

“I’LL BE MY OWN MASTER”

Domestic Conflicts and Discursive Resistance in “Maurermeister Ihles Haus” and “Our Daily Bread”

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“**B**ASICALLY, Master Mason Ihle despised everything that was female” (99), is the phrase F. P. Grove used to describe the German patriarch in *Maurermeister Ihles Haus* (1906), and if Richard Ihle is Grove’s most blatantly misogynistic character, he is also “the prototype of Grove’s fathers” (Blodgett 134). Focusing on the marginalized female characters in Grove’s fiction, E. D. Blodgett has argued that Grove’s patriarchs — Abe Spalding, Niels Lindstedt, Ralph Patterson, and John Elliot — are immobilized and somewhat static in their epic greatness and that it is the women in Grove’s German and Canadian fiction who are capable of change and who also challenge the frozen systems of order set up by the men: “where the males always seem to be who they are — unchanging, hopelessly teleological — it is the females who must act” (126). In Grove’s fiction, female action entails discursive struggle and resistance, thus illustrating Michel Foucault’s point that discourse is inseparably intertwined with relationships of power (*History* 101).

With the narrative point of view focused on Susie Ihle — the rebelling daughter in late nineteenth-century imperial Germany, *Maurermeister* is concerned with “the emancipation of women or at least with their struggle against male tyranny” (Riley/Spettigue 7). Likewise, Grove’s Canadian prairie novel *Our Daily Bread* (1928) traces the young generation’s rebellion against the father, pioneer-farmer John Elliot, whereby the daughter’s questioning of the patriarchal authority is encoded more often in silence than in speech. While in both novels, the sons and daughters ultimately escape the patriarch’s tyranny by leaving his house, the novels’ thematic emphasis on generational and domestic conflicts is interwoven with a feminist subtext, namely, the women’s search for new discourses that can effect significant change within the family’s network of relations. Grove’s women oppose and poke holes into what Mikhail Bakhtin has called “the word of the father,” which most of them encounter with “its authority already fused to it” (342).

While both novels emphasize that the daughter must dethrone the word of the father in order to resist its assimilation, they also point to the limits of discursive resistance. Questioning not only patriarchal but also matriarchal power structures, *Maurermeister* and *Our Daily Bread* address the question of female complicity that perpetuates the subjugation of women in both the German and the Canadian households. Thus in both novels, the women's struggle to subvert the "symbolic order" of the patriarch's house does not occur in a linear fashion but is full of reversals, illustrating Michel Foucault's point on the polyvalence of discourse: "We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (*History* 101). Drawing attention to the shiftiness and flexibility of discourse, the German and the Canadian novel alike emphasize that the daughter's struggle against patriarchy is often a strategic game that involves a cautious manoeuvring between slippery discourses. Such manoeuvres allow her to defy the father's word, but only rarely, if ever, does the daughter manage to change the patriarchal rule of the house.

The juxtaposition of the Canadian and the German novels seems especially appropriate since Grove's interest in engendered discursive rebellion is deeply rooted in his European past — in the time before his spectacular "suicide" in Germany and his "rebirth" as a Canadian writer. Both the intellectual climate and the inspiration of his "wife" Elsa (Ploetz) Endell had a strong impact on the young novelist Felix Paul Greve, and inevitably left their traces in his fiction. In her autobiography written in the mid-1920s Elsa — today better known as the Baroness von Freytag-Loringhoven — looks back on her early life and accuses Greve of having appropriated her "life" and "persons out of [her] life" (34) in his early fiction while at the same time dismissing her own writing with contempt.¹ As Paul Hjartarson's examination of Elsa's autobiography suggests, Grove's *Fanny Essler* (1905) traces Elsa's life from her late teens to her early thirties, while *Maurermeister* fictionalizes Elsa's girlhood and teenage years (276).² Elsa's father was a master mason whom she describes in her autobiography as "alternately violent-tempered and tearfully sentimental" (Hjartarson 276), a description that closely matches Susie's father. Also, in her personal writing in the mid-twenties, Elsa alludes to her problematic relationship with her father and her struggle against her father's language,³ a conflict that is conceptualized in similar terms in Grove's fiction.

While Elsa's experience appears to have provided the raw material for *Maurermeister*, Grove's shaping of his material was also influenced by the turn-of-the-century philosophical interest in language crisis (*Sprachkrise*) associated with Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, whose work Grove knew well.⁴ In the *Gay Science* — a book "of the greatest importance," according to Grove (*Myself* 166)

— Nietzsche has a section entitled “Of the sound of the German language” (160-62) in which he criticizes the militarization of the German language, a German that has turned into “Offiziersdeutsch”: “welches wütende Autoritätsgefühl, welche höhnische Kälte klingt aus diesem Gebrüll heraus” (104), Nietzsche writes, “what raging sense of authority, what scornful coldness speak out of this roaring” (161). Nietzsche’s critique applies to *Maurermeister* in that “wütendes Autoritätsgefühl” is precisely what characterizes the language of the family tyrant, master mason Richard Ihle, whose character is attached to the word “Wut” (rage, wrath, ire) like an epithet (e.g. 45-46; 48-49 in translation). Ihle speaks a form of *Offiziersdeutsch*, the very discourse that Nietzsche rejects as distasteful (“geschmackswidrig”). Not only is Ihle’s language stripped of all music — it is pure command. Such an authoritarian language inevitably stirs up disgust (“Widerwillen”), at the same time that it provokes resistance (“Widerstand”),⁵ not only in the language philosopher Nietzsche who makes it the target of a vicious satire, but also in Grove who ridicules Ihle’s inflexible discourse of authority through Ihle’s wife and his daughters who oppose it, at the same time that they are victimized by it.

IN *Maurermeister*, it is above all Susie Ihle who is linked to resistance and subversiveness. In the first paragraph, the reader sees her as an eleven-year-old leaping over ropes and chains in her little Baltic home town at the sea coast, ready to set into motion whatever is static: “The hazy stillness on the water . . . demanded almost to be shattered” (13).⁶ As Susie and her friend stalk two bourgeois lovers and call them names, it is significantly by manipulating language that the two girls disrupt the conventions and the order of the little Baltic sea town: Susie takes delight in word plays and punning, in parodically imitating the school headmaster’s Saxon dialect (*Master Mason* 37), and, above all, in offending bourgeois respectability with sexual equivocation.⁷ Even in the first chapter, Susie enjoys creating her own linguistic carnival in which she becomes linked to subversive laughter (“Lachen”), and giggling (“Kichern”) (14-15; in the German text 11-12).

Susie’s exuberant play with signifiers — her pleasure with words, puns, and name-calling — is, to apply Julia Kristeva’s terminology, a “maniacal eroticization of speech,” as if she were “gulping it down, sucking on it” (“Microcosm” 42). According to Kristeva, such a “non-communicative, exhibitionistic” sense of speech and play with signifiers is typical for a “borderlander,” a person who lacks a sense of home and a sense of boundaries (“Microcosm” 42). Living in her father’s house but destined to leave it for somebody else’s house, Susie is indeed such a threshold person who finds herself “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law,” as Lynda Boose describes the precarious position of the

daughter figure in a patriarchal family (67). But just as the daughter's liminal status endows her with "the special power of the weak" (Boose 67), so Susie's favourite linguistic strategy of subversion is the principle of negativity, even lying: "All we have to do is keep saying no" (18), she tells her girlfriend, when their pranks become uncovered. When accused of calling names, "Susie collected herself quickly: "'That's a dirty lie,' she said, loudly and indignantly" (19). Here, the manipulation of language is a strategy that is directed against another woman, as it is often used as a weapon against her girlfriends, at the same time that it serves as a strategy to deal with a tyrannical patriarchal power at home.

An expert manipulator of signifiers outside the house, Susie is, however, often silenced when she enters the literal house and rebels openly against her father: "'If you don't shut your trap this instant,' Mr. Ihle flew at her with menace in his voice, 'I'll give you what for'" (102). According to Foucault, "silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions" (*History* 101), but, since the same discourse can be both a strategy of power and a strategy of resistance, silence can also encode an oppositional strategy. The women in Ihle's house often fight back by surrounding Ihle with silence. Occasionally leaving the house to escape the patriarch's wrath, they isolate Ihle within the house (e.g. 50), forcing him to search for companionship elsewhere.

"Father-daughter stories are full of literal houses, castles, or gardens in which fathers . . . lock up their daughters," writes Boose (33), and most of *Maurermeister* is set in the house that gives the work its title. Yet for Susie, the house is more than a simple dungeon. Showing the house, the yard, and her father's shop to her friend Hedwig Ribau, eleven-year-old Susie Ihle ends up sitting in the new family carriage, in intimate closeness with her friend: "Hier fühlte man sich geheimnisvoll in Sicherheit. Es war ein Haus im Hause" (66), "They felt secretive and secure. It was a house within a house" (68). On the surface, these sentences evoke the archetypal function of the image of the house; the house serves as a shelter, a notion that John Elliot in *Our Daily Bread* reaffirms when he invites his daughters who are troubled in their marriages back to the security of their parental home.

But this atmosphere of security is instantly subverted. The German phrase "geheimnisvoll in Sicherheit" is more telling than the English translation, in that "geheimnisvoll" not only contains the word "heim" (= home) but as a whole word also means the opposite of home: it denotes secretiveness, at the same time that it is related to "unheimlich," the uncanny. "Geheimnisvoll" as a premodifier for "Sicherheit" is an odd collocation in German verging on the oxymoronic, as it appears deliberately to undermine the sense of "Sicherheit" in the rest of the house. The phrase suggests the presence of a potential intruder and disturber of peace who is not somebody outside the house, but somebody *in* the larger house itself — the father figure.

The novel describes several scenes where the father intrudes suddenly and violently into his daughter's space, where he makes entrances that are like assaults on her body. Just as Elliot's daughter Gladys confesses as an adult woman, "I am afraid of him [her father] . . . 'Just as mother was'" (285),⁸ so the scene in which Susie is "geheimnisvoll in Sicherheit" is preceded by a chapter that describes Master Ihle's violent entrance into the house that forces Susie and her sister to hide in the wardrobe to escape the father's wrath. Although to the reader Ihle appears very much like the comic stock figure of the ridiculously wrathful tyrant (Blodgett 134), for his wife and the children, the threat is real enough: "What should I do?," Mrs. Ihle asks, "If I say anything he just hits me" (49).

It is the adverb "unheimlich" (uncanny) that the narrator uses when the father enters the house to indicate that, then, the "heimisch" quality becomes negated. Given this textual play on the absence of "Heim" and the novel's title with its emphasis on the house, the novel underscores the separation between "Haus" and "Heim," a distinction that Martin Heidegger emphasizes some decades later, when he asks rhetorically: "do the houses in themselves hold any guarantee that *dwelling* occurs in them?" (324). For Heidegger, "dwelling" ("wohnen") means to live in peace, to be at home, a sense that Susie only experiences in the house "within the house," where she discovers her own home, that is her body and her language in the intimacy with her girlfriend whose language Susie admires and mimics.⁹

Susie's voice of *Widerstand*, of resistance and protest, is also developed in dialogue with her mother, at the same time that her critical discourse is paradoxically *not* directed against the father, whose tyrannies she deeply resents, but against her mother, whom Susie blames for being impotent, for not being able to protect herself or her children: "[Y]ou are just as frightened of him as we are" (49), she tells her mother accusingly. Unlike Mrs. Elliot, who is set up as a strong matriarch in *Our Daily Bread*, Mrs. Ihle retreats into a sentimental language of romanticism and goes to her children for protection, occasionally sleeping in her daughter's room to avoid being sexually assaulted by her intoxicated husband. (Grove explores this motif of rape in marriage in more explicit detail in his Canadian work *Settlers of the Marsh*). While Susie rebels openly against her mother, she oscillates discursively between silence and eulogy in relation to her father, a psychological phenomenon that feminists — Luce Irigaray, Jane Gallop, and Christine Froula — have theorized as the daughter's (or the father's) seduction. To quote Irigaray: "the only redemption of her value as a girl would be to seduce the father, to draw from him the mark if not the admission of some interest" (quoted in Gallop *Seduction* 70).

In the first part of the three-part novel, Grove provides a socio-psychological explanation for this phenomenon. The school — even a school for "höhere Töchter" with exclusively female teachers — lays the emotional seed for the daughter's

identification not with a mother but with a patriarchal father figure by giving birth to children's patriotism and arousing "the children's first 'great feelings'" (90). This explains the traumatic emotional reaction to the *Kaiser's* death in the fourteen-year-old Susie in 1888:

This event, the death of the old Emperor, was the first, and it remained the only experience of Susie's entire youth that caused her real and protracted grief. Even when later her mother was suddenly taken from them and died, she did not suffer so immediately and so selflessly as now in the case of this death, which in no way affected her directly. (88-89)

In Susie's young life, the old Kaiser, in contrast to her father, is the stereotyped image of a kindly old man with a white beard who loves flowers above all. This image of the Kaiser, complementing that of her wrathful, erratic, younger, self-made father works together to constitute the image of the ideal father in her mind, an image that conjures up strength and power and that partly displaces the mother as a figure of positive identification.

And yet, trying to please the father, the adult Susie at the same time struggles to separate from the father, to leave the father's house and to escape the story he has created about her. After her mother's death and Ihle's remarriage, the eighteen-year-old Susie "felt less than ever before that her father's house was her house" (221), a situation that leads to the eventual confrontation between father and daughter. As Lynda Boose puts it: "The daughter's struggle with her father is one of separation, not displacement. Its psychological dynamics thus locate the conflict inside [the] inner family space" (33). The intrusion of a male rival and the creation of "male-female-male syntax" (32) produce the dynamics in the father/daughter text and initiate the daughter's departure from her father's house. In contrast, separation is not the crucial feature in father/son texts: "In the archetypal father-son structure, the son's departure is authorized inside a circular pattern that predicts both his inevitable return and the concurrent threat of displacement/ usurpation that he will pose" (32). The son eventually returns to take the father's place.

"OUR DAILY BREAD" (1928) begins at such a point of separation; it starts where *Maurermeister* ends, namely, with the children's marriage and departure. As in *Maurermeister*, the generational conflicts in *Our Daily Bread* intersect with the language issue, but are contextualized in different terms. On the surface, the generational conflict opposes Elliot's austere, saving, luxury despising life to his children's love of pleasure, luxury and the desire for quick money. Discussing his novel *Two Generations* (1939) in *In Search of Myself* (1946), Grove

writes that his task had been to portray “the transition, in Ontario, from pioneer conditions to an urbanized rural life which brought about a conflict between fathers and sons” (440), an interpretation that has influenced many readers of *Our Daily Bread*. Margaret Stobie, for example, describes John Elliot as “an anachronism in the commercial world”: “Grove seems to be saying that the family belongs to the agricultural phase of human existence, [and] that it cannot survive in the commercial world” (107).¹⁰

Thus, the geographical movement of the children who leave the house to find better living conditions elsewhere is interpreted by Elliot (and most readers) as their choosing different paths in their lives and their refusal to follow the old (agricultural) tradition. *Our Daily Bread* is in fact preceded by the biblical epigraph: “And his sons walked not in his way” (iii, 1 Samuel, 8:3). But what about the daughters? Elliot (and most critics) have chosen to ignore the fact that as in *Maurermeister* the rebelling daughter is constantly in danger of being seduced (or co-opted) by the patriarchal power structure she rebels against, so Elliot’s children are drawn into, and in many ways repeat, Elliot’s fatal ways, even by attempting to create new and different lives for themselves. Almost every single son and daughter fails economically *not* because they refuse to follow Elliot’s dream but because they share his obsession of claiming some territory of their own, of establishing their own “houses” of power and proclaiming themselves masters.¹¹ As Elliot makes a financial success of his land but lets it eat up his soul and destroy his emotional life, so his children opt for the pleasures of life, but become slaves to the land through the burden of debt it imposes.

The patriarchal influence goes even further, since the children adopt the “father’s” language. Throughout the novel, Elliot is described as having a very deterministic perspective that has little to do with the tragic inevitability that some readers see as the key to the novel (e.g. Pacey 52). At the beginning of the novel, Elliot feels that he is being “rushed along an unknown path” (9), and, in another scene, after letting his violent anger take over against his son Arthur, Elliot realizes that “he had acted under a compulsion stronger than his will” (188). Repeatedly, the protagonist absolves himself from responsibility by resorting to a deterministic language, a discourse that is repeated by his children.¹²

Grove critiques the patriarch’s deterministic pessimism and emotional crustiness by presenting him as a *senex*-figure typical of the comic rather than the tragic genre (Blodgett 123) and by evoking his premature senility as a metaphor for spiritual death — a death-in-life stasis. With his white hair and beard, Elliot’s old age comes to allegorize a state of mental petrification: “What is the use of talking?” (235), Elliot asks wearily and decides no longer to “correct” his children because they are “beyond correction” (134). And to a certain extent they are, not because they have gone their own ways but because they have started to adopt their father’s petrified discourse: “What’s the use?” is a sentence that is repeated verbatim by

his sons John (241) and Norman (368) and by his son-in-law Pete (337) who, like Elliot, longs for death.

Reflecting on his children's characters earlier in the novel, Elliot anticipates the generational conflict as inevitable; each child has traits of its father and its mother at the same time that they also have "a third thing" (12) — their individuality — which strikes Elliot as "mysterious" and "incomprehensible." Almost like a Hawthorne villain, Elliot hopes to read and manipulate this mysterious force to make it serve the teleology of his life — his territorial dream of claiming as many pieces of land from the wilderness as possible.¹⁸ The children's only strategy of resistance is to hide their individualities in their relationship with the father with the result that, like Richard Ihle's daughters, most of Elliot's children remain strangers, even to the point of becoming pure abstractions. When Elliot's youngest son Arthur dies in the War in 1918, this death "affected his father strongly. Not that he mourned greatly; he had hardly known the boy; but the first of his children had died!" (241-42).

ON THE SURFACE, the mothers in *Our Daily Bread* and *Maurermeister* appear almost diametrically opposed to each other in their status and power: Mrs. Ihle submits to her husband's whims like an intimidated child, while Mrs. Elliot is set up as the archetypal, powerful matriarch, with much of the narrative suggesting that she is the one who quietly dominates in the Elliot household. The novel starts out with a vignette on the matriarch's elaborate preparations to go to town: "Mrs. Elliot sat enthroned while Cathleen combed her hair, Isabel buttoned her shoes, and Henrietta laid out her dark-grey silks" (15). Meanwhile, John Elliot, who admires his wife's "quiet majesty" (264), adopts the guise of the queen's humble servant and gets the carriage ready. John Elliot and his eldest son John recognize that she, not Elliot, is the one with the power to hold the family together, and as if to prove them right, the family indeed disintegrates shortly after Martha's death.

Yet this novel does not celebrate the power of matriarchy but critically draws attention to the fact that Martha Elliot's power is not in ultimate contradiction with its apparent opposite — patriarchy. Martha's matriarchal powers complement Elliot's patriarchal domination in the family as they are appropriated by (and ultimately serve) John Elliot's territorial dream. Any idealization of matriarchy is undercut from the beginning of the novel, when the narrator speaks of the "worried harshness of her words" (21) toward her children, suggesting that the problems of everyday life erupt into what Elliot would like to perceive as an idyllic mother-child relationship. Also, as Martha is ready to help her daughters in need, so she herself can only walk by leaning heavily on her daughters' arms;

the symbiotic mother-baby relationship is extended, albeit in a reversed form, into adult life. For her adult children, Martha never becomes Martha the individual but always remains the archetypal Mother, an indicator that the relationships have stopped growing and become petrified.

It is Martha, moreover, who repeatedly disrupts the discourse of determinism that is so characteristic of Elliot and his children, as she does, for example, when her daughter Cathleen announces the visit of Woodrow Ormond, who later becomes Cathleen's husband. In Cathleen's, as well as the narrator's discourse, this union with Woodrow comes about without Cathleen's active volition: "Without taking thought of what might be implied in her words, she had issued half an invitation to him" (15). Confronting Cathleen with the fact that she has to take responsibility for her own desires — a responsibility of which Cathleen would like to absolve herself, Mrs. Elliot asks: "[W]hy does that man come?" and "Do you like him?" (21). The conversations between mother and daughter, however, is interrupted and never continued, suggesting that the mother's discourse is not effective in disrupting the cloud of determinism that Cathleen has wrapped around herself like the rest of the (less educated) Elliot children. In her marriage Cathleen becomes an appendage of her successful husband; she gives up teaching for empty social functions and claims that she leads this life because of her husband, so that even the most educated of the Elliot children absolves herself of responsibility for her life's course.

Despite the differences between the two women, Martha Elliot and Bertha Ihle develop very similar resisting strategies toward the end of their lives: both women become what the German text describes as "wunderlich" (95), peculiar or odd, terms that encode the women's disruption of "normalcy."¹⁴ In both cases the women react against the patriarchal structures of their households by deliberately excluding their husbands and children from their lives. Slamming doors and making loud scenes with her husband, Mrs. Ihle openly rebels against her husband's oppression by appropriating his own tyrannical strategies, while Mrs. Elliot — Bartleby-like — quietly refuses any further intimacies and contacts with her husband. By pretending to be "normal," Bertha Ihle tricks her husband into going to Bad Ems for six weeks to cure his sore throat, and then indulges in a carnivalesque buying spree while the bills for all "extravagances" welcome Mr. Ihle several days after his return home. He can do nothing but pay them. Similarly, Martha Elliot's disruptive behaviour culminates in her spectacular dancing adventure. Partially recovered from cancer surgery, she drives to a town-dance and insists on dancing with every male present, while her family at home in vain searches for the mother. "For once in my life I have had a good time!" (131), she triumphantly tells her shocked husband upon her return home.

Nevertheless, just as any "carnivalesque" freedom is temporary, so a simple disruption of normalcy does not bring about genuine change. Grove's texts illus-

trate Michel Foucault's point that a simple reversal of the power relation does not lead to ultimate liberation but often perpetuates the structure of a power relation that can easily be reversed again: the nature of the power play itself does not change.¹⁵ After what is interpreted as an aborted suicide attempt by her family and by her doctor, Mrs. Ihle is taken to a mental institution, where she dies, leaving her daughters very vulnerable in the same patriarchal family structure.

Equally incapable of communicating her resistance in an effective language, Mrs. Elliot leaves a very problematic legacy to her children; her rebelling words are related many years later through Gladys, the only witness of her mother's last days of life.

Oh, she [Martha] cried, I don't even know any longer whether there's a God or not. If there is, I don't care. Come here, listen. I want to whisper to you. You may think I've had so many children because I was fond of them. No! They just came. Because I lived an evil life with your father. Look at me! — And she suddenly bared her body: a terrible sight! (133)

On the surface, this expression of an almost existential despair and her bitter self-condemnation as "the harlot of Babylon" (133) appear to be a result of sexual repressions that inevitably links sex with guilt, an interpretation adopted by most readers. However, the confession of sin followed by an almost Dantean sense of retributive punishment — Martha's awareness of her destruction by abdominal cancer — are rooted in a much deeper psychological and moral feeling of guilt than her sexual language can express.

Martha's sexualized discourse is the closest she comes to expressing a mother's feeling of guilt for having borne ten children not for her own (or for the children's) sake but solely as products of Elliot's territorial dream. She realizes that through the trap of her sexuality, she has become a complicitous agent of Elliot's territorial dream and thus has sinned against her children before they were even born. In the end, she admits to herself (and to her oldest daughter Gladys) that she is close to her first-born only, but that all the other children remained "strangers" in her life (88). Earlier in the novel, Martha Elliot is shocked, when her daughter Mary refuses to have any more children telling Martha that there are "ways and means" to prevent unwanted pregnancies. Unable to express some solidarity with her daughter, Martha is equally incapable of articulating her newly found wisdom and her condemnation of Elliot's dream in an effective, resisting language; she rebels against Elliot by refusing to have him near her in the last months of her life, but is incapable of telling him what she accuses him of.

Unlike Bertha Ihle, who is quietly sent off to an asylum and thus effectively silenced, Martha deliberately chooses silence as her strategy: having no effective language to communicate her newly found awareness, Martha refuses to speak to most of her children. The brief legacies she communicates before her death are ambiguous and, oscillating between two extremely different discourses, they achieve

the opposite of what they set out to do. Martha can only communicate her guilt to Gladys in incoherent fragments, and, as a result, Gladys escapes in horror from her mother's confession by becoming even more firmly submerged in the conformity of her rotten marriage with Frank (134). Then falling back to the coherence of her "old" language with two of her other children, Martha perpetuates the patriarchal pattern that has dominated her life even in her legacy to her children. Hoping to warn John and Isabel not to lock themselves into the prison houses of doomed marriages, she tells her oldest son that his future wife Lillian is no "farmer's wife" (108), as she tells Isabel that her chosen partner lacks the proper "descent" (107). Her evocation of marriage in terms of a "good household," or patriarchal *oikos*,¹⁶ is not only ineffective as a true warning, but makes her an involuntary accomplice of patriarchy. It ironically causes John and Isabel, once married, to stick it out in their rotten marriages in order forever to prove to their mother that they have made the right decision.

This motif of the mother's complicity in the perpetuation of patriarchy is also problematized in *Maurermeister*, where Mrs. Ihle tells her daughters the story of their grandmother: "The old woman, though; she made your grandfather's life such hell that once, when he was drunk, he tried to beat the old woman to death with an axe" (44). Not only has Bertha Ihle swallowed her husband's version of his mother as "a devil incarnate" (47), but Mrs. Ihle's story of her husband's origins presents the wife as the scapegoat who is responsible not only for the troubles in the marriage but also for her husband's violence. A victim of her husband's assaults, Bertha Ihle discloses in her discourse that she has deeply internalized her victimizer's rationalization, namely, that it is the woman who is responsible when she is assaulted by her husband.

In both novels the daughters rebel against the mother's complicity as they rebel against patriarchy itself, yet the mother's complicity already anticipates the containment of opposition in the next generation. Just as Susie Ihle deliberately refuses to follow her sister's example of feminine conformity by becoming a "German housewife," so most of Martha Elliot's daughters attempt to resist the notion of a patriarchal marriage. The androgynous Henrietta negotiates a contract so that she will at least keep her financial independence in her marriage, but her language of patriarchal resistance inevitably slips into the discourse of the market place: Pete can only have her "provided [he] can pay the price" (62). Once married, their relationship turns into a continual power struggle in which Henrietta eventually asserts herself as "master of the house." Conversely, Cathleen speaks the language of "a new ideal of manhood" (45), only to subject her own discourse to this new master's discourse once she agrees to marry him. And Isabel, like her namesake Isabel Archer, adopts a discourse of romantic love, selflessly giving her "virgin love" to redeem her husband-to-be whom everyone else despises (41), only to find out that there is no redemption in marriage.

Margaret presents the most challenging alternative. Refusing to get married so as not to be subjugated by any man, she speaks in a deliberately patriarchal language “I’ll be my own master” (110), she counters her brother-in-law, when he suggests that a woman’s destiny is inevitably marriage and motherhood. Refusing to be tied in any master/slave relationship, she subverts the very idea of mastery by speaking a parodic discourse of “mastery.” By appropriating a masculine language to resist the patriarchal notion of a woman’s destiny, Margaret manages to walk a very fine line between parodic imitation of, and co-optation by, the patriarchal language.

In a sense, this is the strategy Susie attempts to use in her struggle for independence, and yet, Susie’s language oscillates between Henrietta’s master discourse and Margaret’s parodic imitation of it. Toward the end of *Maurermeister*, Susie’s rebellion against her father becomes more and more open and defiant, at the same time that her own private language of resistance also becomes more “masculine,” drawing very strongly on terms that the French feminist critic Hélène Cixous has identified as belonging to the masculine “economy of the proper”¹⁷: “Sie [Susie] wollte ein eigenes Haus haben: niemanden über sich: ihr eigener Herr sein: wer sie beherrschen wollte, der musste ihr imponieren” (243).¹⁸ The language used in this quotation is the discourse of mastery, of ruling and commanding respect, of appropriation and property, in brief, a discourse that lacks the parodic twist that Margaret’s language has. Here, we may ask with Hélène Cixous:

If the position of mastery culturally / comes back to men, what will become of /
 (our) femininity when we find ourselves / in this position? /
 When we use a master discourse? (“Exchange” 136)

As Susie adopts the language of patriarchy without any apparent distance to the language she speaks, she is in danger of replicating patriarchy, of accepting and internalizing the master/slave power structure of her parental home. She is tempted to marry Consul Blume because his title would give her the powerful status of “Frau Konsul,” and the only reason that keeps her from making the ultimate decision is that Consul Blume (“flower”) lacks the one thing that would make him a perfect husband (in her eyes): he lacks masculine aggression, or in other words, he refuses to be (like) her father.

The fact that Susie decides to marry the Consul in the end suggests for most readers the end of resistance and the acceptance of a very unsatisfying reality principle. But the novel also allows a more optimistic (and a more resisting) reading, a reading that emphasizes Susie’s growth. On her very last confrontation with her father, Susie (re)discovers the traces of a new feminine voice of resistance, a language that is rooted in her childhood experience. Just as Julia Kristeva stresses the importance of negativity and disruption in relation to the masculine “symbolic order” as the most effective strategy of feminine resistance in a patriarchal order

("Woman" 137), so many of Susie's sentences in her last fight with her father are negations, a language that resists and exposes her father's hollow truths by simply negating his assertions. Asked to obey her new stepmother, Susie quietly responds by saying: "That's not my mother" (240), adding, "My Mama's dead" (241). Here, the new voice and strength of verbal resistance are rooted in her mother's memory, and it is this new voice that prompts Ihle's violent and physical attack, his "iron grip around her throat" (241), as if he wants to cut off her new, empowered voice. The fact that his grip around her throat signifies a "release" (242) to Susie suggests that for the first time in her life she has consciously distanced herself from her father.¹⁸

Granted, the novel does not ultimately resolve the father/daughter conflict and thus turns into "frustrated comedy" (Blodgett 137, 147), but it is equally important to note that the ending is deliberately vague and open-ended: "'I've got something important to tell him'" (242), is Susie's commission to the Consul, when she summons him to a neutral meeting place. "Something important" is the typical borderline discourse in which the "message" is deliberately relegated into the gaps of the text, into the "not-to-be-read." On the surface, Susie's elusive discourse suggests her acceptance of a union with the Consul, but on a deeper level the important message may be seen in her changed attitude to this man, after she has shaken off her falsely romantic notions of the strong, masculine man modelled on her father. Susie had rejected Blume earlier because she looked at him through her father's eyes: "What would Papa think of me. He'd laugh me to scorn with the little Consul" (186).

I do not mean to read the ending as a romantic resolution and even less to suggest that it leads to an ultimate female liberation; Susie's need to *attach* herself to a man is highly problematic, especially since she has barely *detached* herself from her parental home. But Susie has gained a new perspective on her father, and there is hope that she has come to see the Consul's lack of aggression in a different light, after she stops looking at him through her father's censoring eyes. Also, given Susie's linguistic flexibility and her resisting courage, she has the potential to rewrite the meaning of her name and title (should she really become Frau Konsul).

"My sympathies were always with the women. Yet I was no sentimentalist; in my books I gave the facts and let them speak for themselves," Grove writes in *In Search of Myself* (224). And yet, *Maurermeister* and *Our Daily Bread* illustrate that such "facts" may encode a masculine bias: Grove presents us with women who are discursively subversive and playful and who continually undermine and disrupt masculine self-seriousness, but Grove also limits these women's subversive powers. Martha Elliot, for example, is doomed to die once she tries to break out of discursive normalcy; realizing that she cannot communicate her legacy to her children, she dies in despair. Her daughter Margaret, the most independent woman in the novel, really lives on the border of the novel; her independence is relegated

into the gaps of Grove's text, suggesting that Grove is either not willing, or not capable of writing her parodic mimicking of the patriarchal language. And Susie Ihle's story ends abruptly, once she has found a very precarious voice to confront the father, so that the seeds of her discursive resistance are never allowed to bloom in the novel.

Thus the exploration of women's discursive resistance in *Maurermeister* and *Our Daily Bread* affirms Grove's deep interest in, and sympathy with, the plight of female characters in a patriarchal household, but the novels also point to his limitations as a male author trying to write the feminine voice of resistance. And, perhaps more importantly, these novels — despite their gender subtexts — force us to recognize the author's own ambivalent nostalgia for patriarchal power structures.

NOTES

- ¹ Elsa's "Autobiography" is amongst the Djuna Barnes papers at University of Maryland.
- ² Like *Maurermeister*, Elsa's autobiography describes "her mother's mental illness and death, her father's decision to remarry, her hatred of her stepmother and her own decision, at age eighteen, to leave home" (Hjartarson 275-76).
- ³ Shortly before her death in 1927, Elsa suggested in her personal writing that her conflict with her father (and her father's language) was never resolved: "I left my father's house, protection, money, now I am in his house back again, trodden on, jeered at . . . it is my father's clutch!" ("Letters" 20). Equating the German language with "the father's" discourse, she even felt "nauseated at German sound" and longed to express herself in English — the language in which she wrote her autobiography ("Letters" 20).
- ⁴ See, for example, Grove's homage to Nietzsche in his collection of poems, *Wanderungen* (51-53), or his tribute to Nietzsche in *In Search of Myself* (166-67). "Grove did not create Nietzschean characters, but his protagonists frequently engage in philosophical questions about their existence which resemble Nietzschean inquiries" (13), writes Axel Knönagel in his study of Nietzschean philosophy in Grove's writing. Knönagel, though, does not even touch on the issue of *Sprachkrise*, in which Nietzsche's philosophy and Grove's fiction deeply intersect.
- ⁵ German *wider* = against, contrary to, in opposition to.
- ⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, the English quotations are from Paul Gubbins' translation of the work. The page references for quotations in German refer to the original German work.
- ⁷ Hidden behind shrubbery Susie and her friend Betty shout to the lovers: "Ihr sollt euch vermääählen" (12), "You ought to get ma-a-a-r-ried" (16), and later, getting carried away by their prank, they give their earlier sentence a sexual twist: "Ihr sollt euch vermehren!" (13), "Ought to reproduce" (17). Unfortunately the joke is somewhat lost in the English translation, as the words "vermählen" and "vermehren" rhyme in German but not in translation. Susie and Betty also play on Karl Schade's name, calling him "Kahl" (= bald) Schade (11).

- ⁸ In *Our Daily Bread*, Grove gives the motif of the tyrannical, wrathful father an interesting twist, since it is only very late in the novel that Elliot's wrath surfaces. In the beginning of the novel, he is introduced to the reader as "a thinker, [who] had lived a life of introspection, dreams, and ideas" (5). It is in the middle of the novel that we witness the first explosive, hateful attack on his son Arthur who refuses to become a farmer (176).
- ⁹ Yet there are also loaded silences in the dialogue between the two girls, especially when Susie cautiously discloses her father's violence and tyranny to her friend (68). Hedwig, identified as the commandant's daughter in the novel, abruptly shifts the conversation in a different direction, so that the daughter's story of her father's violence is muted even in the relationship between girl-friends.
- ¹⁰ Similarly, in the words of Douglas Spettigue, *Our Daily Bread* is "the most concentrated of the novels of the decline from the agrarian mode" (132). Comparing *Our Daily Bread* with Quebec writer Ringuet's agricultural novel *Trente Arpents* (1938), Ronald Sutherland maintains that both novels introduce "the beginning of the dissolution of the old order" (6), a dissolution that is symbolized by the fact that "[n]ot one of their many children adopts the values of the father" (9).
- ¹¹ Elliot complains that his children don't follow his tradition but the fact remains that five of his children and their husbands and wives turn to farming to make a living (Gladys, Henrietta, Isabel, John, and Norman).
- ¹² Thinking about her sister Gladys's life, Elliot's daughter Henrietta follows the following train of thought: "Life was leading [Gladys] along a path which she had not chosen except for the fact that she had once on a time chosen a man, Frank Bramley, the druggist" (48-49).
- ¹³ In his growing senility, Elliot, seeding the soil, has a very telling vision: "It seemed to him that, as he had had ten children, ten such seeders as his were being drawn over the prairie, so that, through his children, he had multiplied the land reclaimed from the wilderness by ten" (245). The patriarchal dream of replicating and multiplying himself is thus deeply rooted in the even more powerful territorial dream, the dream of claiming a piece of land as his own.
- ¹⁴ John Elliot summarizes his reaction to his wife's changed behaviour by formulating only one word, "which came from his lips with the peculiar quality of a bursting bubble. 'Odd!' he said, 'Odd!'" (117).
- ¹⁵ See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 92-96 and "The Ethic of Care for the Self" 11-12.
- ¹⁶ In *The Use of Pleasure*, Michel Foucault analyzes the Greek patriarchal notion of the household (*oikos*) in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* and stresses the dissymmetry of the relationship between husband and wife (156). For the male, marriage implied "being the head of a family, having authority, exercising a power whose locus of application was in the 'home'" (151). Although the wife is a key figure in the management of the *oikos* (154), it is the husband who governs and guides the wife, as she becomes the "*synergos* he needs for the reasonable practice of economy" (155).
- ¹⁷ Influenced by Jacques Derrida, Cixous distinguishes between the feminine economy of the gift and the masculine economy of the proper ("Medusa" 259).
- ¹⁸ I am quoting here in the original German because the English translation transforms Susie's obviously "masculine" discourse in German into feminine terms in English. In the following quotation I italicize the most problematic words: "She wanted to have her own *home* ["Haus" evokes a property = house]; nobody over her: be her

own *mistress* [German "Herr" is masculine and is linked to the verb "herrschen" = to rule over]. Whoever wanted to *give her orders* ["beherrschen" not only has the "herr" in it but literally translated means "to rule over"] must *impress* her ["impress" corresponds to the German "beeindrucken" which Grove deliberately does not use in the German text; "imponieren" linked to Latin "impono" is a much stronger term and has even a touch of intimidation to it]" (238).

- ¹⁹ The language describing her father's attack is deliberately rapist: "But at that moment her father's great mass came lunging toward her. He seized her by the hair and flung her to the ground. Susie saw him standing over her, his face blood-shot and swollen" (241).

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NATURAL DREAM LEXICON

John Marshall

She's called out of the dark
 she's proud she's no longer afraid of

 surprised to see she's made herself
 so small.
 She was on a picnic with her mother