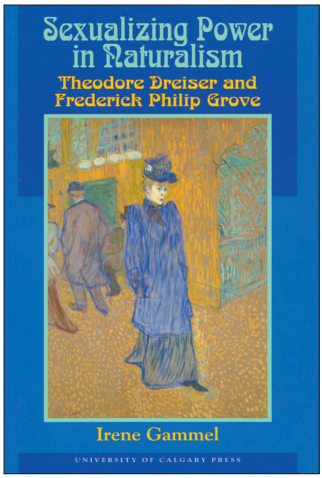

SEXUALIZING POWER IN NATURALISM: THEODORE DREISER AND FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE

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V. Grove's Sexualizing of Patriarchal Power

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Sovereign Power, Bio-Power and the "Inevitable Form" in *The Master of the Mill*

Although Grove establishes a Dreiserian connection between art and economic relations, he moves in a different direction by focusing on what one might term an economy of hyperproductivity. The publication of his late business novel *The Master of the Mill* (1944) thus has to be seen in the context of the *Künstlerroman* that followed, *In Search of Myself* (1946). Opposing Dreiser's ethos of male sexual promiscuity, Grove associates both the artist and the businessman with the traditional producer figure – the family patriarch. Grove's ideal of aesthetic production, as he expressed it in *In Search of Myself*, is encapsulated in the artist-persona as a patriarchal father figure who gives birth to his fictional sons. The author's relationship with his "sons," in turn, is conceptualized in terms of struggle and rivalry, energized and determined by psychoanalytic structures, in particular by the Oedipal conflict. Thus, the aging narrator-author in the fictionalized autobiography has a vision of himself as a godlike paternal creator, a patriarch who rules as an omnipotent and omniscient father-sovereign over his fictional characters, who looks down "as though, from the summit of a mountain" on the "empire" of

his creation, a master over life and death.[1] While Cowperwood slowly freezes to a static figure of sovereign power in *The Titan*, Grove's autobiographical *Künstler*-persona is always already caught in the image of a larger-than-life figure of power.

With the artist's persona thus echoing the Virgilian imperial view from above, Grove's conceptualization of authorial power is suggestive of what Foucault has described as the Roman model of patriarchal power:

> For a long time, one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death. In a formal sense, it derived no doubt from the ancient *patria potestas* that granted the father of the Roman family the right to "dispose" of the life of his children and his slaves; just as he had given them life, so he could take it away. (*HS* 135)

Similarly, in *In Search of Myself*, the artist sees his fictional characters as his fictional sons, who are doubles of himself and who come into being because he is willing to "distil my blood and infuse it into two creatures who had no right to exist on this earth except what right I had myself bestowed upon them" (*ISM* 373). Small wonder that in twentieth-century Canada this dream of absolute omnipotence over his creation is complemented by a negative flipside – the artist's vision of himself as an absolute failure who is drained of his life forces and then cast aside by his fictional characters, who claim their independence from their creator-father: "The trouble was that, after all, I *had* given them birth in my mind and, therefore, power to dispose of my substance" (*ISM* 373). The negative flipside of the omnipotent artist is the impotent artist as a complete failure, who is sacrificed by his fictional sons.

Foucault has argued that, starting from the end of the nineteenth century, "we can trace the theoretical effort to reinscribe the thematic of sexuality in the system of law, the symbolic order, and sovereignty," a phenomenon that Foucault links to the advent of psychoanalysis. After all, Freud's endeavour was "to ground sexuality in the law – the law of alliance, tabooed consanguinity, and the Sovereign-Father, in short, to surround desire with all the trappings of the old order of power" (*HS* 150). With the discovery of the Oedipal triangle, Freud reinserted sexuality firmly into the family, connecting it with the "law" in his emphasis on the incest taboo. But according to Foucault, this "new" psychoanalytic conception of "the category of the sexual in terms of the law, death, blood, and sovereignty" is "in the last analysis a historical

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1 *In Search of Myself* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1946) 262. Further references will appear in the text, abbreviated *ISM*.

'retroversion'"; in other words, it is part of the reason that in its representation of modern power, Western society has not yet "cut off the head of the king."

It may come as no surprise that this "historical retroversion" is a characteristic feature of Grove's novels of the soil, yet we also find it at the heart of his futuristic big business novel, *The Master of the Mill*. Sam Clark, the main narrator, obsessively turns backwards to examine his and his family's involvement in the mill's construction, his thoughts continually circling around his father and his son. Reflecting the author's preoccupation with the role of the patriarchal family in twentieth-century Canada, this "retroversion" has several functions: first, the father as a bourgeois monopolist is a figure echoing the productive, rather than the repressive, aspects of modern power; second, the patriarchal figurehead of power reflects Grove's grappling with an adequate representation of the contemporary Canadian centralization of finance and industry; and third, the novel's simultaneous focus on the patriarch's loss of power signals Grove's continued preoccupation with the crisis of masculinity, which leads to a defensive inscription of traditional models of masculinity into his fiction. Indeed, Grove's representation of modern power in terms of a monarchical-patriarchal power creates fascinating contradictions between the centralized power of the family patriarch, on the one hand, and his modern (Foucauldian) conception of mobile power that is dispersed in all levels of the social hierarchy, on the other. The author can only "resolve" these contradictions by giving his realism-naturalism, eventually, a twist into naturalist dystopia.

Focusing on the construction and automation of the monumental Clark mill, *The Master of the Mill* explores Canada's transitional age, namely, the period between the 1880s and the 1920s that witnessed the economic and cultural consolidation of Canada as a nation. In this period, Canada's economy shifted from a postcolonial, agricultural state towards industry and finance. Looking back on the mill's history, the protagonist Sam Clark traces the development of the Clark flour empire in Langholm, Manitoba, as it grows from Rudyard Clark's small family business in 1888 into Edmund's huge, fully automated corporate machinery with international connections in 1923.[2] Ousted from his posi-

2 Since the novel's chronology is not linear, here are some of the crucial dates. In 1875, the railway net connects with Langholm, giving birth to the original mill. In April 1888, the old mill conveniently burns down, prompting the building of the new mill, which harvests the benefits of the 1888–89 economic boom. When Rudyard dies in 1898, Sam follows his father's plans and completes the first phase of the mill's automation in 1901, causing a massive workers' strike.

tion of power by his son, Edmund, after the First World War, Sam resumes control of the mill in 1923, after his son's death, and "narrates" the mill's history shortly before his own death in 1938. In light of this historical chronology, it has been argued that Grove's novel offers "an allegory of the development of Canada as a nation," with Rudyard Clark representing a pioneer type of capitalism, Samuel a "more liberal generation," and Edmund a "new breed of corporate executive obsessed with an abstract concept of power."[3] While this teleological perspective highlights the differences between the three "masters of the mill," the fact remains that the three men, who profess to be radically different from each other, are driven by the same goal to expand the mill and increase "the demands of production," using similar strategies of power to achieve their common telos.

Conceptualizing his Canadian big business novel as a "historical retroversion" while inscribing an Oedipal psychodrama, Grove in his exploration of power heads in two opposed directions: he is obsessed with what Foucault has described as "cutting off the head of the king" while simultaneously refusing to dispense with the concept of patriarchal-monarchical power. Indeed, Grove tenaciously holds on to that concept. For instance, in the succession of the three male Clarks, it is always the sons who set out to take over the father's power, an idea that reinforces the patriarchal-monarchical notion of power, in which the son can only assume power after the old king is dead or removed from his position. This pattern of *Le roi est mort, vive le roi* is further emphasized in the novel's two-part structure and those parts' titles: "Part One: Death of the Master"; "Part Two: Resurrection of the Master." In a gesture of Oedipal rivalry, Sam opposes his father's ruthlessness in dealing with the workers. He even sees himself as a socialist who is mentally much more attuned to the workers' problems than his father ever was, and he dreams of workers' participation, of raising their wages, of profit for all. Yet once Sam takes over control of the mill, no changes are implemented; Rudyard's legacy is handed over like the sovereign's crown to the son. Enchained in a generational *Wiederholungszwang*, Sam's psychological submission is further reinforced through the mechanistic constraints imposed by the mill. While Edmund and Rudyard pay homage to the mill – indeed, they die for the mill – Sam frequently struggles against the mill's unscrupulous demands, only to yield, in turn, to its law like his father before and his son after him.

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3 Spettigue, *Grove*, 124; Keith, "F.P. Grove's Difficult Novel: *The Master of the Mill*," *Ariel* 4 (1973): 37.

While Sam dismisses his father, Rudyard, as a tyrant-father who manipulates the son even from beyond the grave, Edmund recognizes in Rudyard the mill's mythological and eroticized origin of power. For Edmund, Rudyard is the opposite of his physical – real – father, Sam, whom Edmund despises and rejects as weak and impotent and whom he easily ousts from his position of power after the First World War. Mythologized as the creator of the powerful mill, Rudyard becomes conflated with the mill itself in the eyes of his grandson, who thus resurrects the grandfather in his life as an icon of power and the ultimate love object. For example, while Edmund is presented as a sexually sterile character, his attachment to the mill and the grandfather has (homo)erotic undertones, suggestive of Cowperwood's relationship with Chicago's workers. In an earlier version of the novel, this connection is made in more explicit imagery. Edmund sees the mill as "populated by giants naked to the waist and toiling with superhuman expenditure of energy. Their toil consisted in a fight with machines, forcing them to a pace hardly to be endured. These giants were his father's slaves; but in some incomprehensible fashion they were held in subjection by his grandfather who was dead."[4] The homoerotic signals are accompanied by equally sadistic ones: the workers' (physical) bodies are both gigantic and enchained, impotent, enslaved, emasculated, subdued by the machine. Behind this sadistic image of bondage, Edmund recognizes the traces of his dead grandfather, who emerges for the grandson as a fantasy figure of omnipotent power.

Given *The Master of the Mill*'s emphasis on patriarchal power, the question arises to what extent it really departs from Grove's earlier novels of the soil. The thematic focus and structural devices in Grove's pioneer novels often rely on opposing the leisure- and money-loving, manipulating speculator-capitalist with the honest, hard-working producer-farmer. (*The Yoke of Life* [1930], for example, explores this opposition in a tragic mode, while *Two Generations* [1939] translates it into comedy.) In *The Master of the Mill* (1944), however, Grove shifts his focus radically from the agrarian producer ideal to its apparent opposite – the speculator figure. This may be an indicator that, for Grove, the binary opposition between speculator and producer is not as clear-cut as it appears on the surface of his agricultural novels. Grove, in fact, dealt with manipulative salesmanship as early as 1927 in *A Search for America*, and he presented a

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4 Quoted in Robin Mathews, "F. P. Grove: An Important Version of *The Master of the Mill* Discovered," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 7 (1982): 249.

true speculator in the Americanized businessman Jim Alvin, Jane's husband in the unpublished "Jane Atkinson," but in both novels manipulative speculation is not only morally condemned but leads to unhappiness if not disaster in the speculator's life. In *The Master of the Mill*, in contrast, crooked ways go unpunished: speculative trickery and manipulation lead to lasting economic success. Thus the moral rigidity of the earlier novels seems to be replaced by moral relativism, although even here the protagonist Sam Clark engages in a typically Grovian soul-searching of why and how he "has failed."

In contrast to the Machiavellian philosophies of his father and his son, Sam shares the moralistic vision of Phil Branden in *A Search for America*. But like Branden, Sam "yields" to what his moral vision condemns, succumbing to the demands of the mill, whose power principle he cannot resist. Looking at the mill in the beginning of the novel, Sam sees it standing "behind a veil" (*M* 7). Veiled and fetishized like the Lacanian phallus, the mill emerges as an abstract signifier of power, with which Sam is involved in a love-hate relationship that, in turn, echoes the relationship with his tyrannical father. In psychological terms a fetish is a cover for a knowledge that cannot be faced easily and that Sam can lay open only in the face of death. Sam "unveils" the mystery of the mill in his confession, determined to set "his house in order" by piecing together the mill's history and his family's involvement in it. And just as Lacan asserts that "the demon of *Aidos* (*Scham*, shame) arises at the very moment when, in the ancient mysteries, the phallus is unveiled" (*E* 288), so Sam is filled with a sense of shame and humbleness when he obsessively highlights the moral tainting of those who "yield" to the phallic mill in reluctant submission.

Yet despite Grove's concern with the protagonist's moral complicity, the novel also makes a Dreiserian point. In making the Clarks "return" so obsessively to the mill's shady origins, Grove emphasizes the idea that the monumental mill originates not so much in hard labour as in the manipulator's ingenuity in turning a paper fiction into a material reality, a very "real" corporate machinery, which in turn produces vital commodities without end. Through Sam we learn, for example, that the gigantic mill has its origins in "fictitious dealings," an ingenious paper fiction, very similar to Cowperwood's "technically illegal" money transaction that has him convicted and incarcerated for "technical embezzlement" in his early Philadelphia years in *The Financier*. Just as Cowperwood made profits for his own pocket by speculating with city money before the stockmarket crisis in 1871, so Grove's master financier Rudyard Clark managed to build his new mill in Manitoba in 1888 by using money cleverly drawn from a fraudulent insurance scheme.

With one single stroke in his bookkeeping Rudyard declared a massive amount of his wheat "destroyed" by a fire which he himself had set, only to resell this same wheat at a huge profit after collecting the insurance premium. Like Cowperwood's city money, Rudyard's insurance money may be seen as a "loan" because years later Sam pays back the sum plus the interest on it, ironically to discover that his father had already reimbursed the insurance company with an anonymous money payment right after he had made his fortune. This dark origin and the desire to cover it up binds three generations of male Clarks together in an incestuous bond that is invested with secrecy and mystery. The revelation of the mill's dark origin is like the confession of a sexual secret that has been hidden and repressed over decades. The ethical ambiguity surrounding the mill's origin becomes erotically charged, as it becomes an object of obsessive veiling and of simultaneous voyeuristic curiosity.

Examining both the published and the unpublished manuscript of *The Master of the Mill*, Robin Mathews has observed that the sexuality of the Clark family "is related to some idea, not completely clear, that Grove has about technology, power and the psychological effects of power relations."[5] Indeed, the mill not only produces psychological effects, but Grove uses psychological structures and subtexts to explore modern relationships of power. He examines the monopolization in the contemporary Canadian economy by locating it within a single – patriarchal – family, tracing the contributions of three generations to the building of a monumental mill. Lacan has observed that the phallus, "by virtue of its turgidity," is "the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation" (*E* 287); the mill-phallus takes hold of the three Clarks, so that together they become a composite Cowperwood-superman figure. While Dreiser locates the modern deployment of sexuality and power deliberately outside the close-knit family unit by invoking Cowperwood's spiral of wild promiscuity and his continual breaking of the marital bonds, Grove, in contrast, reinserts sexuality within the family structure by repeatedly invoking an incestuous circularity that binds the three Clarks to the mill and to each other.

This incestuous bond is particularly evident in the Clarks' relationships with the women in their lives, all of whom are called Maud and become somewhat interchangeable in their relationships with the different Clarks. Indeed, the male Clarks' sexual desires are never firmly attached to the one Maud they are married to; desire circulates freely

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5 Mathews 250.

within the family. Rudyard Clark, for example, embraces Maud Carter as more than a daughter-in-law, lavishing presents on her that he jealously begrudges his own son. Similarly, when Edmund starts an affair with Sam's secretary, Maud Dolittle, the public seduction scene is closely watched by a sexually jealous Sam, the rival father. When three years later, after the end of his affair, Edmund marries Maud Fanshaw, it is only to discover that his father has not just participated in the son's courtship, but has outtricked his son by handing over shares in the mill to Maud, so that Edmund is dependent on his wife's collaboration and goodwill in his operation of the business. Sam eventually chooses Maud Carter as his heir, sharing with her a complicitous affection, which is expressed not in words but in "tones which vibrated with unspoken things" (*M* 20).

The dispersal and simultaneous containment of sexuality within the family boundaries represents a sexualization of power that is radically different from Dreiser's exploration of this motif in his trilogy. Like Dreiser, Grove uses his big business novel to inscribe the ingenious workings of sexualized power in his twentieth-century Canadian naturalism; but Grove gives this exploration a more specifically psychological dimension. In this process, sexuality assumes an even more abstract quality than in *The Titan*. While sexuality is strangely omnipresent in the Clark household, neither of the male Clarks is a very physical or sexual person. Sam is described as small in stature, Edmund has a disability from the war. "Divorcing" herself from the mill, Sam's daughter Ruth eventually marries an old European aristocrat to escape sexual relations altogether; she can only exorcise the powerful hold of the mill in her life by renouncing sexuality. Assimilated by the mill, male and female sexuality assumes a symbolic function, representing the mill's hyperproductivity. Invested with male and female sexuality, the mill emerges as an hermaphroditic machine, endowed with monstrous reproductive powers.

Given the mill's mixed blessing of cornucopian productivity, Grove's point on modern power is, in part, a Foucauldian one. The mill's power principle cannot be simply dismissed as negative and exploitative because it is committed to production, the ultimately positive principle of Grove's novels of the soil. Based on Sam Clark's genial plan "whereby the mill could go on growing and growing,"[6] the mill takes on a life of its own to the point of becoming self-procreative. Nature-like, it produces

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6 Frederick Philip Grove, *The Master of the Mill* (1944; Toronto: Macmillan, 1945) 65. Further references will appear in the text, abbreviated *M*.

vital commodities – flour and bread – in unimaginable quantities, enough to provide not only the national demand but also the demands of other countries. Birk Sproxton has discussed the mill in terms of a plant, a living organism,[7] which is appropriate in that the mill, as a huge, futuristic machine, becomes capable of producing its own abundant harvest.

This principle of production, however, is also the mill's secret of seduction. The mill's productivity is linked to the laws of nature, creating a naturalist framework that subjects everyone to its inexorable laws. Sam presents the mill as a "fact of nature," emphasizing that, like nature, the Clark mill has its own laws, which go beyond a sense of good and evil, and are indifferent to morality. Indeed, presented as an independent, larger-than-life organism through the different narrators' perspectives, the mill comes to occupy a position similar to Père Colombe's demonic tavern, *L'Assommoir*, another all-embracing machine that deterministically rules the characters' lives, involving them in the naturalist plot of decline, degradation, and death.[8]

The ambiguity associated with the mill as "a fact of nature" is one that Grove recognizes at the heart of naturalism itself, in which nature is either indifferent or destructive. Walter Benn Michaels has demonstrated in his reading of Dreiser's *Financier* that "nature" is in alliance with the speculator, not with the producer,[9] a point Grove never tires of dramatizing in his agrarian novels (and that he makes most poignantly in *Fruits of the Earth* [1933], where the pioneer-patriarch's constructions are immediately followed by nature's work of decay). Grove's prairie pioneers are engaged in endless and sometimes apparently pointless struggles against the arbitrariness of nature and its power to destroy what is built by human toil.[10] Floods and drought work against the producers' ideal of a regular harvest as compensation for their "honest" work. Nature's principle of providing cornucopian excess in some years and withholding its harvest arbitrarily in others evokes the pattern of sudden disruption

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7 Birk Sproxton, "Grove's Unpublished MAN and Its Relation to *The Master of the Mill*," Nause 50.

8 For a detailed discussion of American naturalism's interest in the "procreative force of the machine, see Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines*, especially his chapter "The Naturalist Machine," 24–44.

9 Michaels, "Dreiser's *Financier*," 288.

10 For a discussion of the (inevitable) conflict between prairie pioneer and nature in Grove's works, see Pacey, *Frederick Philip Grove*, 123–29. Stanley McMullin, in "Evolution Versus Revolution: Grove's Perception of History," Nause 78, links Grove's vision of nature and culture to the influence of the German philosopher Oswald Spengler (1880–1936), who argued that "What man strives to build, Nature tries to destroy."

and arbitrary fluctuations that the speculator thrives on. Thus, the nature-analogy in Grove's conceptualizing of the mill highlights both the productive and destructive aspects of capitalism. Capitalism in *The Master of the Mill* dismisses the former producers – the mill-hands – as useless unemployed, a burden to society. By turning the mill into "a fact of nature," Sam (and Grove) appears to have found an appropriate metaphor to suggest that capitalism with its trickery manipulation has become all-pervasive, like a law of nature that embraces everyone and that is fundamentally indifferent to human welfare.

The mill's principle of seduction, its hyperproductivity, is, significantly, reflected in its capacity to create discourse without end: all those involved with the mill inevitably talk about it, theorize its functioning, and write their histories about it. Rudyard Clark keeps his secret journal that throws light on the genesis of the mill; Maud Clark and Odette Charlebois fill their hours with stories of the mill; Mr. Stevens writes the mill's history between 1898 and 1924; and Mr. Arbuthnot writes a proletarian novel about it, reflecting the workers' perspective. And yet, the production of continually new discourses on the mill hides as much as it reveals. The networks of narration reflect the deliberate confusion and complexity of the mill's own organization.

In *In Search of Myself*, Grove speaks of the "inevitable form" of *The Master of the Mill*, as "the only form in which the book can convey its message" (*ISM* 438). With the shift of manipulative speculation into the foreground of the novel, Grove's traditionally linear narration – the mark of his agrarian novels with their "honest" characters – changes to incorporate discontinuous shifts in time, flashbacks, and unreliable narrative perspectives, which seem not only appropriate but very successful in highlighting his theme of "discontinuous," disruptive, arbitrary, and manipulative speculation, as well as the shifting, mobile workings of power. Dreiser's *Trilogy of Desire*, by contrast, follows the traditional chronological narration and has been negatively criticized because it "lacks a genuinely innovative strategy" for representing the "new man," the superman-speculator F. A. Cowperwood.[11] Grove's Canadian business novel is more innovative than Dreiser's trilogy in representing in

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11 See O'Neill 419–21. Although Beverley Mitchell entitled her essay "The 'Message' and the 'Inevitable Form' in *The Master of the Mill*," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 3.3 (1974), 74-79, she never really addresses the question of why this form should be "inevitable." In "Grove's 'Difficult' Novel," 34–48, W. J. Keith compares the work formally to William Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and thematically to D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, emphasizing the paradoxes and moral ambiguities of the characters' relation with the mill.

its narrative form both the mobility of the speculator's power and its limitations.

Just as the mill has no ultimate centre of power, the novel has no single narrative centre. Sam, the main narrator, is senile, and other narrative centres are needed to fill the holes left in his history. Just as the complexity of the mill's structure consists of a play of presences and absences, so the novel presents a double discourse of "official" and "unofficial" history, the latter reflected in Sam's act of remembrance in his state of senility. The mill's complex administrative organization thus is echoed in the complexity of the novel's narrative structure; both are based on the same kind of *Versteckspiel*.

Consisting of a system of interlocking subsystems, the mill is "a marvel of organization," designed with the deliberate intent of "disguising and dividing the profits of the huge concern, profits which in a single aggregate would have been monstrous" (*M* 93). After Rudyard's death in 1898, Sam's secretary Maud Dolittle becomes "nominal vice-president" of the company, but as such has only a few "qualifying shares" in it, which limits the power of this office drastically. At the same time Miss Dolittle's "real" power lies in her function as sales manager of the company, but in this function her power is disguised (and controlled) by the fact that she does not sign her letters with her own name but puts the secretary treasurer's, Mr. Stevens, stamp under her letters, a formality that again creates confusion for the outside observer about who is in charge. Frequently, the presence of a name signifies the absence of any real power.

Echoing this deliberate confusion in the mill's network, Sam relates its history from the perspective of his growing senility, so that his state of mind partly disqualifies him as a reliable historiographer. Yet it is Sam, in his state of mental disintegration, who revises the "official" history of the mill, "confessing" its dark secrets, if only to himself. Conversely, the supposedly reliable historiographers in the novel frequently reiterate the "official" history. Grove signals to the reader to be suspicious when Mr. Arbuthnot, the writer of proletarian novels, is exposed as Edmund's master spy who helped put the workers out of work in the last stage of the mill's automation in 1923. Similarly, the two female narrators (Maud Fanshaw and Ottilie Charlebois) appear to be reliable witnesses, who lived through some of the events without being fully in charge, and therefore should be expected to offer a critical, revisionary account. Yet their histories eventually turn out to be tainted by their own complicitous involvement in the mill's construction. Maud Fanshaw, Sam's chosen heiress, collaborated in Edmund's unscrupulous business ventures (*M* 307), while her function as a historiographer is coloured by

her belief that extraordinary men "cannot be measured by ordinary standards" (*M* 264). With the women thus willing to "suspend judgement," they perpetuate the official version of events. Naturalist and modernist techniques thus converge to present a narrative network of manipulation and complicitous silence that echoes the mill's administrative complexity.

The mill as a naturalist machine without a true "centre" illustrates Foucault's notion of the workings of power in modern institutions: "One doesn't have here a power which is wholly in the hands of one person who can exercise it alone and totally over the others. It's a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised" (*PK* 156). Foucault also makes use of the image of the pyramid, which happens to be the architectural structure of the mill:

> It's obvious that in an apparatus like an army or a factory, or some other such type of institution, the system of power takes a pyramidal form. Hence there is an apex. But even so, even in such a simple case, this summit doesn't form the "source" or "principle" from which all power derives as though from a luminous focus (the image by which the monarchy represents itself). The summit and the lower elements of the hierarchy stand in a relationship of mutual support and conditioning, a mutual "hold" (power as mutual and indefinite "blackmail"). (*PK* 159)

Similarly, the hierarchically structured mill "towered up, seventeen stories high, at the foot of the lake, like a huge pyramid whose truncated apex was in line with the summits of the surrounding hills" (*M* 2). Significantly, the apex is "truncated," metaphorically illustrating Foucault's point that those who are at the top are by no means the ultimate centre of power. As an old man approaching senility in 1938, Sam Clark nominally wields power as the mill's president and principal shareholder, but he realizes that it is really not he but "the engineers who did what they judged should be done" (*M* 18). Conversely, those who make important decisions in the running of the machine remain somehow faceless and unnamed individuals in the background of his narrative.

On the novel's psychological level, the truncated apex thus emerges as an image of metaphorical "castration," suggestive of Sam's lack of power: he is not "the master of his house" but is submerged in the larger machine. Feeling that his power as the head of a monopolist company has been "an empty shell" for many years (*M* 18), Sam dresses his history in a naturalist language, presenting himself as a naturalist victim caught in an all-embracing machine that holds him in bondage and predetermines his action: "He could never get away from the feeling that,

whatever he had done, he had done under some compulsion. Yet it was he who had determined the development of the mill; but it was, first his father, then his son who had chosen the time for every change proposed, thereby twisting his own purpose" (*M* 4). As Foucault emphasizes that power has become "a machinery that no one owns" (*PK* 156), so even Sam, the president of the mill, is dominated by a sense of being out of control, of being only a tool in the workings of the anonymous machine. Grove makes much of the fact that those who work in the mill somehow become an inseparable part of it, or, as W. J. Keith puts it, "those who are associated with the mill tend to give up their individual traits and, to adapt a phrase from W. H. Auden, forget themselves in a function."[12] Enchained in a text of psychological and mechanistic determinism, Sam, who had the lion's share in the construction and administrative direction of the monumental mill, presents himself as acted upon, as a small cog in the large machine, even at the very moment when his decision inaugurates the first phase of the mill's automation.

Naturalist discourse, then, has a very ambiguous function in the novel. On one level, it constitutes a self-critical analysis of the capitalist figure of power, who recognizes his own limitations. Indeed, the protagonist's sense of Virgilian telos is subverted by the intrusion of his deliberately ironic, degrading perspective, designed to undo his vision of greatness and teleological progress. The subversion of capitalist beliefs in progress and continuity has been one of the traditional functions of naturalist fiction, as David Baguley explains: "It offered images of disruption to an age that desperately sought continuity, failure to an age bent on success, disorder and atrophy instead of regularity and progress, chinks in the chains of cause and effect, the rotting foundations of proudly constructed edifices" (*NF* 218).

But if the naturalist voice in Sam's narration is designed to poke holes into his capitalist success story, it also serves the opposite function, paving the way for the mill's monopolization. Indeed, the naturalist subtext of Sam's story illustrates Foucault's point that a discourse of opposition can easily be recolonized and put in the service of the dominant power principle. Just as Sam is seduced into subjection to the mill's demands, so Sam himself becomes the mill's tool, co-opting oppositional forces. Sam makes much of the fact that he is a man with socialist leanings, who is in sympathy with the lower classes. While there is no doubt that his own ideological position is deeply split, it is his sympathy for the

12 Keith, "Grove's Difficult Novel," 43.

workers that gives Sam the flexibility to succeed in his capitalist ventures, where Dreiser's inflexible titan fails. Sam cleverly assimilates oppositional voices, as illustrated by the example of Bruce Rogers, whose agitation amongst the disgruntled workers jeopardizes the implementation of the first phase of the mill's automation. Voicing an official complaint about the bad working conditions, Bruce Rogers is turned from a proletarian agitator into a capitalist accomplice, a tool in the mill's monopolization, expansion, and automation. "I'm telling [the men] that the whole thing can't be helped; that it is nobody's fault; that strikes and walk-outs are of no use" (*M* 219), Rogers says before leaving Sam after an extended discussion. The supposed agitator ends up reflecting the position advocated by Sam himself, his voice reluctantly supporting the master's plans for complete automation. As Sam listens to Rogers's complaints about the "inhuman grind" of assembly-line work, this criticism is embedded in Sam's "official" narrative, signalling by its context Sam's clever assimilation of the worker's opposition.

Sam Clark's strategy of power corresponds to what Foucault has theorized as bio-power, whose methods are subtler and more effective than the capitalist's open confrontation with the opposition. Describing the bourgeois commitment to philanthropy in Canadian society between 1870 and 1920, Mariana Valverde has explained the mechanics of bio-power as deployed in Canada as follows:

> As historians have pointed out, one important aspect of the growth of modern Canada was the development of an urban-industrial working class. The correlate of that was the development of an urban bourgeoisie, certain sectors of which initiated a philanthropic project to reform or "regenerate" Canadian society.[13]

According to Foucault's analysis of the French bourgeoisie, its usage of bio-power involved a "calculated management of life," subsuming measures of population control and demography:

> This bio-power was without question an indispensable element in the development of capitalism; the latter would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes. (*HS* 140–41)

In *The Master of the Mill*, this "gentle," life-affirming bio-power is conveniently represented by women. It is theoretically expressed by Maud

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13 Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885–1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991) 15.

Dolittle, who explains the demands of the machine for an increased or reduced labour force:

> Population will dwindle as its task disappears. The enormously increased population was needed to nurse the machine in its infancy, to teach it its paces till it could walk by itself. As the population dwindles, it will live in ever greater abundance and ease till comfort smothers it, and it becomes extinct; for ease and comfort do not make fruitful. (*M* 390–91)

Indeed, Edmund envisions a future in which the population is kept in submission through material comfort, whereby charity becomes the major bourgeois strategy to keep "docile" the former workers, who, disgruntled and frustrated, might otherwise attack the machines and disrupt production. Similarly, when Sam Clark dies toward the end of *The Master of the Mill*, he stipulates in his will that a large amount of his money will go to create a charitable fund for the unemployed, the victims of the mill. In its last volume, *The Stoic*, Dreiser's trilogy culminates in a similar pattern: in his will, Cowperwood sets up a charitable fund for a hospital in which people should be treated regardless of colour and creed. Prompted by the demands of bio-power, these charitable activities are, however, not in opposition to the spirit of capitalism, as many readers have argued, but make its smooth functioning possible (as Donald Trump's more recent publicizing of his charitable activities shows).

Just as the reflection of the mill is "shattered and broken into a million luminous shards" (*M* 7), so the sexualized representations of the mill change, according to the demands of bio-power. Given the traditional secrecy of the male Clarks, the women are offered as representations of the mill to the public eye, especially when the male Clarks prefer to retreat into the "not to be seen." The women, then, are not just "useless adornments," as Nancy Bailey has argued,[14] but sexualized representations of the mill's bio-power. They make its smooth running possible by acting as important catalysts in the economic and social power plays. In times of peace, the mill is represented in its static timelessness by the three "regal" and "aristocratic" Mauds. Like the snow-white mill, Maud Carter appears in "snow-white" at the important social event in Langholm (*M* 140), just as the "virginal" Maud Dolittle appears in a "white fur" at a party at Langholm House many years later. While this circular doubling and tripling of Mauds suggests that they fulfill a similar function in their relationship with the mill, the representations of the mill are by no means

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14 Nancy Bailey, "F. P. G. and the Empty House," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 31–32 (1981) 189.

stable but continually shifting, depending on the mill's demands. The two important stages of the mill's automation in 1901 and 1923 are, significantly, represented by figures who signify excess and rebellion.

Grove highlights how much Sam's capitalist monopolization process makes use of images of sexual disruption. A figure of daring promiscuity, Sibyl Carter emerges at the turn of the century as a woman who articulates the new woman's sexual rights. Unlike the images of "ideal" and "regal" femininity, such as Maud Carter and Maud Fanshaw, Sibyl looks very boyish and androgynous, very much like Fanny Essler. Set up as the archetypal, *fin-de-siècle femme fatale* through the eyes of both Sam and his housekeeper, Odette Charlebois, Sibyl's aim is not only to seduce the master of the mill, Sam, but also to flirt with the mill-hands. Her sexuality, then, crosses class boundaries and, on the surface, disrupts the boundaries of Langholm's social and economic order. Indeed, Sibyl's indiscriminate promiscuity seems to infiltrate and sexualize the whole apparatus of the mill, a mill that towers up in front of her as a huge phallic symbol:

> Leaving the office, followed by her sardonic and overpowdered maid, she went down to the carriage, stopping a moment to stare at the mill which, though an unfinished torso, was at the centre towering up to almost its present height. (*M* 174)

Like the other sexual relations in the novel, though, Sibyl's wildly promiscuous and aggressive sexuality takes on an incestuous quality when associated with the mill. Trying to seduce Sam, her sexual desire is directed back to the head of the patriarchal family, the male icon of power, back to her brother-in-law, who conveniently resists physical seduction, but does not resist the temptation to exploit Sibyl's sexuality and put it in the service of the mill in the first phase of its automation in 1901.

As a sexualized object of sight, Sibyl is allowed to displace the "regal" and dignified Maud Carter as the predominant representation of the mill in the minds of the public just before the first stage of automation. Given her image as a seductive siren, she becomes associated with the mill's destructive aspects in the workers' minds, so that the workers' wrath against the exploitative mill culminates in a public chase in which Sibyl is stripped of her clothing:

> All the time such of her pursuers as fell behind were replaced by fresher and younger ones. But she knew now where she was: in a moment she would be skirting the park of Clark House. Meanwhile new hands were reaching for her. Her petticoat fell; her vest; her drawers; and just as she was topping the hill, coming into the direct light, she ran naked, save for her corset. (*M* 177–78)

Culminating in this satirized assault, the spreading sexual aura in Langholm is accompanied by a hectic boom in land speculation that leads to a bust in 1901. This scene, narrated by Odette Charlebois, makes a logical connection between the spreading sexual promiscuity, the speculation bust, and the first workers' strike in Langholm. In fact, the "official" history holds Sibyl responsible for the ensuing "chaos" at the mill, that is, the growing liberality that culminates in the rebellious strike of otherwise submissive workers. In this official history, Sibyl is conceptualized in the (stereo)typical terms of the naturalist female, whose body "infects" the whole social order.

Yet Sam deconstructs this stereotype in his revisionary history. While the official history (ironically related by Sam's housekeeper) identifies Sibyl's "contagious" promiscuity as the cause of the workers' strike, Sam's revisionary history exposes this sexualized "disruption" as part of his own larger plan. Sam was the real instigator of the speculation bust and cause of the workers' unrest, and he was conveniently absent when Sibyl was ritually assaulted and driven out of town. The moment Sibyl left town, Sam returned to workers who were, once again, willing to make peace and comply with the management's call for order. Sibyl's promiscuity hence is not disruptive of capitalist processes but is a clever strategy that helps the apparently innocent Sam to implement the first stage of the mill's automation in 1901. "Unveiling" the mill, then, means exposing that its power principle is based on such "unheroic," sexualized acts of co-optation, which fill the narrator with humility and shame.

Thus it should come as no surprise that Sam survives the other excessive figure in the novel, his own son Edmund. While the clever capitalist survivor Sam remains modestly in the background, refusing the honours of knighthood, his rebelling, excessive son eagerly accepts the old titles in lieu of his father, insisting on being called by his aristocratic title of "Sir Edmund." By the end Edmund dies, when he bravely steps into the limelight of a mill surrounded by rebelling and chaotically shooting workers, a display of old-fashioned valour reminiscent of Cowperwood's display of "titanic" greatness. Trying to subdue the rebels by his sheer presence, he believes himself magically protected by the mill's "veil." Signalling the last disruptive phase in the mill's automation, his fall, like Cowperwood's, does not mark a setback in the mill's monopolization but ensures its survival and consolidation, illustrating Foucault's point that removing the apex of the pyramid does not necessarily destroy the system.

In psychoanalytic terms, the conceptualizing of modern power in the image of a "truncated" pyramid carries with it undertones of sexual castration and impotence. While Edmund is metaphorically "castrated"

(the novel emphasizes his sterility and his premature death), Sam's limited powers and his eventual slippage into senility evoke the same concept. On the surface, these recurring images of emasculation and impotence suggest the Foucauldian idea that the old sovereign-patriarch has been stripped of his power in Canada's twentieth-century economy. Yet the novel's ending simultaneously suggests the opposite. By resorting to an utterly fictional, dystopian, and static future state in which the corporate machine can completely dispense with labour, Grove creates a whole group of unemployed who become like children in their dependency on the charity of a fabulously rich patron. This provider of necessary tangible commodities, in turn, echoes the patriarchal father as well as the generously giving producer figure of Grove's agrarian novels. It appears that Grove's nostalgia for a paternalistic power principle emerges in the midst of his dystopia of modern bio-power. Evoking a modern paradise without the curse of labour, the ending reveals Sam's (and Grove's) longing for an archaic patriarchal power, which holds the strings even from beyond the grave.

The novel reveals the same ideological contradictions in its gender politics. After creating the monumental mill, the males die, leaving the legacy of the mill to three women, Maud Dolittle, Odette Charlebois, and Maud Fanshaw, whose function it is to distribute charity to the unemployed – the "victims" of the mill. If the novel thus ends on the ascendancy of women to (nominal) power, this ending simultaneously suggests the opposite. The women, always already metaphorically "castrated" in a world of male "masters," represent a final – aestheticized – feminine submission to the demands of the phallic mill. This suggests less an increase in women's powers than an ultimate containment of female powers within the boundaries of Grove's naturalism. The women continue their complicitous participation in the economic process, while propagandistically mimicking Edmund's earlier vision on the mill's absolute self-sufficiency: "'What,' Lady Clark asked at a given stage of the discussion, "'am I to do with the mill now I own it?' 'Nothing,' Miss Dolittle said promptly" (*M* 390). Returning to the image of the naturalist wheel, history is conceptualized as an eternal circle of repetition in which everyone is caught. This voice is contradicted by Maud Clark's optimistic re-reading of the wheel imagery in terms of teleological progress: "A wheel does not rotate in empty space: it moves forward" (*M* 392). While the three interchangeable Mauds are thus occupied in the same circles of repetition, as they quietly participate in and are co-opted by masculine versions of power, their narratives inevitably confront them with their ideological complicity and self-contradictions. But before they can move on to a truly dialogical exploration of their differ-

ent positions, the author ends their debate, by arbitrarily and abruptly ending the novel.

Finally, in radical contrast to Dreiser's novel, here the three women who survive are not primarily sexualized mistresses but fetishized mother-figures: Odette Charlebois raised Maud Carter's children, Edmund and his sister Ruth; Maud Dolittle was a mother as well as a mistress to Edmund; and Lady Clark mothered Senator Clark in the last years of his life. As the mill continues its nature-like production, so the women's function is to "shelter and feed the unemployed," as Maud Clark puts it (*M* 390); as the mill is suspended above good and evil in their narratives, so the three women seem serene and impervious, above the disruptive forces of physical sexuality. And yet, it is the man-made mill that triumphs as the image of production; the three women are childless. Female childbirth has been usurped as the ultimate image of productive energy. It is significant that *The Master of the Mill* presents two mothers who die in childbirth; first Sam's mother and then Sam's wife Maud, when she gives birth to her daughter Ruth. As the fetishized and aestheticized representations of the maternal functions of the mill, the three women in nominal power over the mill have been stripped of their own productive capacities. The novel's final view of three fetishized "mothers" without children presents an indirect ironic triumph of "masculine" productivity in the form of the machine, just as Cowperwood's long line of sexualized mistresses functions as a representation of his "masculine" manipulative genius.

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