

Twentieth-Century
Literary Criticism

TCLC 248

Volume 248

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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**Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol.
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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)* has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. *TCLC* has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as *TCLC*. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” *TCLC* “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author’s works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, *TCLC* helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in *TCLC* presents a comprehensive survey on an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of *TCLC* is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism, (CLC)* which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC*.

Organization of the Book

A *TCLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name is given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the name of its author.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
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In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." In *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*, edited by Reginald M. Nischik, pp. 163-74. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 227-32. Detroit: Gale, 2008. The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (New York: MLA, 2009. Print); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

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Frederick Philip Grove

1879-1948

(Born Felix Paul Greve) German-born Canadian novelist, autobiographer, short story writer, poet, and essayist.

The following entry provides an overview of Grove's life and works. For additional information on his career, see *TCLC*, Volume 4.

INTRODUCTION

Grove is an early twentieth-century German-Canadian author whose writings ushered in the beginnings of modernist fiction in Canada. Grove produced poetry, essays, autobiographical sketches, and short stories, but he is best known for his novels, most notably *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) and *A Search for America* (1927), as well as for his autobiography, *In Search of Myself* (1946). In these and other writings, the author shunned the romantic conventions governing Canadian literature at the time and offered instead realistic and psychologically compelling stories of Canadian frontier life. While he focused on Canada's prairie setting and characters, Grove operated within a framework of ideas influenced by the aesthetics and philosophies of *fin-de-siècle* European culture. His writings address both regionalist and universal concerns, but the primary themes include the search for identity, humanity's relationship with modern technology, and the individual's struggle with fate. For much of his life, Grove concealed the truth regarding his European origins. In the early 1970s, however, scholar Douglas O. Spettigue produced a landmark study exposing the author's true identity as the German writer Felix Paul Greve, a revelation that significantly informed critical scholarship in the years that followed. Although an enigmatic figure, Grove remains an important author within modern Canadian letters, appreciated for his aesthetic vision and multifaceted portrayal of prairie life.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Grove was born Felix Paul Greve on February 14, 1879, in Radomno, Prussia, a village near the Russian border, to Bertha and Karl Eduard Greve. In 1881, the family moved to Hamburg, and several years later his parents divorced, leaving Grove in the care of his mother. In 1898, he enrolled at the University of Bonn as a student

of philosophy. Two years later, Grove left Bonn to pursue a career as a writer and translator. He married his first wife, Else Hildegard Ploetz, the former wife of the architect August Endell, during the early 1900s and traveled extensively. After spending a year in Munich, followed by a year in prison for an unpaid debt, Grove moved to Berlin in 1906. Among his early literary efforts in Europe are a collection of poetry, titled *Wanderungen* (1902), as well as the novels *Fanny Essler* (1905) and *Maurermeister Ihles haus* (1906; *The Master Mason's House*). In 1909, Grove abruptly changed the direction of his life, when he faked his own suicide and left Europe. According to some sources, his wife, Else, participated in the plan and followed her husband to North America, where they eventually separated and divorced. In 1912, the author reemerged as Fred Grove, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and over the next few years taught primary school in the region. At this time, Grove claimed to be of Swedish-Russian heritage and the son of upper-middle-class parents. He also maintained that he had been educated at universities in Paris, Rome, and Munich, after which he had toured the continent and established ties with Europe's leading writers. In 1913, Grove married his second wife, a fellow teacher named Catherine Wiens, with whom he remained for the rest of his life.

Grove became a naturalized Canadian citizen in 1921 and continued to write once he had established a new life in Manitoba, producing his first Canadian work, *Over Prairie Trails*, a collection of autobiographical sketches, in 1922. Following the success of this and a subsequent collection of sketches, *The Turn of the Year* (1923), the author gave up teaching and devoted himself entirely to writing. Grove's reputation grew during the late 1920s after the publication of *A Search for America*, and the author traveled across Canada during 1928 and 1929, giving lecture tours as the figure-head of a new wave of literary nationalism that had seized the country. In 1929, Grove and his wife moved to Ottawa, where the author briefly served as the associate editor of *The Canadian Nation*, until it ceased publication later that year. The 1930s were a difficult period for Grove, partly as a result of the financial and cultural crisis taking place in Canada during that time. The author had some trouble getting his manuscripts accepted by publishers, and he lost his job as the manager of the Graphic Press in Ottawa after the firm collapsed. He continued to write, however, producing the novels *The Yoke of Life* (1930) and *Fruits of the Earth* (1933). In

1931, Grove moved his family to a farm in rural Ontario, where he spent his remaining years. During the 1940s, Grove struggled with failing health, as well as financial difficulties, although he was increasingly respected as one of Canada's leading authors. He continued to produce fiction, including the novels *The Master of the Mill* (1944) and *Consider Her Ways* (1947), as well as his autobiography, *In Search of Myself*. On August 19, 1948, Grove died from complications caused by a stroke he suffered earlier that year.

MAJOR WORKS

Grove's first critically acclaimed work, *A Search for America*, treats the subject of immigration and provides a fictional account of the author's early years in North America. Told from the perspective of the narrator/protagonist, Phil Branden, who is generally considered to be Grove's alter-ego, the novel is divided into four parts and details the various stages Branden experiences in his transition from the Old World to the New, and from urban civilization to the simplicity of the rural countryside. These stages are presented as the phases of an educational process, but while the New World is treated as a utopia and refuge, it is also depicted as a place of exile. The theme of self-discovery is a prevailing concern in *A Search for America*, and for this reason many critics place the work within the quest-narrative tradition. The theme of self-discovery, transformation, and exile are continued in Grove's fictional autobiography, *In Search of Myself*. Divided into four parts, the work covers a transposed version of the author's European period, as well as his career as a literary figure in Canada. While Grove preserved chronologies and events from his early life, he emphasizes his education and role as a cosmopolitan figure in the first two sections of the book. He claims to be born in Moscow in 1871, to upper-middle-class parents, and raised in his mother's distinguished estate in southern Sweden. While he characterizes his mother as a member of the elite and decadent *fin-de-siècle* European culture, he portrays his father as a symbol of bourgeois sensibilities and conventional morality. Grove represents himself as the quintessential artist, educated in Europe, who loses his footing in the practical world. As an exile, he remains isolated but assumes the social responsibility of imparting his experiences to the New World. In the last two sections of *In Search of Myself*, Grove provides a more authentic account of his experiences in Canada after 1912.

In addition to his autobiographical writings, Grove is recognized for several realistic novels dealing with life on the Canadian prairie. Most notable of these works, *Settlers of the Marsh* was originally planned as the first part in a trilogy. The novel chronicles eighteen years in

the life of its protagonist, Niels Lindstedt, a Swedish immigrant and settler of the Canadian prairie, and has been described as an early example of the author's technique of symbolic realism. In the work, Lindstedt, sometimes interpreted as a modern saint figure, is caught between morality and sin, represented by two women in his life, Ellen Amundsen and Clara Vogel, respectively. After suffering in an unhappy marriage to Clara, Lindstedt shoots his wife after he learns of her infidelity. He is imprisoned, but the novel offers the hope that he will find happiness with Ellen upon his release. Grove openly addresses themes related to sexuality in the work but also focuses on broader issues, such as the individual's struggle with circumstance. The novel has often been credited with introducing realism and modernist techniques to Canadian literature. Grove revisits the themes he treated in *Settlers of the Marsh* in his later novel, *Fruits of the Earth*. In this work, the protagonist, Abe Spalding, is characterized as a modern Prometheus figure, who literally brings light to his region by providing electricity. Spalding is a strong and powerful man, who increasingly acquires land and achieves great stature in his district. While he devotes his energy to his own ambitions, he is also concerned with the welfare of his community. But as a strong individual, Spalding is also rigid and overbearing, and the novel reaches a point of crisis, when he resists adapting to changes within his environment and is overcome by the forces of destiny. Spalding eventually learns to accept his limitations and failures as a human being.

Among Grove's later works of fiction, *The Master of the Mill* has received increasing interest from critics. Like his previous novels, this work is a family chronicle, focusing on the life of Sam Clark, an Ontario capitalist and mill owner. In the novel, Clark looks back on his life, as well as on three previous generations of his family, and contemplates changes in the fortunes of his influential dynasty. As in earlier works, the themes of the novel center on the individual's desire to assert power and change his environment. The narrative also explores the implications of technology within society, particularly the individual's struggle to control the forces that humanity has created. At the end of the story, the mill becomes a symbol of humankind's tenuous position in the universe, as Clark looks at the industry he has spawned and realizes his own small, superfluous role in the greater process of evolution. While scholars have acknowledged Grove's complex vision and innovative use of flashback techniques in *The Master of the Mill*, many have derided his obtrusive symbolism and overt didacticism in the novel. Grove's last published work before his death, *Consider Her Ways*, has also drawn critical attention in recent years. In this satirical and allegorical novel, the author provides a critique of civilization and the efforts of humankind. The narrator, an "editor" who signs his name "F. P. G.," claims to have entered into a trance in order to communicate with

Wawa-quee, an ant of noble birth, who is called to lead an expedition from Venezuela to New York City, in order to catalogue all forms of life on the continent. Wawa-quee's journey is marked by danger, treachery, and the ant-queen's suspicion that her efforts are futile, and when she returns as the sole survivor, she delivers a justifiably skeptical assessment of the achievements of humanity.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Grove's European works received little attention from critics, and it wasn't until the author emigrated to Canada and established a new identity and style as an English-language writer that he began to enjoy critical acclaim. His 1922 collection of autobiographical stories, *Over Prairie Trails*, received positive reviews, as did his next book, *The Turn of the Year*, and Grove was soon being hailed as a fresh new voice in Canadian literature. Critics especially praised his blending of naturalism, realistic detail, and psychological insight in these works, as well as his treatment of the archetypal hero pitted against the forces of nature and society. While Grove's next publication, *Settlers of the Marsh*, did not sell as well or receive the same warm praise as his previous two works, in part because its overt treatment of sexuality ran counter to the Puritan sensibilities of the time, *A Search for America*, published in 1927, enjoyed widespread popularity and marked the beginning of Grove's most successful period as a writer. Within a climate of economic prosperity and burgeoning national pride in Canada, Grove emerged as an ideal figurehead of the new Canadian literary movement. His meteoric rise was cut short, however, by the cultural and economic crises of the 1930s, during which time the author struggled to find publishers for his work and earn a living from his writing. Although he continued to experience financial difficulties after the Depression and into the 1940s, Grove was increasingly recognized as one of Canada's founding authors. He was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 1941, given an honorary doctorate from the University of Manitoba in 1946, and two years later received the Governor General's Award in nonfiction for *In Search of Myself*. In the decades immediately following his death, Grove was generally regarded as a master of frontier literature, who had chronicled the struggles of settler life and introduced the Canadian West into the world of fiction. Thomas Saunders, writing in 1965, described the author as a "novelist of high rank," who wrote with incomparable "integrity and power," declaring that "if Canada has produced a more powerful novelist, he has escaped my attention."

Until the early 1970s, little was known regarding Grove's life before his emigration to Canada, and scholars generally accepted the information that the author

provided in *In Search of Myself* and his other autobiographical writings. In 1973, however, Douglas O. Spettigue published his study *FPG: The European Years*, which revealed the author's previously concealed identity as Felix Paul Greve. Following the appearance of Spettigue's landmark book, critics began to examine Grove's representation of himself in his work, as well as his immigrant narrative, and reconsider his European influences, especially his relation to the major aesthetic movements of his time. While some commentators, such as Rudolf Bader, reevaluated Grove's place within the naturalist literary movement, others, including Axel Knönagel [see Further Reading], traced the influence of European literary figures and philosophers, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, on his writings. Other scholars attempted to trace connections between the author's European works and those he produced in Canada. In his 1987 essay on Grove, Spettigue focused on the author's German-language novel, *Fanny Essler*, claiming that its central theme—the struggle “between the heroic life that gives value to human action” and the “meaninglessness of cosmic existence which denies it”—can be found throughout his canon. More recently, Konrad Groß and other critics have challenged the view that Grove's work is closely aligned with the “local color” tradition, highlighting instead the universal themes of his novels and stories. While today several factors concerning Grove's life and legacy are yet to be determined, the author deserves, according to most scholars, his prominent place within modern Canadian literature. For many, he was a pioneering writer who ushered in modern techniques and popularized the frontier genre in Canadian literature. In the words of Stanley E. McMullin [see Further Reading], Grove produced “one of the most complex and sustained examinations of North American culture yet attempted by a Canadian author.”

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Wanderungen [as Felix Paul Greve] (poetry) 1902
Fanny Essler [as Felix Paul Greve] (novel) 1905
Maurermeister Ihles haus [*The Master Mason's House*] [as Felix Paul Greve] (novel) 1906
Over Prairie Trails (sketches) 1922
The Turn of the Year (sketches) 1923
Settlers of the Marsh (novel) 1925
A Search for America (novel) 1927
Our Daily Bread (novel) 1928
The Yoke of Life (novel) 1930
Fruits of the Earth (novel) 1933
Two Generations (novel) 1939
The Master of the Mill (novel) 1944
In Search of Myself (autobiography) 1946
Consider Her Ways (novel) 1947

Tales from the Margin (short stories) 1971
Poems (poetry) 1993

CRITICISM

Thomas Saunders (essay date summer 1963)

SOURCE: Saunders, Thomas. "A Novelist as Poet: Frederick Philip Grove." *The Dalhousie Review* 43, no. 2 (summer 1963): 235-40.

[In the following essay, Saunders assesses Grove's poetry, noting that it reflects "the same influences that shaped his prose"; he adds that, "taken by themselves," his poems "may be regarded as having minimal significance," but when seen in relation to "Grove the writer," they "help illumine both his life and his published work."]

On July 17, 1962, the University of Manitoba made arrangements to purchase from Mrs. Catherine Grove, widow of the late Frederick Philip Grove, a number of manuscripts of her husband's work. These included both published and unpublished material—novels, short stories, articles, addresses, notebooks, essays, sketches, letters, and poems. The collection also includes some reviews and comment on Grove's work.

Of the published novels six are represented: *Our Daily Bread*, *Fruits of the Earth*, *Two Generations*, *Consider Her Ways*, *The Master of the Mill*, and *Settlers of the Marsh*. There is, in addition, the children's story, *The Adventures of Leonard Broadus*, which was serialized in the United Church paper, *The Canadian Boy*, in 1940; and a number of short stories and articles.

Unpublished works include "The Weatherhead Fortunes" ("History of a Small Town"), "The Poet's Dream" (or "The Canyon"), "Murder in the Quarry," a manuscript of short stories entitled *Tales from the Margin*, and a collection of poems. To these must be added a number of other short stories, articles, essays, and sketches.

Though by no means a complete record of material by and about Grove, the whole adds up to what must be considered the beginning of a definite collection. It is to the University of Manitoba library that Grove scholars and researchers must now turn for much of the material on which their work will be based.

There is, of course, an appropriateness in the University of Manitoba having acquired these documents. It was in Manitoba that Grove "found" himself as a writer. Here

much of his best work was done, and here he first found publication in the early twenties. His discoverers, indeed, were men of the university (or of one of its affiliates, United College)—Arthur L. Phelps, Watson Kirkconnell, and the late Dr. J. H. Riddell. Grove took his B.A. degree at the university, which subsequently honoured him with an honorary degree as well. When death claimed him it was to Manitoba that his body was returned—to rest beside his daughter in the little cemetery at Rapid City where both he and his wife had taught school.

What the documents acquired by the university will mean in terms of future research only time, of course, will tell. Grove was a controversial character during his lifetime; he has remained a controversial figure since his death. The controversy has raged not only about his life but about his work. He has been described by one set of critics as a great writer, by others as a poor one. By some, both as a person and author, he has been considered something of a fake. But both he and his work continue to command interest; and, among not a few knowledgeable people, they continue to command respect.

It is not the intention here to become involved in this controversy or to make an assessment of the value of the manuscripts and typescripts now in the University of Manitoba's possession. To make such an assessment (entirely aside from the question of Grove's merit as a writer) would require a more detailed analysis of the documents than the writer has so far been able to give them. One of the manuscript collections, however, is worthy of immediate comment, and I therefore deal at present with the poems.

Not many people are aware of Grove as a poet, and the manuscript now housed in the University of Manitoba collection would not encourage rhapsodies over his achievements in verse. Yet it is interesting to note his apparently life-long respect for poetry and his attempts to write it. For, while most of what is contained in the University of Manitoba collection was written after 1927, and was apparently motivated by the death of his daughter, there are indications that he dabbled in poetry during most of his writing life. A date on one of the poems, indeed, suggests that it was written in Nova Scotia as early as 1909.

Grove's interest in writing poetry, however, does not seem to have given him any great mastery of the craft. (Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he reveals mastery of the craft but little beyond that—technical proficiency within imitative limits but not the true poet's ability to give words implications and ramifications beyond themselves.) In 1922, after reading *Over Prairie Trails*, Arthur Phelps wrote him: "You give us the observation of the scientist made with the eye of the

poet." Phelps was enthusiastic over the poetic quality of Grove's prose. But when Grove set out consciously to write poetry, he was not so successful and Phelps was less enthusiastic. "I don't like your verse so well," he wrote in the same letter—a judgment which, after reading the typescripts in the University of Manitoba collection, I am prepared to support.

Written almost exclusively in unvarying iambic pentameters, Grove's verse, over all, while technically correct, is pedestrian and dull. It seldom gets off the ground. It is obviously imitative and much of it could as well have been written in prose. For example:

I never thought a day could be so stale
And drag its weary hours as this one did.

Whatever else these lines may be, they are not poetry. At times he is positively banal. It is hard to imagine, for example, anything pretending to be poetry that could be much worse than this:

Come, let us sit behind this wind-built dune
And look upon the slumbering lagoon.

But not everything he offers as poetry is on this low plane and, aside from their merit as verse, the poems are not without value in assessing the man. They give us something of his basic philosophy, throw light on the content and form of the novels; and in the long poem, "The Dirge," written after the death of his daughter, we have as searching an account as we are likely to have of his emotion and thought during what was undoubtedly one of the most tragic and critical periods in his life. This poem, though philosophically more pessimistic than anything that could have come from Tennyson, is reminiscent in its form—though not in its rhyme-scheme—of "In Memoriam." This may make its sincerity suspect by some readers. Long poems in the form of dirges over someone we profess to love can have an aspect of falseness about them. But from those who knew Grove at the time of his daughter's death, and from all we know of the rapport that seems to have existed between father and daughter, plus the natural affection that can be assumed, this does not seem to have been the case here. Grove, like many artists, seems to have been an essentially selfish man. His tendency was to use people, even those closest to him. But there is no evidence of this in his relationship with his daughter. She seems to have occupied a special place in his affections, and he gave himself to her as to perhaps no other person.

Before considering the long poem occasioned by her death, however, it may be well to examine some of his other verse. The first poem in the typescripts, entitled "Preface," states his purpose in writing the poems that welled up in him following this tragedy:

To tell posterity in accents terse
How one man felt whom God had bent and rent.

But there is nothing terse in what follows. In his verse, as in his prose, Grove took his time and was unwilling to be hurried. His nearest approach to terseness is in his description of the world, his outlook on which is dark indeed:

This world?
A synonym for prison bars.

But although he feels that life is basically harsh and unjust, he refuses to bow to it or to take comfort in the thought of a kindly providence in which he cannot believe. His concept of life, for himself as for the main characters in his novels, is essentially tragic and is nowhere better expressed than in the poem, "The Rebel's Confession of Faith":

I still decline
Thus to be mothered by a providence
Whose kindness is less provident than mine,
Whose justice is but bartering recompense.

I'd rather have my weakness than its strength;
I'd rather stand, a beggar, on my own
Than in reward receive the breadth and length
Of worlds or kingdoms . . .

It is in passages such as this, where feeling and conviction are both strong, that he comes closest to being a poet. Sometimes, in the midst of otherwise pedestrian writing, he holds us with a single line, as in his description of "The sleeping phantoms of a fossil past."

But it is the long poem dedicated to his daughter (about two-thirds of which was published in *The Canadian Forum* in its issue of April, 1932) that is most self-revealing and contains most of his better lines. The girl, Phyllis May, died at Rapid City when she was barely twelve years of age. The loss of the child seems to have touched Grove as perhaps no other event in his life. All the other hardships he had been confronted with were as nothing compared with this. His heroic attitude toward life, never broken by adversity, came nearest to the breaking-point at this time; and the verse which resulted, if not without its flaws, is in many respects worthy of its subject. It has, I believe, a quality of deep sincerity; and for Grove, in writing it, it must have acted as a sort of catharsis, giving relief to his burdened mind.

In it we find the first expression of his desire to be buried beside his daughter when his time comes:

Sleep without fear, my child, not long alone:
For there is room for me, too, in that throng.
Some quarry even now grows my own stone.
Here will I come, nor will I tarry long.

Grove had been a wanderer throughout much of his life. After the death of his daughter he could be a wanderer no more. As he expresses it,

No country, so far, claimed me all her own;
My emblem was the sail . . .

But his child's death changed all that:

Now am I anchored; and forever now
Must here I tarry. For a woman gave
A child to me; and to the ground I bow;
My roots are growing down into a grave.

There seems little doubt that, for Grove, the death of his daughter was the black night of the soul. It was a darkness out of which he found it hard to climb. Even St. Paul's trinity of faith, hope, and love held little comfort for him. Of faith and hope his entire philosophy of life had tended to rob him; and, in his bereavement, he felt that even love had failed. His love for his daughter had no power to break the bonds of death. His statement of this gives us the darkest lines in a dark poem:

But Love, the greatest, proving destitute
Of power to lift the lid from off the tomb,
The bauble Hope lay broken; Faith was mute
And mocked itself by shuffling, Faith in whom?

But something in him clings to the thought that death cannot have the last word. Beauty changes but never dies. Shelley's thought about the young Keats comes to him, and it is Shelley's lines that are engraved on the tombstone of his daughter's grave:

She is a portion of the loveliness
Which once she made more lovely.

His own, more verbose, expression of this runs:

What wafts the wind upon its midnight breath?
It bears, transformed, soft rain from out the sea
And spins a message that there is no death,
That what once was, transformed, shall ever be.

In all his poems, this is as positive a statement on the great issues of life and death as Grove ever allowed himself. There is no suggestion of a belief in personal immortality—only an assertion of the unextinguishable nature of beauty. It is still the tragic concept that prevails—a belief in the earthly immortality of the values he cherishes, values that may be buffeted by an improvident providence but can never be totally destroyed.

This, of course, is the basic philosophy that supported Grove all through his life and through the tribulations of his writing career. The long years of writing, in what was virtually a cultural vacuum, with little or no hope of publication, may be partly explained through the fact that he was a compulsive writer. But there is also this—his unflinching belief in the rightness of what he was doing, his faith in the permanence of its value, his conviction of the survival of the best that was in him and the

world despite tragedy. These things go a long way to explain both the fact and the nature of his writing; and in revealing them, the poems illuminate both his life and his prose.

It may be true that the poems, as poems, leave something to be desired. It may be equally true that their publication in book form would add little to Grove's literary reputation—they might even detract from it. But they should still be of inestimable value not only to the research scholar but to the ordinary reader who is interested in Grove the man, as well as in Grove the writer. Besides throwing light on his thought and character, and being a mirror of his emotion and mind in the aftermath of perhaps the most tragic episode in his life, in condensed form they illustrate the philosophy that informed the corpus of his published work and motivated the delineation of his principal characters. Here, in essence, are Abe Spalding, Neils Lindstedt, John Elliott and all the others.

But more than this, the poems are a clue to the nineteenth-century influences that shaped Grove's writing career. Because his first book, *Over Prairie Trails*, was not published until 1922, and his first novel, *Settlers of the Marsh*, until 1925, it is sometimes assumed that Grove belongs to a much later era than he does. Adverse judgments on his writing have sometimes been made on this false premise. It is conveniently forgotten that Grove started his first draft of *Latter Day Pioneers*, the trilogy out of which *Settlers of the Marsh* was literally hacked, as early as 1892. He had been cut adrift from the European culture in which he had been nurtured some time before that, and there were few literary influences available to play on his life during the long years in which he worked as a farmhand, following the harvests from Kansas to the Canadian prairies, until he settled down as a schoolteacher in a series of Manitoba towns.

The poems reflect this. They are imitative not of twentieth-century, but of nineteenth-century, models. As such, they reflect the same influences that shaped his prose. But they are not imitative of the easy optimism that marked much nineteenth-century writing. They are marked by the tragic manner and a philosophy and concept of realism—the same philosophy and concept that informs his prose. This, even in the 1920's, was something new in Canadian writing. Indeed, it is a measure of Grove's greatness—and a reflection on the development of the art of the novel in Canada up to that time—that, when *Settlers of the Marsh* was finally published, it still broke new ground by introducing the novel of realism into the literature of this country. (Grove may have arrived late as a published writer, but—to use his own phrase—he was still a "latter day pioneer".)

The poems have special value in reminding us of these things. Taken by themselves, and judged only as poetry,

they may be regarded as having minimal significance. But seen in relation to Grove the writer, and Grove the man, they help illumine both his life and his published work.

M. G. Parks (essay date August 1964)

SOURCE: Parks, M. G. Introduction to *Fruits of the Earth*, by Frederick Philip Grove, pp. vii-xiii. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1965.

[In the following essay, published as his introduction to Grove's *Fruits of the Earth* and dated August 1964, Parks acknowledges the author's shortcomings with regard to his "penetration into the human personality" and "realistic painting of external reality" but nevertheless observes that the novel's "philosophic concepts," particularly the themes of "cosmic time and mutability," give the work "a dignity and stature too often absent from contemporary fiction."]

When *Fruits of the Earth* was first published in 1933, its author could look back upon nearly forty years in which it had gradually taken shape in his imagination. In 1894, when Grove was a young farm hand on the Canadian prairies hauling wheat over a thirty-mile trail through unsettled territory, a chance meeting set off a train of thought which led to the genesis of this novel. He encountered a man who had arrived that very afternoon from Ontario and, having promptly filed on a homestead claim and unloaded his horses and possessions from a freight car, had set to ploughing the land as the sun dropped to the western horizon. Grove later recalled that "outlined as he was against a tilted and spoked sunset in the western sky, he looked like a giant" embodying "the essence of the pioneering spirit which had settled the vast western plains." Thus was born Abe Spalding, the central figure of *Fruits of the Earth*. Later experiences served as stimuli to Grove's imagination as he filled in the unwritten pages of the novel: a trip across the sodden, rain-drenched prairie in 1912 led him to conceive the episode of Abe saving his bumper crop of wheat in Chapter X; his observation of farming conditions in the spring of 1913 was later transmuted into the account of the great flood that engulfs Spalding District; the sight of a pupil being crushed under the wheels of his load of wheat suggested the death of Charlie Spalding. The most vital of all such "explosions," as Grove calls them, was set off when, in a drive through the country near Rapid City, Manitoba, Grove noticed a magnificent homestead—a great house of red brick and two huge white barns set in a four-acre yard. When he stopped to investigate, he discovered that behind the imposing façade lay nothing but decay and ruinous neglect: two decrepit horses and one miserable cow were the only animals in the enormous barns,

and in the mansion a family of poor tenants crowded into one room which they heated by ripping up the many floors of quartered oak for fuel. That same night, profoundly moved by what he had seen and applying it to the life of Abe Spalding, Grove began to write the novel. He had glimpsed the eventual fate of Abe's great farm after its forceful owner had died and his ageing widow had retreated to the town.

Fruits of the Earth has a definite setting in time and place. Its structure is chronological, built upon succeeding episodes or periods in Abe's life which depict his changing fortune and the growth of the district. The action covers about twenty-one years, beginning in the summer of 1900 when Abe appears on the prairie to settle on his claim. The locale is the flat prairie some fifty miles south and slightly west of Winnipeg, a district bounded by the Pembina Hills and Morden on the west and the Red River on the east. Grove knew this part of Manitoba very well—so well, in fact, that he catches its prevailing tones and moods again and again in the novel.

While few readers would question the veracity of Grove's setting or his success in using but transcending the literal scene, many have found his imaginative vision much less perceptive in the artist's central investigation of the human heart. If his people lack psychological depth, the reason is at least partly that Grove was primarily concerned in this novel with social forces and their effects on individuals. *Fruits of the Earth*, he once told a correspondent, "was never intended to figure as a novel. I meant it to be taken as a piece of pioneer history." Indeed, its original title was *Chronicles of Spalding District*, and Grove was deeply annoyed by his publisher's insistence that it should appear under the more fanciful title by which we know it. His didactic purpose, his desire to base his fiction on his thesis of man encountering the resistance of nature and society, would naturally tend to make his characterization typical or symbolic rather than fully rounded.

The role he assumed was nothing less than that of spokesman for the Western pioneer: "I, the cosmopolitan, had fitted myself to be the spokesman of a race . . . consisting of those who, in no matter what climate, at no matter what time, feel the impulse of starting anew, from the ground up, to fashion a new world which might serve as the breeding-place of a civilization to come." As an interpretation of a sociological phenomenon, the novel is often impressive. Grove creates in Abe a type of the successful pioneer—not a typical pioneer, for Abe is clearly a man of epic proportions, but rather the kind of man best suited to combat and, in a significant measure, to control the forces of nature and human society which oppose his success. To be successful, Grove decided, a pioneer had to be "dominant" and "rigid"; he had to have "a single-