



SEXUALIZING POWER IN NATURALISM: THEODORE DREISER AND FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE

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“Liberating” Sexuality

Naturalists, who claimed for themselves the right to articulate the “truth” about sexuality, were often accused of producing pornography and found themselves battling against anti-pornography forces. During the Victorian era, explicit sexuality was silently tolerated only in the realm of pornography, which flourished as literature’s social “other.” Similarly, nineteenth-century American writing about prostitution was tolerated only in the sub-literary Gothic thriller. Turn-of-the-century social reformers, to be sure, produced a growing documentary literature on the prostitute, debating her in terms of “the great social evil,” but the prostitute entered “serious” American literature only slowly and in sanitized forms, as “a seduction victim,” as “a saintly sufferer,” or as “a triumphantly manly heroine.”¹ In his recent study on *Foucault and Literature*, Simon During writes that literary discourse has also been “slow to appropriate

1 Laura Hapke, *Girls Who Went Wrong: Prostitutes in American Fiction, 1885–1917* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1989) 1–3.

sexuality or to create sexual desire."² Although literature has been an extremely rich field of sexualization, the sex act itself has often been relegated to the margins of the literary discourse, and thus has often been silenced.

Such silences and sanitizations can be partly attributed to anti-pornography legislations, such as the 1873 Comstock Act, the first federal anti-obscenity law in the United States, named after the founder of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, Anthony Comstock. This law made it a crime to make, sell, or import books and pictures deemed obscene. The Comstock Act can be seen as directly related to the emergence of a mass market press that thrived on sensationalism, but also had a clearly repressive social function in that it was used to ban "contraceptive and abortifacient drugs and devices"³ as well as to censor the emerging realist-naturalist literature. As Laura Hapke's study on the prostitute in American fiction shows, any turn-of-the-century literary writing about prostitution risked being criminalized and censored as pornography, a fact Hapke attributes to the tenacious survival of Victorian concepts of "feminine purity," reflected even in medical treatises emphasizing the "feebleness" of female sexual desire.⁴

In both the United States and Canada the spectre of the new woman was accompanied by the negative image of the prostitute, vividly debated in terms of "white slavery." The working-class woman and her leisure time became the focus of a debate that was motivated by what social historians have termed a "moral panic," namely, the fear of spreading promiscuity and the spectre of the "fallen woman" in the city. In North America and Europe alike, this moral panic created a legal and normative apparatus of control that centred on the body of the working woman. In 1886, Canada's legal system even criminalized "seduction," whereupon the yearly rate of convictions increased from nine to almost thirty-five per cent between 1911 and 1917.⁵ In the United States, this

2 Simon During, *Foucault and Literature: Toward a Genealogy of Writing* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992) 172.

3 Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance, ed. (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 268. For a critical discussion of Comstock's repressive influence on *fin-de-siècle* America, see also H. L. Mencken's "Puritanism as a Literary Force," *A Book of Prefaces* (New York: Knopf, 1917) 195-283.

4 Hapke 1-20.

5 Karen Dubinsky, "'Maidenly Girls' or 'Designing Women'? The Crime of Seduction in Turn-of-the-Century Ontario," *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*, ed. Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1992) 50.

adherence to a concept of femininity as the Victorian angel in the house had its effect on those who were opposed to images of female sexual impropriety: "Thus when writers like Crane, Frederic, and Phillips decided to place the prostitute center stage, their work called up fears, evoking the horror of censor and genteel author alike. Even had there not been the official censorship of Comstock's Society for the Suppression of Vice, American writers worked within a context in which it was difficult to find a non-moralistic description, even if the focus was sociological, economic, or medical."⁶ There was a fear that writings about female impropriety could somehow "infect" the social body, as Lyn Pykett has observed in her discussion of the British reception of sexualized literature: "Much of the hostility to naturalism's representation of sexuality is based on fears of the dangers posed to the nation's health by a failure to control and regulate reading habits (and ultimately the actions) of an emerging mass audience."⁷

The fact that any form of writing about the prostitute was censored as "pornography" may explain why realistic-naturalist authors distanced themselves so vehemently from the pornographic label. Restif did blithely entitle his project on a state-run brothel "*Le pornographe*," but Emile Zola, significantly, dissociated his writing on the French prostitute from its etymological label. Claiming a new, powerful position as a social agency with the right and obligation to speak truthfully about sexual matters, naturalism's ideological battle-cry became "the truth." This, in turn, created a dilemma for twentieth-century writers interested in representing sexuality, as Simon During observes:

Thus, in the first decades of this century, avant-garde writers like D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Henry Miller and Theodore Dreiser found themselves writing about sexuality in terms which could neither produce readerly desire nor accept the cultural values attached to official "obscenity" rulings. For them sex could be used against the apparatus of normalization and productivity; it could be turned against domesticity. Here sex has a different use: both the aesthetic value of avant-garde writings and their "truth" was directly appealed to in the courts which tried to prosecute them as pornography. Their status as art is officially sanctioned in their fight with censorship aimed at pornography and the protection of family life.⁸

6 Hapke 16.

7 Lyn Pykett, "Representing the Real: The English Debate about Naturalism, 1884–1900," Nelson 172.

8 During 172.

Accused of producing pornography, naturalists from the nineteenth century on reacted with two complementary strategies. The first is a radical dissemination of sexuality into literature by displacing it into social relations, economic relations, inscribing sexuality as a marker between social classes. The second strategy involves sanitizing the sex act itself with an increased focus on sexual desire rather than on sexual pleasure. These strategies go hand in hand with the aggressive discourse of liberating literature from puritanical forms of sexual repression and the simultaneous defensive demarcation of a clear boundary between a serious, naturalistic literature (which articulates the "truth" on sexuality) and pornography (which arouses sexual desire through explicit images).

The social struggle around this specific question of who is entitled to speak the truth on sexuality illustrates Foucault's point that "truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power."⁹ For the Foucauldian archaeologist, then, the task at hand is not to discriminate between true or false discourses, but to examine through what rules and what apparatuses discourses establish themselves as true in a society. Thus the archaeologist examines "systematically changing discursive practices, such as who has the right to make statements, from what site these statements emanate, and what position the subject of discourse occupies."¹⁰ Applying this principle to the history of naturalism, the Foucauldian archaeologist is interested in how naturalism has institutionalized itself as an agency with the right (and duty) to produce sexual truths.

Naturalism established itself, in part, through its rivalry with the judicial institutions, a rivalry that was often masked by a discourse of opposition, adopted by naturalists and juridical institutions alike. Indeed, the history of naturalism has become associated with its "obscenity" trials: in 1857 the spectacular trial against Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*; in 1888 and 1889 the trials against Henry Vizetelly, the British publisher of Zola's translated works; in 1890 the equally spectacular trial in Leipzig against three German naturalists, Alberti, Conradi, and Walloth, for violating sexual taboos and spreading obscenities. Also, in 1916 the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice successfully blocked the distribution of Dreiser's *The "Genius"* by making the publisher yield to public pressure, forcing him to withdraw the book from the market. Although

9 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980) 131. Further references to this work will be abbreviated PK in the text.

10 Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983) 67-68.

Flaubert won his trial, basing his defence on the author's right to artistic creativity and freedom of expression, the *Leipziger Naturalistenprozess* ended with a defeat for the naturalist authors: their books were disqualified as popular literature (*Unterhaltungsliteratur*) and the authors were denied the legal privilege of artistic and creative freedom granted to serious art.¹¹ Similarly, Dreiser lost his court case against the John Lane Company in 1918.

It is this history of opposition to judicial apparatuses and forces of public morality that eventually ensured the canonization of naturalism as a liberating force in literary histories. In *The Sexual Revolution in Modern American Literature*, Charles Glicksberg writes that daring to write "the truth, however maligned and unacknowledged, about sex, Dreiser led the revolt against the hypocritical moral conventions that were crippling the intellectual and spiritual development of America."¹² Glicksberg's argument suggests that sex itself brings with it change, exploding old conventions and revolutionizing life. "Dreiser came to be, for his restless contemporaries, the representative writer of the age, a liberating force of great importance for the times," writes Thomas Riggio in the introduction to Dreiser's *Diaries*.¹³ And to give some legitimacy to the new, "unexpurgated" Pennsylvania edition of *Sister Carrie* (1981), a work that is sexually more explicit than the original Doubleday edition, Alfred Kazin observes in the introduction: "To the always alienated and radical Dreiser, *Carrie* represents the necessity of transformation, sex as revolution."¹⁴

It was this idea of Dreiser as the "liberator" of American literature from "puritanism" that the critics had in mind when they labelled Grove

11 See Jutta Kolkenbrock-Netz, *Fabrikation, Experiment, Schöpfung: Strategien ästhetischer Legitimation im Naturalismus* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1981), particularly her chapter entitled "Naturalismus und der Staat: Zur Funktionsweise des ästhetischen Diskurses im Strafprozess," 140–73.

12 Charles Glicksberg, *The Sexual Revolution in Modern American Literature* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971) 46.

13 Thomas P. Riggio, Introduction, *American Diaries: 1902-1926*, by Theodore Dreiser (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1982) 27.

14 Alfred Kazin, Introduction, *Sister Carrie*, by Theodore Dreiser (New York: Penguin, 1983) ix. This view of Dreiser as a sexual liberator has originated very early on. See H. L. Mencken, "Theodore Dreiser" and "Puritanism as a Literary Force," *A Book of Prefaces* (New York: Knopf, 1917); John Cowper Powys, "Modern Fiction," *Sex in the Arts: A Symposium*, ed. John Francis McDermott and Kendall B. Taft (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1932) 54; and Richard Poirier, *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967) 245.

a naturalistic "Canadian Dreiser." In the introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh*, Thomas Saunder uses very telling language to describe Grove's achievement in literature: "On the subject of sex, [*Settlers*] is the frankest of all of Grove's novels and, in a puritanical Canada, it was condemned as obscene,"¹⁵ an opinion that has been adopted by many readers. Saunder's discourse implies that Grove's writing has a sexually liberating effect in a morally backward or misguided country. Grove himself would probably have shared this opinion, as he explained the bad sales of the book with its sexual honesty, comparing it to the realism of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.

In fact, even the most recent naturalist theories emphasize naturalism's "liberating" force to the point of mythologizing it in critical discourse: "Like a Trojan horse of fiction, the naturalist text was a dangerous intruder, penetrating into the protected domains of bourgeois proprieties," writes David Baguley in his theory on European naturalism, emphasizing that the naturalist text "admitted more explicit sexual matter into its range of reference and attacked the modes of representation of bourgeois culture, especially its reassuring, edifying literature" (NF 173). It is, however, naturalism's very liberationist mythology (appropriately expressed by Baguley in a language of male penetration) that needs to be problematized in the context of feminism and Foucault's history of sexuality. Foucault's theory forces us to examine naturalism not so much as an ultimate force of liberation but rather as a discourse rivalling the prerogatives of social purity forces. After all, naturalism demanded for itself the right to speak truthfully about sexual matters and suggested new ways of regulating sexuality in literature.

While naturalism promoted itself in a discourse of opposition to the repressive juridical powers, the "real" problems of twentieth-century realist-naturalist authors often went much deeper and were more complex than the simple juridical-moralistic repression theory suggests. Thus, the "censorship" involved in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* was not a juridical one, but consisted in Dreiser's voluntary submission to the dynamics of the market place: "Dreiser was submissive to every suggestion that might assure publication,"¹⁶ and easily acquiesced to enormous changes and cuts suggested by his friend Arthur Henry, as well as to stylistic changes suggested by his wife, Jug Dreiser. In many cases these changes improved the novel's flow and style, but they also had the effect of sanitizing the

15 Thomas Saunders, Introduction, *Settlers of the Marsh*, by Frederick Philip Grove (Toronto: New Canadian Library, 1966) viii.

16 Kazin xiii.

novel's depiction of sexuality. The "censorship" involved, however, was one that had Dreiser's approval.

Once on the market, *Sister Carrie's* problem was not that it was openly censored but that it was quietly ignored by a mass audience (and reviewers) who refused to buy and read his literature: "Few New York dailies noticed *Carrie*, and many of the most important literary magazines ... were conspicuous by their silence," writes Dreiser biographer Richard Lingeman.¹⁷ When Stuart Sherman openly dismissed Dreiser's naturalism as "barbaric" in his review in 1917,¹⁸ his negative evaluation did not so much "suppress" Dreiser's work, as finally stimulate a debate that would continue for decades to come, initiating Dreiser's subsequent canonization as *the* American naturalist.

While the eventual canonization of Dreiser's literature went hand in hand with the more general social rejection of "puritanism" and "Victorianism" in American society, naturalist authors quickly learned to exploit the advertisement potential of "suppression" stories. The censorship of a book and the ensuing debates were cleverly appropriated as a marketing strategy by a new generation of naturalists. Dreiser's *The "Genius"* is a case in point. The publisher's suppression of the novel motivated many American and British authors to declare their solidarity, thus promoting the book itself to the point that Hamlin Garland, a very respected American realist writer, accused the whole anti-censorship movement that gathered around Dreiser's novel of being "a piece of very shrewd advertising."¹⁹ What is more, as naturalist authors both Dreiser and Grove shared the strategy of creating and perpetuating "legends" of suppression around their works. Dreiser's story of Mrs. Doubleday's suppression of *Sister Carrie* has been revealed to be a gross exaggeration kept alive over the years by the author himself.

Likewise, Grove encouraged a censorship tale around *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), claiming that he had been forced to cut the novel until it

17 Richard Lingeman, *Theodore Dreiser: At the Gates of the City 1871-1907* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986) 298. Also, Harper & Row's reader turned down the novel by pointing to its lack of interest for female readers: "I cannot conceive of the book arousing the interest or inviting the attention, after the opening chapters, of the feminine readers who control the destinies of so many novels," quoted in Kazin x.

18 Stuart P. Sherman, "The Barbaric Naturalism of Mr. Dreiser," *The Nation* 101 (1915): 648, rpt. in *Dreiser: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Lydenberg (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971) 63.

19 Quoted in Philip Gerber, *Theodore Dreiser* (New Haven: College and UP, 1964) 125. For the Comstock Society's activities against Dreiser, see also Mencken 108, 138-43.

was only a "garbled extract" that was bound to fail on the market. Margaret Stobie and Henry Makow have pointed out that this tale is largely a legend of the author's own making.²⁰ Grove further blamed the bad sales of *Settlers* on the novel's sexual explicitness, as he does in a letter to Lorne Pierce in 1925: "[I]t was the old story of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* over again. A serious work of art was classed as pornography; but with this difference that the error in Flaubert's case, increased the sales; he lived in France. In my case, in Canada, it killed them."²¹ While the public controversy surrounding the book's explicit treatment of sexuality was indeed lively, the novel was not banned from Canadian libraries, as Grove claimed it was. Indeed, Grove was aware of the advertisement potential of a ban, as illustrated by an early letter to André Gide (14 August 1905) in which he comments on the expected success of his first novel, *Fanny Essler*: "In all this I'm relying heavily on my novel, which will certainly be charged by the public prosecutor. That is the best advertisement I could hope for."²²

Thus, in a clever gesture of self-promotion, the authors openly situated themselves in a discursive struggle against a repressive juridical power, emphasizing naturalism's success in overcoming these sexual repressions in literature by creating their own liberationist mythologies. Such mythologies are, however, problematic, and not just because of the authors' duplicity. In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault demonstrates in great detail that discourses of sexual liberation should not be taken at face value since, while promising an illusory freedom, they are often part of a larger apparatus of power. Foucault by no means denies the very real sexual repressions in Western society and history; his philosophical critique is anchored in his conviction that "real power" escapes "the rules of jurisprudence" (HS 88). Underlying this argument is Foucault's thesis that modern power has developed much more sophisticated strategies than the repressive apparatus of the law, and to understand Foucault's logic, it is important to remember that he distinguishes between two significantly different conceptions of power. The first, the juridico-discursive model of power, is the "old" type of power, a monarchical power whose main arm is the law. This power is negative and

20 See Stobie 111–13 and Henry Makow, "Grove's 'Garbled Extract': The Bibliographical Origins of *Settlers of the Marsh*," *Modern Times: The Canadian Novel*, vol. 3, ed. John Moss (Toronto: NC Press, 1982) 38–54.

21 Quoted in Makow 40–41.

22 Quoted in Douglas Spettigue, "Felix, Elsa, André Gide and Others: Some Unpublished Letters of F. P. Greve," *Canadian Literature* 134 (1991): 31.

repressive in that it limits the individual by laying down the law, by saying "no" to individual freedom, and by imposing restrictions. Foucault acknowledges that this type of power still exists in modern society, but he emphasizes that it has been virtually displaced in its importance by a new type of power that is much more flexible, productive, and efficient. The new "bio-power" takes sex as its target, attaching itself to the individual body and concerning itself with its health and welfare. Thus the proliferation of discourses on sexuality in the course of the last three centuries has gone hand in hand with the proliferation of sites of power and control over the body. But despite these changes, our thinking about power has not yet changed: "At bottom, despite the differences in epochs and objectives, the representation of power has remained under the spell of monarchy. In political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king" (HS 88–89). Western thinking about power is still dominated by concepts such as repression, the law, and by manipulating ideologies that mask the truth. According to the old juridico-discursive model of power, speaking the "truth" is automatically equated with "liberation" and freedom: truth implies a stepping out of a repressive power regime. It is this very juridico-discursive model that naturalism invoked in its struggle to establish itself as a major form of literature, and it is this model that Foucault critiques.

Without glossing over the reality of sexual repressions, Foucault has argued against "the repressive hypothesis," by emphasizing the sophisticated workings of modern bio-power: "[Power] masks itself by producing a discourse, seemingly opposed to it but really part of the larger deployment of modern power."²³ In other words, naturalism's liberationist discourse only appears to be in opposition to the dominant social power structures; it is really part of the larger deployment of power. By constituting itself as a rebelling discourse, naturalism adopts the mask of opposition, while in fact contributing to the larger deployment of a sophisticated form of bourgeois bio-power. In order to explore this point fully, it is necessary to trace Foucault's historical account of the new bio-power and its use of sexuality.

Foucault has argued that "sexuality is originally, historically bourgeois" and "induces certain class effects" (HS 127). Thus at the end of the eighteenth century when the bourgeoisie asserted its political and juridical dominance over the aristocracy in the French Revolution, it set sex – its body, its health – against the blood of the nobles. Also, it was in

23 Dreyfus and Rabinow 130.

the bourgeois family that “the sexuality of children and adolescents was first problematized, and feminine sexuality medicalized”: continually alerted to the pathology of sex, the bourgeoisie followed an urgent need to keep the body under “close watch and to devise a rational technology of correction” (*HS* 120). In the nineteenth century the deployment of sexuality spread from the bourgeoisie through the entire social body, which was “provided with a ‘sexual body’” (*HS* 127). Human bodies became saturated with sexuality and tied into networks of power through the following processes: the hysterization of women’s bodies, involving the construction of women’s identities on the basis of their reproductive function; the pedagogization of children’s sex; the socialization of procreative behaviour; and the psychiatrization of perverse pleasures (*HS* 104–5). This sexualization of the whole society went hand in hand with the deployment of administrative control mechanisms that centred on sexuality. Thus, the spread of bio-power entailed administrative measures to eradicate perversions among the working class and to control social dangers such as racial degeneracy, bad public hygiene, and prostitution.²⁴ It is these very motifs that nineteenth-century literary naturalism appropriated as its thematic concerns.

Once sexuality infiltrated the lower classes, however, the sexualized body lost its function as a social marker, so that the bourgeoisie needed to give itself a new – class-specific – sexuality to demarcate its social boundaries. According to Foucault, it was the advent of psychoanalysis that allowed the bourgeoisie to claim for its own class a “repressed” sexuality, using repression as a mark of social difference that separated the bourgeoisie from the “sexually uninhibited” lower class. Psychoanalysis not only made a connection between sexuality and the law of repression, it also granted the bourgeoisie a new privilege: the ability to talk about sexuality and to challenge sexual taboos in discourse. The increasing popularity of the confession in psychoanalysis meant a new “command to talk about that which power forbade one to do.”²⁵ At a time when psychoanalysis allowed higher class individuals to express their incestuous desire in discourse, “the regime of sexuality applied to the lower social classes ... involved the exclusion of incestuous practices” (*HS* 129). For the French bourgeoisie, the father figure was elevated into an object of compulsory love through psychoanalysis’s discovery of the Oedipal complex, while the French laws of 1889 and 1898 entailed a loss of parental authority, especially for the lower classes.

24 See Dreyfus and Rabinow 141.

25 Dreyfus and Rabinow 141.

Thus the bourgeoisie gave itself a sexuality that could only be "liberated" through speech and that stimulated an unmitigated desire to reveal the truth about itself. The bourgeoisie even attached a cash value to sexual authenticity. At the turn of the century, the "truth" sold well in newspapers, magazines, and photography. With the emergence of mass market journalism, "truth" circulated in many different forms, creating the success of tabloids such as *True Stories* and *True Confessions* in the United States and the magazine *Truth* in Britain which thrived on publicizing political and social scandals. As well, authentic women's stories were a hot commodity at the turn of the century. Margarete Böhme's best-selling novel about a prostitute, *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen* (1905), was so popular in Germany that it was turned into a movie in 1929, starring American actress Louise Brooks in the role of the protagonist-prostitute. Böhme's novel, deliberately presented in the form of a woman's sexual confession, was followed by a wave of imitations. The fictional confession thus stimulated other women to articulate their sexualities in similar terms, creating a proliferation of documentary truths on women's personal experiences.²⁶

Dreiser and Grove's naturalism was born into this particular notion of truth as discursive freedom from sexual repression. Incorporating the highly marketable sexual confession (and with it the "authentic voice" of the female body) into their naturalism, they managed to carve out for themselves a niche in the literary canon at a time when avant garde writers were starting to attract attention with exciting new forms of narration. As Simon During puts it: "It was because truth as exposé, as confession, as demystification and as contact with social suffering and sexuality was so highly valued and saleable, that Dreiser could uphold the novel's traditional claims to verisimilitude and creativity by processing and transforming reportage."²⁷ It may be true that, in comparison with documentary reportage, "in Dreiser's time, novels ... focus more directly and in more detail on sexual desire and acts to explain their characters,"²⁸ but the process of transforming reportage and confession into fiction is more complex than During suggests. In many cases, the

26 See Hanne Kulesa, "Nachwort," *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen*, ed. Margarete Böhme (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989) 259. For a discussion of the proliferation of British confessional novels, see also Lyn Pykett, *The "Improper" Feminine, The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London & New York: Routledge, 1992).

27 During 228–29.

28 During 229.

fictional transformation involved a sanitizing of the confessional stories that formed the basis of Dreiser's novels.

A case in point is Dreiser's transformation of the life stories of his sisters, which entailed a "process of heightening and cleansing," as Donald Pizer has pointed out.²⁹ Dreiser's sister Emma, for instance, had considerable sex experiences and was rather indiscriminate in her sexual alliances before she eloped with a well-to-do man named Hopkins; her fictional counterpart Carrie Meeber, in contrast, is presented in her youthful innocence, and is more or less abducted by Hurstwood. The model for *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911), Mame Dreiser, "was in her youth as much pursuer as pursued, and she was also frequently domineering and vain," in contrast to Jennie's passivity and spirit of generosity.³⁰ We find a similar sanitizing of female promiscuity in *Fanny Essler*, where Grove glossed over some of the affairs of the promiscuous real-life model Elsa. Indeed, Baroness Elsa's autobiographical confession (written 1923–26 and sent to Djuna Barnes) is much more irreverent and explicit in its treatment of sexuality than *Fanny Essler*.

This sanitizing of women's confessional voices through appropriation into (male) naturalism illustrates Foucault's emphasis on the power effects inherent in confessional discourses. Foucault has conceptualized the "confession" of truth as a widespread cultural phenomenon that goes far beyond the religious domain. The confession plays a significant role as a modern strategy of knowledge and power: "In any case, next to the testing rituals, next to the testimony of witnesses, and the learned methods of observation and demonstration, the confession became one of the West's most highly valued techniques for producing truth. We have since become a singularly confessing society" (*HS* 59). Involving a ritual of interrogation and inquest, the production of truth through confession is inevitably tied into networks of power that can easily turn into a prison for the confessing person. The production of a confession occurs in a relationship of power, with the persons extracting "the truth" occupying the dominant position of authority, since this position allows them to interpret and recodify (and ultimately co-opt) a personal confession for their own purposes. Dreiser, who was a journalist before turning to

29 Donald Pizer, *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser: A Critical Study* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1976) 34.

30 Pizer 100. For an examination of the complexity involved in Dreiser's transformation of real-life stories into fiction, see also Shelley Fisher Fishkin's "From Fact to Fiction: An American Tragedy," *Theodore Dreiser's "An American Tragedy,"* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988) 103–26.

novel writing, was a master at extracting truthful confessions in the question-answer ritual of the interview, and it is these voices that he selects or silences, heightens or tones down, for the purposes of his fiction. In this light, the naturalist emphasis on the new female sexuality has to be seen as a deeply ambiguous gesture: it gives a voice to formerly silenced groups at the same time as it appropriates, shapes, and often contains these voices within the boundaries of male naturalist conventions.

Thus writing "openly" and "frankly" about sexuality by drawing on real-life stories does not necessarily entail a sexual liberation, but can lead to its very opposite, as Patrick Hutton notes with Foucault: "The sexual revolution of the twentieth century, Foucault believes, has less to do with permissive behavior than it does with a widening discussion of sexuality. The discussion professes to demystify sex in the name of its liberation, yet it is subtly coercive in its classification of techniques of sexual behavior."³¹ An active agent in the demystification of traditional sexuality, naturalism has indeed inscribed new ways of "[policing] sexuality by publicly defining codes of legitimate and illegitimate sexual behavior,"³² and by presenting a new textual field for the production of regulated, "authorized" discourses on sexual matters. This makes naturalism both a literary reflection of and an active agent in the social proliferation of sexuality as a *scientia sexualis*.

Dreiser and Grove participate in a "normalization" process by inscribing sexuality in "codified" and "clean" discourses. According to Grove, the only way to deal with sexuality is "realistically": "I advocate frankness in matters of sex; clean, searching, unimpassioned, and unprejudiced discussions of their bearings and their importance. Sex is real; as real as mountain tops and barren sea."³³ This position echoes Zola's description of the naturalist as an unimpassioned observer. Foucault, however, points to an ironic duplicity in the realm of such sexualizations, asking "whether, since the nineteenth century, the *scientia sexualis* – under the guise of its decent positivism – has not functioned, at least to a certain extent, as an *ars erotica*. Perhaps this production of truth, intimidated though it was by the scientific model, multiplied, intensified, and even created its own intrinsic pleasures" (*HS* 70–71). Foucault's criti-

31 Patrick Hutton, "Foucault, Freud, and the Technologies of the Self," *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. Luther H. Martin et al. (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1988) 130.

32 Hutton 130.

33 Grove, *It Needs to Be Said ...*, 52–53.

cism is well taken. It appears that under the guise of cleanliness and truthfulness, the naturalists inscribe in their text a sublimated and sanitized pleasure that indirectly reinscribes the very sexual repression from which they propose to “free” the literary discourse.

Another way of reinscribing sexuality in socially acceptable forms can be found in naturalism’s emphasis on the force of sexual desire. Foucault has argued somewhat polemically that in Western culture it is desire that has taken centre stage and the sexual act itself and pleasure have been marginalized: “Acts are not very important, and pleasure – nobody knows what it is!”³⁴ Similarly, Roger Seamon has observed that the world of American naturalist fiction is characterized by “a deep, endemic and pervasive joylessness,” a world in which the Freudian reality principle reigns, so that the usual sources of delight “do not yield real pleasure.”³⁵ If the pleasurelessness of the naturalistic writing style functions to deny the audience pleasure in order to rouse “guilt in the complacent bourgeois reader,” it also corresponds to a larger bourgeois deployment of a discursively contained sexuality that reinscribes a link between sexuality and guilt, fear, and repression. Thus naturalism established itself as an agency for both sexual liberation and sexual control.

34 Michel Foucault, “On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress,” interview conducted by Dreyfus and Rabinow at Berkeley in 1983, Dreyfus and Rabinow 243.

35 Roger Seamon, “Naturalist Narratives and Their Ideational Context: A Theory of American Naturalist Fiction,” *The Canadian Review of American Studies* 19 (1988): 51.