"The Eternal Feminine" and the Clothing Motif in Grove's Fiction

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Vain trifles as they seem, clothes have, they say, more important offices than merely to keep us warm. They change our view of the world and the world's view of us . . . . there is much to support the view that it is clothes that wear us and not we them; we may make them take the mold of arm or breast; but they would mold our hearts, our brains, our tongues to their liking.

—Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

In woman dressed and adorned, nature is present but shackled under restraint, by human will remolded nearer to man's desire.

—Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

Well, it seems you did not get that one wire I sent; for I just now got a suit of underwear which I expected to find at Pratt's—or Eayrs'. But it does not matter, except that I felt 'smelly' this afternoon. I'll return the suit I'm wearing tomorrow morning, and hope I'll find another one at Ottawa so I can change.

—Frederick Philip Grove,
Letter to Catherine Grove

Frederick Philip Grove devotes a great deal of attention to clothing, in his personal correspondance as well as in his fiction, revealing a fascination and a fastidiousness with personal attire which offer clues to an interpretation of his fictional universe—in particular to his view of the relations between the sexes. Clothing serves many purposes—ornamental, protective, and revelatory—but one of its major functions is that of disclosing human "habits." In addition to being a reliable signal of the intended moral evaluation of Grove's characters, clothing also presents an outward emblem of social standing. A careful analysis of the clothing motif in the fiction presents the reader with a deeper awareness of Grove's theme of self-discovery, as successive layers of disguise are peeled away or discarded. Finally, one of the crucial issues for most of Grove's characters—what he refers to in *Our Daily Bread* as "the leaven

of sex . . . shaping their destinies for a future veiled in darkness"[1] —is given special attention in the focus on dress in Grove's fiction, where clothing is a metaphor for his sense of determinism.

Several critics[2] have claimed that Grove presents a sympathetic view of women, that his novels are claims for their emancipation; they cite Grove's declaration in *In Search of Myself* that "it is not to be imagined that my sympathies were with the men [in the pioneering world]. Quite the contrary, my sympathies were always with the women."[3] But a closer look at his female characters, especially at their outer layers, reveals that Grove not only does *not* understand women very well, but demonstrates his pronounced fear of them. He claims in his "autobiography" that "woman as such remains a mystery to me. Even the prostitute whom I had seen through the open door of a brothel seemed a superior being to me, something almost divine because it [sic] was different from myself" (*ISM* 138). For Grove, woman's influence is sometimes downward, sometimes the opposite, beckoning man toward the sky; as Goethe proclaims at the end of *Faust*, "The Eternal Feminine/Beckons us upward." Those women who are neither naturally submissive nor divinely inspiring elicit violent responses from men. "Let him beat me if he wants," says Fanny Essler,[4] and Clara Vogel in *Settlers of the Marsh* "invites" her husband's murderous rage. In *Two Generations* Nancy Patterson's career in theatre drives her husband mad, and in *The Yoke of Life* Lydia's guilt about her former promiscuity leads her to accept passively Len's suggestion of suicide. The coquette, exemplified by Fanny who constantly admires her dainty slippers and fancy attire in the mirror, is the staple of Grove's female portraiture. Like Grove in his personal obsession with fashion, these women are attracted to their own elegance.

None of Grove's women escapes the narrow stereotypes in which he clothes them; with little variation, they are either earth mothers, dressed in gingham, or *femmes fatales*, in which case they invariably wear silk. Grove, like Len Sterner in his confrontation with Lydia, cannot deal with that aspect of femaleness

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[1] (1928. Toronto: McClelland, 1975) 54.

[2] See, for instance, D.O. Spettigue's Introduction to *Fanny Essler* (Ottawa: Oberon P, 1984); Lorraine McMullen, "Women in Grove's Novels," *The Grove Symposium*, ed. John Nause (Ottawa: U of Ottawa P, 1974): 67-76; Isobel McKenna, "As They Really Were: Women in the Novels of Grove," *English Studies in Canada* 2.1 (1976): 109-16.

[3] (Toronto: McClelland, 1974) 224.

[4] Frederick Philip Grove, *Fanny Essler*, trans. C. Helmers, A.W. Rileng, D.O. Spettigue, 2 vols. (Ottawa: Oberon, 1984) I:28.

which overwhelms him in its nakedness: "Undisguised by clothes or flesh, their souls faced each other and feared the contact. For between them stood something which was as enormous as the night."[5] (Is this the obverse of penis envy?) Grove prefers to dress his female characters in such a way as to conceal what most intimidates him; as Lady Carter observes, "When a man doesn't notice a woman's clothes, [he is forced to] notice her" (*YOL* 78). Inherent in his presentation of women is the internalized acceptance of Nietzsche's edict that exaltation of the Eternal Feminine results in weakness and that, from a historical perspective, the disrobing or dethroning of the Magna Mater creates real heroes.[6]

One of the reasons that Grove resorts to such a conventional physical description of women may be based on a need to relieve his own sexual frustration and sense of inadequacy through his writing. Frank Birbalsingh offers an interesting discussion of Grove's masochistic tendencies, and he discusses the conflict between his naive idealization of women and the harsh reality of his actual experiences with them.[7] As many critics have commented, there is not one satisfying sexual relationship in Grove's fiction, and he leaves the reader with "the impression that he would prefer that [sex] did not exist."[8] Castration anxiety surfaces in the description of Niels's shooting of the horse, and in the mocking references to the noseless and ineffectual Heinrich in *Fanny Essler.*

An exaggerated fear of carnal desire may be attributed to several sources, starting with the unusual attachment which Grove, like Oscar Wilde, felt for his mother, and his painful separation from her. It is remarkable that it is the *burden* of womanhood with which Grove most clearly sympathizes, where "woman is the slave . . . . [In a] pioneering world, like the nomadic world of the steppes, [this] is a man's world. Man stands at the center of things . . . woman is relegated to the task of helper" *(ISM* 224). Grove feels himself likewise to be a victim, a failure, in the New World, harbouring something of a persecution complex. In an interview with André Gide, he says, "My mother was a remarkable woman. Everything that's good in the world, yes, everything greatly good, was hers. I can't think of

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[5] *The Yoke of Life* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1930) 304.

[6] For a fuller discussion of Nietzsche's argument, see *Beyond Good and Evil,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1966) 216 ff.

[7] Frank Birbalsingh, "Grove and Existentialism," *Canadian Literature* 43 (1970): 75.

[8] Desmond Pacey, *Frederick Philip Grove* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1945), 126-28.

her without tears."[9] But Douglas Spettigue, in an astute analysis of the interview, points out how Grove was "playing on Gide's known homosexual tendencies" (126), hoping to ingratiate himself with the great writer and perhaps find a patron. Gide describes Grove as "impeccably dressed" but also as an insincere sycophant; Grove confesses to the Frenchman that he "loves elegance passionately" (123), directly linking his masochism and his extravagant taste in clothing—like Fanny who feels as though she were committing a crime each time she makes an extravagant purchase. Following Spettigue, Louis Dudek is reluctant to call Grove a homosexual, but he cites several illuminating instances of homosexuality in the novels, concluding that "it tells us what Grove feared, what he rejected in himself, and what he carried within him as a hidden grief."[10]

One method of approaching Grove's fear of the female is to read the novels in a Jungian context; here one would find repeated references to the hag figure. When Fanny finally leaves her husband for Reelen, the latter claims that her husband was terribly afraid of her (*FE* 195). Clara, attracted to the primeval in Niels which repulses Ellen, also appears as a hag who drives him to murder what he cannot face in himself. When her mask begins to peel, he becomes frightened: "In the morning, her lips looked pallid; now he noticed a grayish, yellowish complexion . . . . From behind the mask which still half concealed her face, another face looked out at him: the coarse, aged face of a coarse, aged woman."[11] Len is haunted by the demonic version of Lydia Hausman, the kimono-clad whore whom he flees in terror. When he is reunited with her, he is intimidated by her alluring beauty, "as though she were centuries old, contemporary with the sphinx and the women of Babylon" (*YOL* 284). He cannot face her, so "they lived like brother and sister. Lydia never entered Len's room unless fully dressed" (*YOL* 293). Significantly she is not herself self-destructive, but must first submit to Len's rational arguments in favour of a suicide pact. The negative of the siren figure is presented in *Two Generations* also, where Nancy cunningly coerces her father-in-law into handing over his property; Ralph's wife, Diane, is also suspected of manipulation: "He had on occasion felt that she managed him."[12] And, in *The Master of the Mill*, Mrs. Elliot is likened to the harlot of Babylon for having urges which her husband cannot satisfy.

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[9] D.O. Spettigue, *Frederick Philip Grove: The European Years* (Ottawa: Oberon P, 1973) 122.

[10] Louis Dudek, "The Literary Significance of Grove's Search," *The Grove Symposium* 89-99.

[11] *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925. Toronto: McClelland, 1965) 133.

[12] *Two Generations* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1939) 253.

Sibyl, the demonic opposite of her sister-in-law Maud, is symbolically stripped of her finery in a "witches' sabbath":

> "Run, you bitch, run!" And she obeyed. But the crowd ran with her, silent but fiendish. She had just got into her stride, for she was athletic, when she felt herself half arrested from behind by two or three hands reaching for the collar of her coat. Shouldering out of it, she sprinted along in a panic, gathering up her silk dress in front. But fast though she was, another woman caught up with her, inserting her hand in the neck of the dress. She was running uphill now, towards the light. Then came the screech of tearing silk, for the slipping dress impeded her feet. It was found there next day. (*MM* 160)

Like Clara Vogel, Sibyl also loses her magic slipper in this chase which marks her end; she is likewise (symbolically) killed for not learning to "accept her task" (*MM* 238) in the master/slave scheme.[13]

Grove's fear of intimacy also reveals itself in the recurring image of the hermaphrodite. Fanny Essler, who is described as having a boyish physique and playing male roles on stage, is referred to as "lad" by Axel. Like the caterpillar which one day bursts forth from her chrysalis as a butterfly, Fanny (like Lydia, too) eventually loses her "sexlessness"—but not until her late twenties. Near the conclusion of the novel, wearing the appropriate dress from Reelen, she does indeed blossom into a woman. Heinrich Stumpf is an interesting figure in her life; a symbolic eunuch (his nose is missing), he is the only figure in the novel who presents no threat to Fanny, and he aids her in making the transition from girl to woman, so that "for the first time in her life she seemed to be really mature" (*FE* 90). Alice Patterson is another androgynous figure: "she presented a strange, almost ludicrous sight; for, as to body, she was tightly dressed in overalls, with her feminine garments tucked into them" (*TG* 229). In *The Master of the Mill*, the senator's daughter Ruth Clark is desexualized; womanly in her desire, but manly in her attire, she is the only female character in Grove's fiction to appear in a tailored suit, drive a car with as much skill and speed as a man, and marry only for convenience an aging man with whom she shares neither love nor intimacy: "what she married was not a man"

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[13] Possibly the ruthlessness of women is admirable in a business setting, although Maud Doolittle is compared to the murderous Lady Macbeth, and Sam admonishes his wife that he could not have lived with such a woman. Grove had an ambivalent admiration for economic independence in women; in theory (and fiction), he found it intriguing, but in practice (especially evident in his correspondence with his wife), he approved of men's controlling finances.

(*MM* 204). A final example of the hermaphrodite is Lydia, who, at the conclusion of *The Yoke of Life*, just before she meets her death, dramatically alters her clothing style and is at last regarded as Len's equal—having shed the socially constructed guise of femininity:

> Meanwhile he saw in her an equal who must be consulted about the course to be taken. He tried to make clear to himself what kind of change had come over her during the day. The mincing step, considered so feminine by those who lived in towns or cities, had disappeared. Her movements were no longer calculated to fascinate or allure; they were sincere. She had dropped all the pretences of sex. (*YOL* 315)

Indeed, where Grove's puritanism prevents him from delving too deeply into sexual matters (especially evident in the latent homosexual liason between Abe Spalding and his son), he lavishes attention on physical detail, particularly on descriptions of clothing. The build-up of detail is at times strongly contrasted with the minimalist description of intensely emotional incidents. For instance, Grove depicts the preliminaries of Fanny's love affairs very fully but is oblique and recalcitrant in making allusion to their consummation. Grove is similarly evasive in describing any strong feelings about the death of his daughter or his relations with his wife in *Over Prairie Trails*; this creates a sharp contrast with his elaborate descriptions of the environment and its relationship to his burgeoning personal philosophy.

As an indicator of social status, clothing is invested with a rather conventional role in Grove's fiction: rich, luxurious clothes are associated with the élite, and ill-fitting garments generally denote those whom he considers the less fortunate, except in his resigned moments where he praises austerity and poverty. In a discussion of his supposed Russian tour in *In Search of Myself*, Grove remarks:

> Nowhere on earth, perhaps, not even in the early days of Western-Canadian cities, did the possession of an evening suit of clothes confer such an air of distinction on man; nowhere was, among women, *décolletage* so essential to social standing. . . . It was these things which made life possible to them in their isolation; they all "kept their form" as Galsworthy would have called it; and not only kept it but watched over it jealously, punishing every infringement of social convention, on the part of others, by social ostracism.
>
> (*ISM* 148)

In *Fanny Essler*, clothes are repeatedly associated with money, sex, and power. Grove's obsession with quality is revealed when his destitute characters cling to the vestiges of respectability, the worn but elegant and refined articles of clothing which become a trope of survival.

Grove's own fastidiousness in fashion is revealed through his correspondence, where his preoccupation with appearance is frequently linked tc his obsession with money. Like Oscar Wilde, of whom Grove was an aquaintance and devotee, Grove had very expensive and foppish tastes in clothing. He confesses in *In Search of Myself* that "it was my personal misfortune that I had been born and raised with expensive tastes. I could suppress them, it was true; but only as long as I focussed my eyes on other things" (*ISM* 228). He adds that "I wanted to take decent clothes for granted . . . I wanted economic continuity and security" (*ISM* 236). Like Phil Branden, who uses his many overcoats as layers of protective security, Grove sleeps in his overcoat when he suspects the cleanliness of the hotel bed, and his letters to his wife are replete with references to his feeling dirty, whether or not he has recently bathed, and to how much he has spent on new items of clothing. As Pacey points out (87), this is understandable, in part, since there were few laundromats available to Grove on his cross-country lecture tour; but it does not explain the obsessive frequency of such remarks.

In his bachelor days, Grove does not hesitate to indulge in an expensive wardrobe. He regrets that "the greater part of my precious European wardrobe had been sold in New York to provide bread and butter" (*ISM* 183.) Yet he feels guilty about buying beautiful clothes once he has married, especially for his wife Catherine: "we expended an indispensable minimum on her wardrobe; not, however, enough to give her, at ever rising prices, a coat fit to wear in a Manitoba winter" (*ISM* 327). Perhaps he felt compelled to account to his wife for his spending; for each item he purchases for her (a hat, stockings, and underwear) he gives the price paid and apologizes for its plainness.[14] In *Over Prairie Trails*, a sketch of Grove's drives to visit his wife and daughter, Grove always depicts his wife as waiting for him in a linen housedress. Likewise, in *In Search of Myself*, Grove says that his wife dresses modestly and in a fashion which he does not find intimidating or threatening:

> She was good to look at. She had an extraordinarily striking figure, tall and slender like my own, yet well modelled. Her appearance, I said

[14] Examples can be found in Pacey: 120, 121, 128, 129, 138, 151.

> to myself, was aesthetically satisfying; she was dressed simply but in excellent taste. I remember the occasion [of meeting her] so well that I can still tell what she wore. (*ISM* 274)

Yet Grove frequently arouses his wife's jealousy by commenting in his letters to her that rich, well-dressed women pursue him constantly on his lecture tour, as in the following instance:

> As for that widow . . . I can assure you that a dozen or a score of women *offer* themselves in almost every larger place. The effect of my address seems to be almost erotic. If I did not receive their advances with a disarming but ironic benevolence, they'd mob me. (Pacey 162)

In his early fiction, too, where he is strongly influenced by naturalism, Grove has an eye for every detail. Young Fanny Essler is introduced to us as a rebellious daughter whose main characteristic is "a mixture of triumph and defiance;" returning home after the night she has lost her virginity, she is wearing a dress which is "wrinkled and dishevelled," but "which was not inexpensive, and she gave the impression of having well-to-do parents" (*FE* 17). Nearly every major event and each opening section in the novel is accompanied by Fanny's acquisition of, or desire for, some new item of clothing. Wearing the same dress in which she was first seduced, Fanny boards a train for Berlin; she is mistaken for a servant by the porter because she wears no hat. Immediately upon arriving in Berlin, Fanny purchases a new hat, which she later chastises herself for, since it is too "daring" and has consumed the larger part of her meager savings. Similarly, the first thing she buys upon receiving her inheritance is new underclothes, although she has pressing and substantial debts. She frequently goes without eating in order to buy pretty clothes; as she confesses at the conclusion of Book II, her lifetime ambition is "to be noticed" (*FE* 223).

One of the major issues at stake in the quarrel between Miss Blaurock and Fanny concerns the younger girl's love of elegant clothing. Fanny "craved silk stockings" (*FE* 102) and is "ensnared by a sense of adventure" (*FE* 117) that she sees embodied in her well-dressed suitors. Fanny is more successful than her aunt in dealing with fastidious customers, for whom Miss Blaurock has no patience; significantly, it is when Fanny buys her first "Berlin chic" dress that she becomes her own boss at the shop, replacing her absent aunt. All of her dreams of the prince who will one day rescue her from domestic drudgery and poverty are described in terms of the clothing with which he will adorn her. Fanny spends all of her time sewing or thinking

about clothing in order to negate the tedium of her daily life: "The holidays passed quietly. Fanny was bored. Besides some trifles, her aunt had given her material for a dress" (*FE* 105).

When Fanny leaves her aunt in order to pursue a theatrical career, her plans are thwarted when she cannot raise the funds to purchase the necessary wardrobe. Most of the description of theatre life focusses on the "beautiful lace underwear" and the "elegant fur coats" worn by the other actresses, of whom Fanny is envious—not of their talent, but of their stylishness. The men who court Fanny appeal to her according to their dress; she is particularly attracted to the uniforms worn by Axel. Miss Blaurock objects to the visits of Fanny's friends at the shop, largely on the basis of their attire. But Fanny recognizes that clothing will not ultimately confer social distinction, which "often secretly irritated her . . . . I'm the same person, she thought and yet different; and all because of stupid money" (*FE* 86).

As Fanny admits, her despair arises from her compulsive buying of clothing: "it seemed as if she were committing a small sin" (*FE* 11) every time she makes a purchase, particularly when her spirits and her funds are low. Her moral downfall is attributable, in part, to her lust for new clothes, which forces her to use unscrupulous methods and to abandon a series of lovers who can no longer provide her with the outward symbols of success. Fanny does meet her match in one of these lovers: all of her quarrels with Stein concern money, and he says, "You only want things to wear. This is different. I need [money] for work. Nothing but the best will do" (*FE* 72). Since nothing but the best will do for Fanny either, she leaves him, still seeking her ideal rescuer, one of the "real princes who have bathrooms and clean clothes" (*FE* 78). Finally she meets Reelen, a self-portrait of Grove, who is the prince she hopes will elevate her in status, and she wears her first elegant evening gown since the white tulle gown she wore at sixteen. But the innocence of childhood and the respectability of bourgeois society cannot be restored, and Fanny dies shortly after meeting her prince.

In *Settlers of the Marsh*, the protagonist, Niels Linstedt, is not obsessed with his own personal attire, but his response to women is based on how they dress. Grove's descriptions of Ellen Amundsen and Clara Vogel follow conventional stereotypes of the modest farmgirl and the *femme fatale.* Ellen, who represents virtue and lives at the end of one road, usually appears in a washed-out gingham dress, while Clara, who lives on the other road, is always seen in "flimsy, gaudy undress" (*SM* 185) or silken lingerie. The moral crisis in Niels's life is made explicit

when he must choose a direction at the fork of the road; Clara whispers to him:

> "Mostly I live in the city. But I have the place . . . . Go north from your corner, across the bridge; then, instead of continuing north, along the trail which would lead you to Amundsens, turn to the east, along the first logging trail. Three miles from the bridge you will find me . . . " There was a pause—an awkward pause, awkward for Niels. (*SM* 82)

The sexually repressed Niels makes his choice between the two women according to their apparel: although he is so strongly attracted to Clara's provocativeness that he is enticed into marriage, his shooting of her (when her "silken slipper falls to the center" at last) results from his discovery that she is evil incarnate.[15] It is largely the way in which Clara dresses that most provokes his disgust:

> Her dressing gown, of filmy, white, Japanese silk, showed every detail of her undergarments: lacey things of pink Crépe-de-Chine. Her chestnut red hair surrounded her face like a flaming cloud. Her bare arms and soft white hands, issuing as they did from wide, flaring sleeves, were the very picture of allurement and temptation . . . . Niels looked with distaste upon the scene: he felt loathing for the woman. (*SM* 151-52)

A Search for America describes Phil Branden's philosophical attack on the cult of materialism. Thus, the reader would expect to see him denounce class distinctions, especially in their outward forms, when he reaches the conclusion that bourgeois morality is hollow. But the opposite is true. He leaves Europe with a "stack of overcoats" and has to convince the American customs official that:

> I was not bringing all those clothes to the country in order to open a haberdasher's shop, but for personal wear. I had to show him the sleeveholes of every suit as proof that it had been worn. I also remember that what convinced him at last was my hat box, which contained a silk hat, two derbies, a sailor, and three or four caps. He seemed

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[15] His conversion is discussed by Margaret Stobie in terms of "a saint's life" in "The Passion of Niels" in *Frederick Philip Grove* (Boston: G.K. Hall, Twayne's World Author Series, 1973) 79.

> to accept the silk hat as conclusive evidence of my good faith.[16]

Branden's attitude toward Americans who do not recognize his superior background is condescending and sneering. Lonely and depressed in New York, he contemplates suicide; but his spirits revive when he decides to sell his clothing and books, shedding his European skin. Before his Carlylean epiphany, he "disposed of the rest of [his] wardrobe, having picked out one single, brown, English riding suit with breeches—soft-leather-lined—and a raincoat to keep" (*ASA* 222). Even in hard times, Branden insists on the possession of one suit of the finest quality and his raincoat—the latter presumably to render him impermeable to hardship. Yet in the chapter entitled "The Depths," when Branden goes tramping, even his raincoat offers no real protection against his near drowning in the Ohio River. What follows is a symbolic baptism: "I took my rain-soaked clothes off and shrugged my bare body into my raincoat . . . using my clothes as covers" (*ASA* 243) against the storm. Gradually, Branden is stripped of his civilized veneer, but in the subsequent chapter, entitled "I Come into Contact with Humanity Again," he still wishes to cling to the shreds of his fine European clothing as symbols of his former status, even in the hut of the inarticulate hobo. In this he resembles his father, who abandons him with these words: "To put it briefly, I am on the point of becoming a hermit. I might say in self-defence that during the half century of my wedded life I have always lived in clothes which did not fit me" (*ASA* 7). When the fearful challenge of rebuilding an inner life approaches, both father and son cling to the vestiges of an elevated outer life and desire to be well-dressed to meet the occasion.

Social distinctions are also made obvious by the clothing worn by various characters in *Our Daily Bread.* Generational conflict is underscored by John Sr.'s insistence upon owning practical clothes (his cheap grey suit lasts him a lifetime) in contradistinction to the foppish clothes of John Jr., to which Grove gives relatively greater attention:

> [H]e cut a strange figure; for in spite of his physical handicaps, he had attired himself like a fashionable dandy. On his hands—which, small though they were, formed just now the most conspicuous part of him—he wore lemon-coloured kid gloves; on his feet, patent leather shoes. His suit was of navy-blue serge; his neck, encased in a high, starched collar with a flamboyant tie. A

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[16] (1927. Toronto: McClelland, 1971) 16.

> huge sombrero of soft black felt sat tilted on the bald dome of his head. (*ODB* 36)

Mary, too, has rebelled against her father and "become 'distant' with her sisters. When they dressed in cottons, she had dressed in silks" (*ODB* 17). Cathleen also "set her aims higher. She spent on her wardrobe sums which seemed fabulous to Isabel and Henrietta" (*ODB* 34). Henrietta is distinguished by her dowdy gingham housedresses, and Cathleen sends Isabel her cast-off clothing, hoping that Isabel will follow her path to success. But John Sr. remains unimpressed by such outward signs of prosperity and judges his children severely. Ironically, it is only his son John—the most outrageously dressed character in the novel—of whom he is ultimately proud.

Like Niels Linstedt, Len Sterner is divided in his attitude toward women. *The Yoke of Life*, with its strong anti-Semitic tone, describes Len's intimidation at the sight of a Jew's fastidious clothing (102). When Len and Joseph visit a brothel, a prostitute wearing a "loose, glossy pink wrap" causes him to flee in panic. Repeatedly in the novel, silk is associated with sin:

> As he walked the streets, Len peered into every female face . . . . The world of women seemed to have gone mad with the ostentation of sex. In midwinter, they wore almost transparent silk stockings; their busts rose like flowers from the calyxes of their furry wraps. Waists were of the filmiest kind, showing silk undergarments the colours of the rainbow and betraying rather than concealing the breasts underneath. Shop-windows were gorgeous with silk and satin made up into drawers and vests. . . . this heady perfume of sex went to his own head as well. (*YOL* 280-81)

When he first meets Lydia, Len "played a slightly ridiculous part. The village boys at Odensee could outdo him in this business of 'dressing up'" (*YOL* 152). Lydia, however, is thrice described as "silken" and tempting. Len can only deal with her as a de-carnalized Miranda dressed in white (*YOL* 178), as a virginal Eve (*YOL* 158), or as an innocent who looks more "natural" in gingham (*YOL* 144, 309). Lydia's moral decay is accompanied by a change in fashion. Symbolically, she drops the "pretence of sex" when she and Len are baptized in the lake, and she reverts to wearing gingham; as Len remarks,

> "There are two of you. One has so far lived only in my imagination; the other has lived in a mistaken dream of the world."

> A dream of the world! How far that all seemed!
>
> "This sort of thing takes the starch out," he said.
>
> "The starch?"
>
> "The vanity and pretence of the world: the starch from your dress. It is just as serviceable without it." And he nodded to the crumpled, shrunk gingham about her bare legs. (*YOL* 312)

The sort of innocence which Len seeks is deceptive, and Lydia/Eve "was torn between two desires: the desire to rend this boy's illusions and to stand revealed, to shield him, to protect his picture of himself from profanation" (*YOL* 158). Until disguises are abandonned, the true self cannot be revealed; but when Len and Lydia face their nakedness and failure, they commit suicide together.

In *Fruits of the Earth*, Ruth's revolt against patriarchal oppression is expressed by her donning "ready-made" housedresses and gaining weight. Abe's daughter Frances also rebels; like Catherine in *Our Daily Bread*, Frances takes to "stitching a silky piece of lingerie" as she sits "behind Ruth," her mother.[17] The following scene outlines a further example of filial disobedience when Abe discovers that Frances "was precocious . . . advanced in a way that he could not have defined . . . a problem"; she is a writer of impressive political conviction (*FOTE* 181-82). In this novel Grove illustrates how language, like clothing, serves a family or community by simultaneously transforming it. At first proud of his daughter's accomplishments and self-expression, later Abe feels threatened by his daughter's immodesty later and continues to express hostility at girls who "wore silk stockings, silk underwear, silk dresses; and nothing destroys a girl more quickly than the consciousness that suddenly she wears attractive *dessous*" (*FOTE* 223). Frances wears makeup, which the barrister, Mr. Inkster, sees as a direct cause of her being raped, as he demonstrates to her mother, Ruth:

> "Does she wear rouge?"
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> Ruth bridled. "I don't see—"
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> "You wouldn't, madam. My question is answered." (*FOTE* 245)

While women should not dress provocatively, neither should they ignore their appearance, as Ruth does. It is only

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[17] (1933. Toronto: McClelland, 1965) 179.

when Abe realizes how pathetic-looking his wife is that he confesses he has been a tyrant:

> Abe noticed every detail: the faded mauve hat, too small and too glossy, the dress of black, flowered voile, too tight over the hips. In times past he would have been touched by distaste at her sight; today he saw that this woman, human like himself, was stirred to her depth; and he noticed her immense relief at his return. (*FOTE* 260)

Two Generations presents another patriarch, Ralph Patterson, who represses his daughters in a similar fashion. Like Fanny Essler whose early independence makes her seem boyish, Alice is seen as denying her femininity in order to gain paternal recognition:

> Ralph, who was melting a spoonful of cream in his mouth, looked her up and down. "You working too?," he asked.
>
> "Like a man," Alice replied. "Not a person in the village suspects me of being a girl," she said. Her figure was that of a boy; her movements masculine.
>
> "You don't go to town in that outfit, do you?"
>
> Alice laughed. "Why not, dad?"
>
> He grunted. (*TG* 103)

Alice has ambitions to become a doctor, but ultimately she finds—through self-sacrifice in supporting her brother's academic aspirations—"a woman's fulfillment" (180). Yet Alice feels an affinity with Nancy, George's wife, who (like Clara Vogel, also) is an untameable "bronco filly" (*TG* 123), as her husband states. He is alternately attracted to and repulsed by her brazen sensuality and outspoken ways. Nancy presents a sharp contrast to the domestic Cathleen, who "would never do anything objectionable, but neither would she do anything outstanding" (*TG* 138).

In *Master of the Mill*, determinism is enhanced by the descriptions of the women chosen by each successive master. All of the Clark men are small; their women, tall, full-figured, and possessing an aristocratic and ornamental taste in fashion. The Carter women each play a specific role in determining the fate of the mill. In reconstructing the past, Lady Clark and Odette Charlebois introduce the major characters by describing their attire, in an intimate *tête à tête* which frames the narrative. Unlike Grove's men, who fear the revelation of the naked truth, the

closeness of the two women is stressed in terms of their dress or, rather, undress:

> The latter rose out of a half-sleep, much perturbed, and hastily threw a dressing gown over her shoulders. It was the first time Maud had seen her in a state of undress; and she felt touched this time by the fact that the woman's flesh was still firm and all the signs of decay seemed assembled in her face.[18]

Sibyl Carter, with her velvet dress which "fitted like a glove" and her lithe, androgynous figure (*MM* 118) upsets the balance of power; her "aim was to seduce the master of the mill" (*MM* 129). The Mauds in the novel generally appear in white silk—the mill is also white—but Sibyl, a demonic version of the composite Maud figure, wears dark and seductive clothing. She visits the mill in an open fur coat and revealing silk blouse, finds men wearing workclothes irresistible, and claims that "I am an animal and unashamed of the fact" (139). Again the fear of woman as siren is made explicit through clothing.

In opposition to Sibyl is Ruth Carter, a misanthropist who is "without sex," "hollow-chested," stooped, and cynically detached about relationships. She appears in a Parisian tailored suit. The two women reinforce the same dualistic view represented in *Fruits of the Earth* by Ruth and her daughter Alice. And the three women most closely associated with the Clark legacy are all significantly named Maud, representing the three faces of Eve, or the three Jungian archetypes of the anima: mother, siren, and hag. Two of these archetypes merge in the confrontation of mistress and prospective bride when Miss Doolittle, cloaked in "a coal black gown of chiffon velvet," makes the "supreme sacrifice" of handing over the man she loves to Ruth (*FOTE* 232-35). The composite role of the three Mauds is made clear by the senator's confusion of them, as Ruth observes: "The young man who had become her husband had been in love with a woman twice his age; his father had, so that voice betrayed, once dreamt of being to her what his son had become" (*FOTE* 234). The symbolic union of the three Mauds is made most explicit in the senator's deathbed thoughts:

> The last emotion evoked by this man was one of tenderness only; she knew that she was not the Maud to whom the name was addressed; but she formed part of her; the word addressed to a composite figure in which the first Maud had the

[18] (1944. Toronto: McClelland, 1961) 326.

> greatest share. She herself was but a last incarnation of some ideal he had cherished, as imperfect as she felt that incarnation to be. (*FOTE* 326)

Finally, in *In Search of Myself*, the reader has, presumably, a portrait of the artist as a young man. The first reference to clothing is the rejection of the baby's lace outfits, which are considered too effeminate for him, followed by the declaration that Branden's father is disappointed in him. Frequently, the young boy bursts in upon his mother in her dressing room (*ISM* 52, 63, 64), and he describes himself as half-man, half-boy, "only partly dressed," on the night he parodies his father in an Oedipal re-enactment of protecting his mother, "the only woman who counted in my life" (*ISM* 63). The common male fantasy of a displaced incestuous triangle, where the son and the father are rivals for the mother, seems to have fascinated Grove, for he replicates it in *The Master of the Mill*: both Samuel Clark and his son Edmund are drawn to Maud Doolittle as mistress, who represents "heart and instinct" for them both. That Grove had to split the mistress (heart) and companion (spirit) from the mother/wife (mind) testifies to his dualistic view of women and his desire to transcend the carnal. Again, the women who attract—or, rather, distract—him later in life, particularly the wife of the professor, are clothed in scanty silk. A prostitute in a "silken dressing gown" haunts him, much as another haunts Len Sterner, or as Nancy's provocativeness disturbs George's definition of contented married life.

The most important feature of the clothing motif is its relation to the theme of self-knowledge. The last request Fanny makes before she dies is that Reelen undress her, thus divesting her of the final protective layers she has painfully accumulated. This foreshadows her dark night of the soul, when she begs forgiveness of her parents and "realized that she was only deceiving herself out of stubborness" (*FE* 223) in proclaiming her elevated social status. But Fanny ultimately fails to integrate her self-knowledge, consistent with Grove's definition of tragedy. The stripping of pretences leaves her cold, shivering, and longing for retreat into the womb of the past, as she calls out to her mother from her deathbed, like Sterner or Branden who seek rebirth through symbolic baptism but also fail. When characters are stripped of their finery and masks, their vulnerability exposed, they are left to face that "something which was enormous as the night," as Len Sterner describes it. While none of Grove's protagonists succeeds in achieving self-realization, the search itself is painfully articulated in the failure to divest the self of unnecessary or inhibiting attire. Clothing generally plays a straightforward descriptive role in fiction, serving to

reveal—rather than conceal—a character's nature; in Grove's universe, however, what is repeatedly emphasized is artifice or the discrepancy between clothes and the reality they hide. As Grove admitted in *Over Prairie Trails*, "Nature strips down our pretences with a relentless finger and we stand, bare of disguises, as helpless failures."[19]

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[19] (1922. Toronto: McClelland, 1959) 118.