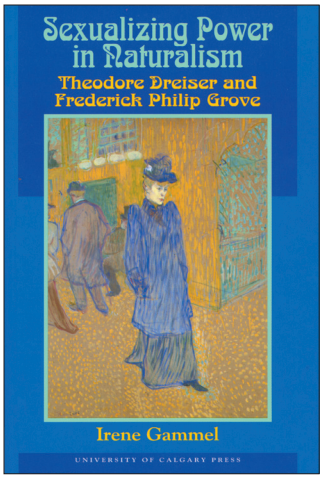

SEXUALIZING POWER IN NATURALISM: THEODORE DREISER AND FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE

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III. Deconstructing the Naturalist Prostitute

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Fanny Essler: A Sexual Picaresque

As Dreiser was planting the first deconstructive seeds in his naturalist fiction in 1900, F. P. Grove was still deeply immersed in reading and composing neoromantic poetry. It was only after 1903, after his incarceration in Bonn and after being cast aside by the elitist *Neuromantiker* that Grove started his career as a prose writer by creating a Carrie-like protagonist. Like Carrie Meeber, Grove's Fanny Essler is an actress who is identified with the modern metropolis and becomes a desirable object for the male gazer at the same time that, endowed with an apparently insatiable body, she is presented as the incarnation of desire. Like Dreiser, Grove also turned to a woman's "true story" to create his first novel. *Fanny Essler* (1905) is closely based on the life of Else Ploetz, now better known as the Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven, whose own memoirs closely overlap Grove's novel. In Grove's career as an artist, his creative "collaboration" with Elsa meant a radical departure from the neoromanticism of his epigone Stefan George. From George's poetic demand for "a transmutation of passion into art," Grove inscribed his lover's sexual "reality" into his fiction. From George's ideological insistence on elitism, Grove was forced to sell his prose in the larger mar-

ket place, inscribing his new motto into the epigraph of *Fanny Essler*: "Jede wahre Kunst wendet sich an die Massen."[1] Using his lover's sexualized story to sell his work to a mass public, the young, ambitious novelist was, however, quickly accused of "prostituting" Elsa by those close to the prestigious George-*Kreis*.[2]

That Grove should have been dismissed as a pimp by contemporary readers is particularly interesting, since *Fanny Essler* is concerned with the politics of prostitution and the victimization of a specularized female in naturalism. Grove, to be sure, gave the motif of prostitution a significantly new twist, since his protagonist subverts the sexual stereotype that her society wishes to impose: Fanny Essler defines herself as a woman who is sexually free, even wildly promiscuous, but not a prostitute. However, in her struggle to create a new identity for herself, Fanny falls back into conventional entrapments. She is often victimized because she insists on being what Angela Carter has polemically called the "good bad girl," who professes to take money only as a "gift," not as payment for sexual pleasure – a duplicitous convention that leaves Fanny extremely vulnerable, since it allows her male lovers not only to exploit her sexually but to humiliate her at the same time. For most of her lovers, Fanny is a prostitute, albeit a special one that they need not pay because Fanny is reluctant to ask for money.

In many ways, Fanny Essler parodies the naturalist insistence on prostitution, and one key to Grove's naturalism lies in the novel's deeply parodic vision. Parodic appropriation and play are, indeed, the trademark of Grove's German and Canadian fiction,[3] but more generally, David Baguley has identified irony and parody as a characteristic feature of naturalist fiction: "In a sense, everything in the naturalist world tends in time towards degraded repetition, which is the essence of satire and parody" (*NF* 143). Naturalist fiction parodically brings "down to earth" idealized situations, characters, and genres. If Grove's obvious

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1 "All true art is addressed to the masses," my translation, *Fanny Eßler* (Berlin: Juncker, 1905) [iv]. Further references will appear in the text, abbreviated *FE*; unless otherwise indicated, translated quotations are drawn from *Fanny Essler*, 2 vols., trans. Christine Helmers, A.W. Riley, and D.O. Spettigue (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1984).

2 See Marcus Behmer in a letter to Ernst Hardt (dated February 19, 1907), in Ernst Hardt, *Briefe an Ernst Hardt: Eine Auswahl aus den Jahren 1998–1947*, ed. Jochen Meyer (Marbach: Deutsches Literaturarchiv, 1975) 53.

3 For a brilliant discussion of *Fanny Essler* as a parody of German *Neuromantik*, see Blodgett 112–53; for FPG's parodic intent in his poetic writing, see Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, "Autobiography," Djuna Barnes Collection, University of Maryland Archives, 165–66.

talent for parody and his predilection for the Flaubertian plots of resignation show an affinity for naturalism's ironic vision, his outspoken rejection of Zolaesque naturalism[4] suggests the opposite. In many ways, Grove's contribution consists in giving the naturalist conventions themselves a parodic twist that reflects his simultaneous struggle against and adherence to this genre.

If Grove's relationship with the naturalist genre is characterized by a complex ambivalence, his attitude towards the new woman and her sexuality is fraught with even deeper contradictions. A reader of Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1890), Fanny Essler frequently challenges naturalism's gender stereotypes. Not only does she refuse to be a *Schablone* (a type) but, unlike Carrie, Fanny is a true "ex-centric" in the sense that she never fully belongs to any social group into which she is initiated. Yet she often finds herself back in the straitjacket of the genre's limiting conventions, portrayed as naturalism's sexualized victim. On the one hand, then, the novel endorses the new woman's cause, defending her unconventionality and her claim to sexual and artistic freedom as well as her desire for a new language. On the other hand, the naturalist conventions also provide the author with a convenient strategy to frame and "discipline" his rebelling female protagonist, in order to impose some order on the threat of her explosive articulation of formerly "repressed" artistic and sexual desires. As a result of such contradictions, Grove's naturalism is even more overtly self-contradictory than Dreiser's.

The structure of *Fanny Essler* exemplifies this point. Echoing the dramatic division so typical of naturalist fiction, the novel's structure highlights five focal points: Introduction of the Heroine, Berlin, Theatre, Love, and Death. The early announcement of the protagonist's death in the table of contents places the heroine in a naturalist tradition that is obsessed with the sexualized woman's death in a plot of decline, aligning her with Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, Zola's *Nana*, Hardy's *Tess* (1891), Crane's *Maggie* (1892), and Fontane's *Effi Briest* (1895). Also, the early announcement of Fanny's death, combined with the evocation of typically naturalistic settings (Berlin, the theatre) and the explicit situating of the novel in the contemporary reality ("the novel takes place between 1892 to 1903") combine to suggest to the reader that this is the story of a contemporary "lost woman," who pays the price for her unconventional sexuality. However, while Grove's association of femininity with death signals a (typically naturalist) sexualization of the female body, *Fanny Essler* simultaneously maintains a parodic distance from this tradition

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4 See Grove, *It Needs to Be Said ...*, 53–59.

by refusing to present the protagonist's death as part of a causal chain. Fanny's death is not linked to her promiscuity, nor does it grow out of a sense of naturalist – or tragic – inevitability; it is as arbitrary as Don Quixote's in Cervantes' picaresque. After a series of adventures, Fanny's death simply enforces the closure of a narrative that otherwise has no end.[5]

Fanny Essler's promiscuity places the novel into Germany's turn-of-the-century tradition of sexualized literature. Published in the same year as *Fanny Essler*, Margarete Böhme's bestseller on a prostitute, *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen: Von einer Toten* (1905), was presented in the form of a diary (*Tagebuch*). These supposedly "authentic" notes of a dying, confessing woman placed Böhme's work firmly in the *fin-de-siècle* female confessional tradition, whose authenticity was supposed to be guaranteed by the reality of a female body behind the text. While both Böhme and Grove drew on conventions that signalled to the contemporary reader a "true story" on female sexuality, Böhme's *Tagebuch* was a huge financial success, followed by reprints, a follow-up novel entitled *Dida Ibsens Geschichte* (1907), and even a film in 1929; *Fanny Essler*, in contrast, achieved only a very modest critical success and, after one reprint in 1907, was virtually forgotten in Germany until Douglas Spettigue rediscovered the novel in his search for the "real" FPG and had it translated into English. The fact that Grove's male version of a woman's life (and sexuality) did not find the popular success enjoyed by Böhme's *Tagebuch* may be indicative of (female) readers' growing suspicion of the (male) realist-naturalist version of female sexuality. Subtitled "a novel," *Fanny Essler* is firmly situated in the male European tradition of realism-naturalism.

Grove's literary models, to be sure, were all male. Arriving in Munich at the turn of the century and witnessing the lionizing of Thomas Mann after his success with *Buddenbrooks* (1901), Grove hoped to imitate his predecessor's social and financial success with his first naturalist novel.[6] Even more important for Grove's representation of female sexuality, however, was the influence of Gustave Flaubert, as the Baroness

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5 E. D. Blodgett's review of the translated Fanny Essler is appropriately entitled, "Grove's Female Picaresque," *Canadian Literature* 106 (1985): 152.

6 "'Fanny Essler' we thought ... even I ... in my own and his favour ... should at least make as much impression as 'Buddenbrooks,'" Baroness Elsa writes in her "Autobiography," 35. I am using the typescript version of the autobiography (prepared by Djuna Barnes), of which the University of Manitoba Archives have received a copy. Further references will appear in the text, abbreviated *A*. On Mann's spectacular success in Munich (at a time when FPG was living in Munich), see Thomas Willey, "Thomas Mann's Munich," Chapple and Schulte 477–91.

confirms: "He esteemed Flaubert highly as stylist, which speaks for cultivated taste, he *was* cultivated, so he tried to *be* Flaubert" (*A* 34–35). The parallels between *Fanny Essler* and *Madame Bovary* are, indeed, striking. Like Emma, Fanny is driven by her sexual desire only to encounter disillusionment in every sexual relationship; like Emma, Fanny puts on male clothing but ultimately fails to change the male world around her. Using *Madame Bovary* as a dialogical intertext, Grove, though, did more than just pay homage to his French mentor. Grove's German Emma Bovary undergoes a significant metamorphosis into a *fin-de-siècle* figure, whose sexuality is authenticated by Elsa's confessional life-story. Energized by Elsa's adventurous life and daring voice, *Fanny Essler* sets out to challenge naturalist conventions, struggling to subvert the stereotype of the entrapped female and daring to "feminize" the genre from within – but only within limits.

While Fanny shares important features with Carrie Meeber (both are protean figures, always in transition and flux), Fanny is a much more radical figure. Always breaking out of confining normative systems and defying the very notion of (intellectual) docility encapsulated in Carrie's body, she assumes the (un-naturalist) position of an independent female subject with a new voice. Arriving in Germany's metropolis in May 1892 after an adventurous flight from the home of her tyrannical father in small-town Kolberg, Fanny is imbued with a deep sense of *Selbständigkeit*, a sense of standing on her own feet, of independence, especially when she walks alone through the streets of Berlin. "Spazieren" (going for a walk) is what connects Fanny with the city, and Grove's novel gives us a sense of the streets and the public places she connects with: the Brandenburger Tor, the Tiergarten, Friedensallee, and Leipzigerstraße. She always returns to Friedrichstraße, the street with the fashionable stores, where she is riveted to the display windows, or where she goes to Café Kranzler to sit at the window to see and to be seen, a scene that echoes Carrie's pleasure and obsession with sitting at windows and gazing outside. Later in the novel, Fanny comes to identify herself and her sense of independence with the city of Berlin: "Sie war Berlin":

> This large network of streets belonged to her; she considered it her own: this was Berlin, and the fact she owned it was thanks to no-one else but herself; she owned it as her realm and she wouldn't have given it up for the easiest, most carefree life. (*FE* 2: 8)[7]

7 "Diese große Straßenflucht gehörte ihr: sie empfand sie als ihren Besitz: sie war Berlin: und daß sie dies Berlin besaß, es als ihr Reich besaß, verdankte sie niemand als sich und sie hätte es nicht für das sorgenfreieste, glatteste Leben hergegeben" (*FE* 282).

Here the city connotes a breaking of spatial boundaries and social mores; it connotes the transition of the female from domestic into public space. Fanny has entered a new realm, adopting a new role, a new identity, and a new language for herself.

In her celebration of Berlin, Fanny deliberately uses masculine, territorial terms, terms of appropriation to describe her newly found freedom in the city. On one level, Fanny's language indicates that as a woman she is working within – she is adopting – the masculine terms that rule and structure the (female) city. But just as the city of Berlin cannot really be appropriated, Fanny's words have an ironic-parodic twist, especially since nothing is as foreign to Fanny as notions of ownership and possession. If anything, Fanny is ruled by the feminine economy of the gift that Hélène Cixous describes as follows: "If there is a 'propriety of woman,' it is paradoxically her capacity to depropriate unselfishly, body without end, without appendage, without principle 'parts.'"[8] Or, as Luce Irigaray puts it: "Le propre, la propriété sont, sans doute, assez étrangers au féminin. Du moins sexuellement. Mais non *le proche*" (*CS* 30). In her usage of the terms of appropriation to describe her closeness with the city spaces, Fanny parodically subverts the masculine language from within and implicitly signals that like the city, she herself cannot be (completely) owned or possessed by anyone.

And yet, despite the parodic note, this double discourse – the subsuming of the discourse of female independence in a masculine language of ownership, and domination – should make the reader suspicious. Even though the city is represented as a female icon, it appears to be ruled by a masculine order that inevitably reaches out to take control of the "independent" woman. Fanny Essler's picaresque journey towards independence is, not surprisingly, full of reversals. As she looks for accommodations in Berlin, the first sign Fanny is pointed to reads: "Advice and Protection for Young Women Travelling Alone" (*FE* 1: 61), a sign that is highly ironic if one considers that both Carrie and Fanny find their "protectors" in the first men they meet in Chicago and Berlin, Charles Drouet and Axel Dahl, who quickly become their lovers and without whom they feel alone, without courage, and overwhelmed by the city. Despite the nausea Fanny feels about the sexual relationship with Axel ("she had to close her eyes so as not to feel repelled" [*FE* 1: 82]), she needs his encouragement and jocularity: "The

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8 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Marilyn A. August, *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981) 259.

minute they parted, her courage failed" (*FE* 1: 81). Drouet and Dahl are similar characters: both are happy-go-luckies, and both are the archetypal male survivors in the city in diametrical contrast to the city's (male) sacrificial victims. As the self-proclaimed protectors of females they, in fact, conquer the women in the sexual relationships, so that the protectorship quickly takes on the overtones of pimping and sexual mastery.

Even as Fanny's linguistic play defies the naturalist confinement of the female within a fixed script, the novel frequently confirms the very naturalist conventions it calls into question, particularly in its treatment of female sexuality. Though Fanny's *spazieren* subverts the very idea of the naturalist streetwalker, prostitution is inevitably projected, and imposed as a role, on the female who ventures out into the city and claims the street or the night for herself. This recalls *Sister Carrie*'s treatment of the same motif. When Carrie stands at the foot of the stairs of her sister's apartment, she is immediately approached like a prostitute. On fashionable Broadway, Carrie discovers that "any one looking" at her and her friend Mrs. Vance "would *pick* Mrs. Vance for her raiment alone" (*SC* 340; emphasis added). While Carrie herself uses the language of prostitution, without even being aware of it, Fanny, in contrast, takes pleasure in acting "as if we're like one of those" (*FE* 1: 114). Here, Fanny's parodic mimicking of the role of prostitute takes on a rebellious, subversive edge, with the novel challenging the convention of the naturalist "fallen woman" by suggesting that for the "new woman," this is a role she can put on (in a provocative gesture) as easily as she can take it off again. And yet, despite Fanny's subversive edge, her language is doubly ironic, as it also anticipates her later need to appeal to lovers for money and parodically echoes the fact that later in the novel she is forced to recognize herself as a prostitute in these lovers' eyes. Thus the naturalist convention of the "inevitable prostitute" is simultaneously parodied (in Fanny's self-conscious play) and confirmed (as one of naturalism's male conventions).

In his comparison of *Fanny Essler* with Döblin's *Alexanderplatz*, Anthony Riley explores prostitution in a somewhat literal sense: "Young girls from the working classes or even the petite bourgeoisie, unable to make a decent living wage, are forced to resort to prostitution to make enough money to buy essential food and clothes."[9] Plausible though

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9 Anthony W. Riley, "The Case of Greve/Grove: The European Roots of a Canadian Writer," *The Old World and The New: Literary Perspectives of German-speaking Canadians*, ed. Walter E. Riedel (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1984) 46; see also Lawrence Hussman, "The Fate of the Fallen Woman in *Maggie* and *Sister Carrie*," *The Image of the Prostitute*

this argument may be, it glosses over the fact that Grove, like Dreiser, is concerned *not* primarily with the exploration of basic or essential human *needs* – the primary concern of nineteenth-century naturalism – but rather with an exploration of human *desire* in an emerging consumer society. (After all, Fanny's motto is not "Du pain! du pain! du pain!", as Émile Zola translates the essential need of the starving workers in the archetypal naturalistic novel, *Germinal* [1885].[10]) If Fanny wanted simply to fulfill her "needs," she would be happy in her own room in her father's house, or even with her Berlin aunt, Miss Blaurock, or her well-to-do friend Heinrich Stumpf, or her husband Eduard Barrel, all of whom are concerned with providing for her needs: "'I don't just want what I *need*'" (*FE* 2: 34) is how Fanny summarizes her desire for "more." Indeed, the naturalist preoccupation with need is parodied in Fanny's anorexic body: she is often hungry, even starving, but when offered food she frequently declines it and spends her last money on clothing and cigarettes. Similarly, she needs a wardrobe to be a serious actress on stage, but she quarrels with her aunt who might be able to finance this costly venture; when she finally receives money (through her mother's inheritance), she spends it on useless painting lessons.

Like Dreiser, Grove abandons the nineteenth-century focus on (instinctual) need to explore (psychological) desire, although Grove's evaluation of this sexualized drive is different from Dreiser's. While *Sister Carrie* presents an erasure of conventional forms of alliance in order to illustrate the deployment of sexuality in the modern consumer economy, Grove, in contrast, shows that the roots of desire are found in traditional forms of kinship. This difference in the conceptualization of desire can be attributed to Grove's earlier exposure to psychoanalysis. With its emphasis on the Oedipal family as the primary locus of sexuality, the novel highlights that Fanny's desire is born in the relationship with her mother and father, and thus is cathected with the conflicting emotions that she attaches to her parents. In Fanny's life, the desire "for more" energizes her journey into female independence, but it is simultaneously presented as a (naturalist) force of female subjection. These unresolved contradictions are a reflection of Grove's own ambivalent relationship towards (sexual) desire and the demands of the new woman.

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in Modern Literature, ed. Pierre L. Horn and Mary Beth Pringle (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1984) 100, for a similar approach to Carrie Meeber, "who knows the agony of deprivation and knows that she must do anything to escape it, including using sexual favors for advancement."

10 Émile Zola, *Germinal*, Livre de Poche (Paris: Fasquelle, 1968) 335.

As a force of resistance, Fanny's desire is linked to her mother. Grove, significantly, uses the term "longing" ("Sehnsucht") rather than Lacan's favourite terms "wish" or "desire" (*Wunsch, Begierde, Begehren*) to describe the force that propels Fanny into action: "Her longing had almost changed into despair.... It was almost as if she sensed that her deep-rooted longing – a longing from which all other feelings, including her love of animals, stemmed – that this longing never could be satisfied" (*FE* 1: 37). "Longing" gains significance in Jane Gallop's feminist (re)reading of Jacques Lacan's theory: "Man's desire will henceforth be linked by law to a menace; but woman's desire will legally cohabit with nostalgia: she will not be able to give up her desire for what she can never have (again)," Gallop writes.[11] For Gallop, this nostalgia is grounded in a longing for the lost mother, "the mother as womb, homeland, source, and grounding for the subject." Since the mother (as homeland) is lost forever, the "subject is hence in a foreign land, alienated."

Gallop's Lacanian reading can be applied to Fanny's desire. Not only is Fanny's mother absent in the novel, but the novel is framed by Fanny's memory of her mother, a memory that is always accompanied by her desire to *return* to Berlin – "*Back* to Berlin" (*FE* 1: 40; emphasis added), "*Wieder* nach Berlin" (*FE* 31) – as if it were a home. Each time, this nostalgic desire to "return" is expressed in opposition to the dominating male figures in Fanny's life: the first time, it is her father who wants to keep her in Kolberg, her "Vaterstadt"; and the second time it is her lover Friedrich Karl Reelen, who wants to get her away from Berlin. Thus Grove inscribes Fanny's "nostalgic" desire (for her mother and Berlin) as a subversive force that becomes the root of her rebellion against male tyranny. At the same time, *Fanny Essler* also confirms the Lacanian point that desire is "an offshoot of that part of need which 'finds itself alienated.'"[12] Although her desire is for Berlin, once in Berlin Fanny often feels out of place; although her sense of identity is connected with Berlin (and her mother), her sense of identity in Berlin is highly precarious. It appears that the more Fanny's feels the splits and contradictions of her subjectivity, the more she feels the need to ground this subjectivity by yearning for a maternal home, for a space of origin (that she will never be able to recover). Here desire, then, is linked to homesickness, connected as it is with the memory of the lost mother.

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11 Jane Gallop, *Reading Lacan* (Ithaca & London: Cornell UP, 1988) 146. The following quotations are from page 148.

12 Gallop 149.

While Fanny's desire for "more" is a desire for female independence, emancipation, and self-determination, Grove deliberately sexualizes, psychologizes, and problematizes this drive as that which ultimately confines Fanny within naturalism's textual boundaries. If Grove's original intent was to "free" the naturalist female from the traditional – genetic – entrapment, he does not really "liberate" her but further enchains her in new seductive psychological and socioeconomic snares, in which even her desire for female independence can be turned against her, used as an ingenious male tool of subjection. Like Flaubert, Grove conceptualizes female desire in terms of a sexual fantasy – the quest for the elusive fairy-tale "prince" who will be her "saviour," and who, in Fanny's case, is really a psychological father-ersatz. Whereas Emma Bovary remains caught in the romantic conventions of her readings, Fanny's emancipatory desire for "more" makes her intellectually recognize and criticize male constructions, but involves her nonetheless in a psychologized, compulsive search for the *Märchenprinz*-father-ersatz. Thus sexualized and recolonized, Fanny's desire for independence becomes the very force that enchains her in naturalism's conventions. These ironic reversals are a structural and thematic pattern of *Fanny Essler*, continually exposing the novel's ideological contradictions. The novel presents itself as a parodic spiral, which turns back upon itself, both challenging and confirming naturalist conventions.

The ambivalence of this parodic play is illustrated in Fanny's sexual relationship with men. On her first day in Berlin, Fanny is "seduced" by a stranger in a spontaneous theatrical street performance that both echoes and gives a parodic twist to Dreiser's motif of the city's scopophilic "eye of power." Window-shopping on Berlin's fashion street, Fanny becomes self-conscious when she recognizes a man gazing through his monocle at her reflection in a store window: "At that point the man flung his head back, which forced the hat to slip down his neck, his eyes and mouth popped open, the monocle fell and he stared at her. He held his hands under the collar in his cape pockets. Fanny saw all of this in the window and it was so comical that she turned away and giggled" (*FE* 1: 71). The voyeur-exhibitionist Axel Dahl parodies male scopophilia in this *mise-en-abîme* of gazes in the glass of a store window. Drawing attention to the theatricality of the city, Dahl displays a critical self-consciousness of the traditional specular pattern of male seduction. Such parodic subversion suggests the possibility of new roles between men and women, as well as the possibility of a rupture in naturalism's deterministic scopophilic economy.

Yet it is this very parodic play that initiates the rapist sex act that follows between Dahl and Fanny, the deliberate crudity of which

reinscribes in *Fanny Essler* the naturalist topoi of female sexual subjection. For Dreiser, the city's imaginary quality is part of its never-ending potential ("The city of which I sing was not of land or sea or any time or place. Look for it in vain!");[13] Grove, in contrast, exposes the city's theatrical possibilities as a dangerous illusion. As soon as Fanny finds herself caught in the "reality" of sex, the possibility of playing a new role vanishes. Cornered by Axel, she undergoes a reverse metamorphosis into naturalist femininity: "she let him do with her as he pleased" (*FE* 1: 81), her "yielding" to his rapist sexuality always already predetermined in naturalism's textual web. Seduced by Axel Dahl, the "new woman" quickly finds herself back in the straitjacket of naturalist conventions, recontained in her role of sexualized victim.

To say that Grove draws attention to female complicity in her own sexualized subjection is, however, not enough. Highlighting the psychological interiorization of deterministic social structures, Grove's naturalism illustrates that the most ingenious jailer is often in the woman herself. In Part 3, for example, Fanny recognizes that she has undergone a pleasurable metamorphosis in her looks: she has become "großstädtisch," "citified," as she has become submerged in the big city's scopic economy.

> And if she came to a display window in which there were large mirrors she would stop and look at herself and try to see herself as a stranger would see her. And each time she was surprised all over again: this was Fanny Essler? (*FE* 2: 8; in the German text 282)

Not only has Fanny's own gaze been replaced by an internalized "stranger's" gaze, but the reflection she sees and falls in love with is literally in the place of the commodified object in the display window. This scene establishes a parodic dialogue with Zola's *Au Bonheur*, in which Denise and her brother admire in the display window of the new Parisian department store the headless mannequins, "portant des prix en gros chiffres, à la place des têtes" (*AB* 14). While *Au Bonheur* provides a male spectator who enjoys the spectacle of "ces belles femmes à vendre," in *Fanny Essler* the (male) gazer is present only in Fanny's own fantasy, suggesting how much the determining social structures have penetrated her body and mind. Here, the capitalist economy of desire not only seduces women into enjoying their own "fabrication" as specular objects of art, but it even seduces them into experiencing fe-

13 Theodore Dreiser, *Dawn* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1931) 156.

male "Selbstständigkeit" in their being seen, in their being a specular object for others. The internalized psychological constraints are thus revealed to be as powerful as the genetic determinants in Zola's novels.

This internalization of an external spectator also aligns Fanny with the exhibitionist naturalist actress-prostitute. Zola's *Nana*, Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, and Wharton's *The House of Mirth* illustrate that literal and metaphorical prostitution are often represented as a specular relationship between a male spectator and a female *tableau vivant*. *Nana* opens with an extended scene on the heroine's enactment of *La Blonde Venus* and ends with the audience's "orgasmic climax"; *Sister Carrie* offers to its male characters (and readers) a seemingly eternal scopophilic "foreplay"; and Lily Bart brings to the stage a high-class artistic sexuality, designed to arouse the (matrimonial) desires of New York's millionaire-bachelors. In her book *La Vie quotidienne dans les maisons closes, 1830–1930* (1990), Laure Adler has described the transformation of sexual practices in high-society brothels by emphasizing the increasing desire for – distanced – specular pleasures in the late nineteenth century: "Most observers of the period agree that the sexual demands of the rich were progressively transformed: consumption of the sexual act was abandoned in favor of visual orgasm. Certainly voyeurism had always been an essential component of desire, but the house of ill-fame began systematically to offer tableaux vivants."[14] Since the "visual orgasm" is a favourite naturalist topoi, as the examples of Nana, Carrie, and Lily illustrate, it is significant that Grove's new woman should be financially most successful in her "portrayal of marble statues," images that freeze her movement and life into highly sexualized statuesque objects, such as "'Ariadne riding on the panther' and 'Venus chastising Cupid'" (*FE* 1: 235).

Grove, to be sure, exposes the social and literary construction of the prostitute as a misogynistic convention. The novel satirizes its male figures in scenes in which Fanny is asked to provide such "visual orgasms." Fanny's fetishist-lover Nepomuk Bolle, a stained-glass artist in Berlin, derives sexual satisfaction from watching not so much Fanny's naked body as her hands. In fact, he creates a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, with Fanny on a church-like bench and the light falling through the stained-glass window (designed by Bolle): "'Those hands!' Mr. Bolle whispered in a sonorous voice, 'Just look at those hands!' Fanny looked at her hands in amazement: they looked very pale next to the dark stained oak. "'Truly, Miss Essler,' Madame Consul said quietly, 'You have authentic

14 Quoted in Apter 42.

Bolle-hands!'" (*FE* 2: 25).[15] Bolle typifies Freud's suggestion that "fetishist and voyeur alike, resisting passage to the Oedipal symbolic order, become fixed regressively in the anal-erotic stage."[16] While Bolle's scopophilic obsession is satirized as an infantile and unmasculine *idée fixe*, it also gives birth to his art, providing the male artist with a subject status that is denied to Fanny. A similar target of ridicule, his anal obsession – best encapsulated in his stinginess towards Fanny and his collectomania – gives him financial power over Fanny.

Presenting an overt critique of such patterns of sexualized power in his parody of male (and naturalist) scopophilia, Grove's parody also allows him to participate covertly in the very male specular obsessions that his narrative ridicules. Fanny's bedroom exudes the same sexuality as Nana's boudoir, and the dressing room in the Berlin theatre provides the same "pile-up" effect of women that Emily Apter describes as typical for the brothel's "composite of differences," or *l'hétéroclite*, in nineteenth-century French naturalism.[17] Peeping into Fanny's bedroom or into the dressing room at the theatre, the reader is turned into a complicitous spy who is invited to share this undressing of women, whereby the emphasis on clothing and underwear has the simultaneous function of keeping "the specter of the essential naked body at bay."[18] In his *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger distinguishes between nudity and nakedness: "To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object to become nude. (The sight of it as an object stimulates the use of it as an object.) Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display."[19] The scopophilic obsession with nudity that characterizes Grove's males is one that is shared by the author himself. Like his male characters, the author maintains his male control by keeping his distance, "enjoying" Fanny as a specularized – naturalist – fetish.

In some ways, the author's complicity with naturalist conventions is also similar to Fanny's submission to the very conventions she rebels against. Often Fanny rejects valuable strategies of resistance, as she does when she works as a chorus girl in Berlin. Joking about their male

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15 For a detailed discussion of this scene as a satire of German *Neuromantik*, see Blodgett, *Configuration*, 130–31.

16 Apter 52.

17 Apter 55.

18 Apter 86.

19 John Berger et al., *Ways of Seeing* (1972; London: BBC & Penguin, 1981) 54.

"souteneurs," the actresses satirically deflate the sexual attention they receive, particularly in their disillusioned but also refreshingly wicked language, in their dialect, their vulgarity, and their curses against their male lovers: "Those damn men!"; "They're shits ... all of them" (*FE* 1: 187). Though Fanny rejects these linguistic weapons of subversive resistance in order to show the world around her that she is more refined and "above" the common chorus girl, she does not reject the signifiers of female sexualization. The sight of the lace underwear and black silk stockings of one of the actresses – both paid for by one of her rich customers – arouses Fanny's desire to possess the same underwear and makes her conclude that "her [own] underthings were plain and unmistakably bourgeois" (*FE* 1: 191). Later, when her lover Ehrhard Stein wants to give Fanny a present, her only desire is for some silken slips.[20]

Conversely, when Fanny does resist her exploitation, this resistance is often articulated in forms that bring her close to the naturalist *femme fatale*. Just as Carrie verbally berates and then leaves Drouet once she has found a new lover in Hurstwood (only to leave Hurstwood once he becomes a burden), so Fanny often treats her lovers with an uncompromising and cold revenge for the humiliation she has suffered in the relationship. Not only does she drop lovers without blinking an eye, but she often confronts them with their own uselessness. As Hurstwood commits suicide after Carrie leaves him in the city, so Fanny's husband Eduard Barrel kills himself after Fanny takes off with Barrel's best friend, Friedrich Karl Reelen. This "tragic" ending, though, is one of Grove's deliberate making. Elsa's memoirs show that the real-life husband, the *Jugendstil* architect August Endell (1871–1925), not only "survived" his wife's adultery, but in an ugly divorce battle successfully stripped her of money that was rightfully hers. Grove's enforced "tragic" twist, then, exposes the author's deliberate conformity to the very naturalist conventions that he had set out to subvert.

Given the author's ambivalent resistance to and simultaneous exploitation of naturalist conventions, it should come as no surprise that Fanny herself becomes a living oxymoron. Fanny is bursting with energy: she acts, she paints, she is interested in literature and critical discussions, and she is determined to live life to the fullest. The narrator describes this desire for *Leben* as "eine ungeheure Lebenslust" (*FE* 79), which has been translated into English as "an incredible lust for life" (*FE* 1: 81). But

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20 It is noteworthy that Grove's letters show his own obsession with underclothes. Numerous letters to his wife are crowded with references to his laundry, his shirts and underwear. See Pacey, *The Letters of Frederick Philip Grove*.

the German word *ungeheuer* literally translated means monstrous, unnatural, too much, connotations that describe how many characters (including the narrator) perceive Fanny.[21] Fanny is seen as a threat, as untamed energy and unnatural vivacity, which the males would like to direct, to channel and tame in order not to be conquered by it.

Just as Elsa Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven complained in her autobiography that Grove dismissed her writing of the "story of my childhood" with "ironical derision" and with shoulder-shrugging contempt, so Fanny is not recognized as the artist she wants to be. Trying to be an artist, Fanny continually turns from artistic subject into object, into naturalist *tableau vivant*. Driven by a desire for art, Fanny becomes acquainted with various lovers and friends – painters, a stained-glass artist (Nepomuk Bolle), a sculptor (Heinrich Stumpf), and playwrights (Ehrhard Stein, Eduard Barrel). Though she is very capable of having intellectual discussions with them, her role is mostly that of a sexual consort from her lovers' and society's point of view. She does not succeed as an actress, and her painting remains essentially dabbling that is easily dismissed by her male friends. Like the author himself, who designed the original cover for *Fanny Essler*, Fanny also works on book designs, although they never find their way into any publication. Her art is always aborted, is only measured against a "superior" male art. Fanny is not the artist she yearns to be, but is often presented as a prostituted work of art to be looked at and subjected to the sensual specular touch of every character in the novel as well as the narrator and the author.

Although Grove satirizes the male artists who appropriate Fanny's *élan* and energy for their artistic productions, Grove's own transformations of Elsa's life-story also have the effect of making Fanny less of an artist, as well as of diminishing Elsa's artistic achievement on the stage

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21 "Ungeheuer," the word that Franz Kafka chose to characterize Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis into an insect, is repeatedly applied to Fanny in the novel. She is playfully called "Ungeheuer" (little monster) by her aunt; she paints a picture of "the vast life" in Berlin, "das Bild von dem ungeheuren Leben," and her entrance into the city appears to Fanny as "ungeheuer erfolgreich," an "enormous success"; see *FE* 138, 54, 62; in trans. 1: 138, 60, 67. Similarly, Fanny's courage ("Mut") is often given a negative twist in the novel. Repeatedly, Fanny is linked to "Übermut" (57, 58, 65, 66, 70, 169, passim, in the German text), which the English text often translates by giving it the exclusively positive meaning of "high spirited." But "Übermut," like "ungeheuer," has a primarily negative connotation in German, implying a slippage into a dangerous situation (as in the German popular saying, "Übermut tut selten gut").

or as a writer. Grove's ambivalent oscillation between the demands of the new woman and his fear of her powers, between his desire to transform naturalism and his need for its secure gender boundaries, produces a self-deconstructive naturalist fiction that exposes its own (and its male author's) gender bias. This is most clearly illustrated in the novel's use and thematizing of the female sexual confession, which will be examined in the next chapter.