

LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Reinventing the Self in the Canadian Multicultural Space(s): Frederick Philip Grove's *Search* for Identity

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Abstract:

Space crucially influences how individuals who *live* (in) it construct their personal identities. This issue has been fundamental to the making of contemporary Canadian culture: by looking at or imagining their place, Canadian authors become the writers of two *homelands* who find their space in the global cross-border English-speaking culture as well as in the Canadian multi-ethnic or post-ethnic society. These authors become *mapmakers* as they introduce new sources of thought into a different space, and try to find their Self from a culture they have left behind. This essay takes into consideration the figure of Frederick Philip Grove, a cultivated European immigrant who left Berlin in 1909 to start a new life in North America and became a well-known Canadian fiction writer. The paper will concentrate on how he explored Western prairie pioneer life and its vibrant multi-cultural communities, and to what extent the Canadian natural and cultural realm Grove inhabited continuously influenced the definition of individuality he captures in his autobiography *In Search of Myself* (1946).

Keywords: space; Canada; landscape; experience; autobiography; fiction.

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Nearly thirty years ago, in a brief note called *The Grove Enigma Resolved* and published in the *Queen's Quarterly* magazine, Douglas Spettigue announced his discovery that before 1909 the Canadian writer Frederick Philip Grove was the German translator and author Felix Paul Greve, who was born in Radomno, on the Polish-Prussian border on February 14th, 1879. In his autobiography, *In Search of Myself* (1946), Grove suggests he

was born in Russia, and it is ironic that after World War I this fictional element became a real fact - the village is actually in Russia, today. By the age of thirty, Greve had already lived a full life: going beyond the humble origins that had marked his youth, he had become an expert in many ancient as well as modern languages, and in less than a decade his achievements as a translator would have been sufficient for a satisfying professional career. Driven both by ambition and financial needs, Greve appeared to be headed for success: nevertheless, 'like an inattentive skier whose skis occasionally overlap' (Martens 2001: x), ambition exceeded financial needs, and his career began a rapid and relentless decline.

Today, as a canonised Canadian novelist, poet, essayist and short-story writer, Grove is widely recognized for the way his work combines German and North-American life, literature, and culture. He revisited his two national identities in *In Search of Myself*, an autobiographical journey from 'Childhood' to 'Youth', and from 'Manhood' to an 'After'. Originally from a working-class background, Grove appeared in Winnipeg in the late fall of 1912, where he was granted an interim certificate to teach in Manitoba. The part of the autobiography taken into consideration here recalls Grove's period in Canada from his beginnings as a teacher to his steady attempts to write and have accepted books of western life: Grove is trying to become a *writer in Canada* rather than a *Canadian writer*. His Prairie novels do not represent 'novels of the soil', rather, Grove makes use of traditional Canadian themes in order to transform them into paradigms for universal questions. Indeed, Grove repeatedly reaffirms that he does not consider his works to make an important contribution to a national literature. Instead, it is through this raw material that he reveals his own vision of life, civilization, nature and the conflict between material and spiritual values. 'I have remained in Canada', he writes in 1940, 'because there was in me one urge more powerful than any other, the urge to express certain things. In other words, to write'. And he concludes: 'What I wanted to write about had offered itself in this country' (Unpublished Lecture 1940: 5). Northrop Frye, in his *Conclusion* to the second edition of C. F. Klinck's *Literary History of Canada* (1976), notes the absence of genuine classics in Canadian literature, yet Grove has been a major and controversial diasporic figure in the developing Canadian literature, and one who clearly continues to influence many Canadian writers today.

As Smaro Kamboureli explains (2000: 27-79), what is known about Grove has been derived from his own autobiographical narratives, which have proven to be largely fictional: in fact, he continues to reinvent himself through his writing and his life in Canada. Grove's *constructed* self is deeply influenced by his perception of the *Canadian land*, the kind of space, in Margaret Atwood's words, in which 'we found ourselves lost' (Atwood 2004: 18). In experiencing spatial disorientation, anxiety and *out-of-placeness*, Grove blends the realistic features of his writing with a naturalistic treatment of the environment, considered as a character in the story through which the author draws the imaginary map of his vicissitudes. It is fiction writer Peter Turchi who, in *Maps of the Imagination* (2004), analyses the geo-cartographic power of space, placing particular emphasis on the map-story relationship and considering the writer as an explorer and a cartographer. Using the map as a metaphor, Turchi considers writing as a combination of exploration and presentation, all the while providing an erudite and fascinating guide.

He compares the way a writer leads a reader through the imaginary world of a story, novel, or poem to the way a mapmaker charts the physical world. "To ask for a map", says Turchi in the first chapter of his book, "is to say, "Tell me a story"" (11). Yet in *In Search of Myself*, Grove demonstrates the other side of the coin: in telling his story, he encourages the reader to construct his/her own mental map of real/imagined places. The author uses many of the same devices as a mapmaker in plotting and executing his work, making crucial decisions about what to include and what to leave out, in order to get from here to there, with a necessary yet not confusing surplus of information. As a consequence, Grove portrays the three-dimensional world he experiences on the two-dimensional flat surface of paper, and his literary skill helps the reader project their imagination onto the page in their own map-making process.

Canadian writers have long negotiated the shared and contested spaces of the map, charting and re-charting the contours not just of identities and communities but also of geographical spaces and places. With – or perhaps because of – the varying degrees of national and regional affiliation that accompany their indigenous, settler, immigrant, and diasporic imaginaries, they reveal the persistent relevance of Northrop Frye's famous question 'Where is here?'. When it comes to Canada one should reconsider the common understanding of what and who is local or familiar, as they have historically been intertwined with what and who is foreign or unfamiliar. So much so that, in 1972, Margaret Atwood claimed that Canadian territory was still

an unknown territory for the people who live in it. [...] A state of mind, the space you inhabit not just with your body but with your head. It's that kind of space in which we found ourselves lost. (Atwood 2004: 26)

In a country where the *here* and *there* have never been clearly defined, and where a person is quite often lost as he/she cannot separate what is at the same time home ground and foreign territory, the indefinite human being represents the 'mister in-between' (Bhabha 1994: xiii): that is the position an individual assumes when he/she has internalized the split between Self and Other, between native and cosmopolitan. In Canada, then, configuring the *here* and *there* means to acknowledge its heterotopic feature and the multiple conflicting social relations 'which are nevertheless interpellated by the national label, "Canada"' (Sugars 2001: 143). Following Deleuze, a native's ground, or at least his/her presumed one, must be continuously re-territorialized because, as Martina Michel suggests in her study on 'New English Literatures', each subject holds a specific position in the field of postcolonial discourse, and is 'the site of multiple and conflicting voices within which the individual is embedded' (Michel 1995: 91). Finding a place in Canada then, means to fill 'the silence of eternal spaces, to regain Eden and close the gap of alienation between humanity and the ground of being' (Hillger 2006: 93).

These issues have been fundamental to the making of contemporary Canadian culture, which is often viewed as a cultural mosaic in order to express the ideal of unity through diversity. Canadian authors have increasingly come to be seen as transcultural and transnational. They are writers of two or more *homelands* who find their space in the global English-speaking (and French-speaking) border-crossing culture as well as in the

Canadian multi-ethnic, post-ethnic society, where the so-called minority literature *is* in effect now part of the mainstream. The first writers using English in Canada were visitors – explorers, travelers, and British officers and their wives – who recorded their impressions of British North America in charts, diaries, journals, and letters. These foundational documents of journeys and settlements presage the documentary tradition in Canadian literature in which geography, history, and arduous voyages of exploration and discovery represent the quest for a myth of origins and for a personal and national identity. Immigrants to Canada, dreaming of a new Eden, encountered instead the realities of a different culture, a fierce climate, unfamiliar wildlife, and physical deprivations. As Frye observed, and as already noted, the origins of Canadian literature were haunted by the overriding question ‘Where is here?’; thus, metaphoric mappings of peoples and places became central to the evolution of the Canadian literary imagination.

As a consequence, Canadian literature has suffered the conflicting division between native (local) and cosmopolitan (foreigner) since its beginning; and the search for a truly Canadian form of expression, deriving from national unity and cultural maturity, has shaped the country’s literary production from the 1850s to the first half of the 20th century. Frye, commonly considered to be the intellectual who established the nationalist and literary contexts within which it would be possible to speak of a Canadian literary tradition, was the first to theorize a national-cultural and de-colonized Canadian space. In his criticism, he tried to systematize and incorporate all the different and often controversial definitions of Canada, distinguishing between two basic literary productions: one associated with colonial thought, the other related to the process of decolonization (it is this latter that has mostly contributed to contemporary images of Canada). While reviewing A.J. Smith’s *Book of Canadian Poetry*, Frye identified a ‘unity of tone’ (Frye 1971: 130) permeating the poems selected for the anthology (which took into consideration those published before 1943, the year when the book came out); this feeling was like an epiphany, as for the first time he felt

...the existence of a definable Canadian genius [...] neither British nor American but, for all its echoes and imitations and second-hand ideas, peculiarly our own, and characterized by [...] a distinctly Canadian ‘attitude of mind’ and a ‘recognizable Canadian accent’. (Gorjup 2009: 8-9)

Pursuing this ‘attitude of mind’, W.H. New’s journal *Canadian Literature* has helped later writers and intellectuals to integrate with the reading public, in the process enabling authors originally from Italy, the Balkans and Eastern Europe, from Asia and the Caribbean to become well-known Canadian authors. Writers such as Michael Ondaatje, Robert Kroetsch and others, have made ‘a vital contribution to the internationalization of English Canadian literature’ (Thorpe 1992: 112), because they have fiercely challenged ‘the Eurocentric Canadian nationalism’ (118). According to Thorpe, ‘Canadian literature is irrevocably international in content and concern’ (123), and shows that differences can actually represent an enormous potential in terms of culture. *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fiction* (1990), edited by Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond, was the

first anthology that brought together writers from different racial, ethnic, and national contexts. In the *Introduction*, Hutcheon and Richmond write that in

...placing well-known Canadian writers like Michael Ondaatje, Joseph Skvorecky, Joy Kogawa, and Mordecai Richler in the (for some, surprising) context of multiculturalism, [the collection] sought to undo the kind of thinking that separates the 'central' from the implicitly 'marginal' by showing how many of Canada's canonical texts are indeed written from the so-called margins of ethnicity. There is an argument to be made that the canon in Canada has been, from the first, a creation of women and 'minorities'. (Hutcheon and Richmond 1990: 12-3)

According to the editors, then, the Canadian literary canon has always been a product of minorities: only the multicultural-oriented Canadian character has allowed many immigrant writers to tell the story of the land they had left or that of the land they were becoming part of. Consequently Canadian Literature, or Can. Lit., as it has been popularly abbreviated, implies a symbiotic relation between the country and its multicultural writing *corporu*, because in Canada 'the land hardly allows for utopian dreams' (Kanaganayakam 2005: 1). The question, in fact, is not if there is some writing that can be labelled as Canadian, but only to decide what this label means. 'I am here. Come and visit me' (Ondaatje 1987: 10), says Patrick Lewis in Michael Ondaatje's 1988 book *In the Skin of a Lion*: words that strongly indicate how the person who is speaking is certain of the place where he/she is living, and that seem to answer Frye's concern over the Canadian quest for identity. This means that the notions of space and place, perhaps paradoxically, depend on how authors choose to position themselves: the texts produced are not tied to a unified and well-defined culture, but become part of a wider and more specific literary system in order to reach that unity in diversity so hoped for. Both individually and collectively, literary texts have helped to give that 'here' its shape and character. It is the text, in some sense, that must conform to the writer's double condition of native and foreigner, bringing something from the past into the present, something from the old world into the new world. In this respect, Salman Rushdie writes:

[I]t may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation [...] almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands. (Rushdie 1991: 10)

By creating their imaginary homelands, these authors truly become mapmakers as they introduce new experiences in (and of) different spaces. At the same time, they repeatedly try to reconstruct their histories, past and present selves in (and out of) a culture they

have forever left behind. Writing itself becomes a form of cartography when the landscapes and spatial experiences that writers describe engender mental or cognitive maps in the reader. While the role of geography in Canadian literary studies appears to be increasing in the wake of the ‘spatial turn’ in the humanities, ‘in the Canadian literary context space and place have always mattered’ (Warley, Ball, Viau 1998: np); and Canadian writers have long negotiated the shared and contested spaces of the map, charting and re-charting the contours not just of identities and communities but also of geographical spaces and places.

If literature is one of the (social) spaces in which individuals attempt a construction of their cultural identity, Canadian literature has been ‘an integral part of a network of discourses that have produced identities informed by images associated with the land’ (Warley, Ball and Viau 1998: np). Frederick Philip Grove’s Canadian experience, writing, and culture, made him a unique and internationally recognized literary figure, a pioneer in the building of today’s Canadian multicultural context. Grove’s journey from Europe to North America, then, deflects attention from a life lived for art’s sake to an art that is essentially for life’s sake:

Art has its being, not in the activity of the artist – which is only its occasion – but in the mental and emotional reaction of him [sic] to whom it is addressed: there is its true and only material; what is commonly called its material should properly be called its tools. (356)

The result of *The Grove Enigma Resolved* was to make ‘the familiar *unfamiliar*, the known *unknown*’ (Hjartarson 1986: ix): an act that removed Grove from alienation and entered him into the Canadian literary context, a stranger who became the Canadian man *per excellence*. Grove was revealed as a man born in Russia and of Scottish, Swedish and English blood; who was raised and educated in Paris, Munich and Rome; and who travelled extensively, from the Sahara to Madagascar, up to the most isolated territories of the American continent, before settling in Canada. He ‘is yet the typical, perhaps even the archetypal, Canadian’ (Ross 1957: 32). Grove is an intellectual who sees alienation and isolation as the essential part of the author’s existence, ‘an expatriate writer [...] able to mediate between self and the world outside’ (35) and to analyse people’s reactions and relationships through reality rather than through a re-construction of reality itself. As often happens with intellectuals, isolation, though in many cases oppressive, gives a sort of imaginary freedom:

the important thing is that you have [...] an audience *in mind* when you speak. Whether it is really there does not matter. In case of need you can imagine it. (Grove 1974: 10-1)

Thus, Grove found himself in Canada in 1909 after faking his suicide in Germany. In a country still looking for a cultural and literary identity, he understood he had few opportunities as a translator – as well as fewer opportunities for earning an income; therefore, he used his experience and education to teach and write. The decision to leave

Germany meant abandoning his job as translator, a profession which requires not only the knowledge of another language but also the ability to sympathize with something Other - another idiom, culture, ideology, which for the sake of understanding one adopts as one's own:

I had at bottom no language which was peculiarly my own. In a way this was an advantage to me; I had half a dozen instead. But in another way, it was a disadvantage and even a misfortune: I lacked that limitation which is best for the profound penetration of the soul of a language. I ground my teeth in my struggles; and, for the moment, all my struggles were with words. (338)

To be between languages means to abandon cherished ideologies and requires one to hide some of one's beliefs; it means to forget 'the firmness of the shaping perception of one's life' (Martens 2001: xi). It means, finally, 'to feel at home where no home rises on the horizon. One is always on the way, in search of oneself as other' (xi), as E.D. Blodgett writes in the Foreword to Klaus Martens' book on Frederick Grove.

Between Felix Paul Greve's life in Europe and his widely documented arrival in Canada, there is a relatively short but absolutely crucial time-lapse we know little about. It is a three-year period, which goes from Felix's fake suicide in Berlin at the beginning of Summer 1909 to the appearance of Fred Grove in Winnipeg, in December 1912; a period that Grove himself quite fictionally describes in *A Search for America* (1971), a book 'written and rewritten eight times' (vi) under the pseudonym of Phil Brandon. Except for his known financial difficulties, the reasons for this decision are incomprehensible, and Grove's movements still obscure: did he really take a boat from Rostock (or Stralsund) towards a Scandinavian harbour, and then a ship to England in June or July 1909, as Phil does in the book? Actually, Rostock can be easily reached from Berlin, and today it is still the main boarding place for Scandinavia, mainly Trelleborg and Malmö – where Grove himself declares he had lived with his parents). In *A Search*, Phil's departure in 1892 is narrated as follows:

what I resolved to do was this. I intended to step in at Cook's tourist office in London – on the Strand, if I remember right – and to ask for the next boat which I stood any chance of catching, wither at Liverpool or at Southampton. [...] As it happened, when, a day or two later, I carried this idea out, a White-Star liner was to weigh anchor next day, going from Liverpool to Montreal. The boat train was to leave Euston Station the same night at ten o'clock. I bought my passage – second cabin – received a third-class railway ticket free of charge and – had burnt my bridges. (Grove 1971: 11)

Following the traces Grove leaves in this first (unofficial) autobiographical work, we could try to geographically map his journey as 'an immigrant into the western hemisphere' (11): he caught a train from London to Liverpool and boarded the *Megantic*, a White Star rapid boat cutting through the Northern Atlantic towards Canada. It carried immigrants, Americans and Canadians coming back from Europe, and tourists.

According to the Canadian Border Service Agency, the *Megantic* left Liverpool on July 22nd and arrived in Quebec on July 29th, 1909, and a thirty-year old Greve was among its passengers. Moreover, Greve introduced himself as Grove but held his original first name as well as the P. for Paul: as Martens argues, he did so because he had not decided yet whether to stay in Canada or return to Europe – to support his thesis, Martens suggests Grove wrote ‘travelling author’ in the employment/job slot, as he was inclined to move Westward following the Canadian Pacific Railroad. Phil’s movements, *In a Search for America*, become then much clearer, as if Grove builds and justifies his choices and behaviour: he moves to Montreal, works in a Toronto restaurant, is a book peddler in New York and in Philadelphia where, ‘in a self-liberating move’ (Martens 2001: 237), he dismisses his past and all his beliefs in a good society and falls into anonymity. At this point, Phil/Frederick follows the Ohio River till Indiana, ends up in Dakota where he works on a farm during wheat harvest, and finally leaves for Winnipeg.

Here ends the story of Phil Brandon alias Frederick Grove. It is his second migration to Canada, on ‘a dismal November day’ in 1912, ‘with a raw wind blowing from the north-west and cold, iron-grey clouds flying low – one of those Ontario days which, on the lake-shores or in a country of rock and swamp, seem to bring visions of an ageless time after the emergence of the earth from chaos, or a foreboding of the end of a world about to die from entropy’ (Grove 1974: 1), with which he begins *In Search of Myself*, the partial life-story of a man defeated by circumstances and by his own weaknesses. A curious amalgam of fact and fiction, the book records no failure; on the contrary, in this work Grove reasserts the creative and indomitable will to build a better future for himself and his family in the face of failure itself:

1893,[...] 1927, [...] between the two dates mentioned I had successively been a waiter, a book agent, a factory hand, a roust-about on board a lake steamer and a hobo or itinerant farm-laborer in the West. The one thing which I might have done with some credit to myself and some profit to others, it never occurred to me even to try – and that was teaching. In Europe I had held no qualifications whatever; in America it was to be my lot to find out that, in no matter what occupation except that of an unskilled laborer, the single qualification needed was ‘experience’; and experience, in no matter what, was the one thing I lacked. (181-82)

Starting his journey northbound – ‘home as I called it’ (245) -, Grove draws his own imaginary path through the indefinite and unlimited Canadian prairies, that constantly change and shift:

[T]he stooks of ripe wheat stood with their feet in water or, when it had frozen overnight, in ice; the roads were bottomless mires; and on account of the sticky nature of the gumbo soil prevailing throughout the district which I had to traverse, it was impossible to make any progress except by picking one’s way along the grassy margin. (245-42)

For a man of burning ambitions, there can be no surrender; braving the elements and facing this ever changing, harsh landscape, was the only way of survival. Grove's mapping activity creates a new landmark: on 'a glorious, cold winter day, the temperature ranging in the twenties below zero' (250), the Provincial Education Office sent him to Southern Manitoba, where a teacher was required in the village of Morden. This chance brought Grove to his 'dreamt-of goal' (251): in Morden, the world was

snow-white and flat as a table top; but, to the west, the horizon was broken by the low line of hills which go under the name of Pembina Mountains. [...] Everything – landscape, buildings, and even the inhabitants, who, by the way, came from the German districts of Russia, - reminded me in the most vivid way of the steppes. (251)

Regularly, these landscapes pair to the ones of his European, or rather Russian, childhood; so that this journey through the Canadian space becomes also a movement through time and memory. 'Nothing that has ever been is ever lost' (10); again, some pages later he writes:

...the district, south of the town of Morden, was flat as a table top. But most of the farmsteads were surrounded by windbreaks of tall cotton-woods, now bare of their brittle, triangular foliage and sticking out of the snow like huge, inverted, primitive brooms. The hamlet itself [...] was treeless. I had seen such places, indistinguishable in every feature, in the Russian province of Volhynia and on the steppes of Siberia. (253)

These descriptions strongly reflect the Canadian land, and mirror the space occupied by nature that many authors describe in their works. But it is also true that to Grove, who considers himself a 'cosmopolitan, [...] the spokesman of a race', snow and hail, fog and rain, 'had become living things':

...what inner vitality I had was spread out over a province, yes, over an empire. I could switch my attention from one point of it to another, as though, from the summit of a mountain, I were looking down over hundreds of miles, piercing the distance with telescopic vision which enabled me to see the minutest details no matter how far away they might be. (262)

Wherever Grove turns, in this whole region of the Canadian West, a double action is being performed: looking at the landscape, while at the same time *mapping* and *populating* it in his imagination. This is why he writes:

[T]here were figures moving about which were the creations of my brain, at the same time that they were the mirrorings of actual conditions. These figures did not all of them command my own sympathies; with some of them I lived in an everlasting conflict; but they shared my blood and my vital strength. I could not

have fashioned them had I not seen their side; and, I believe, I have been just to them. (262)

This passage, as Eric Thompson notes, reveals 'Grove's Olympian self-confidence in his powers of *telescopic vision*' (Thompson 1979: 15) in the lives and fates of the prairie's men and women, who seem to literally merge with the landscape and represent the narrative material to which Grove feels closer. He cannot distance himself from his autobiographical roots, and is unable to avoid references to his real experiences which become stories. In *In Search of Myself*, for example, Grove explains how the figure of Abe Spalding, his *alter ego* and main character in *Fruits of the Earth* (1933), came to life:

[I]n the fall of 1912, I had [...] come up through the northern prairies, skirting rain-drenched fields, threading miry roads which smacked their lips at every step I took. (261)

Again the landscape metamorphoses. It seems that Grove is split between two separate lives that influence each other until they reach a perfect correspondence. One life addresses the creation of a character, the other deals with the adventures of his character and the difficulties he is going to face as Grove himself did in his real life:

I lived my life, he his. As I grew older, *he* did, slowly maturing, slowly changing, slowly shaping his life as best he could. We were never one; though I felt with him, we remained two. (261)

However, as he explains, Abe is not the only figure to share Grove's peregrinations and sufferings. Following his experiences, in fact, other characters were taking shape in his mind: Len Sterner, who was fighting for his education in the dry lands of northern Manitoba; Niels Lindstedt, who was looking after his family homestead in the same area, 'fighting the devils in his blood' (262); Felix Powell, who was starting his career in a small Canadian town; the Clarks, in *The Master of the Mill*, who were accumulating their fortune; and John Elliot, the old man of Saskatchewan's Sedgeby district, who was arguing with his children. As Louis Dudek suggests, Grove is looking for an identity still incomplete: in other words, only a real experience can help him to create a fictional story through his imagination (Dudek 1974: 88-9); only gradually, and starting always from reality, can he build a character:

There is a fundamental difference between books that are "made" and books that have "grown". [...] I am so constituted as to be able to produce books only that have grown. [...] I am the man who looks on; as life flows by, he sees and fashions a few things *which have come to him* and which, slowly, but inevitably, demand artistic formulation. (421)

Grove's major credit, then, was to make a great contribution to the narration and consequent affirmation of Canadian prairie life of his time. His adventures are often

those of the immigrants, the people for whom Grove wants to become the spokesman. On one hand, then, it looks like he has finally found his place; on the other hand, both the wish of reaching personal satisfaction and the adversities of the Canadian landscape that recall to his mind the old European/Russian space ('Everything – landscape, buildings, and even the inhabitants[...] – reminded me in the most vivid way of the steppes' (251); 'I had seen such places, indistinguishable in every feature, in the Russian province of Volhynia and on the steppes of Siberia' (253)), lead him to reconsider his condition. The 'evil' Nature, indeed, does not become sweeter as spring approaches: ice liquefies, causing floods, 'and for a fortnight or so I was prisoner at the school' (255). In this description, nature is described as a jailer, and the hostile space becomes a prison he can hardly escape from: 'Then, slowly, the flood ran out, spreading eastward, following the imperceptible slope to the Red River. Below the water, the ground remained frozen, of course. Next came mud, mud, mud' (255). Finally, under the fierce winds of late April and early May, roads and fields dried and Grove became 'restless' (255). It is evident that Nature plays a major role in Grove's writing: the new season modifies the winter landscape, and it influences and contributes to Grove's interior transformation:

[I]t was spring; the prairie was greening up; in the trees of the windbreaks planted around the farms, the leaves were burgeoning forth; the birds were singing. In the landscape there was nothing to distract us, except perhaps an occasional mirage. All about lay the featureless prairie, stretching away to the distant horizon, utterly flat. (274-75)

Grove found his 'place' seven miles west of Amaranth, twenty-two east of Glenella and not far from the Riding Mountains which represent the northern part of the Pembina Mountains, and thirty-four miles north of Gladstone, 'separated from it, first by a fringe of forest a few miles wide, and then due south, by what was called the Big Marsh' (300). It was from this place that Grove drew inspiration for the landscape descriptions and setting of *Settlers of the Marsh*. In a space 'which offered no limit to the imagination' (301), in a territory whose forests reach the Arctic through the North-Western Territories, lying between the Canadian National Rail and the lake, Grove definitely reaches his 'promise of paradise' (301). It's 1927, and if on the one side his health improves and his job finally starts to be rewarding, on the other side he has to face the sudden death of his daughter, May, born from his marriage with Catherine Wiens in 1914. Only a few words are used to describe this grief: 'Even today we dare not mention her when the anniversaries of her birth or her death come around' (391). Grove's life changes radically; and so does his relationship with space and with the characters that originated from it:

...for years I had been absent-minded, forcing myself by a sheer effort of the will to attend to my daily task; for years I had been unable to enjoy the beauty of any landscape, for in every scene I had set eyes on I had looked only for what was relevant to the setting of my book; for years I had, in every person with whom I came into contact, not excluding wife and child, reacted only to what referred to the human world inhabiting the bush-country of Manitoba as I had 'created' it; for

the landscape [...] and its human inhabitants as well, were mine, were the product of my mind; yet, to me, they have become more real than any actuality could have been. For years, yes, decades, every figure [...] had, from day to day, sucked my life blood, [...] leaving me limp as a rag, making me a bore to others and a burden to myself. (373)

Only by imbuing space with meaning can he find relief. Only earth, rivers, mountains and trees give him comfort; the surrounding landscape becomes an extension of Grove himself, where he derives strength for both mind and body. But how did this specific space become such a special place to him? Because most of the forest ‘was still untouched by the hand of man; the poplar prevailed, both aspen and balsam’ (299). Some parts had been devastated by fires, ‘and of these the great willow-herb had taken undisputed possession’ (299). Grove’s choice of words shows how he wants to underline the candour of the landscape he is observing, to describe its purity that can erase any unnecessary thoughts from his mind. It is a revelation:

I was at home here. I had not known what the last few years had done to me by removing me from my true environment. I had not known that I was so scarred with suffering, by the career which had opened before me. I had not known – or had I? – that, for me, nothing whatever counted, neither honour nor wealth, neither security nor even domestic happiness, when it interfered with my work. If I were living here, I should resume that work. (300)

An affirmed writer both in Canada and the USA, Frederick Philip Grove died on August 19th, 1948. He was buried in Rapid City next to his daughter May. Despite many unresolved questions, his literary life clearly represents the influence that space plays in the construction of identity:

I had [...] never made a secret of the fact that I had not been born in Canada. To many, there was no difference between a Canadian of foreign extraction and an ‘enemy alien’. For decades I had felt myself to be a Canadian in a sense that went far beyond a mere civic adherence or dynastic allegiance; compared with my feeling of identification with the interests of the west, even formal naturalization was a mere irrelevancy; I had struck spiritual root in the pioneer districts of Canada. (291-92)

Frederick Grove will have to re-map his imagination in order to finally realize the nature of his relation to Canadian life. His story is that of a man who was driven by desperation to flee Europe, who sought in Canada the fulfilment that had been previously denied him. A man who burst into tears when Wilfrid Eggleston was reading the motivations for the Governor General’s Award for *creative non-fiction*, which Grove won in 1947 – it was only one year before his death: it was too late for him to be recognized and appreciated as a talented writer in his lifetime. A man who would have liked to be pure and was not; who would have liked to achieve greatness in literature during his life, and

for all his talents did not; who would have liked to live the life portrayed in the literature of talented men, and could not. However, Grove himself represented the influence that space has on the construction of identity and on the literary production of the individual who lives in it. In amalgamating with the environment, Grove has narrated not only the life of the prairies and its difficulties, but has demonstrated again the strong link between people and the space they inhabit. 'Was it worth?' (457), he asks himself and the reader on the last page of *In Search of Myself*. We should reply, 'Yes, it was'. Reading Grove's writing is, in a sense, to "read" the place itself. And it is through this experience of Canadian space that Grove himself becomes a map, and transforms his life in his best piece of fiction: because in Canada the reality of space forces an inevitable linking of the individual with the surrounding landscape. Following his story, we see how time is only given in perceptions and recollections from the past, while an 'adequately progressive sense of space' (Massey 1994: 5) dominates and influences a life lived fictionally, where truth is fiction and fiction is truth. No one, Edward Said teaches us, can be completely original when he/she writes, because every human activity is deeply influenced by a limited set of images from which an author can draw inspiration; and the percentage of imagination lying behind any creation cannot be immune from the influences of the context where it happens, nor from the narrator's background and the historical moment which he/she lives in. The question, then, is if any sort of representation can actually be true, or if on the contrary it is rooted in the language and culture, in the institutions and power, and in the *space* of the person who writes.

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