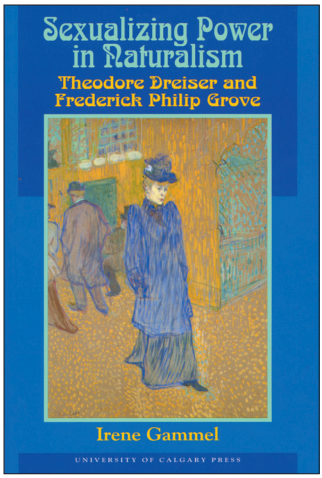

SEXUALIZING POWER IN NATURALISM: THEODORE DREISER AND FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE

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Fanny Essler in *(A) Search for America*

"Throughout his writing Grove has been moving in the direction of an androgynous society, in which roles are no longer sex stereotyped," writes Lorraine McMullen in her analysis of Grove's Canadian fiction.[1] This emphasis on androgyny, however, marks less a telelogical "direction" in Grove's Canadian fiction than a feature already anticipated in his German novels. Fanny Essler is a precursor of the twenties androgynous "flapper," whose sexuality is expressed less in eroticism than in nervous energy. Although contained within a naturalist narrative, Fanny's female body stubbornly rebels against its "natural" destiny: she wears male clothing, is called a "lad" by one of her lovers, and plays male roles on stage. When asked to play female roles in the theatre, she forgets her lines. This continual crossing of gender boundaries – indeed, her refusal to conform to traditional notions of "femininity" – challenges naturalism's traditional assumptions about the innateness and

1 Lorraine McMullen, "Women in Grove's Novels," *The Grove Symposium*, ed. John Nause (Ottawa, U Ottawa P, 1974) 75.

"naturality" of male and female identities. The novel's conceptualizing of the female body and sexuality, then, suggests a mode of social determinism that moves far beyond the social Darwinistic frameworks of Spencer and Huxley. Through Fanny's deliberate play with gender roles, her body becomes, to use Judith Butler's poststructuralist words, "a peculiar nexus of culture and choice," whereby "'existing' one's body becomes a personal way of taking up and reinterpreting received gender norms."[2] Thus, the construction of Fanny's body occurs through what Foucault has termed "technologies of self," via practices and codes, through which she becomes submerged in the social network of power.

This point is highlighted in Fanny's relationship with Friedrich Karl Reelen, the author's persona, in Parts 4 and 5 of the novel. Reelen can only "construct" his masculinity by coercing Fanny into the role of traditional femininity, so that – like the male naturalist narrator – he appears in the role of the Mephistophelian manipulator of the sexual "technologies" provided for Fanny's "self-construction." Just as traditional naturalism insists on clear-cut boundaries between male and female nature, so Reelen proceeds to "rewrite" Fanny in the social network, insisting on transforming her from a sexually ambiguous "lad" into a respectable "lady." In long dresses, Fanny's body "achieves" the statuesque look, and on Reelen's advice she also transforms her formerly "boyish" hairstyle:

> She now wore her not very full-bodied but curly dark blond hair tied back loosely, without a part, so that both her ears, in which she wore two costly pearls, were left exposed; and the large knot that in part consisted of a wide false bun to back her own hair, hung loosely from the middle of the back of her head and reached far down to the nape of the neck, which set off the face by adding a full frame of hair around her shoulders when seen from the front. (*FE* 2:212)

The arrangement of her hair as a deliberate frame for her face reinforces the impression of Fanny as a beautiful picture – a (male) work of art, or a sexualized body-construct inscribed on the material body of the female. This new hairstyle, significantly, corresponds very closely to what Ursel Lang has analyzed as the female hair-model ordained by the fascists in Hitler Germany, thirty years later: "Some women have their hair waved in careful ridges, kept well in order. The face, and above all the forehead, is always completely exposed."[3] Reaching the pinnacle of

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2 Quoted in McNay 72.

3 Ursel Lang, "The Hair Project," Frigga Haug et al. 100.

"femininity," Fanny thus carries the signs of her relationship with this tyrannical "god" imprinted on her body, as her hairstyle, clothing, and body language reflect Reelen's obsession with discipline and control of the body.

Relying on such processes of "feminizing" the female body in relationships of power, male identity and sexuality are shown to be conditioned by and "constructed" on the basis of, social, psychological, and normative determinants. Though Reelen uses a language of Nietzschean will power and self-sufficiency to describe himself, the novel exposes how much his "self-construction" as a desexualized, "strong man" depends upon his "disciplining" and sexualizing of the female body. Grove subverts Reelen's *Übermensch*-persona, by showing that he is as much a *Schablone* as the other male characters in the novel. Reelen can only create his masculinity by defining himself against Fanny's femininity, representing himself as "complete" by defining her as "lacking," the incarnation of voracious desire. Fanny becomes quite simply his "Other," his negative mirror image (which explains why Reelen's obsession is not with her change and "improvement," but with her flaws). Hélène Cixous' Hegelian gender critique is very appropriate to describe Fanny's specific relationship with Reelen, but also describes the male narrator's more general relationship with the female body in naturalist fiction: "We know the implied irony in the master/slave dialectic," Cixous writes, "the *body* of what is strange must not disappear, but its force must be conquered and returned to the master."[4]

However, the sexualized female victim is by no means a literal "slave." While Fanny exults in her sexual satisfaction, she stubbornly resists the price she is asked to pay for sexual pleasure. Resisting total "feminization," she embarrasses Reelen in public through her mistakes and her moods, which remind him that she cannot be absolutely appropriated, as she continually disrupts his scheme of order. But Fanny's mistakes also present a target through which Reelen maintains his male dominance in this relationship because they indicate that his "orthopedic," "educational" process has to be intensified.[5] Fanny and Reelen

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4 Cixous, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays," *The Newly Born Woman*, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988) 70.

5 In the style of free indirect discourse, Fanny herself thinks of her attitude in terms of "Trotz" (*FE* 527, 529, 530), a word that denotes resistance ("obstinacy"), but like "Übermut" this word has a negative twist in that it implies an infantile obstinacy. "Trotz" is also a strategy Fanny uses in her relationship with her tyrannical father.

become involved in a sadomasochistic power play, which is inscribed on her sexualized body, whereby, to use Susan Bordo's words, "the attempt to subdue the spontaneities of the body in the interests of control only succeeds in constituting them as more alien, and more powerful, and thus, more needful of control."[6]

By refusing to be metaphorically "corseted" by Reelen, Fanny rejects not only his "technologies" of feminization. She also rejects what Susan Bordo has described as the social function of the corset: "the nineteenth-century corset appears, in addition to the actual physical incapacitation it caused the wearer, as a virtual emblem of the power of culture to impose its designs on the female body."[7] By the same token, Fanny also resists the sexual-textual constraints of traditional male naturalism. By rejecting the culturally sanctified "technologies of self" and with it the reality of a "natural" femininity, Fanny challenges naturalism's generic "corset" for women.

Recognizing in Fanny nothing but the raw material, the female force of nature that can be transformed and tamed according to his male vision, Grove's Reelen is a Grovian self-parody in more than one sense. If Grove ridicules himself in his cold dandy persona, he also parodies himself as a male naturalist author who disciplines, tames, sanitizes, or freezes excessive or unconventional female sexuality and behaviour within the textual boundaries of his narrative. Just as Reelen fails in his efforts to feminize Fanny, so Grove realizes that her voice often explodes the framework of his narrative. Throughout Reelen's attempts to transform Fanny into a "lady," she continues to re-emerge as an androgynous "lad" who successfully refuses to become a *Schablone*, defying the corset that Reelen and naturalism wish to impose on her sexual body.

If Felix Paul Greve's parodic treatment of Reelen marks the beginning of his critique of stereotypical sex roles, Frederick Philip Grove continues this exploration of sexual identities in his Canadian fiction, as Lorraine McMullen's quotation at the beginning of this chapter suggests. Writing his Canadian classic, *A Search for America* (1927), almost twenty-five years after the publication of his first German novel, Grove recontextualized his German characters and motifs by situating Fanny's journey into *fin-de-siècle* North America. Like *Fanny Essler*, *A Search for America* is a picaresque, featuring a European intellectual dilettante who struggles to find a new identity in the new world culture. Grove's "Od-

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6 Bordo 78.

7 Bordo 76.

yssey of an Immigrant" presents the first-person narrator Phil Branden, a young pseudo-aristocrat from Europe, who works in turn as an omnibus waiter in Toronto, an encyclopedia salesman in New York, and an itinerant labourer on western prairie farms before becoming a teacher in Winnipeg. Grove's inscription of his autobiographical self into his Canadian novel is reminiscent of *Fanny Essler*: in both, fact merges with fiction in typically Grovian ways. It should come as no surprise, then, that Phil Branden shares many features with the author's European persona, Reelen, as his impeccable clothing, his high-society flair, and the mask of the arrogant and cold dandy suggest. Furthermore, the Canadian novel echoes *Fanny Essler*'s self-parodic tone, as when Phil Branden charges his younger self with being a "presumptuous pup," an "insufferable snob and coxcomb," who speaks in "nonsensical prattle" and indulges in "artificial poses."[8]

More interesting than the parallels, however, are the differences between the two novels, which frequently echo ideological shifts in Grove's conceptualizing of sexual identity. While Reelen used Fanny as a foil that allowed him to confirm his role as a "master," Branden himself encounters a deep identity crisis in his odyssey across America, so that his experience doubles Fanny's. In North America, Branden finds himself entrapped in the typical naturalistic plot, often occupying a "female" position as he becomes victimized in his journey across America. In fact, in the course of his cultural and linguistic crisis, in his personal experience of entropic disorientation in a new culture, the new Canadian immigrant experiences a precarious sense of his own "feminization." The cultural and linguistic uncertainty experienced in the new country, and the accompanying "loss" of power and masculinity, prove so unsettling for Branden that he can only articulate this loss of control by impersonating a female role in the naturalist plot of decline, eventually to exorcize both his "femaleness" and his "sexuality" when he is reborn as "a new man" in Canada. Transforming his "search for America" into narrative, Branden in many ways impersonates Fanny Essler – her anorexia, her fear of slipping into prostitution, her hysteria, her reduction to her body under the gaze of others. He can only overcome his crisis by distancing himself from Fanny Essler, by repressing her, and by eventually asserting himself in his "male" identity.

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8 Frederick Philip Grove, *A Search for America: The Odyssey of an Immigrant* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971) 3–4. All subsequent quotations will appear in the text abbreviated *ASA*.

This "translation" of *Fanny Essler* into *A Search for America*, then, has to be seen in the larger context of Grove's life and adventurous biography. In her memoirs, Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven gives some interesting insights into the emotional and ideological changes FPG underwent after his emigration to America in 1909 (and after inviting her to join him in his new world adventure). Absorbed in his "primitive struggle for life" on his farm in Kentucky between 1910 and 1911, Grove distanced himself from Elsa sexually, telling her *"I don't need any woman"* (*A* 72) before leaving her altogether. Unbeknownst to her, he travelled to Canada to become a teacher and a writer in Manitoba in 1912. Yet *A Search for America* is not only a continuation of but also a reworking of – perhaps even a Freudian *Durcharbeiten*, a "working through" – *Fanny Essler* in a new context; consequently, this preoccupation reflects FPG's problematic attachment both to Elsa (the "real" woman) and to *Fanny Essler* (the novel left behind in Germany). Though in his first Canadian novel, *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), Grove "kills" an Elsa-like (and Fanny Essler-like) character in Clara Vogel, in *A Search for America* the male narrator impersonates her, absorbing her into his own persona. If this "ingestion" is part of the author's psychological separation process, it also highlights the self-contradictory sexual ideology inscribed in Grove's Canadian fiction.

Branden's odyssey of an immigrant is set in the early 1890s, which does not coincide with the author's biography, but significantly overlaps the time of Fanny Essler's European odyssey (thus emphasizing the parallels between Branden and Fanny Essler).[9] Like his female predecessor, Branden moves to the big cities, to Montreal and New York, where he relives (Fanny's) exhilarating possibilities of self-construction, but also experiences a sense of naturalist subjection as he becomes enchained in America's norms. Like the German *picara*, he moves from one adventure to the next, trying to maintain his integrity in naturalist episodes that ritually torture and mutilate his body. Like Fanny, Phil Branden searches for his identity, but unlike Fanny he finds the key to

9 Also, in his fictionalized autobiography *In Search of Myself* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1946), Grove describes a personal life that closely overlaps *A Search of America*. He reiterates that between 1892 and 1893, he "had successively been a waiter, a book agent, a factory hand, a roust-about on board a lake steamer ... and a hobo or itinerant farm-labourer in the West" (181), when in reality he went to school at St. Pauli (Germany) during this time; see Spettigue, *The European Years*, 39. For a study of the time framework and composition history of *A Search for America*, see K. P. Stich, "Beckwith's 'Mark Twain' and the Dating of Grove's *A Search for America*," *Canadian Literature* 127 (1990): 183–85.

his identity not in his sexualization but in his desexualization, as he tries to detach himself from the status of the naturalist victim. Thus, in *A Search for America* Grove's naturalist fiction undergoes a significant shift: the (androgynous) female protagonist that characterizes his German fiction is replaced by a (feminized) male, who is subjected to painful but equally exciting adventures; consequently, the narrating (male) subject merges with the narrated (feminized) object. This gender configuration, in turn, challenges the typically naturalist separation between powerful male spectator and powerless female object.

Although silenced and repressed in his Canadian life and identity, *Fanny Essler* is thus covertly incorporated into Grove's Canadian art. Just as Branden remains attached to his past throughout the novel, so the author turns back to his earlier fiction and to the German naturalist conventions to produce his new Canadian fiction in an act of creative translation and transculturation. Although he yearns to leave his marital and artistic "failures" behind in Europe (the relationship with Elsa was a personal "failure" leading to public scandal, just as *Fanny Essler* was a financial disappointment), FPG fabricated his own rebirth as a writer of fiction by secretly resurrecting *Fanny Essler* in his Canadian naturalism (albeit as the novel's silenced "discourse of the other"). As a new world writer, Grove "confessed" his identity by simultaneously withholding significant information about his German past and the Fanny Essler subtext that energized his new world fiction. While the Canadian author's *Versteckspiel* with his readership thus marks the birth of the immigrant-author as a trickster, even as a "pathological liar," it also continues the German author's self-parodic naturalism and allows him to inscribe into the gaps of his new world fiction an elegiac subtext – his separation from (and simultaneous assimilation of) Elsa/Fanny Essler.

Margaret Stobie has appropriately discussed *A Search for America* in terms of a Rousseauistic romance, a "fable of identity," in which the protagonist undergoes a true metamorphosis, descending into "the depths" in order to ascend to a higher level and to be reborn as a new human being. Following in Thoreau's footsteps in an experiment of self-isolation, Branden takes off his "mask" and his clothing in his American odyssey in order to find his "essential self" underneath the artificial poses of the European dilettante. According to Stobie, then, the key to the novel lies in its Rousseauistic undercurrent: "As Rousseau insisted, the essential man, the 'I, myself,' existed independent of the social order or of vocation."[10] While the novel frequently alludes to Thoreau, the nov-

10 Stobie 67.

el's transcendental frame of reference is put into question by the novel's naturalist framework. If anything, the novel deconstructs the notion of a transcendental self that can be "found" underneath layers of clothing, just as it deconstructs the notion of a "natural" sexual identity. Branden's "search for America" is as illusory as Fanny's search for the fairy-tale prince. Just as Branden never solves the riddle of America, so his search never leads to the discovery of an "essential" core of sexual identity, or manhood. After shedding the mask of the male dandy, Branden discovers his (female) identity, his connection with Fanny Essler, a connection that is too troubling even to name or explicitly identify.

In a more general sense, Branden travels through North America not so much to discover (or become alienated from) a true (innate) selfhood, but rather to create himself as a subject. Distancing himself from society in general and from women in particular, he eventually appropriates Thoreau's technologies of desexualization in order to escape the sexualization that subjugated Fanny Essler and that jeopardizes his sense of self in the beginning of his journey. In his desire to find new technologies of self on the American "soil," Branden not only discovers the immense "labour" involved in this undertaking, but he also becomes aware of his deterministic subjection to the cultural norms of the new society. Foucault has argued that the individual cannot produce a self without producing the self's subjection, "their constitution as subjects in both senses of the word" (*HS* 60), which echoes a naturalist sense of social determinism. While Foucault writes that "the subject constitutes himself in an active fashion, by the practices of self," he also emphasizes that "these practices are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group."[11] The "technologies" available for the individual's self-construction vary from culture to culture, from time period to time period, but they always assign the individual a place in the network of power. Illustrating Foucault's point about the polymorphous power effects on the individual body, a myriad of social practices shape the direction of the new immigrant's actions, engineering his new identity while encouraging the subject's active participation in this self-construction. Grove draws attention to this transformation of self as a process of "Americanization"; the word "America" is repeated at least one hundred and thirty times in the novel in order to emphasize

11 Foucault, "Ethic of Care," 11.

that Branden becomes a new subject, a "social man" who is absorbed into America's social practices and discourses. Just as *Fanny Essler* becomes "citified" in Berlin's metropolis, so Phil Branden becomes "Americanized" through a host of technologies that embrace and "penetrate" his body.

As the intertextual dialogue with *Fanny Essler* reveals, *A Search for America* conceptualizes Branden's "subjection" to – and "submersion" in – American culture by drawing on naturalism's sexual and feminine tropes. Like Fanny, Branden speaks a confessional language. Highlighting the feminization of Branden's speech, all chapter titles start with the pronoun "I" or "my," and the first paragraph of the novel presents seventeen counts of the first person personal and possessive pronouns. Caught in a struggle for survival in America's social Darwinistic universe, Branden is transformed into "that impersonal neuter thing called help" when he becomes a waiter in Toronto, in a chapter appropriately entitled "I Submerge." Ready to don his apron, he descends into a naturalist, "excessively dirty subterranean room" (*ASA* 41) that echoes Fanny's dressing room in the theatre. From here, he emerges to serve an "ever-thickening mass of humans" (*ASA* 52) in the cheap Toronto restaurant, thus occupying the feminized waiter position of other naturalist males (e.g., the saloon employee Hurstwood or the bellhop Clyde Griffiths), which is inevitably linked to the plot of decline. Grove's description is Zolaesque in his evocation of the human masses that absorb Branden's younger self in a living, pulsating machinery of bustling waiters, hungry customers, and swinging doors: "I felt like a drowning man, swamped under the crushing flood of humanity" (*ASA* 53).

Moreover, like Fanny (and like the typical female in naturalist fiction), Branden experiences his own objectification and victimization as metaphorical prostitution. Entering the "new world" with neither sufficient money nor adequate job experience, he soon finds himself in the typical position of the specularized, naturalist female who is "stared at," like Carrie Meeber, when he travels by train to Toronto in search of his first job. Faced with the probing eyes of Bennett, the Simpson's worker, Branden's formerly powerful gaze is emasculated and impotent: "I should have frozen him, annihilated him with one of those glassy stares for which I had been famous among my former friends, one of whom used to say, 'Phil can put more opprobrium into one of his fish-eyes than you can cull out of an unemasculated Shakespeare in a day'" (*ASA* 21). Thus unsettled, the immigrant-narrator is in the process of losing his sense of control, particularly when, later in the novel, he becomes the specular object of male "desire": "I felt a pair of eyes which brushed over my body and seemed to touch it, now here, now there."

Courted by two males, Branden occupies Fanny Essler's position in a triangle of male desire, mimicking her female sexual submission: "I yielded to its invitation, at first reluctantly, then not without pleasurable readiness" (*ASA* 109). Like Fanny, he is punished for his complicitous submission: he is fleeced in a con-man game and soon finds himself in prison.

It is small wonder that Branden, experiencing his cultural crisis as a crisis of (sexual) identity, should feel "embarked upon things desperate and suicidal" (*ASA* 19) as he enters the new world. The new gaze he encounters fills him with a sense of bottomlessness, of the abyss, or what Martin Heidegger has called *Abgrund*. Subjected to a process of feminization and victimization, Branden senses the danger of disappearing altogether, of finding his masculinity – and thus his positive subjectivity, according to the logic of naturalism – completely shattered on the new continent. He provides a strong image of male emasculation in the figure of Whiskers, an old waiter, an aged Hurstwood figure, whose hollow cheeks and eyes stand for "Old Age," "tragedy," and "failure" (*ASA* 59). That Whiskers should terrify Branden with the giggle of "a silly girl" reveals how much Branden conceptualizes his own loss of power in feminized terms. For Branden, Whiskers is a demonic double, whose disintegrating body signifies the victimized, objectified, and castrated naturalist male.

Reluctantly playing the role of a feminized male, Branden finds himself inevitably slipping into the position of the naturalist prostitute (if only in a metaphorical sense). Early in the novel, he discovers that in order to survive in the new world and get a job, "I had to sell myself to this man" (*ASA* 35), and from this early struggle to get a job, Phil, like Dreiser's Clyde Griffiths, learns the techniques of selling services and goods by "selling himself." Yet his struggle is, like Fanny's, to maintain his own integrity in order not to be drawn into the deterministic fate of the naturalist female. In contrast to Fanny, who sees the key to her identity in her promiscuous sexuality, Branden makes an effort to distance himself from sex through various strategies: the novel is virtually without any sexual relationships; he speaks about sex only in the distanced, Latinized form of "rebus sexualibus" (*ASA* 72); and his friendship with Ella, the only female friend, is clearly asexual. Thus it is not his sexuality but his aversion to sexuality that deserves further critical attention, since Branden's desire in overcoming his "feminization" is related to naturalism's conceptualization of female sexuality in terms of excess and lack of control.

The body of the sexualized female in naturalism is often driven by excessive hungers and voracious desires. This feminized body, best encapsulated in the physical weakness of *la chair molle* with its predictable "yielding" to the demands of the flesh, is naturalism's privileged signifier

for female lack of control and will power. Feminized and sexualized as naturalist figures, Branden and Fanny struggle for control over their bodies, both driven by the urge to conquer in an act of will power the body's hunger and voracious desires. Obsessed with stripping the body of its precarious weakness, its femininity, both Branden and Fanny are anorexic figures. For Fanny, fasting is a life style, an activity that she indulges in. While starving herself, she feels "her body so heavy" and is tortured when "feeling the weight of her body" (*FE* 2:8). In her Foucauldian analysis of anorexia nervosa, Susan Bordo has made a connection between anorexia and the female's desperate desire to control her body: "In this battle, thinness represents a triumph of the will over body, and the thin body (i.e., the non-body) is associated with 'absolute' purity, hyperintellectuality and transcendence of flesh." In contrast, "Fat (i.e. becoming *all* body) is associated with the 'taint' of matter and flesh, 'wantonness,' mental stupor and mental decay."[12] The anorexic is often dominated by a "deep fear of 'The Female,' with all its more nightmarish archetypal associations: voracious hungers and sexual insatiability."[13]

As Branden enters the new country and impersonates the naturalist female, he struggles against his "descent" into naturalism by divesting himself of (female) desire and physicality. Moreover, the narrator tries to maintain textual control by preventing his metamorphosis from narrating (male) subject to narrated (female) object, from manipulator of language to manipulated physical and sexual body. Determined not to allow American society to seduce him by appealing to his desire, he becomes a tramp and an itinerant farm-labourer, a role that dissociates him from sexuality. As he divests himself of his clothing (and his language), he also divests himself of food, trying to impose his will on his body by denying it vital nourishments; he follows Carlyle's formula of increasing the value of the "fraction of life" by "lessening the Denominator" (*ASA* 223). Appropriately nicknamed Slim, Branden inscribes into his narrative the pleasure of starving: in his odyssey across the country he feels not only a perpetual hunger, but "a weird intoxication with hunger" (*ASA* 250), like Fanny Essler. Moreover, the adult anorexic's ideal of eternal adolescence is reflected in his impersonation of Huck Finn. The novel explicitly alludes to Mark Twain, and, like Twain's "uncivilized" orphan, Branden survives by eating the leftovers of civilization, such as the corn he purloins from fields or the ham he finds along the

12 Bordo 80.

13 Bordo 87.

river banks after a flooding. The latter, however, is a "rich" food that his stomach instantly rejects, so that Branden is caught in the bulimic's self-imposed binge-purge cycle, as eating becomes a secretive, isolated activity. While he takes pleasure in denying his body vital nourishments, this compulsive rationing of food corresponds to his deliberate efforts to eliminate desire and to escape the lure of a seductive consumer economy.

Like the naturalist female who yields to the demands of the flesh, so the anorexic is characterized by a sense of powerlessness and desperately tries to regain control of her body: "Most strikingly, there is the same emphasis on *control*, on feeling one's life to be fundamentally out of control, and on the feeling of accomplishment derived from total mastery of the body."[14] Bordo's description of the anorexic applies to both Branden and Fanny. In his desire to gain control over his new situation in a new country, Branden dominates his body, and identifies in anorexic fashion with "the mind (or will), ideals of spiritual perfection, fantasies of absolute self-control." But in trying to master his (feminized) body (just like Reelen tried to master and subdue Fanny's body), Branden paradoxically ends up in Fanny's position: his anorexic mindset echoes her lack of control. Like Fanny's, Branden's anorexic condition, then, is a no-win game, or to cite Bordo on the anorexic's typical entanglement in contradictions: "caring desperately, passionately, obsessively about attaining an ideal of coolness, effortless confidence, and casual freedom," the anorexic remains caught in "powerlessness."[15]

Branden, significantly, reaches the bottom of his naturalist "descent" in Book 3, "The Depths," where he encounters his own – feminized – mirror image in the figure of a hermit, a true androgyne.[16] The hermit's alien body is part female (he has long hair, "like that of a woman") – and part male; he is also a Cyclopean monster, without an expression "in his vacant bold eye." The uncanniness of this encounter, to be sure, is based on Branden's own projections. The chapter title, "I Come Into Contact with Humanity Again" (*ASA* 250–64), is deeply ironic, since Branden does not connect but recognizes in this physical body nothing but the threat of his own internal emptiness and hollowness. Feminized and "reduced" to the experience of "body," the male narrator, like the her-

14 Bordo 84.

15 Bordo 94, 85.

16 This title could also be seen as an intertexual nod to Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, a work Grove had translated into German.

mit, has lost control and speech with which to "master" his experience. Both face each other, unable to connect through words. Speaking becomes a painful bodily activity, as the hermit, "twisting his whole body into the act," produces a word of farewell, "heaving the words up from, let me say, his abdomen and ejecting them forcibly" (*ASA* 259). At the same time, this scene also suggests a birth-giving of language through the body (just as the naturalist narrative itself is born and energized through the language of the body).

Branden's feminized body dies metaphorically in a fever attack to be reborn as a male and as a desexualized farm "hand" in a chapter conveniently entitled "I Become a 'Hand'" (282–93). This "death" in a foreign land echoes Fanny Essler's death of a malaria fever attack in Portugal, where she dies, like Branden, far away from her *Heimat*. But in contrast to Fanny, Branden's "death" marks the beginning of a "rebirth" and a new life beyond the realm of naturalist femaleness. Indeed, the death of the female and the rebirth of the male is a recurring motif in Grove's fiction: the female's violent death (e.g., Clara Vogel, Frances Montcrieff) often marks the end of a plot of decline, while the male is frequently allowed a comic "rebirth" (e.g., Niels Lindstedt, Harold Tracy). Branden initiates his own rebirth by rescuing the androgynous hermit from drowning and by forcing this alien body to eject the first words; thus he becomes his own midwife as he is born into a new culture, speaking a new language and moving beyond victimized femininity. But the fact that Branden, as a "new man," insists on his maleness also shows that Grove's conceptualization of sexual identity continues to operate within naturalist conventions, in which the position of control is automatically associated with the male.

Since Branden's "descent" is characterized by his feminization, anorexia, and aphasia, it should come as no surprise that his "levelling" entails a new male identity, an acceptance of essential food, and his transformation into a writer. Accepting that his place is "with the men," he follows Dr. Goodwin's commission that the "real man longs for production" (*ASA* 289) and becomes an itinerant worker on the large western farms, celebrating the new community of "hoboes" as a male community of "desublimated Thoreaus." If the "theme of Grove's *A Search for America* is the narrator's search for a North American pastoral myth in its genuinely imaginative form," as Northrop Frye has argued,[17] then

17 Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971) 240.

Branden appears to have found his ideal in what Grove describes as a pastoral of the fields. As a simple field worker on the Mackenzie Farm, the mecca of "hobodom," the narrator's earlier anorexic vision gives way to a catalogue of food, an Odyssean banquet of essential nourishments:

> We went to the cook-house for dinner. The food was good, consisting of soup, meat, vegetables, and pudding. Plenty of pies were scattered over the tables which were covered with white oil-cloth; there were large stacks of fresh bread, both white and brown, dishes of butter, pitchers with milk, and pots full of coffee and tea. As once before in similar surroundings I marvelled again at the capacity for eating which these workers of the soil displayed. (*ASA* 347)

And yet, just as Grove does not abandon the narrative strategies of the naturalist genre, as the descriptive catalogue suggests, so Branden continues to adhere to the naturalist position of (male) narrative authority. In this context, the gaps are as important as what is said in the text. While Branden overtly celebrates his identity as a farm "hand," he silences the fact that he has become "a voice," as well, a narrator who controls his experience through manipulation of language, through story-telling. The identity assumed by Branden, then, is one that echoes the traditional male – desexualized – narrator in naturalism, who hovers above the text as a bodiless authority, endowed with immense powers.

The contradictions of Branden's different roles underscore this point. Even as an itinerant worker he does not really merge with the community of field workers he celebrates, but is separated from them by a distinct difference in consciousness. *A Search of America* is a "novel of double consciousness," as Tom Henighan defines this genre in *Natural Space in Literature* (1982); it is a narrative in which "field is polarized with the city" and in which the narrator is generally a sophisticated outsider who tries to reach some kind of identification with the peasant world.[18] Just as pastoral myths "do not exist as places," as Northrop Frye has observed,[19] so the idyllic picture of the workers' Odyssean banquet clashes with Branden's naturalist consciousness of the reality of social problems (such as gambling, vermin-infested houses, dependency on employers). As the social problems reintroduce a naturalist leitmotif, so Branden presents himself as a sympathizing narrator-spectator, who enjoys a

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18 Tom Henighan, *Natural Space in Literature: Imagination and Environment in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Fiction and Poetry* (Ottawa: Golden Dog Press, 1982) 70.

19 Frye 241.

broader perspective and speaks with a voice of authority that others lack. As a naturalist narrator, he assumes control and narrative authority, and with it a clearly defined – male – identity.

Posing in his different roles as a pruner of trees and a teacher, Branden returns to the traditional orthopedic-didactic voice of the naturalist narrator. He uses the language of the early precursors of naturalism, the eighteenth-century French socialists, such as Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier, who voiced their social critiques in evocations of utopia. Branden's charge against the young farmer millionaire Mackenzie (who lives in a "white house"!) presents these two movements of naturalism: first, the social accusation – "You have taken [the small farmers'] land" (*ASA* 376) – and second, the projection of a socialist utopian order in which the millionaire should "divest" himself of his "property" and thus make possible "real democracy" based on an economy of "a greater number of independent farmers" (*ASA* 379–80). The closer Branden moves to his evocation of utopia, though, the more virulent and shrill are his accusations against "real" America. It is the very shrillness of his voice and the overly moralistic quality of his narrative that expose his personal involvement, insecurity, and the laboured effort to speak in a "male" voice of authority.

Indeed, the novel continues to undercut the naturalist separation between empowered (male) narrator and impotent (feminized) victim. The narrator-observer (having superior knowledge and the power to manipulate language) and the narrated naturalist object (being blind, impotent, and without language) are shown to be one and the same character, with the novel deliberately blurring the boundaries between the two. It is Branden himself who participates as an active, *eironic* agent in the satiric-naturalist dissection of his younger *alazonic* self. Splitting his self into young and old, naive and mature, Branden creates what W.J. Keith has called "a curious 'double-view' effect in which first- and third-person intermix, and Branden can present himself as both the personal 'I' and the objective 'young man,'" or what Frances Kaye has discussed as Branden's "biformity," his tendency "to propagate opposing points of view."[20] This dialogical principle is an ironic technique of self-subversion that allows the new "I" to put the old self on trial and to play the role of vicious, critical prosecutor at the same time that both

20 W. J. Keith, "Grove's Search For America," *Canadian Literature* 59 (1974): 59; Frances Kaye, "Hamlin Garland and Frederick Philip Grove: Self-Conscious Chroniclers of the Pioneers," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 10 (1979): 34–35.

young and old narrator put America on trial, testing the American reality in their odyssey across the country.

The dissection of his younger self tortures and mutilates the body, so that the narrative takes the form of "*sparagmos* or tearing to pieces," according to Northrop Frye "the archetypal theme of irony and satire," or naturalism.[21] Branden's (naturalist) adventures are painful ones, in which the male body is ritually dissected and crucified in bodily tortures that carry the overtones of Sadeian pains. Travelling on train rods to the western hobo-land, Branden's body is crushed and metaphorically destroyed by a true torture machine: "I saw myself lying on the sleepers, a mangled mass of bloody flesh and crushed bones" (*ASA* 332). "Punishing" himself in a naturalist narrative is significant in two ways, signalling, first, the author's ritual destruction of his "female" self, and second, the author's guilt about his "killing" of Fanny Essler.

Unlike Dreiser's tragic figure, Clyde Griffiths in *An American Tragedy* (1925), who fails as "a historian of self" and lets others tell his story, Grove's naturalist victim rises phoenix-like out of naturalist ashes to tell his story. As Branden's youthful body is mutilated by "that part of America which had wounded and hurt me" (*ASA* 209), so a somewhat maturer Branden emerges from his passive victim status to put America on trial by dissecting it intellectually in naturalism's privileged mode of *sparagmos*. While Clyde is the naturalist victim of "an American tragedy," Branden turns his back on American society and becomes a "Canadian."

Just as Canada is described as a borderland in *A Search for America*, so Branden maintains a precarious borderline status: he is simultaneously subject and object, acting and acted upon, authority figure and victim, with the novel blurring the naturalist boundaries between knowing spectator and ignorant victim, between masculine and feminine. Like Fanny Essler, Branden deliberately speaks from the margins – as an immigrant, as a "hobo," and as a Canadian – which creates a distance between himself and the centres of power of the new society. His position on the margins of America also signals that his persona hovers on the margins of the naturalist genre. Although he assumes the authority of the male naturalist narrator, he also maintains Fanny Essler's female confessional voice up to the end, manipulating the conventions of the confessional genre. If it is true that Branden has not undergone a total metamorphosis into a "social man," but still shares the sense of superiority and arrogance

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21 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973) 192.

of the European Reelen, it is equally true that he has not abandoned, nor totally repressed, Fanny Essler by the end of the novel. Opting for Canada as his new *Heimat*, the narrator continues to hover on the borderline between (stereotypical) masculinity and femininity, between narrative subject- and object-positions, so that the novel's overt claim of his rebirth as a new "man" is subverted by the novel's covert intertext. This intertext suggests a more feminized, Flaubertian identification, with the narrator "confessing" via intertextual dialogue: *Fanny Essler, c'est moi.*

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