use of the colour white for various effects. Its mention is so frequent and references to other colours are so few that it inevitably thrusts itself upon one's consciousness. Not that such minute considerations lack literary precedent. Melville devotes a full chapter to Moby Dick's terrifying whiteness; James Joyce, in his Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, gives a definite chain of significances to his mention of things white. Indeed, as part of the trilogy, Pioneers Grove and his wife had wanted Settlers of the Marsh to be called The White Range Line House.[5] Ellen and Clara are, of course, set opposite each other in the archetypal moulds of "good" and "bad" women.[6] Golden hair and wide light-blue eyes vie with dyed hair and coal-black "beady" eyes. The feature receiving the most attention, however, is their skin. Ellen's complexion is described many times as "a pure, Scandinavian white" while Mrs.

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[5]See the Grove Papers, Pt. II, Box #9, the second booklet of the trilogy manuscripts. Pencilled in by Mrs. Grove is the title The White Range Line House: A Story of Marsh and Bush.

[6]Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (New York: Atheneum, 1966), p. 101.

Vogel earns only a "rather pallid" and later much harsher depiction.

This would seem an auspicious beginning for the mood Grove would have whiteness evoke, but a knowledge of the sequence of events precludes our thinking purity ("white") in Ellen a blessing or virtue. This ominous aspect ushers in other instances of foreboding whiteness. Mrs. Vogel attempts to lure Niels to her white house (p. 55). Niels tries to hide from life's problems behind "tall, ghostly, white stems of aspens /which/ loomed up, shutting out the world..." (p. 55). He pins his hopes on the sorrow-stalked white mansion that he builds for Ellen. White mists fill the Marsh as Niels attempts to bury his sense of desolation in an orgy of work (p. 67). White is the colour of Niels' face at the news of Amundsen's death and at the question, "How does it feel to be married?" (p. 144). White mists and chill surround Niels' first ride with his "unexpected freight", Mrs. Vogel (p. 92). Similarly, white clouds immediately precede the agonizing bout with unavoidable fate in the summer storm encounter. The "curling festoon of loose, white, flocculent manes, seething, whirling..." (p. 98) captures the sense of wild, irrational forces whose pawns the helpless couple are. At the sight of tears "quivering on her lashes, white, sun-bleached lashes", the "realisation of a bottomless abyss shakes him" (p. 99). As Bobby approaches the death-visited farm, he is struck by the unlit buildings looming <u>white</u> in the wisp of moonlight. Glistening white aspens wait patient-

ly in the murderous night.

Following the murder and absolution, Grove has his "white" associations do an about-face. The colour becomes endowed with consistently favourable connotations. Ellen's complexion is "still that pure, Scandinavian white" (p. 211), but this whiteness belongs now to a woman about to accept the natural processes of love and abandon artificial purity to seize happiness with both hands. The plum tree buds, symbol of fertility, burst into white blossoms, with life and hope and the purity of a new beginning.

> The smaller trees in the bluff blossomed forth: clouds of white blossoms: . . . before them the whole of summer lay, the summer of life.
> (p. 213)

The clouds are again white, but this time they sail serenely on "a Sunday in June" (p. 214). Ellen's lashes are still white, but tearless, and in this context the abyss closes forever.

Life-death, whiteness, and success are the most important minor motifs, but they are by no means the only ones. Patterns perhaps less salient include nature, social issues, and the threads provided by the individual characterizations. Nature serves primarily as an outlet for Niels' passions and as an objective correlative for human relationships or emotional states. The social topics direct themselves most often to the valuing of machinery over human lives and the hardship of pioneer times, particularly on women. The viewpoints and blindspots of the various characters, presented by their own testimony and by the detached commentary of the omniscient author, function as yet another cohesive artistic force.

Controversies have surrounded Grove's awkwardness with dialogue, the degree of catharsis the novel achieves, character credibility, and the appropriateness of the ending. The temptation is to leap into the fray and burden and analysis of structure with a meandering appendage of asides and afterthoughts. The only one of the aforementioned quartet that merits a moment's consideration is the question of the ending. Does it destroy or upset the unity and symmetry of the novel's structure? Is it not a shallow acquiescence to the popular demand for a "happy ending", the very phenomenon Grove repudiates in an essay by that name? Thomas Saunders feels that it "is not enough to blind us to the high quality of the narrative up to that point."[7] One might be even more loyal to Grove's artistic sensibilities and pose a defence along these lines:

Grove's original ending read as follows:

> They are sitting together in a small room, at winter time, the winter of life. The wind is howling and stalking outside: the wind of the world. In the stove nearby a fire is roaring, radiating its genial warmth. A lamp sheds its homely light from above over head and shoulders. And as they look at each other, they listen to the pitter-patter of little feet sounding down from above where the children are romping for a few minutes before they bolt into their beds....[8]

Realizing the artistic objections that would be raised to such a patently "happy" and convenient ending, Grove cut it

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[7]Thomas Saunders, introduction to Grove's Settlers of the Marsh, p. xiii, (copyrighted 1965).

[8]Grove, The Grove Papers, Pt. II (Box #9, page 195, dated 191761924).

from the novel. It was a decision actually totally in harmony with his view of tragedy.

> What, then, is tragic?
> To have greatly tried and to have failed; to have greatly craved for life and to receive death: all that is the common lot of greatness upon earth. It would be misery indeed, instead of tragedy, if there were not another factor in the equation. It would be crushing, not exalting. The tragic quality of Moses' fate--combining the terror that crushes with Aristotle's catharsis which exalts--lies in the fact that he accepted that fate of his; that he was reconciled to it; that he rested content with having borne the banner thus far: others would carry it beyond. In this acceptance or acquiescence lies true tragic greatness: it mirrors the indomitable spirit of mankind. All great endeavour, great ambition, great love, great pride, great thought disturb the placid order of the flow of events. That order is restored when failure is accepted and when it is seen and acknowledged that life proceeds by compromises only.[9]

As noted before, the couple are now proceeding toward a vision which grants no more guarantee of attainment than their previous broken dreams did. But they have tried and failed and have been exalted by the final acceptance of compromise. In Grovian terms, catharsis has been achieved.

Naturally, much remains to be said on this particular novel, but it may now be asserted with new confidence that it is a complexly and skilfully structured piece of literature. The question now becomes one of how Frederick Philip Grove fared in his other fictional works.

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[9]Grove, It Needs to be Said, p. 87.

CHAPTER III

NOVELS OF SOIL AND SOCIETY: STRUCTURAL OVERVIEWS OF OTHER GROVIAN FICTION

Having affirmed that the upper reaches of Grove's writing do involve intense thematic and technical structuring, we are compelled to consider this area of competence in relation to the rest of his fiction. When and in what ways is he less (or more) successful in unifying his art? Does he have recurrent blindspots, consistent strengths? Does he grow or decline? Generalizations of this scope can emerge only from an overview of each of Grove's works of fiction.

Novels of the Soil

Most of the Grove canon concerns itself with fiction "of the soil", frequently involving a man-nature conflict, the pioneer experience. The earliest of Grove's published works, Over Prairie Trails (1922) and The Turn of the Year (1923),[1] represent a clarion indication of the importance of the man-environment relationship in the author's thinking. In all, five of Grove's novels take a prairie or rural setting, the quintet including the already-discussed Settlers of the Marsh (1925), Our Daily Bread (1928), The Yoke of Life (1930), Fruits of the Earth (1933), and Two Generations (1939).

Our Daily Bread, considered by Desmond Pacey to be

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[1]Both volumes, essay in form, will by virtue of their fictional content be discussed in Chapter IV.

F. P. Grove's "finest book", makes the transition from the pioneer life to that of the established resident, having moved on from the question of sheer survival to a concern with smoothing and perfecting one's world. Thus the specific goal of the protagonist has altered, but he strives all the same. By introducing his epigraph with the words "Hic tua res agitur", Grove pinpoints the plight of John Elliot: "And his sons walked not in his ways (I Samuel 8, 3)." Not merely the problem of generation conflict (although that in itself is no trifling matter), the theme involves man's endless search for permanence. Procreation is in part a bid for immortality, and if a man's children do not preserve his ways and his accomplishments, what has been achieved? For a pioneer farmer, his children's turning from the land goes beyond the hurt of a personal repudiation and becomes a denial of dignity, meaning, and even God's purpose.

Grove divided his second novel into three sections: Book I, The Passing of Mrs. Elliot; Book II, Chaos; Book III, In Exile. Mrs. Elliot's death represents the end of an era, the breaking of the last tie binding the large family together. Chaos, the scattering of the clan, follows thereupon. The final stage, exile, encompasses loneliness, madness, and death for the would-be patriarch. Awareness that Grove wished his work to be entitled Lear of the Prairie[2] prompts meaningful parallels between the two eternally tragic figures. Both

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[2]Desmond Pacey, Frederick Philip Grove, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1945), p.77.

appear essentially insensitive to their situations and through highhandedness provoke challenges to their authority. Both experience profound parent-child estrangement (although clearly to dramatically different degrees!). Each wanders and suffers madness. And each, before death, achieves a measure of insight and tragic acceptance.

If not always a sympathetic figure, John Elliot is an extremely strong one.[3] The narrative gives us access to Elliot's thoughts and reactions, providing the psychological insights so particularly necessary to the characterization of a stern, cold, aloof personality. Without those constant artful glimpses into the farmer's mind, Elliot would stalk enigmatically along the periphery of the reader's consciousness and then vanish without a trace. As it is, the reader shares this lesser Lear's sufferings and his vision of man's essential isolation.

Themes of continuing concern to Grove contribute to the structure of Our Daily Bread. The sense of malign Fates, of onrushing time, of inevitable decay, of human beings dehumanizing themselves in their efforts to humanize the prairie--all weave their way through the book and through the lives of the Elliots. Problems of guilt and sex and alienation recur as eternal human themes, conjoined with more immediate conflicts related to World War I, mechanization, and urbanization. The momentary "reunion" of one family over its dy-

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[3]It is a peculiar irony that his nature in overview unifies the novel's structure while it internally creates and precipitates family disunity.

ing sire assumes its place in the grand reiteration that is human experience. The "achieved content" is indeed art.

The Yoke of Life (1930) represents a return to the basics of prairie settlement, the pioneer struggles to establish a home, a community, and an ordered existence in a new land. And once again, examination of the table of contents is the most immediate means of grasping the author's structural intent. The novel is fairly symmetrically divided into four sections: I, Boyhood; II, Youth; III, Manhood; IV, Death. Each part contains six or seven titled chapters marking the stages of Len Sterner's quest for education, love, and fulfillment. Each part begins with introduction to a new set of circumstances ("The House", "The Camp", "The Slough", "The Meeting"); each part concludes with a chapter of finality, of progression from one phase to the next ("Departure", "On the Highway", "Once More the Farm", "The End").

The seemingly simplistic pattern of the four parts waxes more complex when we consider that the novel "suffered" a change of title in the hands of an editor. The charting of a soul from childhood to death is in itself a most delicate task and a blunt division of that journey into the stereotyped "ages of man" may reduce the investigation to an impersonal, obvious level. But Grove saw Adolescence as the proper title for his work,[4] in the light of which the entire perspective of Len Sterner's development falls into new and

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[4]Pacey, Frederick Philip Grove, p.57.

painfully bold relief. From a highly promising boyhood, Len moves into an emotional adolescence from which he never emerges into the health and completion of maturity. That he can find that much-needed completion only in the relatively artificial mode of ritual suicide simply confirms the hopelessness of his ever meaningfully assuming the yoke (and the equally significant joys) of life.

As with much of Grove's fiction, the themes of vision and quest provide major structural support in The Yoke of Life. At sixteen, Len vows that he will one day "master all human knowledge in all its branches. Whatever any great thinker or poet or scientist /has/ thought and discovered, he /is/ going to make his own."[5] But even as he formulates this elevated goal, his freckle-nosed nemesis sits nearby, "distract/ing/ his mind to such an extent that he fidget/s/ more than ever and /loses/ the thread of his thought."[6] Indeed the thread might well be the thread of life to be cut by Atropos, for his loss will go far beyond that of a mere thought. It will be the subversion of an ideal into an obsession. Yet, for the moment, under the tutelage of the Grove-like Mr. Crawford,

> Len's eyes gleamed and glittered. All the muscles in his shivering body tightened with the exaltation of his mind. His vision took the shape of a glorious sunrise, the only kind of glory which he knew. He felt as if he were wrapped in solitude: the words of the man by his side were coming from a great distance. Len was in the presence of revelation: and what was revealed to

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[5]Grove, The Yoke of Life (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1930), p. 33.

[6]Ibid., p. 35.

him was the majesty of his self.[7]

The visions and the quest end, of course, in the inevitable consequence of refusal or inability to compromise with life: suicide. The "majesty of self" gives way to "a common oblivion of self"[8] and Len attributes his failure to having "been swamped by other things, by life, by...".[9] Like Niels Lindstedt and most of Grove's primary characters, Len must meet the obligations imposed by his integrity. However wrong, distorted, or melodramatic that finale may be, it assumes the tragic dimensions of Fate and completes the design.

It is predictable that, in a setting so similar to that of Settlers of the Marsh, the same problems and themes would dominate the author's thinking in The Yoke of Life. Thus we find again a novel girded and articulated by the patterns of passion, sex, life-death, fate, free will, pioneer suffering, and even the ubiquitous whiteness.[10] Once more passages of lyrical description (Grove at his best) are

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[7] Ibid., p. 46.

[8] Ibid., p. 344.

[9] Ibid., p. 345.

[10] This sub-structure, perhaps less apparent than the others, again operates with multiple connotations, but much more consistently, indeed virtually always functions ominously. In Part I alone, 40% of the text's specific references are to "white" and refer to the bleak hardship of snow, to storm formations, to anemia, or to the seductive power of Lydia's pallid bosom and ironically white dress. From this we move with Len to final death in churning white waters and the closing scene in which Len's name and the yoke of life are taken up by the child born in the white bed.

balanced by terse, rather formal dialogue and the author's tendency to expostulate and occasionally to over-clarify mood and motive. The most serious charge against the book's unity has been launched by Desmond Pacey who claims that a realistic narrative degenerates into false, overblown dramatization of a dubious transformation (that of Lydia) and an even more unlikely, wildly Byronic suicide scene. Considering the novel's ending to be "crudely melodramatic and improbable,"[11] Pacey attributes the "failure" to the judgment that it is "impossible successfully to graft a romantic superstructure upon a realistic base."[12] But this attack has been countered with some eloquence by Ronald Sutherland, who claims that

> Grove's major achievement in The Yoke of Life is to take a climax straight from the tradition of romantic melodrama and transform it into an in evitable outcome. He would never have succeeded if the characterization of Len had been weaker. But as Len is portrayed in the book, it is evident that he must crack up and do something desperate. His situation--his incapacity and unwillingness to adjust to realities which offend his sensibility--is, of course, hardly peculiar. Neither is the violent consequence. In fact, it is a very current phenomenon. Newspaper reports of persons burning themselves alive in front of embassies or shooting a group of people and then committing suicide have become commonplace. The Yoke of Life, like The Master of the Mill, is poignantly relevant to the problems of modern society.[13]

The reader is caught squarely between these two critical opinions and must finally trust to his own intellectual and emotional responses to gauge the book's success.

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[11]Pacey, Frederick Philip Grove, p. 61.

[12]Ibid., p. 62.

[13]Ronald Sutherland, Frederick Philip Grove (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), pp. 54-5.

Fruits of the Earth, begun in 1925 and printed in 1933, is the last of Grove's published "Prairie Series", although not the last with a rural setting. Like Our Daily Bread, its situation is primarily that of the established, "successful" pioneer, but unlike the former work the stylistic approach to the protagonist is more detached, more in the nature of the omniscient observer. Anticipation of this technique lies in the book's original title: "Chronicles of Spalding District";[14] the author tends to document rather than dramatize. Gone is the Kafka-esque heightened awareness of Lindstedt's consciousness and the painful puzzlings of Elliot's meandering mind. Abraham Spalding to his wife, the world, and the reader acquires the dimensions of an archetype, representative man struggling to put his mark on Nature, to "set his own seal upon /the wilderness/."[15]

Certainly struggle is a very real and important part of the book, but it is its eternal opponent, Time, which comes to predominate in both Abe's and the reader's mind. All is growth and decay, creation met and conquered by corrosion. Thus the novel's first half, "Abe Spalding", carries us away for the moment in the enthusiasm of "progress". But the theme of Time's slow, insidious destructive power underlies the narrative and surges to the surface in the first chapter of Part

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[14]M. G. Parks, introduction to Grove's Fruits of the Earth (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), p. viii.

[15]Grove, Fruits of the Earth (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), p. 22.

II, "The District".

> Abe looked about and seemed to see for the first time. There were his wind-breaks.... They would age and decay and die.... Even the prairie was engaged in a process that would do away with it. Abe looked at the ditches running full of a muddy flood; and his mind lost itself in the mysteries of cosmic change.[16]

Recognition of the futility of human endeavour of course does not affect the necessity of the attempt. It is man's destiny and his glory to strive, and Abe responds to this continuing need by moving from personal, material goals (Part I) to community goals (Part II). The narrative predictably rests upon the course of these two aims, providing an engrossing and quickly moving tempo. As part of his chronicling and chronological approach, Grove curbs his usual proclivity for lengthy, contrived philosophical interjections and hyper-detailed natural descriptions. The dialogue continues to be somewhat stilted and formal, but the author shows some signs of trying as much as the frustrated Abe Spalding to come to terms with the casualness of the twentieth century mentality. Indeed a defence of the "air of incompletion"[17] of the novel's conclusion could well involve the author's new disinclination to "tidy up" the ending in a neat, definite nineteenth century manner. A mind acutely aware of the endlessness of cosmic and human reiterations might well rebel against a facile and convenient "completion" as an essential denial of his work's major theme.

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[16] Ibid., p. 134.

[17] Pacey, Grove, p. 70.

Sex, the generation conflict, social changes, Fate, alienation, vision, the city as den of vice, mutability, the debunking of materialism--these have by now become old, familiar themes in the Grove canon. But in Grove's own words we are brought back to Formalist theory: "The thing done is nothing: the doing everything."[18] Without sacrificing individual characterization, and with an abiding respect for the subtleties of structural unity, Grove has created an epic figure whose proud, narrow approach still captures a goodly portion of human experience and human dilemma.

The final rural novel, Two Generations (1939), was written by Grove in his new home in Simcoe, Ontario, and seems to reflect both more humour and more complacency about the thematic problems which had pervaded his thinking for five decades. Whether these mellower tendencies may be attributed to relocation in relatively serene, settled surroundings or to the natural process of aging, the product was a book which Grove himself regarded philosophically as "a mere trifle".[19]

If the author's judgment may be accepted at least to the extent of acknowledging the lessened intensity with which these themes are handled, it may still be maintained that their presence (in altered form) continues to serve as an im-

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[18]Grove, Fruits of the Earth, p. 132.

[19]Pacey, Grove, p. 77.

portant structural unifier. On the whole, image patterns and minor structural motifs have been supplanted by dialogue and by commentary usually omniscient but occasionally point-of-view. For the first time in a novel, Grove has eschewed chapter titles or book divisions and provided no more guidance to the work's natural structure than numerical divisions. The omission is appropriate, however, as the action flows swiftly and unhesitatingly through a series of crises and conclusions (e.g., Henry's greenhouse scheme and engagement, George's rupture and engagement (!), the car purchase, and all the personal confrontations between Di and Ralph, Ralph and Phil, Nancy and George, etc.) Far less concerned than Grove's other novels with symbolism and cosmic patterns, Two Generations concentrates on the rhythms of daily life and family interaction.

Characterization in the novel creates its own balances, as in the contrast between practical, stolid Ralph and dreamy, impetuous Phil. As reflections of these two distinct personalities, the Patterson farm is placed in subtle contrast with Sleepy Hollow--the seat of sensible, hard-headed action versus the Heart of Silence. Mrs. Patterson and her daughter Alice provide yet another dichotomy, the latter rebelling against all the womanly forbearance and discreet patience of the former. Nancy and George offer a total clash of life styles, while Henry and Cathleen present superficially different, but ultimately congruent, visions of sterility. Di's

down-to-earth sincerity gives the lie to Eva Rogers' shallow values; indeed Ralph's wife sets the pace for the style of Two Generations with her straightforwardness and moderation, her quietude and her sense of humour.

All the moral, emotional, and metaphysical problems of Grove's earlier works recur in muted form in this setting of pre-Depression material affluence. To a greater extent than ever before in Grove's writing, a single theme, the generation conflict, dominates and superseded all. Certainly the issues of determinism, sex, time, futility, alienation, and human values retain their significance, but their contribution to the unity of this particular work is decidedly secondary. If the result is less intellectually challenging, it is at least structurally satisfying and does, as Desmond Pacey has remarked, achieve a "high degree of formal coherence."[20]

Novels of Society

Two of Grove's novels, separated in publication by seventeen years, are more society-oriented than soil-oriented. They are A Search for America (1927) and The Master of the Mill (1944). Concerned primarily with struggles other than those of man with his environment or his progeny, these two works focus upon man's New World experience and man's relationship with his own creations.

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[20]Pacey, Grove, p. 48.

Since A Search for America was actually written in the nineteenth century (1893-4),[21] it is predictable that its form would be conventional, its chapter sequence ordered and revealing. Its literary precedent is the picaresque novel; use of this mode in the style of realism is Grove's personal combination. As a piece of "approximate" autobiography, the format of the book is chronological and episodic; as the imaginative record of an immigrant's search for the essence of America, it is swiftly paced and analytically catholic.

In terms of structuring, the importance of the central theme of quest is indisputable. Like Sir Gawain's trek or Gulliver's travels or Conrad's descent into the Heart of Darkness, Phil Branden's physical journey reverberates with moral, psychological, and social soundings. Witness the titles of his four Books: One: The Descent; Two: The Relapse; Three: The Depths; Four: The Level. All adventures, anecdotes, insights, impressions, images, and diction work to carry the reader to Branden's ultimate conclusions and to show the transition from a European to an American mentality. As Grove, through Branden, phrases it,

> When I came from Europe, I came as an individual; when I settled down in America, at the end of my wanderings, I was a social man. My view of life . . . had been, in Europe, historical; it had become, in America, ethical. We come indeed from Hell and climb to Heaven; the Golden Age stands at the never-attainable end of history, not at Man's origins. Every step forward is bound to be a compromise; right and wrong are inseparably mixed; the best we can hope for is to make right prevail more and more; to reduce wrong to a smaller and smaller fraction of the whole till it reaches the vanishing point. Europe regards the past; America regards the future. America is an

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[21]Author's Note to the Fourth Edition, p. v.

> ideal and as such has to be striven for; it has to be realized in partial victories.[22]

These opinions derive solidly and predictably from Branden's experiences and remarks, yet the critics are correct in noting an abruptness, what Pacey calls the "truncated effect"[23] of the ending. It is somewhat similar to seeing a child grow and develop and suddenly skip from about age seventeen to full maturity; the observer _has_ almost "made it" through the cycle, it is true, but he has missed a brief yet crucial phase. So it is that Branden shows his opinions in embryo and in early development, then seems to leap hastily into full-blown possession and articulation of these views. We are not surprised at their appearance _per se_ but rather at their arrival _so soon_.

An interesting stylistic design in the novel relates to form and content. Grove tends to reserve his lyricism for the rural sequences, his philosophical oratory and terse sentence structuring for the urban passages. This implied city-is-sin sentiment recurs frequently in Grove's writings and the pattern above noted culminates naturally in a remark in the concluding chapter of _A Search for America_: "Blessed is the nation that remains rural...for it will inherit the world. Freedom and happiness flee, unless 'superest ager'."[24] With such words and only measured optimism,

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[22]Grove, _A Search for America_ (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1939), p. 286.

[23]Pacey, _Grove_, p. 31.

[24]Grove, _A Search for America_, p. 286.

Grove steps from the open road and, for the moment at least, concludes his search for America, for his self, and for order.

At virtually the other end of Grove's literary life we find a renewed interest in the dynamics and implications of what man "hath wrought", his society and its conditions. This time, symptomatic of Grove's later work, the table of contents does not map out the novel, but confines itself to two parts, provocatively titled "Death of the Master" and "Resurrection of the Master". And as a tribute to the vitality of his art, this late novel displays more innovative spirit than any of his earlier works. Impressionism, time shifts,[25] centre of consciousness make their appearance as media for tried-and-true themes as well as contemporary, hopefully transitory problems.

That the internal patterns of the book are complex, no one may reasonably dispute. In his introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of the novel, R. E. Watters does a creditable job of delineating and unravelling its multiple themes and relationships. With this groundwork in mechanics already done, we can afford to consider for a moment the rationale for such complexity, the significance of form. Why did Grove feel that he had "at once succeeded in finding the inevitable form--the only form in which the book can convey its message"?[26] The most obvious answer appears also to be

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[25]For a specific critical discussion of the use of time effects, see R. E. Watters, Introduction to The Master of the Mill by F. P. Grove (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961).

the most accurate; a complicated theme demands a complicated technique. Prophecies of future social patterns cry for prophetic, experimental methods. The regathering and reshaping of a fragmented past can be captured truly only through the medium of fragmented recall. As the cogs and bolts of a machine interlock, overlap, and mutually trap, so do the characters. All life becomes a great, inhuman factory, and the Hegelian master-slave theory becomes a blueprint of the industrial age.

Upon the frame of three generations, three master-slaves, and the monolithic mill the novel is woven. Cross threads encompass everything from the trinity of Mauds through economic balances to the everpresent sense of Fate. But the reader is never far from the giant mill.

> It had led a life of its own, more potent, more decisive than the life of any mere human being. The individual destinies connected with it had merely woven arabesques around it.[27]

To this mammoth symbol, the structure owes its stability, its relevance, and its artistic worth.

With the exception of Consider Her Ways, which is to be dealt with in Chapter IV, we have now had a bird's-eye view of all of Grove's novels. "Success" is a relative term at best, but it may surely be asserted at this point that Grove

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[26]Quoted by R. E. Watters, Ibid., p. vii.

[27]Grove, The Master of the Mill (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961), p. 20.

does indeed demonstrate flexibility and imagination in his rendering of experience, that his art surpasses mere story-telling. So much, in fact, is the impact of Grove's writing a matter of mood, drama, and "felt experience" that skeletal synopses of his novels (e.g., The Yoke of Life, The Master of the Mill) may easily verge on the ludicrous or the incomprehensible. Thus the parts of his creative wholes are obviously contributory in status but the mutual dependence is complete and without those parts--diction, theme, motif, or whatever, there would be no whole.

CHAPTER IV

THE REMAINING GROVIAN FICTION: A MIXTURE OF MODES

In many ways the literary form most congenial to Frederick Philip Grove's talents was the dramatized essay,[1] catering as it did to his oratorical and descriptive skills and avoiding his uneasiness with fictional dialogue. Grove's two works of this genre, written at the beginning of his literary career, have been acclaimed by the critics as "almost perfect",[2] "tour/s/ de force of theme and variations".[3] Obvious forerunners in theme and style to his novels, Over Prairie Trails (1922) and The Turn of the Year (1923) are the earliest representatives of Grove's "Prairie Series". Originally planned as a single volume, the books provide two formats for a loving and detailed investigation of nature.

Over Prairie Trails, recounting seven journeys in as many chapters, has all the symmetry and polish of a pearl necklace. Each of the seven journeys is simultaneously a pilgrimage, an adventure, and an investigation of the Canadian wilderness. All are independent units, yet part of a questing nature and a "travel" experience that extended far beyond seven country drives. Based upon Grove's actual sep-

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[1]This mode is alternatively called "serialized sketches"; any term suffices which distinguishes this form from critical or purely expository essays, such as those of It Needs to be Said.

[2]Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1961), p. 208.

[3]Malcolm Ross, Introduction to Over Prairie Trails, by F. P. Grove (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), p. x.

aration from and trips to see his wife and child in 1917-1918, when she taught in Falmouth and he in Gladstone, the accounts derive from the wellsprings of Grove's own emotional life and thereby transcend sheer travel narration in their impact upon reader and speaker alike. The first chapter, "Farms and Roads", introduces us to the Manitoba prairie, establishes our bearings by night and day for future journeys. Each trip thereafter concentrates on one dominant facet of nature's changing face: "Fog", "Dawn and Diamonds", "Snow", "Wind and Waves", "A Call for Speed", and "Skies and Scares". With the exception of Chapter 5, which narrates the author's return from the trek of Chapter 4, all travel is <u>to</u> the hearth of Grove's emotions, his wife and little girl.

On the artistic selection of material, Grove says in his preface:

> With all their weirdness, with all their sometimes dangerous adventure . . . they /the trips/ stand out in the vast array of memorable trifles that constitute the story of my life as among the most memorable ones. Seven drives seem, as it were, lifted above the mass of others as worthy to be described in some detail. . . . Not that the others /of the seventy-two drives made/ lack in interest for myself; but there is little in them of that mildly dramatic, stirring quality. . .[4]

Grove goes on to account for the rarity of return trip accounts (only one!) in his selection by saying that his mind, lingering with the beloved left behind, had "no vitality left for the perception of things immediately around me."[5] This pushes Grove's method of selection of material beyond mere cataloguing or traveloguing into the realm of impres-

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[4]Grove, Author's Preface to <u>Over Prairie Trails</u> (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961), p. xiv.

[5]<u>Loc. cit.</u>

sion, of artistic ordering of experience. The sooner this is realized, the sooner the balance and artistry of Grove's craft in these sketches become apparent. The emotive focus switches from the clinical observations of a "nature buff" to the heightened and selective perceptions of the exhilarated husband and father anticipating reunion and completion of his world. With his poignant, always poetic evocations of natural phenomena, from a glittering crystal day to the muffled chill of impenetrable fog, Grove fulfills Conrad's dictum and makes the reader "see" with clarity and subtlety.[6]

The companion volume to Over Prairie Trails, written the same winter of 1919-1920, is The Turn of the Year (1923). Again a series of nature essays, the book structures itself upon the rotation of the seasons, interspersing descriptions of a northern spring, summer, and autumn with vignettes of pioneer life. Many of the passages possess all the richness and lyrical power of the best of Over Prairie Trails. Yet Grove's preoccupation with scientific detail and elaborate

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[6]Conrad, in his preface to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus', stated his task as artist to be "by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you SEE. That--and no more, and it is everything. If I succeed, you shall find there according to your deserts: encouragement, consolation, fear, charm--all you demand--and, perhaps, also that glimpse of truth for which you have forgotten to ask." (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1937), p. 52.

Grove, in his author's note to Fruits of the Earth, shows an awareness of such similarities of methodological thought between himself and Conrad. He further makes his own explicit pronouncements on "seeing", taking care that the term extend beyond the visual sense or even all physical senses to the scope of insight. See Grove, It Needs to Be Said (Toronto: the Macmillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1929), pp. 129, 130.

meteorological explanations threatens occasionally to reduce the essays to the level of technical reportage.[7] The organic unity of the work is also open to question, with critical response to the vignettes ranging from "disruptive" to "the unifying cry of human life".[8] Generally speaking, this format, so bluntly stated in the table of contents with its spring-summer-autumn of life juxtaposed against the natural cycle, inevitably seems somewhat contrived and self-conscious. The "seasons of a lifetime" metaphor has become enough of a literary cliché that its use requires a lighter, subtler touch. It is symptomatic of Grove's early work that he feels a great need for explicitness,[9] and it has been justly charged that he too frequently leaves precious little to challenge the reader's intellect.

In the essay form, then, Grove found the ideal medium for his penetrating observations of the natural world. His two works of this type further demonstrate the first inklings of change in his subject matter. Grove may say at this point, "I love Nature more than Man," but the swing

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[7]What I see as flaw has been praised by others as a sort of "magic realism" in literature and the factor which saves both this book and Over Prairie Trails from being "simply another set of vague raptures concerning nature's beauty." (Pacey, Grove, pp. 92, 93.)

[8]Paraphrases of the sentiments of Ronald Sutherland, op. cit., p. 31, and Arthur L. Phelps, Introduction to The Turn of the Year (Toronto: The Macmillan Co., 1929), p. 13.

[9]Compare this with the satiric demands of his final novel, Consider Her Ways. Concurrent with acquiring a sense of humour in print, Grove began to trust his reader more.

of his focus to things human is presaged in his constant insistence in the essays upon the presence in each wilderness scene of a human silhouette. The saga of the settler constantly and consciously interjects itself.

Approximately one-quarter century later, Consider Her Ways (1947) was published. In a sense it could not have reached completion sooner. From an initial rejection of Man in favour of Nature, through an increasingly tragic vision of human life, to a mellower, more humorous view of living (Two Generations), Grove had moved inevitably toward this final phase, gentle satirization of Man's follies and Man's pride.

The fantasy borrows from Jonathan Swift and Lemuel Gulliver in introducing itself as a

> Narrative of an Expedition from the Tropics into the Northern Regions of the Continent Undertaken by Order of Her Majesty Orrha-wee CLXVI compiled by Wawa-quee, R.S.F.O.

and in beginning each chapter with a capsule summation of its contents, such as "Chapter 1, The Isthmus: CONTAINING adventures with hostile leaf-cutting ants; man; his great water-beetle; and three armies of legionary ants." The novel requires a single suspension of disbelief, the notion that the ant world is highly complex, articulate, and "civilized". Upon this basic premise the author attempts to build a logically and artistically consistent tale, relying particularly on scrupulous attention to scientific and linguistic detail to

build credibility.[10] The narrative, of course, structures itself upon the travel device, with its individual physical challenges[11] and the overall goal of the expedition. The characterization of several ants, notably Bissa-tee, Assa-ree, and Azte-ca, is impressively vivid, and throughout the unifying presence of the commentator, Wawa-quee, presides.

As satire, Consider Her Ways must be judged less than effective. Occasional "jabs" are well executed, but generally the narrative regarding the ants' adventures becomes so specific and so interesting in itself as to submerge any satiric impact.[12] Structurally, however, the work exhibits dramatic balance and timing, wins the reader to the required suspension of disbelief, and retains his attention from journey's start to journey's end. Matter-of-fact reporter's diction and sustained point-of-view (Wawa-quee's) contribute to the successful fusion of form and content into Schorer's "achieved content" or art.

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[10] Again in the use of such time-honoured and effective devices the similarities of Consider Her Ways with Swift's Gulliver's Travels and such other works as J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings are evident.

[11] The chapter titles themselves give a rough outline of these challenges: I. The Isthmus; II. The Mountains; III. The Slope; IV. The Plain; V. The Seaboard.

[12] Ronald Sutherland, op. cit., p. 35, concurs with this judgment and adds that "Implications and observations pertaining to the human race appear irrelevant, sometimes forced." Desmond Pacey, refusing to commit himself, goes only so far as to tag the novel "a literary curiosity" (Creative Writing in Canada, p. 205).

One last form of literature provoked F. P. Grove's experimentation: the short story. One who has read the rest of the Grove canon approaches the short stories optimistically, anticipating the same skill with vignettes and fragments of the larger human story so ably demonstrated in Grove's novels. Of the mode Grove once wrote:

> /short stories/ deal with socially significant things from the main stream of life. In them, both characters and happenings must be more or less typical for a given society. They must be the normal, natural growth of given conditions actually existing in our midst. In reading them, we must be living the lives depicted as if they were our own.
>
> The exceptional, the unusual thing in character or incident has no place in either except in so far as it may be exceptional or unusual merely in degree, being the quintessence of the typical. In this respect, in fact, it is imperative, if the short story or the novel is to be of value, that the unusual element enter largely into its composition. . . . . .
>
> The short story presents characters or incidents, or more commonly both, "excised" from the social body or in vitro.
>
> A character with which it deals it takes for granted; it defines it and shows it in reaction to one single crisis, choosing, of course, most commonly the chief emotional crisis in the life of that character. The conditions under which the incident or the crisis takes place, it merely outlines, without relating them to the wider social background in which they lie embedded.[13]

With this fairly concrete definition in his mind and Grove's previously demonstrated facility with vignette and sketch, one would expect a flood of effectively executed short stories from his pen. Such is not the case. Only six have reached publication and their quality varies widely. The earliest, "A Poor Defenceless Widow"[14] bases itself almost exclusively on

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[13]F. P. Grove, It Needs to be Said (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, Ltd., 1929), pp. 120, 121, 122.

[14]F. P. Grove, "A Poor Defenceless Widow," Saturday Night, January 9, 1932.

the humorous anecdote of a hapless mayor held at bay by a less than defenceless widow. Characterization is glancing at best and Grove's criterion of "social significance" is not met. The most one may say in praise is that it might claim a minor place in the realm of (strictly) leisure literature.

Grove's next short story, "Snow,"[15] binds itself to the Prairie series of novels both through narrative style and through content. "Snow" is strongly reminiscent of the initial passages of Settlers of the Marsh; it moves beyond simple excerpt, however, and in completing its "action" achieves dramatic unity. Search yields to discovery, and the inevitability of events, first expressed in the landscape, is reinforced by the old lady's final, resigned "God's will be done!"

The material of "Riders," published in 1934,[16] derives from Grove's own pre-Depression experiences as a transient and achieves the social significance that he demands of the short story. Yet in the final analysis, the story is little more than a vehicle for social oratory. In the guise of autobiographical conversation, the "rider" mounts his soapbox, and a potentially dramatic situation fades into polemic.

Grove's fourth venture into print in short story form was "Platinum Watch".[17] A return to material of the weight of "A Poor, Defenceless Widow", "Platinum Watch" details the an-

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[15]Grove, "Snow," Queen's Quarterly, XXXIX: 99-110 (Spring, 1932).

[16]Grove, "Riders," Canadian Forum, XIV: 177-178 (February, 1934).

[17]Grove, "Platinum Watch," Canadian Bookman, XXI: 5-12 (October, 1939).

atomy of a swindle. Following the logical unravelling of the confidence game provides the author with automatic shape and direction for the story. The content is clearly not durable; once the riddle is exposed, we know all and our interest turns elsewhere. Yet the vignette appeals to our eternal enjoyment of human ingenuity and, if not profound or of abiding value, "Platinum Watch" is at least the stuff of momentary pleasure.

"The Desert"[18] achieves the unity of "Snow" and an added measure of "human interest" as a woman's happiness hangs in the balance. The dramatic counterpoising of Alice's two seemingly contradictory desires is executed against a bleakly eloquent prairie backdrop. Within the compression required of a short story, Grove manages to suggest all the themes and motifs which integrate his prairie novels. In a brief span, he captures as much cosmic sense as his lengthy novels and proves the effectiveness of his brand of realism.

"Lazybones",[19] Grove's last published short story, is more successful technically than artistically. There is the obvious unity of time--a day in the life of Elizabeth Hurst. There is the familiar and evocative rolling prairie with its power to make felt a cosmic awareness; "she felt at one with some mysterious thing pervading the world."[20] There are, however, two flaws in an otherwise interesting, integrated story.

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[18]Grove, "The Desert," Queen's Quarterly, XLVIII: 216-232 (Autumn, 1941).

[19]Grove, "Lazybones," Queen's Quarterly, LI: 162-173. (Summer, 1944).

[20]Ibid., p. 163.

The first is Elizabeth's reminiscence of her and Walter's courtship; the situation, actions, and dialogue are drawn almost verbatim from the wooing of Isabella in Our Daily Bread. Re-use of material is of course no crime but one might have hoped that Grove would have outgrown such embarrassing attempts at colloquial conversation as "I'm doggone poor"[21] and "We hook up next fall?"[22] The second artistic weakness is one with which Grove constantly contended, a basic distrust of his readers' perceptiveness. In a word, he overexplains. Fearing that we will miss the shadings and modulations in Elizabeth's day, he bluntly subdivides his narrative: "This was the time of day when she felt critical and burdened with a load hard to bear";[23] "This was the time of day when she felt angry and rebellious";[24] "This was the time of day when she felt resigned";[25] and finally "This was the time of day when she knew contentment."[26] The bounds of craft have been overstepped and as Joyce Cary warned, "If you make your scheme too explicit, the framework shows and the /story/ dies." Technique has here confounded content; art is victim.

The conclusion must then be that Grove, with apparently immense potential as a short story writer, too frequently makes one or another artistic blunder to accumulate any

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[21] Ibid., p. 164.

[22] Ibid., p. 165.

[23] Ibid., p. 169.

[24] Ibid., p. 170.

consistent record in this mode. Led by the success of sketch and vignette in Grove's novels, the reader is caught almost unawares by such a judgment. It would appear that Grove's art depends far too heavily on the powers of accumulative detail and thematic "resonance" to be able to make its impact in the confines of the short story. Without the constant, echoing richness of a more leisurely, lengthier form of literature, Grove can give us only the bare bones of the situation. We either fail to "see" or to understand with any confidence why it matters either way! As a phantasist he shows ingenuity and skill; as a satirist he is too diffuse to be effective. As any essayist, Grove strikes the area most suited to his precise and probing talent for description. In all genres, he displays an acute sensitivity to the problems and challenges of the literary craft and if his tools or his nature occasionally lead him astray, the rejoinder is that the artist can only try. Treading a tightrope between technique and content, he must maintain a most precarious balance in the cause of artistic unity and of art.

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[25] Ibid., p. 172.

[26] Ibid., p. 173.

CONCLUSION

Regarding the value of art, Frederick Philip Grove once observed:

> Art is one of the necessary, universal activities of mankind, as unavoidable as science or religion. It is born by an instinct bred and created into the innermost constitution of the human soul. It interprets us to ourselves, our feelings, our responses to life; it makes us emotionally articulate.[1]

For human understanding to be achieved, he is saying, a manner of ordering experience must be found, and one such manner is art. The role of the artist becomes that of leader, guiding the reader on the critical journey of perception and thence comprehension.

> To see /a thing/, in its true significance, in its relation to other things, in a true and yet novel bearing, as a part of that web of things and events which we call the totality of human life--that is the function of the artistic temperament. If to this artistic temperament there is joined the ability to make others see, then we have what I call artistic power. . . . Power is the ability of making you see, so that you stop and marvel because you never saw before. It consists in the moving up of the thing to be seen, so close that you cannot get away from it; that you must look and cannot turn your back. That you see, not only it, but through it human life, recognizing with a sudden thrill its whole, abounding significance.[2]

In terms of his own work, as we have seen, Grove has had varying degrees of success in achieving this "artistic power". When he writes of nature or of pioneer struggles or of man's eternal inner torments, we do indeed "see". When

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[1] Grove, It Needs to be Said, p. 107.

[2] Ibid., p. 130.

he writes of social problems or human conversation or man-woman relationships, we generally "see" less clearly. Nor is the difference simply one of subject matter, but of form and genre as well. Within the spaciousness of the novel, Grove can exercise that "reverberatory" technique which has been discussed. Occasionally he is betrayed by the scope of that genre into oratory or clinical detail. Yet his talents in the latter line are also considerable; his essays are generally imaginative and artistically excellent. It is in the confines of the short story form that his skills tend to fail him. Finally, as a man of demanding and inquisitive intellect, Grove makes the understandable error of wishing much and expecting little of his audience. The result at times is overclarification; we "see" all too clearly and the "artistic power" vanishes. Grove himself acknowledges that "no author has depth who speaks his whole mind",[3] but only slowly throughout his career does he develop a trust in his readers' sensibilities.

All of Grove's work may now be said to exhibit a constant awareness of the demands of the form-content relationship, a particular sensitivity to structure and motif. Each of the structural techniques that the author employs has the status of a chain link: secondary and only contributory but absolutely vital to the unity of the chain. The "parts" we have examined are naturally only parts, but they comprise an artistic totality greater than their sum. In

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[3] Ibid., p. 129.

coming to know the parts, then, we approach comprehension of the whole. And that, of course, is the artist's goal.

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