TWO ODYSSEYS OF 'AMERICANIZATION': DREISER'S *AN AMERICAN TRAGEDY* AND GROVE'S *A SEARCH FOR AMERICA*

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On the surface, Theodore Dreiser's fictionalized case-study of Clyde Griffiths, a young upstart executed for the murder of his pregnant working class girlfriend, may not appear to have much in common with Frederick Philip Grove's semi-autobiographical "Odyssey of an Immigrant" across the North-American continent. Grove's hero Phil Branden, a young pseudo-aristocrat from Europe, works in turn as an omnibus waiter in Toronto, an encyclopedia salesman in New York, and an itinerant labourer on western prairie farms before becoming a teacher in Winnipeg. What brings Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* (1925) and Grove's *A Search for America* (1927) together is a concern not only with the metaphor of America—a concern inscribed in the very titles of the works—but also with the power of the norm and the significance of marginalization in North-American society. A juxtaposition of the two works gives us insight into significant differences in Canadian and American conceptions of personal and national identity.

Throughout the novel, Dreiser presents Clyde Griffiths as a social outcast who not only finds himself between different social classes, on the borders between inside and outside, but also identifies with so many doubles (Mitchell 57-63; Lane 213-220) that the boundaries between the "self" and the "other" become completely blurred in his life. Similarly, as an immigrant, Grove's Phil Branden lives on the border between different cultures—between America and Europe, the United States and Canada. And if both protagonists suffer from their status as social outsiders, they also develop strategies to deal with their marginalization. But these

strategies are very different, leading in the case of Grove's protagonist to empowerment and rescue, while Dreiser's anti-hero finally suffers complete impotence and death. Both works point to significantly different Canadian and US-American valuations of the margins.

Clyde Griffiths is condemned to die on the electric chair without knowing who or what he is, while Phil Branden makes the deliberate decision to live in Canada rather than in the United States (*Search* 382). This decision, though, is indicated not in the text itself but in a footnote. This shift from the centre of the text to its margins, I will argue, is doubly appropriate, because Canada is a country on the margins of North-America, and, even more importantly, because Branden chooses the margins as a privileged locus of resistance against what Michel Foucault has called "normalization" (*Discipline* 184).

If Branden resists normalization, Dreiser's Clyde Griffiths not only submits to it but yearns to merge with the norm that excludes him. Many critics have argued that Clyde Griffiths is alienated from himself because he is "other-directed" (Orlov 466) in the framework of a fundamentally materialistic American society. Rather than accepting this notion of Clyde's alienation from an innate selfhood, I tend to agree with Philip Fisher, who claims that "within Dreiser's novel the question of authenticity never exists. Clyde has no self to which he might be 'true'" (140). Instead, Clyde "gets his 'self' moment by moment as a gift from the outside" (141) in that he creates himself through imitation of others. In Fisher's view, "[i]dentity, blurred or collective, externalizes the question of who I am, converts it into the question, Who do they take me for?" (145). This notion of a constructed identity in a social community inevitably brings to the fore the question of power relations—i.e. the construction of self in the American hierarchy of value which includes and excludes.

Michel Foucault provides a helpful framework for exploring the motif of identity in both novels:

> The subject constitutes himself in an active fashion, by the practices of self, [but] these practices are nevertheless not something that the individual invents by himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group. ("Ethic of Care" 11)

Both Clyde and Branden travel through North America not so much to discover (or become alienated from) a true (innate) selfhood, as some critics have argued (Stobie 59-69; Orlov 459), but rather to create themselves as subjects. That process does not take place in a vacuum but is always already mediated through society and its institutions, through established discourses and practices, which seduce the protagonists into adopting the "technologies of self" that will assign them their place in the hierarchy of North-American society. Thus it should come as no surprise that in both novels the metaphors of self-creation are interwoven with metaphors of national identity.

Not only is the word "America" repeated at least one-hundred-and-thirty times in Grove's *Search,* but Grove also labels the hero's self-conscious transformation of self "Americanization." Similarly, in the first sentence of Dreiser's novel, we find the protagonist Clyde Griffiths in "the commercial heart of an American city" (*Tragedy* 7), Kansas City, which lies geographically at the "heart" of the United States. As the allusion to the "fable" in the opening lines of *An American Tragedy* and the reference to the *Odyssey* in the subtitle of *A Search for America* suggest, both narratives follow the design of what Northrop Frye has called "fables of identity." But while Dreiser's Clyde Griffiths ultimately vanishes like a "nobody" into America, Grove's hero creates his precarious identity as a Canadian immigrant who finds his voice not by merging with, but by keeping a deliberate distance from, the new country.

"Europe regards the past; America regards the future" (*Search* 382) is Phil Branden's motto in his picaresque journey across the North-American continent. The typically Grovian loss of family fortune, recounted in the first chapter of the novel, is a metaphor for personal failure, a failure that has become Branden's identity; in the Old World, his subjectivity had become fixed in the gaze of others. Determined to rewrite, to recreate, to refabricate his self, Branden turns his back on Europe and the gazes that have paralyzed him. The longed-for metamorphosis that is finally achieved, though, comes with the gradual and ironic realization of the fact that America has a past as well. Canadians and Americans see in Branden nothing more than the young, inexperienced newcomer, a nobody. This new gaze fills him with a sense of bottomlessness, of the abyss, or what Martin Heidegger

has called *Abgrund*. "Feeling suddenly embarked upon things desperate and suicidal" (19), Branden senses the danger of disappearing altogether, of finding his subjectivity completely shattered on the new continent.

Branden reacts to this new threat by trying to escape the gaze of the "other" altogether. In Book III, "The Depths," he decides to become a tramp, an outsider like Huck Finn. But unlike Huck, who grows precisely because he is not alone, Branden does not have a companion: he is completely thrown back on himself. In the chapter "I Come Into Contact with Humanity Again" (250-64), Branden meets a hermit who has given up speaking a long time ago and whose gaze is empty, reflecting Branden's own isolation and sense of nothingness. But Branden's language, which emphasizes the emptiness of the hermit's eye (253) and the expressionlessness of his features (252), suggests something of the wanderer's incipient realization that subjectivity can only be created through intersubjectivity, through language.

"To enter Canada is a matter of being silently swallowed up by an alien continent," Northrop Frye has observed ("Conclusion" 324). But Phil Branden never becomes completely swallowed up by the new country. Rather, in the course of his odyssey, he gains a new perspective on his past, from which he never cuts himself off completely. Branden's past accompanies him to America in the literature he reads, in the European accent of his speech, and in the image of the suitcase(s) he brings from Europe, although at no point is his vision of America "dwarfed by his memory of Europe" (Stich 163). Granted, the narrative satirizes Branden, as in the account of his arrival in Montreal like the stereotypical tourist with camera in hand, "fourteen pieces of luggage," and "half a dozen overcoats" on his arm (*Search* 15), a cumbersome burden rapidly disposed of in the process of the newcomer's acculturation. But Branden significantly keeps back one last suitcase which he "fill[s] with some cherished trifles" and hands over to his friend Ray before he starts his tramp out West with the understanding that he will some day ask Ray "'to forward this suitcase of mine'" (222). This, in fact, happens on the last page of the novel when Branden finally decides to become "'repatriated' in Canada" (392). As the connection with Ray enables Branden to return "home" to Canada, so the suitcase encapsulates the Canadian immigrant's connection to Europe. The narrator's becoming

a Canadian does not force him to break with his past but allows him to incorporate his past into his present identity, an experience that he shares with the narrator of Grove's *In Search of Myself* (1946), who chooses Canada as his home because Canada had not "entirely severed the umbilical cord" which bound it to its motherland (217).

While Branden's Canadianization connects him with both his past and his future, Clyde Griffiths' Americanization entangles him in a celebration of the future. Like America itself, the protagonist of *An American Tragedy* "amputates" time, making the new an absolute in his life. In his discussion of *Sister Carrie* (1900), Philip Fisher notes that Dreiser describes a "self in motion that we might call the self in anticipation": "The anticipatory self has as its emotional substance hope, desire, yearning, and a state of prospective being" (157, 159). Like Carrie Meeber, Clyde Griffiths identifies with such an "anticipatory self"; the only self he has is the one that he will become. Speeding into the future in his mind and continually creating grandiose dreams, Clyde projects an ego ideal for himself that is as inflated as it is inevitably "fictional" or imaginary (cf. Lacan 2, 15, 42). This ego merges with, even doubles, the national ego ideal and is monstrous in its willingness to sacrifice others in order to ensure its own survival. Clyde's involvement in two fatal accidents can best be summarized by oxymoron: Clyde acts in "criminal innocence" and becomes "innocently criminal" (McWilliams 45).

Since even "the fear of death . . . is psychologically subordinate to the narcissistic fear of damage to one's own body" (Lacan 28), it should not come as a surprise that in Clyde's paranoia the impulse to self-protection overrides all other concerns. Haunted by the threat of having his inflated ego "de- crowned," of being publicly exposed as the father of a working woman's unborn child, Clyde Griffiths knows only one reaction: to plot the murder of Roberta Alden. Although incapable of directly taking her life, Clyde refuses to come to her aid as she drowns in Big Bittern Lake after an accident. Thus Clyde's "murder" is passive; his guilt is not defined by a concrete act, but is located in a gap. This (non)act, in turn, prompts a number of his society's representatives to impose on Clyde their (mis)interpretations and judgements.

From the beginning of the novel, Clyde's alienation is emphasized. As part of a family of street preachers singing to an indifferent audience, twelve-year-old Clyde becomes an object of comment, discourse, and interpretation for passers-by—and likewise for the reader—who are invited by the spectacle to see the abnormality of the youth's situation:

> The boy moved restlessly from one foot to the other, keeping his eyes down, and for the most part only half singing.... He was too young, his mind much too responsive to phases of beauty and pleasure which had little, if anything, to do with the remote and cloudy romance which swayed the minds of his mother and father (9).

Dreiser's emphasis on the entrapping, scrutinizing power of the gaze in the opening scene evokes Foucault's descriptions of the power effects produced by Jeremy Bentham's prison model—the Panopticon—in which an anonymous, omnipresent gaze leads to the restructuring of the individual prisoner's self. Like that prisoner, Clyde internalizes the value system of those who look at him: "he felt ashamed, dragged out of normal life, to be made a show and jest of" (10). Clyde's restless feet and mind already move him beyond the poverty and shabbiness of his everyday life, move him into a future invested with romance and promise. But while his restless feet indicate his desire to escape (Clyde's favourite mode of problem-solving), he paradoxically remains in one spot, thus describing an ironic, circular movement suggestive less of freedom than of ritual bondage. This first scene, significantly, is repeated almost verbatim at the closing of the novel, this time with Clyde's nephew Russell as entrapped subject.

A figure of alienation, Clyde is always "out of place," even as he moves through a series of city spaces. Whether visiting his uncle's rich mansion or the Finchley's cottage world (Book II), Clyde is an observer who yearns to but never does merge with the world he sees. Paraphrasing Julia Kristeva on the borderline patient who is "neither subject nor object, neither inside nor outside, neither here nor there," Shuli Barzilai reminds us that "Instead of '*Who* am I?' this patient asks, '*Where* am I?'" Also, the 'borderlander' is always an exile: "'I' is expelled,' or ceases to be, for, 'How can I be without border?'" (295). According to Kristeva, this liminal position entails a specific language: "the patient's

'borderline' discourse gives the analyst the impression of something alogical, unstitched, and chaotic" (42). When asked, for example, by his arch-rival and cousin Gilbert Griffiths how he likes the manual work in the basement of the collar factory in Lycurgus, Clyde answers: "I'm learning a little something, I guess" (228). On the surface, Clyde speaks the discourse of an underling who readily nods and smiles to ensure his master's approval. And yet, into his discourse erupts another voice that not only contradicts but unweaves the discursive net of conformity that his words fabricate. "A little something" denotes "Yes, I'm learning what you want me to learn," but at the same time his sentence has a very subversive undercurrent: "I'm not really learning very much! What am I doing here?"

In crisis moments Clyde's discourse tends to be emptied of meaning, encoding one message and suggesting its opposite at the same time, especially since Clyde often resorts to words such as "something," "anything," "I guess," and "I suppose," phrases that are open to any interpretation. Clyde's fabrication of shifty signifiers is evocative of Kristeva's analysis of a liminal language: "Beneath the seemingly well-constructed grammatical aspects of these patients' discourse we find a futility, an emptying of all affect from meaning—indeed even an empty signifier" (41). And yet, in *An American Tragedy* this shifty language has a significant impact on those in power. "That's the trouble with people who don't know. They're always guessing" (229), Gilbert aggressively counters Clyde's borderline language, thus putting the young upstart in his place by confronting him with his lack of knowledge, of education, and of proper speech. Deflating Clyde's ambitious hopes of rising quickly in the Griffiths' family business, Gilbert is keen on proving that he and his penniless cousin speak two radically different languages and thus belong to two separate social classes: "'Well, the fact is,' went on Gilbert, 'I might have placed you in the accounting end of the business when you first came if you had been technically equipped for it'" (229). The narrator comments parenthetically on the power effect of Gilbert's language: "(The phrase 'technically equipped' overawed and terrorized Clyde, for he scarcely understood what that meant)" (229).

It is ironic, though, that Gilbert should dismiss his cousin as an inferior in the same breath that he offers him a better position,

thus paving the way for his rival's further rise. It appears that the more the social boundaries between the two unequal cousins become blurred, the more forcefully Gilbert insists on recreating the (discursive) boundaries between them. Also, Gilbert's aggressive energy and resentful charges are rooted less in his rival's social inferiority than in Clyde's ability to present himself in society as Gilbert's physically more attractive double.

The pattern of this linguistic power play is repeated in the murder trial (Book III), where Prosecutor Mason exacts Clyde's destruction—the death penalty—simply by prompting the accused to speak. Clyde recounts the memorized story composed by his lawyers—the complicated tale of his change of heart vis-à-vis Roberta Alden before she drowns in Big Bittern Lake—but into his speech inevitably erupts a second discourse of slippages, gaps, contradictions, and memory failings—in brief what Jacques Lacan has called "the discourse of the Other" (172) over which Clyde has no control. It is this second discourse that the prosecutor and the jury see as sufficient proof of his guilt. Puzzled and enraged by Clyde's liminal status, the discursive and judicial masters simultaneously distance themselves from Clyde's personal history and "empower themselves" through his "narrative befuddlement" (Mizruchi 279). The accused is unjustly convicted of murder in the first degree.

Like Dreiser's "tragic" quester, Grove's wanderer is also a "borderlander." But Branden's position and experience are contextualized by Canadian rather than American values. Northrop Frye reminds us that in Canadian consciousness, the question of "who am I?" is always deeply rooted in the question "where is here?" ("Conclusion" 826). This is the very question that haunts Branden from the moment he disembarks in Montreal and feels, like Clyde, "incongruous and out of place" (15). In contrast to Clyde, Branden not only survives but prevails by consciously asserting his borderline status and by cultivating a liminal language. He maintains a delicate balance between the old and the new, between "here" and "there," between the "self" and the "other," never merging with either one.

Continually playing with, and subverting, the new world icons, the Canadian traveller distinguishes himself from his American counterpart through his self-conscious linguistic flexibility. Well equipped with hermeneutical tools on his journey

across America, Grove's hero, like the legendary Odysseus, is an ingenious reader and writer who takes pleasure in deciphering the foreign-sounding American vernacular as he strives to overcome linguistic barriers. As a "linguist" (22), he quickly recognizes that the American ideal is deeply intertwined with its literature, especially with the writings of Henry David Thoreau and Mark Twain. But the immigrant-writer's desire for rendering in language the ultimate "truth" (72) of his experiences is doomed to end in frustration. Never finding the magic words that would translate his life experience adequately into language, he is forced to recognize that his representations are approximations at best, a recognition that compels him to continual revision and rewriting. In the process of describing the hermit (Book III), for example, Branden emphasizes this fellow outsider's striking resemblance with "Mark Twain in Carroll Beckwith's portrait" (252). Soon after, he revises this description by adding an allusion to the Homeric Cyclops: "There was no expression in his vacant, bold eye" (253). Continually adding to his picture, the narrator represents the hermit as a collage of overlapping literary and popular icons, of linguistic fragments and memory pictures, as much from the old world as from the new. Never totally fixed or finished, nor ultimately blended together, these collages defy the very idea of a finished picture, as well as the concept of a perfected, static self.

Just as the train loosely connects the different provinces of Canada, so does the image of the "wheel on rail" (25) join the different episodes of Grove's picaresque novel. Taking an ironic perspective, the narrator evokes the railroad as an icon of power and movement, a machine that disrupts the nature idyll, at the same time that the fabled iron horse also functions as an aesthetic object: "Nor had I learned as yet to stand transfixed when looking at the Titan frescoes of light effects on clouds of smoke from iron-furnace or railroad yard" (17). Although entrapped at one point in a speeding train and subjected to painful tortures when travelling on train rods in another episode, Branden always manages to disembark, when pain threatens to overwhelm him. Unlike the American nightmare that speeds the unsuspecting Clyde along, Branden's is the odyssey of a skeptic who repeatedly distances himself from the New World and its seductive icons. He reembarks on his journey of discovery only when he feels ready.

Thus, rather than travelling in a linear fashion, Branden, like the legendary Odysseus, zigzags across the country. Although developed explicitly in the author's preface, the concept of teleology (xviii) is playfully subverted in a narrative that shows the traveller's ultimate *telos* to be utterly fictional. In *The Bush Garden* (1971), Northrop Frye argues that the theme of "Grove's *A Search for America* is the narrator's search for a North American pastoral" (240), and such pastoral myths "do not exist as places" (241). "America is an ideal and as such has to be striven for; it has to be realized in partial victories," Branden confirms toward the end of the novel (382), emphasizing that the process—the movement toward the ideal—is more important than reaching the goal. Like Odysseus' painful passage homeward to Ithaca, Branden's route is "many-twisting" and asks for a *polytropos*, subversively scheming traveller. Cunning Odysseus tricks the dangerous Cyclops by telling him that his name is "Nobody," thus giving himself an identity that at the same time denies the very concept of identity, a trick that ensures the hero's survival (Book IX). Similarly, Branden survives not because he creates a name or a well-defined identity for himself, but because he manages to elude the notion of a fixed identity in his journey toward self creation.

If anything, Grove's *Search* celebrates irony, perspectivism, and reflexiveness, subversive strategies that "express the ineluctable recreations of mind in search of a truth that continually eludes it, leaving it with only an ironic access or excess of self-consciousness" (Hassan 506). Lacking perspective, irony, distance and self-reflexivity in the discourses he uses, Clyde Griffiths' tragedy is "his failure as a storyteller or historian of self" (Mizruchi 244). Branden, however, succeeds in writing himself into being, albeit in a collage with self-conscious splits and ironic contradictions that echo the multiplicty of the larger Canadian self.

Interweaving their protagonists' tribulations with judicial metaphors, Dreiser and Grove put their protagonists "on trial," at the same time that they probe North American social and judicial practices. Dreiser's *Tragedy* intersects with Foucault's argument that "the law operates more and more as the norm" in twentieth-century "normalizing" societies (*History* 144). *An American Tragedy* presents norms (or internalized social practices) as relatively flexible and humane, while the legal system and the metaphorical laws—taboos, rigid conventions and formalized prescriptions—

cause Clyde's and Roberta's tragedies. Driven by desire—his overwhelming "hunger" for a better life—Clyde frequently breaks formal contracts and promises, and although he has an intuitive understanding of norms, he repeatedly runs afoul of the law. Through a series of metaphorical and literal trials, Clyde is made aware of the existence of powerful rules and regulations, the words and meaning of which, however, only reach him in mediated forms. Like Kafka's Joseph K. in *The Trial* (1924), who is executed without understanding what he is guilty of, so Clyde never comprehends the workings of the law and therefore is dependent on those who interpret it for him—judges, lawyers and prosecutors.

"Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of dialogic interaction," Mikhail Bakhtin writes in his analysis of *Dostoevsky's Poetics* (110). While Dostoevsky demonstrates in *Crime and Punishment* (1866) that truth is created in a dialogue, Dreiser critically demonstrates how discursive difference—or "heteroglossia"—becomes erased in Clyde's trial. Many critics have commented on Dreiser's strategy of incorporating letters, newspaper articles, and even trial records verbatim in his novel, a technique that has generally been interpreted as part of the naturalistic author's desire for documentary authenticity. But, more importantly, these subtexts introduce a mixture of genres and discourses, thus creating a sense of heterogeneity which sharply contrasts with the prosecutor's (monological) voice. Roberta Alden's letters, for example, are juxtaposed with Sondra Finchley's, both speaking of their claim on Clyde in radically different terms; the prosecutor's text is followed by a defence speech designed to undo the prosecutor's argument. Despite such rich potential for dialogic interaction, the outcome of the trial is not only a parodic truth—an oxymoronic false truth—but the verdict marks the triumph of a monolithic discourse that manages to absorb, appropriate, and render ineffective all potentially oppositional voices.

Giving detailed attention to Prosecutor Mason's ideological stance, Dreiser explores the power effects of what Foucault has criticized as "globalising discourses" which feed on and subjugate dissenting voices (*Power* 83). Introducing a cleverly censored selection of Roberta's letters to Clyde into the trial,

Mason uses her voice of pathos to support his aggressive charge against her former lover. Similarly, instead of opening up a dialogic debate, the news media's sprawling headlines—"'PROSECUTION IN GRIFFITHS' CASE CLOSES WITH IMPRESSIVE DELUGE OF TESTIMONY' and 'MOTIVE AS WELL AS METHOD HAMMERED HOME'" (664)—discursively merge with Mason's charge. And only on the surface is the lawyers' discourse opposed to the prosecutor's rhetoric. Reacting against Mason's presentation of Clyde as a callous bestial murderer and "a reptilian criminal" (508), the defence lawyers deflate Clyde's role of a negative hero by declaring their client a "mental and moral coward" (669-70), thus absolving him of responsibility for his action. Such seemingly oppositional discourses do not create a dialogic debate whose aim is the truth. Rather, they create an either/or situation—a power struggle—in which one (false) position will eventually triumph over the other. Thus Dreiser's American tragedy is that the spirit of democracy—the multiplicity of voices—becomes erased by the tyranny of the "authoritative word [that] demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 342).

While Clyde is tried by the self-proclaimed upholders of the American ideology, Branden puts America itself on trial by satirically dissecting not only its legal system but also the American norm. He targets American graft, greed, and snobbish gullibility with a virulent language designed to cut, deflate, and wound, before the healing process can start. Appropriating the conventions of Petronius' and Rabelais' satires, Branden loads his language with a degrading animal imagery, likening Mr. Tinker, the ruthless encyclopedia salesman, to the preying cat, the hawk and the snake (160) and multi-millionaire Mr. Kirsty to a "monkey" (197). Satirizing America's optimistic belief in progress and civilization, he dismisses these traditional values as a "chronic disease of mankind which now and then breaks out into some such acute insanity as the late war" (218-19).

Adopting another convention of satire, Grove has his narrator wear the mask of misanthropism when he launches a tirade against America's treatment of its immigrants. Instead of thanking his benefactor and saviour, Doctor Goodwin, who is part of the "ideal" America, Branden puts him on trial accusing him in a generic "you" of responsibility for the immigrant's plight in the

New World (288). Similarly, Branden's charge against the young farmer millionaire Mackenzie (who lives in a "white house"!) presents the two movements of satire: first, the accusation—"You have taken [the small farmers'] land" (376)—and, secondly, the projection of a utopian order in which the millionaire should "divest" himself of his "property" (379) and thus make possible "real democracy" based on an economy of "a greater number of independent farmers" (380). The closer Branden moves to his evocation of utopia, the more virulent are his satiric accusations against "real" America. Frequently, he voices these charges in the style of the old biblical invocations, as in his plaidoyer for a better education—"Alas! Our schools!" (302).

Branden also puts himself on trial by satirically dissecting his own self, by splitting it into young and old, naive and mature, by creating what W. J. Keith has called a "double-view perspective" (59), or what Frances Kaye has discussed as Branden's "biformity," his tendency "to propagate opposing points of view" (35, 34). By presenting the narrator's self as always already fragmented and split, Grove draws attention to what Jacques Lacan has theorized in psychoanalytic terms as "the self's radical excentricity to itself" (171). Already on the first pages, Branden charges his younger self with being a "presumptuous pub" (4), an "insufferable snob and coxcomb" (3) who speaks in "nonsensical prattle" (4) and indulges in "artificial poses." Putting his "old" self to the test in his American experiment, Phil Branden quickly undergoes a transformation from the arrogant pseudo-aristocrat to the tramp, who undertakes a journey "out west" with almost no money in his pocket.

The test Branden undergoes tortures and mutilates his body, so that the narrative takes the form of "*sparagmos* or tearing to pieces," according to Northrop Frye, "the archetypal theme of irony and satire" (*Anatomy* 192). Very soon after starting his tramp, Branden feels a "wild stabbing pain" across his back (229), and his foot-joints, hips, and back "all hurt" (230). This ritual dissection and crucifixion of the body is the torture of "Purgatory" (332) rather than that of the ever-lasting Inferno, as it prepares for the healing and restoring of the body and soul, for a rebirth of self. Clyde's torture, in contrast, is of the mind rather than the body and leads to spiritual death rather than rebirth.

In his life and death Clyde becomes not so much a subject but subjected to the cultural codes of American society. The confessional techniques which serve as the "technologies of self" in Grove's *Search* are presented by Dreiser as dangerous entrapments that ultimately strip the protagonist even of his most precarious sense of self. Bereft of strategies that would help him to understand the contradictions of his position and feelings, Clyde is sacrificed by an America that seems equally incapable of deciphering and appreciating the mixed signals of Clyde Griffiths' (non)identity. America's judicial institutions impose on Clyde a clearly defined identity by declaring him a criminal and a murderer who deserves to die. In the "death house" or "Murderers' Row" of Auburn Penitentiary (754), Clyde becomes part of a well working machine that completely mechanizes his death, ritually destroying his soul along with his body. The death institution feeds his body but subjects his mind to a psychic torture of terror and of hope eternally denied in the repeated confrontation with the deadly process. His upcoming electrocution is reenacted and imprinted on the consciousness of the convict by a long line of executions that precede his own, deaths which he is forced to witness in "the sudden dimming of the lights" (773), as the death voltage is applied to the condemned on the electric chair.

As a marginalized subject, Clyde Griffiths is sacrificed by a master discourse that asserts its ultimate authority by pronouncing the death verdict. This ritual casting out of the scapegoat figure is a recurring motif in American literature, fictionalized in the public condemnation of the adulterous Hester Prynne by her Puritan community in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), and thematized in a different context with the figure of the Jew Robert Cohn in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). In Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932), this motif culminates in the castration and lynching of Joe Christmas, a white man presumed to have some "Negro" blood. In each of these novels, the communal ego affirms itself by casting out a marginal subject who speaks the discourse of the "Other," a voice which threatens to disrupt the imaginary unity of the communal, fetishized self-image. In these works, the American narcissistic ego inevitably feeds on its own children.

While Dreiser's ironic tragedy dramatizes the ultimate expulsion of the scapegoat, or *pharmakos*, Grove's work, in contrast, turns into an ironic comedy-romance, ending with the protagonist's overt reconciliation with North-American society. Branden, by the end of the novel, decides to become a teacher and in a big sweep professes to reconcile the former contradictions of his life. From an individual, he claims, he has changed into "a social man" (382), who will help the new immigrants of the country to build their "partial" views into "total" views. The contextual framework of this happy ending, however, signals a deeply ironic twist. Branden has learnt in the course of his picaresque adventures that there are no total views, only partial views, and, in order to survive, the immigrant needs to be able to change perspectives, to distance himself from the self-evident—the norms and the conventions. Branden's overt "reconciliation" with society and his rebirth as a Rousseauistic "social man" are questionable, if we consider, for example, his treatment of his friend Ivan after they are assigned to different work tasks. "It separated my close relation to Ivan; it made me independent of him," Branden writes and concludes: "That is the reason why he disappears from this narrative" (355). In the end, Branden is as alone as he was in the beginning of his odyssey, so that his own narrative undercuts and subverts his clean conventional romance resolution. The transformation of self that Branden describes thus remains incomplete and suggests a subjectivity that is forever *en procès*.

Branden's deliberate decision to speak from the margins—as a "hobo," as a Canadian, and as an immigrant—creates a distance between himself and the new society's centres of power. He manages to rescue part of his innocence by refusing to merge his voice completely with a master discourse—i.e. the American ideology. Also, being a hobo does not become a new absolute in the narrative. Although the hobo has no fixed nationality—the mecca of "hobodom" is multicultural and polyglot—he has cultural attachments. The hobo moves from place to place, but also has longings to settle down. He has friends and loyalties and yet does not belong to a particular group. Being a hobo, an immigrant, or a Canadian entails a life on the margins, on the threshold between integration and disintegration, since all three subject positions defy ultimate definition.

In Grove's *Search*, the concept "America" is "always already" split, indeed fragmented into numerous pieces. "America" is an idealized construct, against which reality can be measured, but even the ideal has no absolute value. "America" forms the "soil" in which the confessional immigrant-narrator deploys his "technologies of self" and becomes a new person with a different sense of self. And there is a "real" America which becomes the subject of the narrator's satiric "anatomy," whereby US-America is linked to a set of clearly defined negatives, against which "Canadian" is set up as the unspoken, undefined opposite, and thus as a shifty, fluid, non-essential entity. Branden dies metaphorically to be reborn in an identity that seems deliberately contradictory and is articulated in a discourse that is critical of America. Clyde Griffiths, however, dies because America is incapable of deciphering and recognizing as its own an individual who speaks contradictory discourses, who fits and falls out of every social category, and whose identity and language are vague and shifty. The American tragedy is that, although America's ideology demands a positive ego identification, it sacrifices Clyde, who has internalized his society's fetishized self-image as the ultimate *telos* of his life.

NOTES

[1] Both novelists insist on the representativeness of their heroes by framing the titles with an indefinite article: "*A* Search," "The Odyssey of *an* Immigrant," "*An* American Tragedy." For Dreiser, the crime of Chester Gillette (Clyde's real life prototype) expresses "an archetypal American dilemma": Gilette "'*was really doing the kind of thing which Americans should and would have said was the wise and moral thing to do* [attempting to rise socially through the heart] *had he not committed a murder*'" (quoted in Pizer 204).

[2] Fisher makes much of the uniforms in Dreiser's *Tragedy*, the "metaphor of 'set' identity" (144).

[3] Branden reads *The Odyssey* and the New Testament (*Search* 222), but also more modern writers such as Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (219). His new world experience even helps him understand old world ideas: "I suddenly seemed to

understand three great historical figures that had been enigmas: Sulla, Diocletian, Charles the Fifth" (220).

[4] According to Michael Spindler's study on "Youth, Class, and Consumerism in Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*," most of the novel's characters are young people. Clyde identifies with "[t]he emerging consumption-oriented section of the economy [that] emphasized spending and gratification, not saving and denial" (78). In short, he identifies with "the emerging leisure class" (78) and an American youth culture that is deeply rooted in consumerism.

[5] Lacan distinguishes between the speaking "I" and the ego: "It is therefore always in the relation between the subject's ego *(moi)* and the 'I' *(je)* of his discourse that you must understand dealienation of the subject" (90).

[6] Foucault describes the power relations in Jeremy Bentham's prison model and its influence on other social institutions as follows: "The celebrated, transparent, circular cage, with its high tower, powerful and knowing, may have been for Bentham a project of a perfect [prison] institution; but he also set out to show how one may 'unlock' the disciplines and get them to fuction in a diffused, multiple, polyvalent way throughout the whole social body" (*Discipline* 208-09). According to Foucault, the "panoptic schema, without disappearing as such or losing of its properties, was destined to spread throughout the social body" (207).

[7] Margaret Atwood uses a similar technique of narrative self-subversion in *Cat's Eye*. For a discussion of this technique, see Hutcheon (100-01).

[8] Before his ultimate "rebirth," Branden dies metaphorically when he suffers from a virulent attack of pneumonia that nearly kills him. Undergoing a bodily crucifixion with "huge thorns tearing [his] clothes and lacerating [his] flesh with their points" (283), he re-enacts "Jesus who had been a tramp" (274). Travelling on train rods, his body is metaphorically destroyed by a true torture machine: "the rods, a mere vibrating mass of whipping cords; our arms, springs now stretched to the snapping-point, now compressed beyong the power re-expanding when the roadbed rose and pressed the steel-truck. . . . I saw myself lying on the sleepers, a mangled mass of bloody flesh and crushed bones" (332).

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