

## GROVE AND THE MATTER OF GERMANY: THE WARKENTIN LETTERS AND THE ART OF LIMINAL DISENGAGEMENT

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Andreas Weidenhammer (1863-1925), born in Heidelberg, Ontario, editor of *Canadischer Bauernfreund* from 1903-9, gives Grove his first job in Manitoba. By the time he dies in 1925, as Inspector of Schools, he has changed his name to Andrew Willows. The anti-German hysteria of World War I, which changed Berlin to Kitchener, forced a man of German origin, born in Canada, to change his name in his sixties.

But there is a retention. Weidenhammer does not let his name go completely.

die Weid-e. fem. (pl. -en) willow.

Weiden: Willows gives a job to Greve: Grove.

How different is this kind of camouflage and disguise/fear to Grove's own predicament?

Of course, Greve-Grove had an earlier incentive. As someone who had faked his death a new name would be in order. As someone who had been in prison in Germany the only way past Canadian or American immigration authorities was another name. A criminal record spelled no entry.

Yet, like Weidenhammer, he stays as close to the core of his name as possible.

The act is one of translation, not denial or betrayal.

In the midst of the constraints of circumstance, there is personal and cultural integrity.

Grove was a German who became a writer. He was a writer who committed "suicide" and became, by this act, an anonymous person, an underground man. We say he was an immigrant, but this is a superficial, administrative category. He would probably have seen himself as an exile, in the beginning at any rate. Again this is a moral, psychological condition. Germany, being German, being a writer in German would have been the reference terms for him in the situation of exile, the positive poles of reflective concern in a place — North America — that had no reality for him. It was a negative entity: nowhere. Germany held Grove, attached him to its existence. By leaving it he left history; by leaving history he left his

individuality. The compact between history and society in Europe placed the identity of the individual into a concrete, metaphysically unproblematic world. What Grove's arrival in North America did was to destroy this compact. In *A Search for America* he put the matter succinctly:

When I came from Europe, I came as an individual; when I settled down in America, at the end of my wanderings, I was a social man. My view of life, if now, at the end, I may use this word once more, had been, in Europe, historical, it had become, in America, ethical.<sup>1</sup>

This is an astute, and in its own way, a remarkable statement. The quality of individual being, of being a shaped, coherent self replete with personality, background and prospect that was Frederick Philip Grove (as Greve) dissolved, became useless. His sense of himself became problematical. The recesses of a highly specific individuality that both Joyce and Proust examined with such curiosity became unavailable to Grove. He settled for himself as a proposition, reflective of man in his social (i.e. most general, anthropological) aspect; he settled for America as an abstract plain voided of history in which the ethical dilemmas of this universalized, social man were acted out. He was not alone in this and the large outlines of the European response to America are visible throughout Grove's work.

What is interesting about Grove is the *conscious* way he eventually negotiated the problem of an abandoned self in a strange world where disguise was always necessary and, in circuitous ways, betrayal was always possible. "I must be I" is the constant refrain of his work. He negotiated his dilemma by redefining himself as a *writer*; that is, as a human being the primary aspect of whose personality becomes the degree of consciousness he brings to the world and to his experience. It is as if a Cartesian *cogito*, by distancing itself from the experience and the world as linked but separable items, overcomes the experience as a meshed-in aspect of the world, of the world as a meshed-in aspect of experience. In Germany, love, death, stealing, being in university, or prison, or Berlin are textured *into* Grove. They are the corpuscles of his subjective experience rather than categories of his existence as *homo sapiens*. Asserting himself as a writer became a

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<sup>1</sup>Frederick Philip Grove, *A Search for America* (Ottawa: The Graphic Publishers Limited, 1927), p. 436.

shorthand and coded way of asserting his sense of self. And asserting such a self, even in a distantiated manner, was part of Grove's imperative for survival after his flight from Germany.

The other conscious programme for survival in the early years was marriage. When Grove pulled the two projects together — marriage and writing — he found himself alive with the possibility, as he put it, of using the word *life* once more.

He may have lost the right, in his eyes, to feel easy with this word when he "arranged" his death from a steamer in the Baltic. Apart from this, however, the early years of transition would have been sufficiently difficult for Grove to have withheld the full privilege of the term "living" from them. Not being in Germany, for a young man who had stepped so messily and decisively from history, would have been the equivalent of not being in life. The attempt to re-enter a sphere of living with new associations in a new world on fresh ground rules involved a re-assessment of that core of his existence where being himself and being German were closely engaged.

When we first meet Grove in Canada it is against a German Mennonite background, on the eve of a World War. The underground man re-surfaces.

The most impassioned letters of his life were written by Grove to Warkentin on December 6, 1913, and February 10, 1914. Warkentin was now in Germany, soon to be interned by the outbreak of war.

The subject is Germany, abandoned by Grove only five years before, but still haunting his conscience and pressuring his consciousness.

Van Gennep defined *rites de passages* as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position, and age."<sup>2</sup> He divides the transitional rite as a process into three stages: separation, margin, re-aggregation. Turner uses the term liminal for the middle phase which inflicts a limbo, in-between condition on those who undergo it.

Grove's letters to Warkentin register the confusion of this phase in an instructive, and from the immigrant rite of passage perspective, classical manner. It is important not to dismiss Grove's

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<sup>2</sup>Cited by Victor Turner, "Variations on a Theme of Liminality," in Sally Moore and Barbara Meyerhoff, eds., *Secular Ritual* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977), p. 36.

utterances as psychological tantrum. Margaret Stobie does dismiss Grove in this way:

As Grove's sense of injury grows, the tone of the letters changes. His world is now a smaller one, depending on small things that have suddenly ballooned to blot out distance, perspective, judgement, proportion.

The detailing of the bottles of seeds, the mounting of insects, the cost of postage sounds like the cry of a man who sees a last chance slipping away. He is an outsider and unwanted. To ease his mortification, Grove escapes into the legendary world that he had already devised of the Swedish father and Scotch mother and of himself as a sophisticated man of the world, a scholar, a far-traveller.<sup>3</sup>

Margaret Stobie has given Grove the benefit of astute and stubbornly honest attention. But here she gives him the benefit of what Lawrence called the "old stable ego" in a manipulative, controlling, intentional relationship to his utterances. The case in these letters is not so simple. Grove is writing in disguise, from hiding, caught in liminal currents in which Greve and Grove caught between Weidenhammer and Warkentin stands on transplanted German Mennonite ground trying to sort out the complex terms of his existence, to negotiate the difficult terrain between Van Gennep's phases of separation from Germany and re-aggregation to North America. These complex of terms will eventually become the themes of his fiction. But in the letters to Warkentin they present themselves with the ambiguity, the abrupt tendentiousness, the sudden insight and the fit of irritation that goes along with newly discovered matter. Grove wrestles with Warkentin, a man he hardly knew, who would return to the Mennonite schools of Manitoba in 1918 and live until 1971. Warkentin was a symbolic correspondent in a symbolic place who provided Grove with the ideal foil for a debate with himself. It is from these letters that *In Search for Myself*, *A Search for America* eventually spring. He is juggling with the terms Germany, America, Europe, Canada, England. He is juggling with them as cultural forces harboring conflicts and divisions that have to be exercised, exorcized, sorted out. Grove would never allow himself to be either this vulnerable or this revelatory about himself again.

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<sup>3</sup>Margaret Stobie, "Grove's Letters from the Mennonite Reserve," *Canadian Literature*, 59 (Winter 1974), p. 70.

Turner speaks of the most characteristic midliminal symbolism as being that of paradox, of being both this *and* that. He speaks of masked figures invading the liminal scene. In Grove's letters we see the paradox of a correspondent who is, as we now know, in hiding, a masked figure enacting and exploring the paradoxes of being both this *and* that, of being German *and* American. Within the masking, by a process of rhetorical and fabular extrapolation, a persona, a role, and a terrain of symbolic, ideal proportions are elaborated. By the time we emerge from these letters a degree of fixity and assertion have descended on Frederick Philip Grove. Many readers have sensed a postulated quality to this assertion and perhaps like Margaret Stobie have visited a degree of impatience on Grove and his work in consequence.

A closer look at the liminal transitional phase of the Warkentin letters may be of value.

The first letter we have of Grove's, written to Warkentin from Winkler on September 7, 1913 is *in German*. It is a short letter, requesting three books on educational matters, beginning with a short introductory paragraph which one might be inclined to overlook in a more neutral, less deliberate correspondent.

Ich bin so froh, jemanden in Deutschland zu haben der mir vielleicht behilflich sein kann, dass ich Ihnen möglicherweise lästig fallen werde. Vielleicht wird es Ihnen zur Genugtuung gereichen dass Sie ja schliesslich Ihrer Heimat helfen.

I am so happy to have someone in Germany who may be able to help me, that I may possibly become a nuisance to you. Perhaps it would be of some satisfaction to you that you are, after all, helping your country.<sup>4</sup>

The formal re-opening of lines of communication with his native land is in his native language. Subsequently, whether because Warkentin chose to return the correspondence in English or because a symbolic point had been made by Grove, the letters are in English. Yet, they are still written by a German, about Germany as a political, economic, social entity; about the relations of Germany to other nations, particularly England and the United

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<sup>4</sup>The text of the Warkentin letters is Desmond Pacey's, *The Letters of Frederick Philip Grove* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), pp. 3-14. The references come from such a definable and limited body of text that I have omitted page details in favour of location by date of letter built into the flow of the article.

States; about the mythologies and hostilities of nation that were becoming more volatile and fierce on the eve of the World War. The syntax, the tone, the subject place, the Germanness of Grove, and the German contribution to European civilization and history at the centre of this correspondence. The mood of his letters to Warkentin changes in response to Warkentin's own letters. We do not have these. But we can reconstruct from Grove's letters the temper of Warkentin's replies. We need to do this in order to develop a sense of Grove's initiatives in the exchange. He is glad to have someone *in Germany* to *help* him and he concedes that he may become a *nuisance*. Grove anticipated making demands but was clearly not expecting to have demands made on him. Warkentin's first six months at Leipsig University involved a good deal of culture shock for him and this sense of dismay and disillusion found its way to Grove in Winkler. The young man was homesick, disliked the drizzling weather, was impatient with the slow pace of the German worker. He gave Grove information about his curriculum in November 1913, but by Christmas the correspondence from Warkentin had become a jeremiad. He hates Germany and is appalled by the rampant patriotism and the sense of superiority that is sweeping the country. The prostitution and sexual manners of a large city alarmed the young Mennonite from Manitoba. Grove quotes one sentence from a Warkentin letter: "If we had waited for German philosophy to decide . . . where would we be?" It shows his impatience with the academic traditions of German idealist philosophy. None of this should be surprising. What is important for the reader of this correspondence, however, is the *reactive* nature of Grove's handling of the questions of German nationalism, German science, German philosophy, German claims to superiority, and of the *Sexuelle Frage* in Germany. He deals with them because Warkentin has brought them up.

It is when we address the issue of *how* Grove handles these questions that one begins to get a sense of the negative and the positive aspects of his response to Warkentin. There is an objective and a subjective dimension to his replies. If Warkentin says that there is open prostitution in Leipsig Grove will point out that this is true of Paris and London and New York as well. If Warkentin says that Germans are slow and plodding Grove refers to trading figures which show that German exports are booming. That is the objective aspect of his defence of Germany.

When Grove is obliged to respond from his own subjective experience as a *German* the letters become agitated and, at times, anguished. At these points the exchange has turned around. Grove's contact in Germany has become a nuisance for Grove and in replying to that nuisance — a nuisance of conscience and consciousness for him — layers of his personality open up. The defence of Germany which began in a kind of negotiated and public manner suddenly, under the impress of Warkentin's lamentation, became a defence of himself. This was a private terrain which he suffered but did not yet control or understand. His writing career would take up this burden. But in 1913 and early 1914 Grove registered the weight and the confusion and could only begin to put out tendrils of explanation, of expiation.

The transitional rite of separation, margin and re-aggregation is carried through these letters with ambivalence and posture. Where the correspondence is most subjective it may often be least intentional. The tendrils of explanation are often called forth by the passion and issue of the moment and, in this sense, constitute a local and immediate explanation. Grove made an observation to Warkentin in February 1914 which harbours an important distinction. "I did not want you to like Germany — but I did want you to like the experience you are going through." His own improvised explanations attach to the *experiences* he himself has gone through, somewhat apart from the anchor of place and culture that has accompanied those experiences. The correspondence juggles a series of defensive strategies: of Germany, of himself as a German, of himself as American, of himself as a self which is neither German nor American. The experience he is undergoing is filled with dilemmas but at the level of experience it is neither authentic nor inauthentic. It simply is. The local explanations that he calls up function to satisfy and reinforce the observations he is making to Warkentin. The purpose is pedagogical in relation to Warkentin, psychological in relation to himself and organizational in relation to the experiences from which the explanations emerge and toward which they eventually, having consolidated themselves, reconverge. By the time Warkentin is in Ruhleben Prison Camp and Grove has married Catherine Wiens, the future Canadian novelist has fabricated from the bits and pieces of this correspondence a fictional biography. He has moved from separation to re-aggregation. There are a number of ways we may

phrase the reconstruction. We can say that Grove has reshaped his biography; that he has symbolically cut himself off from Germany; that he changed his idea of himself. He has tied the improvised tendrils of explanation to Warkentin into a fully fledged myth and it will be from the web of significance sustained by this myth that his writing career will grow.

In December 1913 Grove addresses Warkentin as an *American*: "You American people are funny." His affection for "staid old Germany" is evident. Two months later, under the sting of Warkentin's hostility to Germany Grove retreats: "Also, of course, I hate Germany. I hate America too, but probably a trifle less, because I am here." Canada is an absent term in Grove's essential thinking. Europe and America, with Germany representing Europe, are the poles of his discourse. Yet although Germany has shortcomings it "is the one really instructive country where Americans ought to go." Grove cuts off the ambivalence with a declaration: "Yes, I am afraid, I *am* an American, always was one, sorry to say so. *I* could no longer live in Germany." In a rhetorical sense this is sheer assertion, but if one looks at the italicized words one can detect the inner echo of a truth being spoken. He, *Greve*, cannot live in Germany; he, *Grove*, is an American.

It is between the difficult denial "I hate Germany" and the bittersweet acquiescence "I *am* an American" that we meet for the first time the great fabrication of Grove's new life.:

My father was a Swede, my mother a Scotchwoman, I was raised in Germany, I have lived in pretty nearly every country in Europe, in N[orth] A[merica] and Canada, I have travelled in Africa, through Asia, in Australia, I know India and China a little, the islands south of Asia fairly well — so I believe — speaking merely geographically — I can claim a certain 'manysidedness.'

There is a Whitmanesque glow to this kind of utterance. Grove is certainly embracing global space and there is an arrogance to the manner which overwhelms the deception about his parents. It is simply one item in a self-generating exaggeration which pursues its own hyperbolic logic:

Also as far as 'education' goes (the ' ' means that I think very little of what is commonly called education) — I speak English, French, German, Italian and Arabian — and I have a fair knowledge of Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, Spanish and Swedish with their respective literature. . . .



This tapestry of universal claims is a mask of invention being produced at a great pace. The syntax bears this out. As a constructed fable it is amenable to a variety of contextual explanations and perhaps, more important for Grove, *usable* in his subsequent career.

The immediate context would be the value of the fabrication as an association-dissociation device for handling Warkentin (= Canada) in Germany by Grove (= Germany) in Canada. The mood of aggrandizement has an imperial outreach to it that has some echoes of the pre-1914, post Congress of Berlin German drive for colonies. This is the overseas German making a non-parochial, non-Burger gesture: Grove as *auslander Deutsch*. The idiom of empire added to the temptation of the universal and the transcendental would naturally lead Grove into this language and the posture of self behind it. The shades of Bismark and Whitman hover around the re-making of Frederick Philip Grove.

The imperial omniscience he attributes to his putative self is a supportive fiction for his claim to "manysidedness," a claim necessary to *refute* the narrow-minded accusations which Warkentin directed at the Germans, and which Grove will re-direct at Winkler, and North America. But the main function of the imperial stance is to graft and neutralize a combination of opinion and experience that Grove needs to get under psychological, and subsequently, artistic, control. Thus, in relation to the sexual question he makes "an alarming statement" to Warkentin: "I do not object to sexual intercourse without marriage — but I object to just those consequences. I also object to premature development of the sexual instincts."

This is an *opinion* and as such is somewhat safe. We share our opinions with the world and they often derive from the culture or the group to which we belong. Rhoda Metraux, for instance, in her examination of German child-rearing books in the period of Grove's letter and of his own upbringing, noted that "the greatest anxiety expressed by experts is connected with the idea that the child may be weakened and spoiled, may become unsocial and prematurely sexually aware (*frühreif*) through parental overattentiveness, overcarefulness, and overfeeding with foolish affection."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Cited in Ethel Nurge, "Some Depictions of German Cultural Character" in John W. Bennett, ed., *The New Ethnicity: Perspectives from Ethnology* (St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1975), p. 237.

Grove's sentences about sexuality, marriage and premature development are a mixture of the "unorthodox" and the "orthodox," but they are so within the confines of a debate. Consequently, when he releases himself into that debate he has distanced his experience into being an example of something.

I have suffered immensely myself from that cause. I think I was 15 years old when I was 'seduced' by a married woman.

Grove is placing cultural, historical and geographical frames onto his life (selected aspects of it) and by doing so thematizes it. Warkentin was a blessing in disguise. He gave Grove an occasion to "place" his essential self (a hidden, previously secluded existence) into a manageable relationship to the various worlds he had endured, transgressed, betrayed.

After his confession Grove returns to the realm of opinion again, this time concerning the urban nature of German civilizations. He is shuttling between the private and the public, between fact, fable and fiction. The shoring up of the first person continues:

I believe I have been through every representative Northwest of America with the exception of the extreme Northwest of Canada and everywhere I found the closed mind.

Grove seems, at these moments, to be talking *through* Warkentin more than *to* him, to be talking *from* an extrapolated dimension of the immigrant experience. When he has detached the purely personal and subjective aspect of his experience, from his point of view, Grove can introduce his Winkler (echoes of *Winkeltum*, his synonym for ignorance and "cornerdom") encounters. There is a genuine *cri de coeur* here which Professor Stobie finds irritating but which exemplifies a set of cultural observations which Grove believes to be true apart from their connection to him. A little later in this letter he speaks of himself valuing "even one tiny little bit of found knowledge immensely more than all the deeds ever done." The expression "found knowledge" is particularly appropriate for the way in which Grove with naturalistic and almost pious industry *quarried* his own *literally* lived life for significance and meaning. His Winkler battles constitute such found knowledge and it is from this base (common to both Warkentin and himself in many of its

aspects) that Grove can find a voice which is passionate, impersonal and of some philosophical seriousness:

In the whole of life I do not see any sense. If I want to be truthful I must say that in our individual effort I see only a struggle to get over it in the best possible way. I stand apart, aloof, if you want to put it that way. It is a horrible thought to me that I am *acting*, 'doing' at all.

This is genuine speaking: it does not deal in paradox. He will develop the opposition of "doing" and "knowing," of the active and the contemplative life. But after his faked suicide, his escape to America, his even now invisible years, the moving simplicity of the admission "It is a horrible thought to me that I am *acting*, 'doing' at all" is striking. Grove has found it possible to speak of himself with candour and a degree of freedom which is equally striking.

Whenever you touch life you make a mess of it. When you are young you don't notice it so much.

Grove is not young in this way any more. He sees himself now as a spectator, someone who watches, observes, analyses, "who wants to know." In a most poignant phrase which we may take literally, soberly, he writes: "That is my only salvation."

Grove is writing at white heat at this point with a clarity and a despair that give one the impression of having been freshly minted. His reading, his travels, his watching, his *being* find a bitter focus in which the asserted and hard-fought-for imperial self must sustain its existence against bleak odds:

You say: 'If we have waited for German philosophy to decide . . . where would we be?' But where *are* we!?! Is life one trifling little bit less raw, less cruel today than it was 10,000 years ago? Only the robust thick skinned people ever could endure active life: the rest of them went to the wall or into the wilderness. I am the latter.

This is social darwinism imbued with the language of religious sadness and finding an almost existentialist habitation deep within Grove's mind. It will be a mood which will touch almost every subject that Grove sets out to handle. Like the slow, penetrating drizzle which discomfited Warkentin in Germany, the darwinian-

apocalyptic pattern always seemed to emerge from the events that Grove scrutinized. But scrutiny, reflection, analysis was the only option open to an embattled species whose own version of what it ought to be, to be human, was so out of kilter with the facts of its own history and the evidence that was coming in from the physical universe and the study of animal behaviour. Mindless action was out of the question; actionless mind was not a visibly exciting alternative, but it was, like the penetrating drizzle of North Germany, more fruitful than the destructive downpour of sheer action. One can see why Grove was so reluctant to yield to Warkentin's impatience with German philosophy. Too much, beyond Germany and embracing the destiny of man at the outset of a brutal century, was at stake. Against this backdrop the Whitmanesque-Bismarkian posture of the imperial self becomes more comprehensible. There is no logical reason why the naturalistic assaults on the religious and humanist ambitions for man should not have overwhelmed one of the last bastions of these pretensions: a privileged almost sacred sense of a self in a rational, aloof, filtering relationship to its own existence. Where proofs could not be marshalled assertion had to be invoked as an unconditional imperative. I must be I. Who, or whatever that I may be. It was an extraordinary dilemma for a man who wished to write but who had neither the euphoric, culturally sanctioned optimism of Whitman nor the stark, action-based but also culturally sanctioned *Realpolitik* of Bismark. Add to this his exile, his suicide, his changed name, his hiddenness in a strange land and his defence of his self becomes comprehensible.

There is a drama of introspective power going on in the italics of the first person in this correspondence, in the rhetoric, the emphases and the anguished nuance that Grove strives for whenever the occasion or the syntax of language requires that he write the most complex of all simple words: I.

The backdrop of his defence of mind is a raw, cruel one of 10,000 years in which the thin skinned among men — which includes those with intellectual, moral or compassionate natures — go to the wall or into the wilderness. "I am the latter," says Grove, a man who has been to a literal wall and who resides, from his point of view, in the wilderness. What he is fighting against is the terrifying possibility that the wilderness may indeed prove to be the final expression of the wall: extinction. Consequently, the intensity

of his response to Winkler. A squabble with a fellow teacher is an either-or situation for Grove. He has no further ground to yield because all ground has become apocalyptic, holy. "With our friend P.H. it is fight, I am afraid. It looks as if the issue will soon be: he or I." From the detached perspective of history and if one isolates the educational politics one might feel that Grove has a kind of tunnel vision. But it is context and perspective that determine the significance of an event for its participants and Grove's response gives us a graphic glimpse of how he saw himself, the self that is attempting to negotiate a rite of passage out of chaos into a re-ordered world.

But I am bleeding. The things said about me here are sometimes funny, sometimes they hurt because there is a kernel of truth in them. I cannot afford to pay any attention to that. I *have got* to win out.

Paradoxically, even in the wilderness one has to be thick skinned in order to survive, in order to direct questions at life — which it may repudiate or ignore but which still have to be asked. Grove's defence of the philosophical intelligence comes from a passionate association with the aspirations of that intelligence. He gives us, in his outburst to Warkentin, an *apologia pro vita sua*. The notion of the independent observer is one of the working assumptions of science; it becomes part of the functional assertion of Grove. With some irony and a little tiredness he points out to Warkentin that "Even Science never explains: it describes; describes more and more minutely — and I enjoy the spectacle."

What one realizes at this stage is the sheer exhaustion of Grove's parrying with Warkentin and his stiff but eloquent juggling with his own thoughts and feelings about the host of issues that we have indicated make up the substance of these letters. We have suggested that the transformations going on apace in this exchange have the characteristics of the middle, liminal stage of Victor Turner's analysis of ritual. But the most remarkable utterance of this seminal and symbolic debate comes when Grove wants to disengage himself from the mess of assumption and emotion that the subjective pressures of their private situation has visited on both correspondents. Grove gets fed up with the terms of his defence and of Warkentin's attack on Germany. He gives vent to a surrealistic oath:

Let the slow, careful German laborers of the mind work for me, and let the whole city of Leipsig go to smash, let the traffic be stopped and the fire department lift trolley cars!!

This is a vehement curse of dissociation. It is the *non serviam* of Frederick Philip Grove, the man who was in another land and another language a writer and who in a new land and a new language would be a writer, again, anew. The curse is also a prayer: "let the slow, careful German laborers of the mind work for me. . . ." — it is the world of Daedalus, of artifices of the mind, of exile, cunning, of the artist not romantic and lyrical in his intensity, but reflective, deliberative and, in his mid-thirties, no longer young.

The psychological distraction that Grove displays in part of this correspondence and which was a natural response to a fairly distracted life up to this point yields to a tougher, more impersonal conception of himself in relation to his previous German experiences and to his new role in Canada. The build-up of what one called the imperial self, the Whitmanesque dimension of rhetorical self-presentation, constitutes a mediating stage between the psychological reaction to his world and a more phenomenological, impersonal (in Eliot's sense of the word) reaction to found, known aspects of a world thematized by a reflective concern that gave it and his own efforts as a writer in relation to it, a deep seriousness. Grove has firmed up the interior uncertainties of his predicament. One might say that he circumvented the dis-ease of exile and immigration, which threatened to overwhelm him, by becoming the analyst of this dis-ease.

This is, of course, a private victory for Grove which gave him considerable subjective confidence. He has fabricated a host of allusions which enable him to write. And he will begin to do this in books like *Over Prairie Trails* and *A Search for America* with great power. It is not surprising that his first ventures, after having consolidated the fragments and aspirations of a difficult situation, will involve him in an examination of his new environment in its physical and symbolic aspects. The question that may be asked in the wake of his ritualistic interaction with Warkentin is this: is Grove, *from hiding*, performing Crevecoeur/De Tocqueville analyses of North America? It is an intriguing question.

Grove's reference, in the Warkentin 10.2.14 letter, to his former marriage is a paranthetical insertion. It comes as a bracketted comment after his espousal of the contemplative life as his only

salvation and preceding his observation about the value of found knowledge. A general argument about science and the slow German mind has led to a side reflection of a personal kind:

As for my marriage, that has gone to smash; something I have been working for for the last five years. I don't blame the girl — I merely don't understand her. Difference of age was considerable; she was my pupil before she went to college. At Christmas I went down to Arkansas — into the hospital!! And when I came out after a week of raging fever, I did not know my world any longer! I was so changed. Well, enough of that.

Why should Grove have introduced this item at this point? It is presumably an aspect of his biography. It suggests that Warkentin was aware of Grove's marriage although no one in Winkler saw the woman. Douglas Spettigue has canvassed the evidence around this relationship with what seems to have been an American girl. He came up with nothing. Yet, although Grove could fabricate in the grand Felix Krull manner or less grandly in the prosaic but crucial immigrant manner, he is unlikely to have distorted the kernel of truth that gave a quality of subjective authenticity to his fabrications. He was, in his own way, fastidious within the constraints of a predicament that circumstances and the botched antics of his twenties in Germany had created for him. Again, if we look at the passage with literal eyes, attentive to the masking that he was practising as the idiom of his contact with the world, we notice that Grove permits us to conclude that he has been working *for* a marriage for five years rather than *at* a marriage. So it may be *plans* for marriage that have gone smash and it could be that the fall-out of this smash explains his observation to Warkentin that he had nothing against sex outside of marriage, as long as one avoided promiscuity or issue.

The facts behind this passage are obscure. The tone and the attitude it reveals are not. Grove comes across somewhat like the bachelor of Henry James first novel, *Watch and Ward* (serial publication 1871), who adopts a fatherless child and conceives of the idea of rearing her in *his* image of the ideal wife, to be his wife. As Nora's cousin Fenton phrases it: "It seemed to him an extremely odd use of one's time and capital, this fashioning of a wife to order."<sup>6</sup> Grove had been working for the marriage for five years: it

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<sup>6</sup>Henry James, *Watch and Ward*. Quoted by S. Gorley Putt, *The Fiction of Henry James* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 27.

was a project. She had been his student before going to college. The difference in age was considerable. Roger Lawrence, the protagonist of *Watch and Ward* would not have recognized his temperament in Grove; as a character he is quite different. But James would have spotted the fashioning, shaping intent and would have relished and probably polished into more astringent focus the phrase: "I don't blame the girl — I merely don't understand her." It is in the understated power of the "merely" and the emphatic "understand" that one explanation for the marriage parenthesis suggests itself. He has sandwiched his Jamesian "scene" between his defence of the contemplative mind and his use of the term "found knowledge." The contemplative life he defines as "the life of the spectator who wants to *know*, not to do. The marriage project had all the ambiguous ingredients of watching, wanting to know and understand, wanting to do and not doing. Clearly, Grove would like the appropriateness of act to follow on a fullness of knowing the conditions and the consequences of action. He would like to get married but on his conditions with the relationship in his control, in the control of his *understanding*. In this way the element of design and intention is visited on what would otherwise be accident and mess. His letter to his future wife, Catherine Wiens on June 29, 1914, in relation to the marriage festivities of John Enns, his fellow teacher, bears out this interpretation. Grove's Roger Lawrence passage is, then, his application of science and the slow German mind to a very private experience which has consumed his time and capital for five years and which he had hoped to be his "salvation." Grove would always bring the lens of the understanding to the volatile plastic world of emotion and imagination in his fiction. Here we see it in his life.

Just as the word "understand" bears a peculiar weighting in the sentence we have quoted, so too does the word "salvation." A structural parallel is registered in this letter in which two items from different segments of discourse — marriage and the slow contemplative mind — are associated with salvational power. The form that the contemplative mind will take in Grove's life is that of writing. Writing and marriage are, at this stage in Grove's career, redemptive channels, projects that he has to work at in order to survive. In a very dramatic way *Over Prairie Trails*, his first published book, brings both these salvific modes into crucial relation to each other, and together they connect up with the will to



survive and the fear for extinction. The trail between Gladstone and Falmouth near the western shore of Lake Manitoba carried a man who had left the powerlessness of Roger Lawrence behind and now had both wife and child. But circumstances placed Mrs. Grove and their daughter apart and Grove's journeys through treacherous winter terrain were fraught with difficulty and tense with the possibility of his losing his way and perishing. The difference between his paradise regained and that paradise being lost depended on careful, often minute detailed observation. The scientific mind, the naturalist's eye, became an instrument of preservation for his self as an isolate entity and as something connected into other human beings through marriage and family.

Eugen Diesel in his introspective book *Germany and the Germans* (1931) has made the point that "when particular eras of German history have run their course Germans have always felt themselves confronted with chaos."<sup>7</sup> He contrasts this reaction to an English ability to manage crisis with less devastating despair. These matters of collective psychology are relative and it is quite possible to see the crisis engendering circumstances of the emergence of modern Germany as the explanation for a set of responses that are not innate to this or that people. But the evidence of Grove's work and life supports the Diesel observation although the exile-immigrant experience of the man would probably be sufficient stimulus to an intense preoccupation with order and an equally intense fear of chaos.

In the correspondence with Warkentin order of an assertive fictive kind is visibly at battle with chaos. By the time we get to *Over Prairie Trails* the chaos has been placed outside the person of the narrator and beyond certain aspects of his predicament. Grove has withdrawn into a protective shell of *shared* humanity, shared with his family and community, *against* the power of nature. Chaos is placed in this book *outside* of men into a world of natural force. In an important way *Over Prairie Trails* is the product of the exile-immigrant come home. When he gave up on his Jamesian ward Grove spoke of finding himself at Christmas in hospital in Arkansas: "When I came out, after a week of raging fever, I did not know my world any longer! It was so changed."

On the road between Gladstone and Falmouth, he appropriated his world with remarkable detail and in doing so forged the

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<sup>7</sup>Cited in Nurge, p. 223.

link between his writing and his marriage. It was a fine homecoming for his talent and his situation. And it prepared him for what he knew he was especially prepared for: to be the novelist of the immigrant groups in Canada.

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