

## EXTRAVAGANT EXPRESSION OF TRAVEL AND GROWTH: GROVE'S QUEST FOR AMERICA

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Elitism, literary pretensions, self-importance, and mere fashionable travelling turn Grove's account of his life in Europe into an extravaganza of façades. His educational journey from European bourgeois society to a life of seeming simplicity in rural North America is the subject of his main autobiographical creations in Canada: *A Search for America*, *Over Prairie Trails* and *In Search of Myself*.<sup>1</sup> In these "search" books the actualities of Grove's European past as Felix Paul Greve are intricately concealed behind biographical innuendoes and a deceptively simple foregrounding of North American incidents and setting, allowing Grove to taunt the reader: "I believe I have hidden myself fairly well" (*ISM*, 383). His hiding has, in fact, been so effective that his initial American travels between 1909 and 1912, after which time his career as a teacher and writer in Canada verifiably began, are still a matter of conjecture.

Seen in the context of autobiographical art in America and in the light of literature about America's pioneers and immigrants, its frontiers, and its image as land of opportunities and extremes, Grove's travels would appear to be extravagant only in the word's literal sense of "wandering far." Indeed, under the influence of Thoreau's existential philosophy in *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, Grove's simplifications of his life progress matter-of-factly in *A Search for America* and *Over Prairie Trails*. Yet he encounters dramatic snags with each ostensible shift from place (America, prairie, trails) to self, particularly *In Search of Myself*: "In this

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<sup>1</sup>*A Search for America* (1927; rpt. Toronto: New Canadian Library, 1971), abbreviated to *ASA* following quotations from the text; *Over Prairie Trails* (1922; rpt. Toronto: New Canadian Library, 1969), abbreviated to *OPT* following quotations from the text; *In Search of Myself* (1946; rpt. Toronto: New Canadian Library, 1974), abbreviated to *ISM* following quotations from the text.

<sup>2</sup>For biographical information, see D.O. Spettigue, *F.P.G.: the European Years* (Ottawa: Oberon, 1973).

record, I know, I am dying to myself" (*ISM*, 387). Grove's blunt admission of failure as a neo-Romantic journeyman echoes Thoreau's comparable apprehensiveness about *Walden*:

I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be *extra-vagant* enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced. *Extra vagance!* It depends on how you are yarded.<sup>3</sup>

In the following pages I will try to show how Grove's "wandering beyond" was linguistically and geographically not "*extra-vagant* enough" for him to achieve a new identity. There were literally too many open roads open to him as a fugitive from his past in Germany, where he had been a translator, literary dilettante and, one might say, occasional confidence-man. I intend here to demonstrate how Grove methodically manipulates connections between travels in geographical and psychological space and to reveal him as a no less accomplished poseur or trickster in his life as a writer in North America than in his past in Europe. My critical approach to the books under discussion focuses on metaphors, puns and related linguistic foregrounding which, I am convinced, point the direct way to Grove's complex game of hide-and-seek with the reader, a game for which Grove was suitably "yarded." We know of his compulsive lying in Europe;<sup>4</sup> we should also keep in mind his allegedly life-long "foible for coyotes" (*ISM*, 256), those archetypal tricksters of North American folklore.

Phil Branden, Grove's persona in *A Search for America*, has left Europe, expecting to strike it rich in North America. After his rude awakening to crude materialism in Toronto and New York — cities representative of economic success in Canada and the United States — such "success seemed strangely inadequate now, might it be ever so great. What good could it do me if I won all the riches on earth but lost my — growth?" (*ASA*, 103). This revelation follows Phil's experiences as a waiter and book salesman, experiences directly opposed to his European years as a prodigal participant in culinary, literary, and related tasteful exertions of the

<sup>3</sup>(1854; rpt. Garden City: Anchor Books, 1973), p. 272.

<sup>4</sup>André Gide, "Conversation with a German Several Years Before the War," in *Pretexts: Reflections on Literature and Morality by André Gide*, transl. and ed. by Justin O'Brien (New York: Delta Books, 1964), p. 239.

wealthy. His new goal is, he says, "to find in [North America's] labyrinth of roads, and fields, rocks and soils, that spot of humus where I could take root in order that I might grow . . . I suddenly saw myself as a mere germ, as a seed that wanted to be planted" (ASA, 103). His quasi-chthonic metamorphosis from "a hot-house plant used to artificial atmosphere" (ASA, 17) to a plant growing naturally and freely leads him from the cities of the East to the rural Midwest, on to the Great Plains, and eventually to Manitoba. Travelling under the illusion of a geographical quest for the American ideal, he becomes a typically Romantic journeyman rather than (as he envisioned before his inherited wealth ran out) something like a Baedeker tourist to "Yellowstone, the Grand Canyon, and maybe the Yosemite and the Big Trees" (ASA, 17).

There is, however, a strange link between the Big Trees (the giant sequoias) and his seeing himself, either directly or by association, in landscape images, usually in connection with wood. I say "strange" because Grove is addicted to that word in all his books. It seems such an unobtrusive filler, yet it alludes to the foreign, curious elements in Grove's search as much as to the word's relevant German equivalent of *komisch*, meaning "humorous" more often than "curious" or "odd." And strange it is to follow Phil through the wooded hills of Pennsylvania, through wooded river valleys, on a timber raft, to a veneer mill, over railroad ties, to Midwest tree plantations, and railroad ties again, always in search of "humus." Strange, because both the frequency of the references to wood and trees and the context in which we find them give them a greater linguistic authority than would at first seem to be the case.

As soon as Phil is on the train to Toronto after disembarking at Montreal, the railroad cars' "large expanses of costly woods, which were left without the elaborate carvings of European de luxe trains — meant to disguise inferior materials used — delighted [his] eye, which at the same time was scandalized by the cowardly indulgence in puny decorativeness displayed in the brass-work of the lamps" (ASA, 18). This concrete example of New World naturalness in conflict with Old World pretensions prepares the reader for Phil's need to strip his culture-*riche* appreciation of luxury to an unaffected sense of essential values. This process of educational growth is, of course, at the moral centre of the book as Grove's strategically placed quotations from *Walden* and *Sartor Resartus*

indicate.<sup>5</sup> Phil's preoccupation with literal as well as metaphorical clothes underlines his indebtedness to these two books. His middle-class panoply of European culture, his corresponding trunks full of books and wardrobe — almost enough clothes to bar him from entering Canada without an import licence (ASA, 16) — and his re-reading *Sartor Resartus* while roughing it as a tramp, all bear witness to the dialectics between the clothes-make-the-man and the nature-makes-the-man motifs which structure Phil's journey.

In New Jersey, the Garden State, Phil's educational progress towards simplicity reaches a turning point after a glimpse of stifling city life in Newark:

I do not reason or think; instinctively I strike to the left, into the forest, on rising ground. Dry leaves rustle under my feet. The falling light of the moon only half illuminates the roots in which my feet get caught. At last I spread my raincoat on the ground and lie down.

The air is still warm; but everything around is hung with beads of dew. The clean smell of humus, mixed with the smoky haze of the lower air, has something heady; it affects me like new wine. (ASA, 229).

The humus and the elevating company of big trees intoxicate Phil, giving him a sense of resurrection. Yet his new proud vision of himself as an "outcast" and "anarchist" standing "alone . . . against the world" (ASA 229) is full of dramatic irony. He has reached the hill with feet (roots) caught in the roots of the forest, whence he rises after a nightmarish sleep in bodily pain, hardly able to reach a valley stream: "At last I stand. My foot-joints, my ankles, my knees, my hips, and my back — all hurt. But I pick my raincoat up and start a descent from tree to tree" (ASA, 230). His journey's progress appears in jeopardy because of his walking in agony, holding on to trees. While the trees lend him physical support, they, as metaphors of organic growth and maturity, are also subconscious reminders of his over-confidence in his spiritual growth.

The psychologically and physically opposing sensations during this ascent towards wish fulfilment and simultaneous descent towards reality culminate appropriately in *Pennsylvania*:

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<sup>5</sup>A *Search for America*, pp. 105, 223, 317.

in the dusk of the evening, the road I followed gave out; it was on a marshy plain in the hills; it became less and less well marked and finally ended in a number of diverging water-soaked wheel-tracks, not far from a cluster of half-decaying, storm-battered, lightning-rived remnants of trees. Thus I struck out at random, going west. (ASA, 233)

Phil's arrogant confidence in himself breaks on the top of a ridge: "Up here on the heights perched insanity. As if I were fleeing from the threat of the inanimate world above . . . I started to plunge down the hillside, stumbling over rocks, falling headlong over roots . . ." (ASA, 233). This flight from the threat of insanity, which was already mirrored in the "cluster of half-decaying trees," precipitates Phil from a "wanderer in the hills" to a "wanderer in the valleys" (ASA, 234). In the calming proximity of settlements and rivers, and with a notebook at hand to record his thoughts, he is able to continue his educational journey westward with renewed pride in his "strength and endurance" (ASA, 238). As if in response, the "woods began to flame on the east sides of the ridges" (ASA, 238).

From what appears to be casual references to willow-brush, willow-boughs, firewood, a wooded island with "huge domes of trees" (ASA, 245), and from the boards and logs (i.e., partially dressed wood as opposed to trees and branches) floating down the Ohio River, it is a logical step to Phil's raft. It is made of salvaged boards held in place by a kitchen table and has a "layer of willow-boughs for a mattress" (ASA, 246-47). Huck Finn-like, Phil is Mississippi-bound on the Ohio, drifting somewhat grotesquely on cast-off, but solidly wooden, symbols of house and home. The allusions to Huck's freedom on the river become particularly poignant when, soon after Phil's own sudden shipwreck, he rescues an old driftwood gatherer from drowning in a *dead* arm of the river: the man's face "closely resembled the face of Mark Twain" (ASA, 252). With the implicit death of Huck Finn's and Mark Twain's America, the double-dealing extravagance of Phil's "huckleberry-ing" gains momentum.

Helping the old man gather dead wood, chopping fire-wood on a farm in exchange for a meal, becoming a hand in a lumber mill, these are significant stages of Phil's partial reintegration into society. This reintegration is at the expense of his delight in humus, trees, rivers, and frontier idylls. The literal, metaphorical as well as

psychological turning point in his quest for America occurs in a Midwestern small town where he finds that "the Abraham Lincolns live all around" (ASA, 290). They are people like the strangers who take him in, a seeming immigrant-tramp, when he has pneumonia, and the unselfish doctor who pulls him through his complications from the disease. It is ironic that Phil's discovery of so-called Middle America is coupled with his success as a veneer-man who revives the local mill's production of ready-made veneer products. Be it veneers of wood or veneers of European culture, Phil is an expert in making fronts stick. "I'm a veneer-man" (ASA, 307, 309) is his trademark and sly confession on his way further west and north.

To the reader's surprise, Phil's North American wood-lore goes back to his having "grown up in a tree-nursery" (ASA, 320) with childhood memories allegedly strong enough now for him to become an expert pruner. "By this time it also dawned upon me that I could also graft, bud, and transplant," and he buys "the best tools which the market afforded" (ASA, 320). For Grove veneer-making, pruning, grafting, budding, transplanting, and buying the best tools are subtle biographical metaphors. Their ambiguities explain and at the same time question Phil's growth as a new man, just as they elucidate much of Grove's transplantation, the accounts of which he veneered, pruned and grafted so expertly.

In this respect, the recurrent wood/tree motifs in *A Search for America*, together with Grove's philological erudition and playfulness<sup>6</sup> in his cunning biographical games provide a compellingly plain solution to his choice of names: Greve means thicket, grove in Chaucer's English; Phil's Swedish family name is not so much a Scandinavian form of Brandon<sup>7</sup> as simply a Swedish noun meaning the fire; and Grove stands, above all, for the new growth after the fire (Branden) had ravaged the old growth (Greve) and also for a grave in the Low German spoken in Greve's northern Germany. Consequently the recurrence of thickets, deadwood, firewood, trees, and pruning in *A Search for America* imposes a consistent psycho-biographical level of meaning on Phil's already more metaphorical than literal identity and travels. Phil's relatively late resort to pruning and grafting trees suggests that Greve did not use the name of Grove immediately upon arrival in

<sup>6</sup>See, e.g., K.P. Stich, "Settlers of the Marsh, 'A Garbled Extract'?" *Canadian Notes and Queries*, 21 (July, 1978), 8-9.

<sup>7</sup>Spettigue, *Frederick Philip Grove* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969), p. 24.

the United States. Still, at the end of *A Search for America*, a critic of this cryptic autobiographical work may expect only partial success, as if in response to Phil's reconciliation to only "partial victories" (ASA, 382) in his quest.

On the one hand, such partiality attests to Phil's achievement at the end of his journey. He has grown from a "hot-house plant" to an itinerant harvest hand and tree pruner, a man apparently very much in control of the growth of crops, trees and himself. On the other hand, the nature of his victories merely perpetuates his addiction to illusions. While his new-found confidence and poise enable him to shrug off his being cheated out of his fees for pruning a whole plantation (grove?), it is very odd that the plantation owner should resemble the manager of the veneer factory. The reader is clearly being goaded to question the strength of Phil's American veneer: "America is an ideal and as such has to be striven for" (ASA, 382). Phil's extravagant answer is in the form of railroad signal posts which he paints, working his way back to Canada:

When I arrived [in Winnipeg], I had a number of interviews. I wanted to go to foreign settlements and help recent immigrants to build their partial views of America into total views; I wanted to assist them in realizing their promised land. The upshot was that I applied for and obtained a position as a teacher.

I have been a teacher even since; and not only a teacher, but the doctor, lawyer, and business-agent of all the immigrants in my various districts.

And twenty-seven years after the end of my rambles I published the first of my few books. (ASA, 392).

This conclusion bristles with incongruities: he has found the America of Lincoln in Manitoba, not in the United States; the wanderer has become a master of new wanderers; his books as well as the earlier notebook are the final product of his wood-lore — trees of learning; and finally, the underlying theme of clothes-make-the-man is no less ambivalent in Phil's transformation into a North American, who all too easily answers to St. Jean de Crèvecoeur's propagandist definition of an American, than in Phil's earlier roles as a European clothes-man. While he has transferred the geographical search for America to Canada, he has yet to learn that the Canadian bush-garden is as much a yard, to use Thoreau's metaphor again, as the Garden State, Pennsylvania, or anywhere else in North America for cultivating dreams of self-hood in imitation of a Lincoln, a Thoreau and a Twain.

Grove sees his early life as a teacher in rural Manitoba in terms of "crepuscular contentment" as if "cradled . . . in a sense of security, with economic difficulties banished from consciousness" (*ISM*, 254). Yet Grove's naturalist objectivity moves linguistically into vigorous alliance with his resurgent psychological unrest when his twilight happiness as a writer on the vastly unlettered frontier of the so-called Last Best West gives way to the shadows of his life as a fugitive from himself: "I felt an exile. I was an exile" (*ISM*, 235). He recognizes his recurring nostalgia for new beginnings as a psychological prison in the hindsight of *In Search of Myself* as well as in the relative immediacy of *Over Prairie Trails*. Nevertheless Grove says: "This period . . . remains to me the climax of my life" (*ISM*, 308).

On the surface, *Over Prairie Trails* is a sequence of nature essays;<sup>8</sup> a selective record of Grove's weekend travels through the Manitoba bush frontier between Gladstone, where he taught, and Falmouth, where his Canadian wife taught and lived with their daughter. The book's dimensions as a "paradigm of the human experience" have been argued perceptively.<sup>9</sup> Its psycho-biographical nature, however, has remained neglected because of a general contempt for psychological approaches, particularly among Canadian literary critics. It is clearly relevant that Grove's travels through thickets, wastes left by forest fires, groves, swamps, fog, snow, and darkness should allude directly to his dilemma as an exile now "yarded" by domesticity and haunted by duplicity.

Since the nature imagery in *Over Prairie Trails* is essentially analogous to that in the New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Ohio scenes in *A Search for America*, I want to concentrate here on Grove's linguistic scheming:

Underbrush everywhere, mostly symphoricarpus, I thought. Large trunks loomed up, charred with forest fires; here and there a round, white or light-grey stone, ghostly in the waning light, knee-high I should judge. Once I passed the skeleton of a stable — the remnant of the buildings put up by a pioneer settler who had to give in after having wasted effort and substance and worn his knuckles to the bones. The wilderness uses human material up . . . (*OPT*, 10-11; Grove's ellipsis)

<sup>8</sup>Spettigue, *European Years*, p. 199.

<sup>9</sup>W. J. Keith, "Grove's *Over Prairie Trails*: A Re-examination," *Literary Half-Yearly*, VIII No. 2 (July, 1972), 84 and 76-85 passim.



Here, as throughout this book, his botanical and geographical specificity is in counterpoint with words like "loomed," "ghostly," "waning," "skeleton," with subjective idioms like "worn his knuckles to the bones," and statements — complete with afterthoughts in the form of ellipsis marks — like "the wilderness uses human material up . . ." More than anything else, *Over Prairie Trails* is a ghost tale in the tradition of Poe and Hawthorne; and the ghost is Grove's hidden identity which he cleverly dramatizes. Above all his companionship with a "wily," "furtive," "half-guilty looking" (*OPT*, 7) wolf (i.e. prairie wolf or coyote) complements his cryptic thoughts, in the "silence of the grave" of a fog-bound prairie marsh, on being stalked by the memory of his faked suicide on a trip to Sweden in 1909:

and when exhausted at last, you broke down and huddled together on the ground, the werwolf<sup>10</sup> would come, ghostly himself, and huge and airy and weird, his body woven of mist, and in the fog's stately and leisurely way he would kneel down on your chest, slowly crushing you beneath his exceeding weight; and bending and straightening, bending and stretching, slowly — down came his head to your throat; and then he would lie and not stir until morning and suck; and after few or many days people would find you, dead in the woods — a victim of fog and mist . . . (*OPT*, 33-34; Grove's ellipsis).

A variant of the resurrection scene in Pennsylvania (quoted above), this werwolf passage underlines how irrelevant the actuality of Grove's travels is. Grove's often praised accuracy as a scientific or naturalistic observer is just another one of his impressive veneers. It is, I am certain, his most enticing veneer in light of his other reputation as a cumbersome, somewhat Dreiser-like craftsman.

Grove's sly under- and over-statements, his ambiguities, his precision and imprecision, in short, his linguistic mendacities — as one might call them — begin in his preface to *Over Prairie Trails*:

I made thirty-six of these trips: seventy-two drives in all. I think I could still rehearse every smallest incident of every single one of them. With all their weirdness, with all their sometimes dangerous adventure — most of them made at night, and with hardly ever any regard being paid to the

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<sup>10</sup>It is linguistically interesting that Grove, who tends to use conservative British spelling, seems to have slipped up on *werewolf*. *Werwolf* is both the German as well as the simplified English spelling.

weather or the state of the roads — they stand out in the vast array of memorable trifles that constitute the story of my life as among the most memorable ones. Seven drives seem, as it were, lifted above the mass of others as worthy to be described in some detail — as not too trivial to detain for an hour or so a patient reader's kind attention. (*OPT*, xiv)

On the trips he again and again qualifies his observations as "mental vision" and seeing "with my mind's eye"; he overuses "strange" or its synonyms, yet he calls himself "rather a thoroughgoing person" (*OPT*, 19); he occasionally stresses that he means things "quite literally," but at one point assures us that "nothing of what I am going to describe can be observed in that case" (*OPT*, 23); he mentions his "habit of observing the smallest details, even if only subconsciously" (*OPT*, 29); yet he also wonders "how much of what I seemed to divine rather than to perceive was imagination and how much reality" (*OPT*, 36); and he finds it "very hard to say what was reality, what fancy" (*OPT*, 40). These and similar signals to the reader, here much more frequently than in *A Search for America*, juxtapose eye-sight and "mind's eye" (a favorite term of Grove's) in order to open the reader's eyes to *Over Prairie Trails* as a series of artful confessions of a fugitive whose self-centered metaphors and personal puns reflect his confidence in being well-hidden.

"Oh, for the juggling of words! . . ." (*OPT*, 102; Grove's ellipsis). This is, I feel, Grove's central statement about the on-going repetitions and variations in his description of the outer world in order to bare his inner world. It is the "juggling" which adds new life to an otherwise commonplace theme in North American literature. Once accepted by the reader, the "juggling of words" reveals an extravagant trickster who thought he could afford to taunt: "I sometimes fear there is something wrong with my own mentality" (*OPT*, 99). While the psychological turmoil implied here as elsewhere redeems Grove's writing from being merely clever, it is precisely its mechanical, and rational quality, its ratiocination (to use Poe's term), which provides the key to Grove's autobiographical creations. Thus his equivocalness as an autobiographer surfaces even in the wording of a footnote:

It might be well to state expressly here that, whatever has been said in these pages concerning farms and their inhabitants, has intentionally been so arranged as not to apply

to the exact localities at which they are described. Anybody at all familiar with the district through which these drives were made will readily identify every natural landmark. But although I have not consciously introduced any changes in the landscape as God made it, I have in fairness to the settlers entirely redrawn the superimposed man-made landscape. (OPT, 8).

As in *A Search for America*, however, Grove's extravagance lies above all in his self-portrayals through symbols of growth — trees, thickets, groves, and bluffs in abundance — and through metaphors of the weather. The reader needs to be alert to Grove's autobiographical intentions in such statements as: "I am naturally an outdoor creature" (OPT, xiii): "this is not the record of the whims of the wind, but merely the narrative of my drives" (OPT, 79); and "I have kept weather records for whole seasons — brief notes on the everyday observations of mere nothings... They would seem meaningless to most of my fellowmen, I believe; to me they are absorbingly interesting reading when once in a great while I pick an older record up and glance it over" (OPT, 99).

Descriptions of trees and weather structure the seven frontier journeys geographically and psychologically; they also give the journeys a fateful aura when, in the conclusion, Grove focuses on a "fan-shaped formation" of "soldier-clouds" on his last trip:

This arrangement I have for many years been calling "the tree." It is quite common, of course, and I read it with great confidence as meaning "no amount of rain or snow worth mentioning." "The tree" covered half the heavens or more, and nowhere did I see any large reaches of clear sky. Here and there a star would peep through, and the moon seemed to be quickly and quietly moving through the lines. Apparently he was the general who reviewed the army. (OPT, 135)

The words I emphasized are of the type meant to detract from the psycho-biographical and, at times, cosmic intensity of Grove's narration, here his misjudging the weather (sky, heaven, fate, emotions) and his ending up almost stranded and maimed as a result of over-confidence: "I am confinned that the skies broke my nerve that night" (OPT, 145). This admission turns *Over Prairie Trails* into a bitter-sweet self-parody. Through its metaphoric language the book moves compellingly from the level of nature essays to the level of psycho-biography.

*In Search of Myself*, Grove's late confessional work, is the remarkable record of a man whose nerve has been broken but whose veneers have remained intact. Since my topic is Grove's North America, I shall disregard the sections of the book in which Grove covers up his European past. (It is only his Canadian years, by the way, which, as he "vows" in equivocal way, come close to the historical in this account [ISM, 11]). Here my focus is naturally on his Canadian experiences.

In the prologue Grove is stuck with his car near Simcoe, Ontario, in "a morass dotted here and there with the dead stumps of huge trees of a departed generation: swamp-oak, white ash and pine, now blackened by carbonization" (ISM, 1). The morass is an extravagant example of decay rather than growth — even the traditional tree of life, the evergreen, is dead. Grove's car, however, and his errand to pick up a domestic helper for his home in Simcoe, are signifiers, not of decay, but of that economic success envisioned at the beginning of his American quest and now partially achieved through, above all, the purchase of a farmhouse with, as he says, "possibilities":

The window-sashes needed replacing in order to bring back its colonial dignity; but the dignity was still there. What had attracted me more than anything else was a grove of cedars and spruces between the house and the highway that ran past the property. Behind the house, though not on my land, towered an elm which was one of the most magnificent trees I had even seen in my life. The fields, too, were divided from each other by rows of fine trees: basswood, elm, ash, maple. A meadow behind the barnyard was crossed by a pleasant creek. (ISM, 419).

This pastoral setting is an extreme opposite to the marsh scene so reminiscent of similar passages in *A Search for America* and *Over Prairie Trails*. Both the house and the marsh are representative of Grove's history of successes and failures in trying to form and reform himself.

At Simcoe, Grove shows himself as a writer contemplating his lack of public recognition. He distinguishes between "made" and "grown" books, emphasizing that he can produce only the latter kind (ISM, 421), tree-like, Grove-like books of psycho-biography, as it were, in accordance with his parable in the prologue:

and if there is nobody to hear, it remains as though it had never been said; the tree falling in a forest where there is none to hear, produces no sound. A book arises as much in the mind of the reader as in that of the writer. (*ISM*, 6).

Readers have indeed failed to heed the intense ironies of Grove's carefully orchestrated imagery. The trees, as I have shown, serve to recall, reflect or foreshadow stages on his literary journey of Nabokovian equivocations from the old Grove in Europe to the new Grove in North America. The trees also provide a metaphoric link to the making of books (cf., not only paper as an end-product of wood, but also tree of life/book of life). Thus, through their position in the prologue of *In Search of Myself*, the swamp trees "blackened by carbonization," represent the unpropitious history of Grove's confessional books.

Grove's irony about himself and, indeed, his goading arrogance towards the reader have made him alternately blacken and whiten his life. The "promise of paradise" which he sees in the "desolation" (*ISM*, 301) of the Canadian frontier includes autobiographical writing as a form of catharsis through creative burials of his past. Even his chronic and often debilitating spinal problems, which he mentions in all three books, corroborate this sense of decline. His weak spine, which holds his skeleton tree together, quite literally explains his "broken nerve." Grove's mask of specificity — be it about his travels, or the physical environment, or his body — always blends smoothly with his role as a trickster and a minor Faustus figure whose success lies in exploiting the reader's expectation and gullibility.

At the end of Grove's journey there is an appropriate metamorphosis of nature into art, of trees into panels and doors, as he is ostensibly renovating his house:

The dining room, to mention one thin, was panelled in chestnut and elm, to be finished in the natural colour of the woods — all the finishing to be done by myself. Every panel had to be selected, to be compared with all the other panels, to be matched and tested in the light to which it was to be exposed. The "figure" of the wood used for the posts had to be scanned and harmonized; the three doors were made up from timbers inspected at the mills. As they are today, they look, without imitating anything, like symphonic movements from Beethoven's Sixth. (*ISM*, 445).

House, panels, doors, posts, light exposure, Beethoven's "Pastoral" — Grove is in remarkable control of autobiographical innuendoes. He appears to have finished his quest for America with the final movement of the "Pastoral" — homecoming and grateful feelings after the storm. Yet behind the veneer of the gentleman-farmer at peace with the world remain the agony and duplicity of the writer-fugitive hiding behind platitudes: "My life was, or should have been, the life of the imagination. . . . I have often doubted whether there is anything that I can legitimately call 'I'" (*ISM*, 452). This is no longer the voice of the Grove whose dream of regeneration on the frontier tended to echo Huck Finn's famous dictum: "I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before." Instead it is the voice of Twain's Mysterious Stranger who takes leave at the end of the book, saying: "Nothing exists but you. And you are but a thought — a vagrant thought, a useless thought, a homeless thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities!"

Taking the historicity of Grove's travelogs as unessential, I have emphasized their psycho-biographical structure and energy. The geographic-historic illusion of his travels in search of America and self is never linguistically clearer than in the sequence of his moves in Canada from Plymouth (as he called Falmouth in *Over Prairie Trails*) to Eden, to Ashfield, to Rapid City, to Port Hope (all real places). He arrived at Port Hope out of money, coasting down Main Street in a car just out of gas, and coming to a stop just outside the Royal Bank (a real bank). As if the journey from Grove's Plymouth Rock to a royal haven were not sufficiently bizarre, he adds:

"You need no identification here, Mr. Grove," [the bank manager] said. "I heard you speak in this town a year ago."

Two days later I heard that this manager had suddenly died, from causes unknown. (*ISM*, 404).

To conclude my study of Grove's *Wanderjahre*, of his quest for literary greatness and of his narrative games with the reader I let Grove speak again:

I likened my work to . . . a tree falling [in virgin forest]; its sound arises merely in the nerve centres of him who hears. I remained unheard; there was no sound; there was no art. My work was futile. So long as I remained my sole reader, whatever of cunning there may have been in my writing — and naturally, I thought there was a good deal — was a sort of spiritual self-abuse. (*ISM*, 358)

As I have shown, self-centeredness and cunning very much shape the themes, settings and metaphors of Grove's literary travels. Yet a crucial question remains. Does all the marvellous cunning make up for the "spiritual self-abuse," the self-pity, the lack of honesty? I fear not. It is, after all, only the reader's awareness of Grove's brilliant manipulation of his identity that raises the search books above the level of plodding prose. Though exceedingly clever and not quite without a sense of redeeming self-parody, Grove's achievement ultimately lacks the creative detachment, enchantment and vision that one finds in the autobiographical artistry of such North American "journeymen" as Thoreau, Melville and Nabokov.

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