



Journal of the Short Story in English

Les Cahiers de la nouvelle

64 | Spring 2015

Special Section: The Modernist Short Story, and Varia

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Electronic version

URL: <http://jsse.revues.org/1569>

ISSN: 1969-6108

Publisher

Presses universitaires d'Angers

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 March 2015

ISSN: 0294-04442

Electronic reference

Andrew James, « The Tales of Frederick Philip Grove », *Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online], 64 | Spring 2015, Online since 01 March 2017, connection on 03 May 2017. URL : <http://jsse.revues.org/1569>

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The Tales of Frederick Philip Grove

Andrew James

- 1 The twenty-three stories in the original version of Frederick Philip Grove's *Tales from the Margin* comprise a cycle: characters recur and the locale is limited to Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta: the Canadian Prairies. This paper will examine how our perception of Grove's cycle alters when the stories are viewed as tales. This is the label the author preferred. As he explained in his essay "The Novel," while the short story deals with characters and incidents "excised" from the "social body" (*It Needs to Be Said* 120), the tale is concerned with the "border-provinces of human life" or life "on the margin." Because tales belong to the oral tradition, the style of oration and identity of the teller are also important. Chaucer democratized tales by proving that anyone, irrespective of economic class or educational background, could tell a tale so long as it had sustaining interest to command an audience; Poe used the genre as an invitation to a fantastic, psychologically layered fictional world; and Washington Irving employed narrators who were dramatic figures in their own right, filtering his tales through them (Fallon xvii). These three elements—the levelling of class barriers, psychological penetration, and a subjective narrative style—are relevant to a discussion of Grove's *Tales from the Margin*.¹ Perhaps a fourth element is incredulity, for when someone says that he or she is telling a tale, we know that the truth is likely to be stretched. This applies to tall tales, many of which Grove told about his own life (Spettigue 21) in pseudo-memoirs, convincing generations of Canadian readers that he had emigrated from Sweden, rather than Germany, and inventing an alternate biography for himself.
- 2 Several early Canadian short story cycles helped to establish a literary identity for a particular group or geographic area by outlining certain basic characteristics of local inhabitants. Stephen Leacock, Alice Munro, and Mavis Gallant all wrote cycles on the people in circumscribed locales which may be compared in this respect with works such as Joyce's *Dubliners* and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*. If Grove's tales had been published earlier they would have joined this group, but a cycle largely concerned with foreigners in the Canadian Midwest was deemed unappealing to Canadian readers in the 1940s (Sellwood 93). The story cycle was mothballed, rather than marginalized, for over

forty years, and when it finally did appear its editor Desmond Pacey ignored Grove's publication instructions. Although the author intended *Tales from the Margin* as a cycle of twenty-three tales to be presented in a particular order, Pacey deleted six and added eight later selections, then shuffled the resulting twenty-five tales. In spite of Pacey's meddling, the overall message of marginality remains relatively unchanged: Grove's characters operate on the margins of society, a position with which the author was also familiar.² As a highly literate, university-educated German immigrant to a rural Canadian Prairie community, he was marked by his accent, erudition, and bookish English. He straddled two worlds, standing neither inside nor outside, and this nebulous position is reflected in the authors listed in Grove's essay "The Novel" as representative writers of tales, as we shall see. It is also reflected in the tales' persistent concern for the poor and the forgotten—those who struggle and fail to improve their lot in a harsh environment—and the rogues and scam artists who take advantage of the weak. However Pacey's editorial interference was not wholly negative. Some of his additions provide further evidence of Grove's interest in the psychological penetration of his characters while others are revealing of a schism that exists within the author himself.

- 3 Unlike *Tales from the Margin*, Grove was not, for most of his writing career, neglected. His story "Snow," about a poor Prairie farmer who freezes to death in a blizzard, was the first piece of short fiction by any author to be published in the *Queen's Quarterly* in 1932, and this opened doors for young writers such as Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, and Margaret Lawrence, who would also publish stories in the journal (Bell); it also offered encouragement to western Canadian writers that their voices could be heard in eastern Canada.³ Grove was part of the Canadian literary canon in English up until the 1940s, thanks to seven novels, a collection of essays, and two fictionalized memoirs. As a purveyor of naturalist and socialist ideals, his explorations of pioneer life in the harsh but majestic Canadian west warned of the dangers of mechanization and unchecked capitalism. But there are other extenuating circumstances that affected the reception of *Tales from the Margin* in the early 1970s, shifting the focus away from the contents and Grove's message. Around the time of publication, scholar Douglas O. Spettigue was announcing to the critical world that Frederick Philip Grove was not an Anglo-Swedish immigrant born in 1871, but a minor German modernist writer named Felix Paul Greve, born eight years later in 1879. Although many details still remain sketchy, Spettigue had discovered that Grove/Greve, or FPG as he came to be called, attended university in Bonn, settled in Berlin in 1906 or 1907, and authored numerous literary translations, two monographs on Oscar Wilde, a book of poetry, a play, and two novels in German. Living the life of a dandy, he borrowed wildly until, burdened by debt, he was imprisoned for a year for fraud (Spettigue 95-97). A few years after his release he faked his own death by drowning, surfaced in America in 1909, then arrived in Winnipeg in 1912, calling himself Frederick Philip Grove from Sweden. Two years later he married fellow-schoolteacher Catherine Wiens, claiming to be a widower, though he was still married to Frau Else Greve. In the know about the drowning plot, she had moved to New York and was living her own bohemian existence (Pacey and Mahanti 18, 21).
- 4 These revelations shocked scholars and titillated readers, who thought that they knew all about Grove's life from his autobiographical novels and memoirs. Spettigue's 1974 biography of Grove's German years initiated a renewal and shift in Grove studies, with researchers focusing on the man, and using the fiction to explain his life. There had been little interest in the author sometimes referred to as the Canadian Dreiser (Knonagel 246)

for the previous thirty years, since naturalism had fallen out of favour and the critical focus had moved to younger, more sophisticated and socially diverse writers. It was also somewhat embarrassing that no one had solved the riddle of Grove's past sooner since he had called himself "Fred Grove" as a Manitoba school-teacher, been known to his friends as "Phil," a nickname for "Felix," used the same three initials throughout his life, and kept the same birthday, February 14 (Pacey and Mahanti 21-22). It has been suggested that Grove had two very good reasons for hiding his identity. First, he arrived in Canada at the height of anti-German sentiment, in 1912 (Spettigue 15), and doubtless thought it would be easier to assimilate if he claimed Swedish heritage. The deception would not have been difficult to pull off since Swedish was one of five languages that Grove spoke fluently. Second, his criminal record in Germany, if it had become known, would have hurt his chances of acquiring Canadian citizenship, which he did in 1920 (Pacey and Mahanti 22).

- 5 Before discussing the cycle, the reasons for its persistent neglect require some explication. Although it was substantially complete by 1928, publication did not take place until 1971. Konrad Gross has suggested numerous factors that may have contributed to this delay: a preference in the 1920s for experimental American short fiction to Grove's perceived naturalism; the limited number of Canadian magazines publishing short fiction; the fact that Grove's stories often read better as short character sketches, which led to their critical dismissal; and the crippling effect of the Depression on the publishing industry (86-7). One of the attendant results of the long gap between composition and publication was that readers were not attuned to look for modernist influence. Because Grove's German background was still unknown, no one knew that the Anglo-Swedish immigrant schoolteacher Frederick Philip Grove had once been the German dandy and minor modernist writer Felix Paul Greve.
- 6 In "The Novel" Grove says that the attraction of tales is that they deal with "the unusual" and therefore satisfy "our occasional appetite for the adventurous, the mysterious, or the horrible." Representative writers of tales include: Hoffmann, De Quincey, Poe, Chesterton, Conrad, and (in some of his works) Hamsun (120). The appeal of each of these authors is different and for the purposes of this paper I will exclude Poe and Chesterton. Poe has exerted sway over almost every writer in the modernist era, and his influence as a master of short fiction does not require exposition; Chesterton's mysteries, on the other hand, have little to do with Grove's tales. We know that Grove read voraciously in English in his youth, and Chesterton was doubtless an early influence. But the other four listed writers have important connections to Grove that are revealing of his conception of his short fiction as tales. As an immigrant to Canada, writing in the language of his adopted country, Grove approached his subject with a different eye and this represents a connection to Conrad, though a more significant thematic similarity lies in their shared interest in exploring personal identity. Conrad's fiction must have appealed to a man who continued to recreate himself in order to obscure his past. In the author's note to "An Outpost of Progress," one of the works in *Almayer's Folly and Tales of Unrest*, Conrad says, "I fancied myself a new man," though "It was only later that I perceived that in common with the rest of man nothing could deliver me from my fatal consistency. We cannot escape from ourselves" (Conrad vii). He maintained that his story was "true enough," having been based largely on his own travel experiences. "The sustained invention of a really telling lie demands a talent which I do not possess" (vii). While Conrad presents his tale as fact, Grove similarly blurred the distinction between experience and imagination

by fictionalizing his own life and presenting it as memoir. At the conclusion of *A Search for America*, published just two years before “The Novel” and concurrent with the composition of his tales, Grove explains the central character’s name:

Why, so I have been asked, did I choose a pseudonym for my hero? Well, while a pseudonym ostensibly dissociates the author from his creation, it gives him at the same time an opportunity to be even more personal than, in the conditions of our present-day civilization, it would be either safe or comfortable to be were he speaking in the first person, unmasked. (*A Search for America* 513-4)

- 7 By writing from a marginal, rather than mainstream, perspective, Grove perhaps felt free to express negative opinions of Canada. After all, it is Phil Branden, not Frederick Philip Grove, who is critical of capitalist greed, the treatment of immigrants, and the laziness of the average North American.
- 8 It is not Conrad’s technique that is relevant to a discussion of *Tales from the Margin*, but his deliberate blurring of fact and fiction in tales about foreign lands in order to express the idea of being haunted by the past. In another of Conrad’s tales, “Karain: a Memory,” the titular character and a friend pursue a Dutchman who has eloped with the chief’s beautiful daughter.⁴ After two years they find the couple, but on impulse Karain shoots his obsessed friend Matara and spares the Dutchman, with whom the woman appears to be happy (38). Thereafter Karain is convinced that Matara’s ghost is haunting him. Similarly, Susan in “The Idiots” puts an end to years of psychological torture by killing her husband, only to find that she cannot escape his ghost. Her solution is to end her own life by jumping into the sea (84).
- 9 Thomas De Quincey probably made Grove’s list of representative tale tellers by impressing upon him that it was possible to use one’s language skills to write about foreign countries. During Grove’s writing apprenticeship in Germany, from 1900 until 1907, he published translations of De Quincey’s tales (Pacey 1974, 130), several of which are set in Germany, including “Klosterheim, or the Masque” and “The Avenger.” De Quincey also anglicized some German legends. The allure of E.T.A. Hoffmann, on the other hand, lies in his ingenious expression of a schizophrenic personality. In the story “Councillor Krespel,” we are told that “There are some people [...] from whom nature, or some special fatality, has drawn away the veil under the concealment of which the rest of us pursue our follies. Their inner workings are visible” (173). This is something that Grove aspired to in some of his psychological tales, as we shall see. Hoffmann lays bare the souls of his characters in order to point to a duality in heart or mind. Sometimes the point is made literally, as in “The Choosing of the Bride,” when the goldsmith changes his face to that of a fox (352). At other times, this duality is borne from the unbridled desire, or mania, for literature, art, wealth, something which we think will please us more than love (411). Thus, when Grove listed representative tellers of tales in “The Novel” he was helping us to understand how he conceived of his own short fiction. His repeated lies, exaggerations, and fabrications about his own life are indeed indicative of “some deep-felt need to fictionalize his background” (Pacey and Mahanti, 19), and when he wrote his tales, he had in mind literary predecessors who had stood outside, writing about other worlds as a means of exploring their own identities. There is a sense in which the term “tale,” more so than “story,” implies an exoticism that goes beyond the realm of everyday experience. Conrad and De Quincey chose to write about foreign lands, and Hoffmann introduced elements of the fantastic to distinguish his fictional world from reality. And for Grove, immigrant life on the Prairies must have seemed fantastic, himself as much of an outsider as Conrad journeying down an African river. Thus, the preference for the

term “tale” over “story” draws attention to Grove’s position as author in relation to his material that might not otherwise be readily apparent.

- 10 When Grove’s friend, the scholar Desmond Pacey, unearthed the typescript of *Tales from the Margin* at the University of Manitoba’s archives, he discovered that on the table of contents page Grove had divided the twenty-three tales into four groups. The first group of nine tales focuses on the arrival of settlers in Prairie communities; the second group of ten looks at the communities after settlement; greed and the obsessive pursuit of material wealth are the themes in the third group of three tales; and the final group is a single tale, a parable that reiterates the message of the previous twenty-two. Grove included the following written directive: “The above arrangement in groups is intentional and should be adhered to by the printer. The author.” Disregarding the directive, Pacey selected and shuffled seventeen of the tales, adding another eight later works, and presenting it under the title: *Tales from the Margin: Selected Stories of Frederick Philip Grove*. Pacey defended his heavy-handed editing in the introduction. He admitted, “It might be suggested that, in offering this collection of Grove’s short stories to the public, I should have followed his own selection in the typescript version,” (3) but felt that eight other stories, most of which had been written after 1933 and placed in magazines, were of superior quality. Prior publication, he argued, was proof of merit (4). He makes the rather audacious claim that the four stories dropped from the cycle—“Bachelors All,” “The Deserter,” “Foreigners,” and “The Heir”—“are almost certainly early and unrevised stories” since three of the four had only ever been printed in the local *Winnipeg Tribune Magazine* (4). The downside of Pacey’s meddling was that the integrity of a focused study of the immigrant experience, written during Grove’s first sixteen years in Canada, had been compromised. Some of Pacey’s selections betray a disproportionate interest in Grove’s private life. “The Desert” is about a female teacher who at last agrees to marry, but without surrendering “her own true life” (77). Grove too had married a teaching colleague, Catherine Wiens. While this tale’s locale—the Prairies—fits the cycle, its subject matter does not. Two clear geographic anomalies are “Riders” set during the Depression in Ontario, and “The Boat,” which takes place in Europe before the turn of the century, and explores a young boy’s tangled relations with his parents. From an artistic standpoint, the addition of “Herefords in the Wilderness” is unfortunate since it repeats a scene from another tale in which an old man wearing nothing but an overcoat and trousers gives the storekeeper Kalad four eggs in exchange for tea.
- 11 While some of Pacey’s editorial additions do detract from the thematic unity of the cycle, two others—“A Poor Defenceless Widow” and “The Spendthrift”—help in understanding Grove’s modernist preoccupation with human psychology. In the former tale, first published in *Saturday Night* in 1932, Mrs Messinger must pay \$4000 in income tax and she is determined to enlist the help of Mr Higginbotham, the mayor of Purlieu, Manitoba (43). The mayor is described as “a prisoner in his office” because the persistent widow refuses to leave until he has met with her and agreed to offer assistance. Neither the setting nor the focus on financial issues is problematic, but the story tells us nothing about homesteaders, immigrants, or life on the land. Peripherally at least, the latter tale, “The Spendthrift,” has to do with life after settlement. Its central character is Norman Walker, a farmer without capital who happily receives a succession of loans without realizing that he is becoming the banker’s “slave” (179). This is one of the better stories not included in the original typescript because of its psychological depth. Once Norman becomes convinced by his older and wiser brother John of his impending ruin, he spends with

increasing abandon, thinking, “what’s the use?” (180). Norman, John, and the other six Walker children are brought together by a will, and Grove uses the occasion to return to one of his favourite themes: the divisive effect of money on family relations. Grove’s genius emerges in the complexity of Norman’s portrayal. While he makes rash decisions and acts with false bravado, we discover that he secretly longs for the approval of his siblings and has become convinced at the family gathering that he will gain sister Clara’s. When she cannot support his decision to sacrifice a \$5000 future payment for \$3000 immediate cash, he becomes furious (191).

- 12 The passive aggression of Norman Walker and Mrs Messinger is fascinating. Although Grove consistently sides with the underdog, we never feel that Norman and the widow are victims; our attention is drawn to their blindness, and the unfortunate fact that they drive others away through their strong desire for empathy and support. In one of the stories in the second grouping of tales, Grove employs the same pattern to enlist the reader’s sympathies. “The Lumberjack” opens with a critique of the feeling of smug superiority that established Canadians have in relation to immigrants. This is reflected in Abe Standish calling his Swedish boss “Petterson,” without “Mr.,” and his eagerness to loaf (88). As the story progresses, Abe’s brother Alph catches typhoid and it affects his brain, making him susceptible to fits of lunacy (89-91). Though the boss Lars Petterson has come to hate Abe for his laziness and attitude, after he learns of Alph’s fits and institutionalization his attitude changes. The Standish brothers used to be terrors of a somewhat acceptable laddish sort—drinking, womanizing, full of life but lacking in maturity—but now they are psychologically broken. Lars wonders if this is what the wilds of Canada can do to a man, and his lament concludes the tale: “To make a man out of this boy, another boy had to go insane!” (94). By the end of the tale the reader has forgotten the initial complaints of discrimination against immigrants, but retains the message that nothing short of a personal disaster can make some people change their self-destructive ways.
- 13 A recurring theme in Grove’s cycle is that respect must be earned, and this is a by-product of the author’s interest in personal identity. In *Tales from the Margin*, respectable characters are, however, in the minority, for Grove’s view remains pessimistic, and perhaps nihilistic: over and over we are shown that, given the chance, the strong will always exploit the weak. Scam artists, salesmen, and heartless businessmen are censured by Grove while the few thrifty, honest, and hard-working characters are singled out for praise. This message reflects his socialist political position—he stood for election for the forerunner of the New Democratic Party, the CCF, in the Ontario election in 1943 (Chen 24)—while also allowing us a glimpse of the author retracing and rejecting his own past. He wanted to leave behind his days as a dandy and spendthrift in Germany, crippled by debts, embarrassed and humbled by a year in prison for fraud, and must have felt that he had surfaced reborn in the Canadian Prairies. While he may have “died out of one culture and into another,” as Canadian writer Robert Kroetsch neatly puts it (70), the past was not completely buried. In his tales he espouses the principles of honesty, thrift, and hard-work with all the fervour of a proselytizing reformed sinner, or an alcoholic warning against the bottle.
- 14 Characters in two other tales tell us more about the kind of man Grove endeavoured to become in Canada. Dave Chisholm in “The Midwife” has been married to a schoolteacher for six or seven years and he has children. Before he married, Dave and a friend, Doyle, had often been to town, “talking, disputing, and chaffing each other, and spending money

recklessly" (196). The divergence of their paths is expressed in the town's lights. "To Dave, the settled farmer, these lights symbolized distance and far-bound traffic," says the narrator, though for Doyle, who continues to live in "single blessedness" (196), they have different connotations. Dave and his high-spirited friend are representations of Grove and Greve; if Dave sometimes wonders whether he or Doyle is happier, Grove must also have reflected on the difference between a profligate European life full of artistic stimulation and a quiet life in a Canadian cultural backwater.⁵ Dave Chisholm is a responsible family man who helps his neighbours in times of need and is unfailingly optimistic. When he experiences troubles with his wagon on a muddy road, he says, "While there's life, there's hope; and while hope lasts, it isn't all wrong." And after the wagon ventures into a watery ditch, leaving him drenched, the narrator enters into this spirit of optimism, referring to him as "freshly washed" (205). The narrator of "The Extra Man," a Pacey addition from the 1930s set in Ontario, represents another version of Grove. It is only four pages long and written in a direct, conversational tone. The narrator is a farmer and writer (216) who is contrasted with a newly arrived English immigrant whose real name is protected, giving the tale an even stronger sense of verisimilitude. The narrator offers work to "Art," a good-natured, hapless, lazy Cockney aspiring to be a writer. This does not interest the narrator, and he comments wryly, "I did not exactly 'see myself' discussing the principles of composition with my hired man while pitching hay" (216). Art is impressed by the beauty of nature and the narrator admits, "for all I knew he might be a true poet," but he proves to be useless on the farm. He is unable to distinguish between beans and weeds during hoeing (218) and he replants ripe burs by burying them when he has been asked to uproot and dispose of them (219). The suggestion is that other characteristics besides congeniality are required to succeed in this harsh rural environment. But in calling the immigrant "Art" and emphasizing his dreamy impracticality, we can see Grove justifying his own rejection of bohemianism, or art for its own sake, and the decision to write about his experiences on the land. There is also a degree of wish-fulfilment in Grove's self-depiction as the knowledgeable and capable farmer. We know that Grove was a schoolteacher who was not endowed with physical strength; while he admired self-sufficiency and the ability to live in harmony with one's environment, "he was," according to his brother-in-law, John Wiens, "no farmer" (quoted in Spettigue 197).

- 15 We can also glimpse Grove in the sometimes awkward phrasings, bookish language, and arcane expressions that occur with just enough frequency to upset his ordinarily lucid, stripped-down prose. The narrator in "The Midwife" refers to immigrants who learn to speak English fluently though "their phrases and idioms had remained German," and Dave Chisholm's use of the phrase "It makes me nothing out" is offered as an example. Dave resembles the author in his speech patterns and reading tastes: Tolstoy, Swift, Thoreau, and Hamsun occupy his bookshelf (193). The occasional patches of purple prose and arcane vocabulary in the tales do hint at a language learned through study rather than natural usage. The introduction of the following three phrases would have sent many readers scrambling for dictionaries: "refractory beasts" (30), the "recrudescence of winter" (66) and "the indefeasible power of education" (81). At other times, awkward syntax and word order disrupt the narrative flow, as in the following sentence: "Often and often I longed to go there [...]" (237). Another example of word choice that might have given readers pause is "offal," a word of Germanic origin used to refer to social detritus or cast-offs (126). In this case too the vocabulary item can be directly linked with Grove because the protagonist in "Riders" is down-on-his-luck Reg Gardiner, who

formerly taught school in Saskatchewan and submitted stories to magazines. The stories were all rejected and he has drifted to Ontario, without money or prospects, living from one day to the next. These are all facts from Grove's own experience, accurately reproduced in a jumbled, non-chronological manner.

- 16 Perhaps the most widely ignored element in Grove's short fiction is the modernist consciousness of his narrators. In this he owes a debt to Norwegian Knut Hamsun, whose writings Grove greatly admired. Consciousness combines with the art of insinuation to encourage us to read between the lines. In "The Novel" Grove emphasized insinuation as a quality that enables a good novelist to avoid speaking his or her "whole mind": "He who, having made a survey of what he has to say, says one third of it and scatters the rest between the lines gives a depth and a relief to his utterance which is the most inspiring thing which I can imagine" (*It Needs to Be Said* 129). Knut Hamsun was a skilled practitioner of insinuation. In the novel *Mysteries* (1892), his narrator plants ideas in the reader's head, encouraging a particular line of interpretation. The primary mystery concerns the identity and ambitions of the flamboyant protagonist Johan Nilsen Nagel, who arrives in a small town unannounced, registers at a hotel, and after his evening meal goes out for a walk. The narrator describes his after dinner movements:

He stayed out until long after midnight and didn't return till a few minutes before the clock struck three. Where had he been? Only later did it become known that he had walked to the next town and back—along the same long road he had been driven over that morning. He must have had some very urgent business there. When Sara [the maid] opened the door for him, he was wet with perspiration, but he smiled at her and seemed to be in excellent spirits. (6)

- 17 We have no idea where Nagel has been, though the narrator does and chooses not to say. The suggestion that Nagel had "urgent business" in the next town at such a late hour invites disagreement for, if the visit had been urgent, he would surely not have travelled on foot. Hamsun wants us to view Nagel's movements with suspicion and this change in narrative style during the modernist period has been described by one scholar, in comparing Fontane with Mann, as "an increase in the consciousness portrayed and a corresponding increase in the consciousness of the portrayal" (Stern 425). The author's refusal to speak his "whole mind," as Grove characterized insinuation, is therefore a way of telling the reader that there is more going on than meets the eye. Because the consciousness of the characters is portrayed in greater depth, an increase in concentration and engagement on the reader's part is needed to understand the narrative.
- 18 Throughout *Tales from the Margin* there are clues that things are not as they seem, and this is another reason Grove considered them tales: we are told to question the motives of the canvassers, scam artists, and wily businessmen who take advantage of unsophisticated rural residents. Sometimes the transactions are harmless—trinkets are sold at inflated prices—but on occasion bankers and people who might now generously be called entrepreneurs trick settlers out of their farms by enticing them into contracts with crippling conditions. In "Salesmanship," a team of con artists travels from town to town selling dry goods. The narrator piques our interest, much as Knut Hamsun does in *Mysteries*, by pretending not to know the identity of the travellers and posing questions that might occur to an uninformed observer:

The driver was a man; tall as far as one could judge while he was sitting, broad of shoulder, massive, heavy. He was clad in a clean army shirt, drab-coloured breeches of good cut, with polished leather gaiters hugging the calves of his legs and a wide-

brimmed sombrero of black felt on his head. He looked the typical American business man who has left factory or office for a vacation. The four women could not possibly constitute his family. More likely he had picked them up on the road to give them a ride? Yet, on that assumption, whence all the baggage? (157)

- 19 The man is the ringleader, Mr Marston, who instructs his group of saleswomen to set up camp outside a Manitoba town, upon whose residents they will prey. Information is divulged as the scene unfolds before our eyes, the insinuations becoming stronger until the narrator admits to omniscience. On the story's second page, he tells us that Marston manoeuvred his car "into the underbrush so that a person driving along the road would never have suspected its presence" (157). Soon after Marston orders the women to prepare the tent, then his supper, and as he lights his pipe for a stroll along the river, the narrator remarks: "No one would have thought his mind might be occupied with anything but the enjoyment of the landscape" (159). But of course his mind is occupied by thoughts of future scams.
- 20 Grove's tale cycle tends to reinforce natural laws and deny the existence of an overarching ethical system, and this is in essence a variation on Nietzschean philosophy. A prime example is the story "The Agent," in which a canvasser, or salesman, dupes customers out of their money then spends his profits on high living (113). Bill Orting, the agent, cannot escape the cycle of money easily earned and soon spent; he refuses to do honest labour and is constitutionally unable to save (120). The struggling writer and occasional labourer Gardiner in the story "Riders" aptly summarizes Grove's philosophy by exchanging Bill Orting's circle for a straight line: "We are on the road, and the road has no end; we have no goal; there is nothing waiting for us anywhere. We are the offal of society, cast away, spewed forth into the gutter; and all we can do is to obey gravity, running down, down, down" (126). The parable with which Grove intended to close his cycle, "In Search of Acirema," is also Pacey's final selection and it offers a vision of life lived first in the old country then in the new one, elucidating the dreams and ambitions of the settlers (301). In this case, with a certain degree of self-aggrandizement, Grove makes his prophet the marginalized character. The narrator says,
- Even in the new country, however, a prophet arose who preached that property makes a slave of him who owns it. Unlike the great prophets in the old country, he was neither condemned to take poison nor nailed to the cross nor burned at the stake. He was simply not heard; his countrymen were too busy. (306)
- 21 It is interesting that Grove's parable as message was rejected by both the publishing industry and, in the context of the above tale, the inhabitants of Acirema. In his study of the modernist short story, Dominic Head called Kafka's parable "Before the Law" "a representative modernist short fiction," citing its ambiguity and subversion of literary convention. According to Head, "the rejection of parable as message, as a parallel to the inscrutability of authority, is itself presented in the form of a parable" (15-16). In Grove's parable we are struck by his determination to not only transmit a message but inform us that, in the parable itself, it falls on deaf ears.
- 22 "Acirema" in the title represents America spelled backwards, an indication both of his disillusionment with the commitment to forward progress in his adopted homeland and his own continued identity issues. In *A Search for America* Grove writes about Canada and America as though they are a singular entity and it is not until the end that Grove offers a qualification. He claims to have based the book on a tramping journal kept in the 1910s, in which he noted that the difference between the old and new worlds was that America looks towards the future while Europe is concerned with the past. In a footnote to the

1927 publication, he added: “I have since come to the conclusion that the ideal as I saw and still see it has been abandoned by the U.S.A. That is one reason why I became and remained a Canadian” (499). In light of Grove’s identity issues, many of which feature in *Tales from the Margin*, this remark is rather ironic. He was obviously bothered by the realization that no matter how often he proclaimed the truth about life in Canada, most people ignored him. Spettigue, perhaps our most reliable and comprehensive scholar on Grove, decided that he was tortured by “emotional stresses and weaknesses” (217); this led to trouble in Germany and the reinvention of himself in Canada:

He seems not so much to have turned back to his actual past as to have woven out of its fragments a life that would convey the illusion that this man had known and done everything, had been everywhere, and that the fault for his failure to achieve renown was not, therefore, in himself but in his stars—not even in stars, perhaps, but in a world that would not accept him as he believed himself to be. (Spettigue 218)

- 23 Grove’s dissatisfaction with capitalism probably has its roots in his own disastrous financial experiences in Germany and the naturalist position he adopted in Canada, but his refusal to offer solutions to the problems he so shrewdly identifies is Nietzschean. We know that Grove had an affinity for this philosopher (Pacey 21) and, like Nietzsche, Grove undercuts the seriousness of modernity and its tendency towards dogmatism (Pippin 112) in stories that display a familiarity with modernism. The following analysis of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* could also be applied to “In Search of Acirema”: “Nietzsche wants quite deliberately to claim that one of the chief characteristics of the nihilism crisis is that very few people experience the modern situation as any sort of crisis” (Pippin 88). Perhaps it is because most people refuse to recognize a crisis that Nietzsche advised writers to focus on the inner life in anticipation of the modernist agenda of “track[ing] the movement of consciousness and explicat[ing] the mundane” (Sheehan 67).
- 24 In conclusion, Grove’s stories work as tales when this term is understood to mean psychologically penetrating stories about marginalized people told with a heightened narrative consciousness. While Desmond Pacey’s editing inhibits our appreciation of the tales as a cycle, the very fact that he felt the volume needed to be made more attractive to receive the acceptance of the Canadian reading public verifies the truth of the Acirema parable. Those willing to listen to the prophet’s bleak warnings are few. Today Grove’s admonitions to live the good life and reject materialist greed read as something far different from the complaints of an ungrateful immigrant. Indeed, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see Grove trying to use his own disreputable past in order to forge a new identity in Canada.
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- 25 And like the prophet in his parable, Grove’s stories have been largely ignored.

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NOTES

1. See Charles E. May for an examination of Washington Irving's innovations in short fiction. May calls Irving's narrators "individualized" (6) and notes as a key to his success his ingenuity in "grounding traditional German folktales in American settings" (24).
2. For a more detailed discussion of modernism and marginality see Chana Kronfeld's study in which she argues that the true modernists were those with an "affinity for the marginal, the exile, the 'other'" (2). Ironically, the writers held up as representative modernists tend to be those from the cultural center who wrote in English, French or German. While Kronfeld lobbies for the inclusion of several Hebrew writers as true modernists because of their position on the cultural and linguistic margin, the argument could also be applied to someone like Grove. Because he wrote about the rural residents of the Canadian Prairies, he was labelled a naturalist, detracting attention from the experiments he conducted in point of view and the intriguing questions posed in his books about the nature of authorial identity. Rod Rosenquist makes an interesting case for high modernists as self-promoters, who were often adept in the "manipulation of literary consumerism" (6), influencing the public's reception of their works through their correspondence and discussions with reviewers. To some extent he echoes Kronfeld in saying that "Those who found themselves marginalized by the establishment of high modernism are the ones who speak most clearly of the nature of the literary field in the modernist period and the sometimes unique problems that arose from it" (18).
3. The theme of duality which is explored in this essay is treated in a different way by Richard Cavell in his brief discussion of "Snow." Cavell argues that Canada's status as a country formed through immigration contributes to a feeling of "displacement [that] powerfully haunts one's sense of national belonging." He cites Grove's story (though *Over Prairie Trails* would seem more relevant) in noting "the displacement of 'home'" for Grove, who was making long journeys on the winter weekends by sleigh between his school and home. "The effect of the snow is thus to superimpose another landscape on the one Grove is describing," as his references to Odysseus and the sea make clear. "The new world, in short, must also and at the same time and in the same space become the old world if Grove is to go home, because home is at once in Canada and in Europe" (127). I argue that Grove wrote *Tales from the Margin* out of a sense of displacement, though it is a far more personal feeling than the one described by Cavell. Grove wanted to efface

his previous life in Germany but he was also unable to accept Canada as he found it, and this contributes to the sense of duality, or marginalism, in his tales.

4. Adrian Hunter gives a different analysis of “Karain: A Memory” in focusing on the “frame-narrator” as a development in Conrad’s art. By placing one story inside another and having characters comment on the different stories, Hunter argues, narrative truth becomes subjective. We as readers must then consider the competing interpretations and draw our own conclusions (27-28).

5. The stark contrast between Greve/Grove has led some critics to explore the sexual schism in Grove. Leigh S. Matthews has argued that it is precisely because the modernist dandy Greve was involved with a world of homosexual literary characters in Europe that the pioneer Grove, in compensation, chose to live in an overtly masculine Canadian Prairie settlement (118-9).

ABSTRACTS

Les vingt-trois histoires qui composent la version originale de *Tales from the Margin* de Frederick Philip Grove sont articulées selon un cycle. Les personnages sont récurrents et les lieux sont limités aux régions des Prairies canadiennes : le Saskatchewan, le Manitoba et l’Alberta. Cet article se propose de considérer l’évolution de notre perception du cycle de Grove lorsque les histoires sont vues comme des contes. C’est l’étiquette que l’auteur préfère leur donner car il estime que les contes se situent aux « régions-lisières de la vie » ou « à la marge ». Le cycle d’histoires écrites par Grove n’a pas été publié de son vivant et quand il le fut, les instructions laissées par l’auteur quant à sa publication n’ont pas été respectées. Bien qu’il souhaitât que *Tales from the Margin* soit édité dans un ordre fixé au préalable, l’éditeur a remplacé six des contes par huit histoires publiées ultérieurement et a mélangé l’ordre préétabli pour aboutir à vingt-cinq histoires. Cet article souligne le fait qu’en dépit de problèmes éditoriaux, le message d’ensemble qui traite de la marginalité reste inchangé. Les personnages de Grove se situent en marge de la société, une position familière à l’auteur à la fois en tant qu’émigrant vivant au Canada sous un faux semblant et en tant qu’écrivain incapable d’atteindre la réputation à laquelle il aspirait.

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