

GROVE IN SEARCH OF AN AUDIENCE

Janet Giltrow

AS A FICTION WRITER, Frederick Philip Grove seems to have settled into his rightful place in Canadian literary history — perhaps not so eminent a place as he might have wished, but a stable position nevertheless. Grove as a writer of non-fiction is another matter. Because of their literal reference, Grove's non-fiction writings must go on facing their contradiction: specifically, Douglas Spettigue's researches into Grove's personal history.¹ *Over Prairie Trails* (1922), *The Turn of the Year* (1923) and *In Search of Myself* (1946) all declare by their formal characteristics that they proceed from a faithful relation to fact. In *Over Prairie Trails* Grove honours that relation, striving to secure an exact verbal representation of reality. Yet Spettigue has shown us that we can't always count on Grove, that Grove does not speak truthfully when he describes his early life and travels in *In Search of Myself*. So we find an unsettling division in Grove's non-fiction: on the one hand, the breathtaking lies of *In Search of Myself* and, on the other, the meticulous veracity of *Over Prairie Trails*. In this essay, I will try to account for Grove's duplicity as well as his truthfulness by focussing on his sense of audience: Grove was obsessed with the problem of audience, and with his falsehoods he tried to short-circuit ordinary rhetorical routes towards discovering, engaging and convincing his public.

A writer's genre determines his formal relation to his audience; his genre both limits and licenses what he will tell and authorizes by convention his claim to his audience's attention. The generic conventions which govern Grove's non-fiction and establish his relation to his audience are those of the travel book; Grove was a journey-maker, and the central event in his life was his move from the Old World to the New. In this he was something of a literary late-comer, for he shares the perspectives of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers in the tradition of North American travel narrative — St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, Moodie, Richardson, Thoreau, and others.

In classic travel, the writer-audience relation is highly specified: negatively, in that the writer *does not* address the foreign society to which his travels lead him; and positively, in that he does speak to the society he left behind, at home, about what has happened to him abroad. Grove's separation from his native German culture, his alienation in a foreign community which did not readily acknowledge

him, and his failure to adapt happily to the new culture turned him naturally towards the travel genre. If he was to be unheeded here, he would speak to an audience far away which would understand him, and he would tell about what Mrs. Moodie called "painful experience in a distant land." But, having taken up a genre which demanded a literal account of reality, why did he lie?

Facing this question, we must recognize the social aspects of travel writing, for Grove's non-fiction narratives (both true and untrue) were a literary response to a social predicament. Travel writing, like other uses of language, occurs in a social context, marked by relations among those who speak, listen or overhear. Kenneth Burke has suggested that all literature should be seen as "addressed," as being directed towards a postulated reader, as going between individuals and making connections.² This connection-making is a social function of texts, and genres establish their own forms of social relationship between reader and writer. Sociolinguistic theory acknowledges this characteristic of utterance and genre; by convention, genres transmit social information, above the content level, as to the speaker's status and identity vis-à-vis his audience, his community, and his subject.³ The speaker in the travel genre obeys specific conventions: his discourse about foreign places is informative, conveying comprehensive factual data heretofore unknown to his audience;⁴ he speaks as a member in good standing of the community he addresses, expressing himself in ways valued by that community rather than in ways valued by the foreign society he describes; clearly, in situations of language difference, he will use his native language rather than the language of the foreign place. His discourse in itself signals his continuing membership in his original culture; it is an agent of social coherence, and the writer's choice of genre indicates his idea of his place as a social being.

With these issues in mind, we find Grove in a peculiar position. In telling stories of travel, the writer presupposes a distant, attentive audience representing a community of which he is a member. But the "addressed" quality of Grove's art falters on two counts. First, the travel genre was no longer a stable literary form. After four centuries of providing a direct literary avenue between the New World and the Old, travel writing had lost its currency; once eager for the published journals of travellers, European readers were no longer paying close attention to exotic news from America. Whereas Susanna Moodie could appeal confidently to a nineteenth-century European audience which sympathized with her troubles and took an interest in her descriptions of Canadian life, Grove in the twentieth century enjoyed no such confidence. Travel writing could no longer presume a recognized relation between writer and reader and, therefore, could not perform efficiently the social function of reaffiliating the absent writer with the addressed community. Second, Grove's membership in the society he would address with his travel art was dubious; the educated German community which

would have been his ideal audience had, in effect, rejected him, even set the law on him, as Spettigue discovered. I suggest that Grove's lies were an attempt to reconstruct the feeling of belonging, the clear sense of having come from somewhere, which would give his non-fiction writings generic status, transmissibility, and meaning. Grove's own remarks show that the problem of transmissibility weighed heavily with him. Repeatedly, he complains about his lack of an appropriate audience; he confesses his "terrible need to communicate" and his need to "explain" what has happened to him; he describes numerous instances of social isolation where his voice is unheard or disregarded. In all, he felt the awesome silence that settles on the alien in a foreign place, and he wanted to break the silence by finding an interlocutor who would receive his communications from this remote place. Like those who had gone before, he needed to tell the story of his travels.

In Search of Myself, Grove's account of his wanderings in Europe and America, is the keystone of his reconstruction of his origins. Long taken as a reliable record of Grove's career, this book describes Grove's move from the Old World to the New, and in it Grove managed the informational conventions of travel-based narrative, including social commentary, in such a way as to convince his readers of the truth of his account. In its expression of the writer's attitude of discovery and his feelings of social disorientation, this book shares important features with classic North American travel narratives. Like Mrs. Moodie in *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), Frances Trollope in *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), and John Richardson in *Eight Years in Canada* (1847), Grove felt demeaned and degraded in North America, unacknowledged and even despised. Like them, he resorted to long expository narrative to recover his status. Unlike them, however, he knew no conclusive connection with a clearly identifiable audience sympathetic to his argument. Grove's ties with the Old World were ambiguous, tortuous, and attenuated.

IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND *In Search of Myself*, it is helpful to look at its novelistic precursor, *A Search for America* (1927). The shaping event of each narrative is identical: the relocation of the narrator from Europe to America. Obviously, this story was seminal to Grove's Canadian years, claiming his attention to the end. Not until the end, however, did he violate the boundary between fiction and non-fiction, deliberately miscueing his readers as to the nature of reference in *In Search of Myself*. When he did cross this boundary, he took *A Search for America* with him by suggesting to readers of *In Search of Myself* that his novel about emigration had been more fact than fiction.

A Search for America tells of a young man's loss of fortune in Europe, his emigration to Canada, and his travels in the United States. Having enjoyed a youth of cultural refinement and careless self-indulgence, the hero, Phil Branden, learns from his father that the money which supported his leisure is gone. Shut out from his accustomed life, Branden embarks for the New World.

His situation is a familiar one. Like Mrs. Moodie, rather than endure a *déclassé* destiny at home, Branden sets out reluctantly to repair his fortunes. In her introduction to the first edition of *Roughing It in the Bush*, Mrs. Moodie writes about the social circumstances connected with this kind of travel: "In most instances, emigration is a matter of necessity, not of choice; and this is more especially true of the emigration of persons of respectable connections, or of any station or position in the world. Few educated persons, accustomed to the refinements and luxuries of European society, ever willingly relinquish those advantages, and place themselves beyond the protective influence of the wise and revered institutions of their native land, without pressure of some urgent cause."⁵ Grove represents Branden's "connections" as having been at least "respectable" — indeed, as nearly illustrious — and his station as eminent for so young a man. His educated mentality amounts to genius, and his habituation to the "refinements and luxuries of European society" is profound. In Mrs. Moodie's terms, then, Branden's emigration is a drastic occurrence, and, like earlier travellers from Europe, he must learn to put up with having his social and cultural assets and his education called into question in all his transactions in North America. He enters into an anomic phase of disorientation and isolation:

I had stepped from what I could not help regarding as a well-ordered, comfortable environment into what had upon me the effect of an utter chaos. For the moment all human contact was non-existent. I felt that not only had I to learn a great many things, the social connections of a world entirely different from the world I knew, for instance; but I also had laboriously to tear down or at least to submerge what I had built up before — my tastes, inclinations, interests. My everyday conversation had so far been about books, pictures, scientific research. Not a word had I heard or spoken about these things since I had set foot on the liner which took me across the Atlantic.⁶

Branden becomes anonymous, for his European identity is now obsolete. Moreover, he enters into a regime of silence; not a word is "heard or spoken" of what had been his accustomed intercourse with his fellow creatures.

In the third section of the narrative, "The Depths," Branden becomes a tramp, passing into a social void. He sets off on foot, westward: "I have left the society of man. I am an outcast. . . . I am alone; I stand against the world." Now complete quiet descends on him as he avoids all contact with other men, and is "silent for days and days at a stretch." In this extreme isolation, silence becomes tolerable: "I established a mood which eliminated the feeling of loneliness. It

may have been because I got used to being alone. That terrible need for communication, for imparting to others what I garnered in impressions, moods, thoughts was on the wane." Itinerancy seems to rationalize Branden's reticence; as an alien traveller, he cannot or will not establish the social relations that generate talk. He gets used to keeping quiet.

But it is not strictly true that he was free of the "terrible need for communication." In *In Search of Myself* Grove describes the composition of the Phil Branden narrative: "in 1893, at the end of the year, I settled down to write the story of what I had lived through since August, 1892. The result was a manuscript of, at a conservative estimate, between five and six hundred thousand words which I called *A Search for America*."⁷ Grove's dating is false, but his idea about writing is heartfelt; what was not expressible in social intercourse was imparted, in a flood of garrulousness, in a literary form. When the time came for speaking out, Grove compensated a thousandfold for the verbal restrictions of life in the New World. And he also redressed his anonymity, for, with his two long narratives about his travels, Grove would make up for his lack of social recognition by publishing the details of his identity.

Here we must face the problem of Grove's self-misrepresentation. Spettigue's inspired researches into Grove's European past revealed an impoverished, irregular background which was a far cry from the opulent origins described in *A Search for America* and *In Search of Myself*. Grove came from agrarian stock, but before he was two years old his parents had left the land and settled in Hamburg, where his father found humble employment with the civic transit authority. By becoming a civil servant, Grove's father gave his family some claim to lower middle-class status. As a schoolboy, Grove developed scholarly ambitions, and in his later school years he consorted with children of families of higher social class. Over a period of two or three years during his young manhood he studied intermittently at German universities, but never acquired a degree. He tried to ingratiate himself with the literati, received some modest recognition for his poetry and translations, but finally failed to win the regard of the intelligentsia. Out of this confusion of social influences and aspirations comes a sense of Grove's classlessness and of his having been socially uprooted by his ambition long before he left for Canada. Of one thing we can be sure: Grove — or Felix Paul Greve — was no affluent gadabout but a rather seedy translator, poet, and novelist, eventually imprisoned for debt and fraud. It was this sordid indebtedness, not the loss of a magnificent fortune, which led to his emigration. Spettigue reckons that Grove didn't arrive in America until 1909 — fifteen years later than he claimed. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this web of subterfuge is the credulity of Grove's Canadian audience; by exploiting the informational conventions of travel narrative, Grove was accepted as the man he wanted to be. He created credentials for himself.

In his "Prologue" to *In Search of Myself*, Grove sketches the occasion of the book. His feelings of professional failure were crystallized, he says, when he saw a newly published biography of a "Frenchman, still living, who in my early days had been one of my intimates." The fame of this former cohort (taken to be André Gide) threw into relief Grove's own inability to find an audience. He compares his own obscurity to the prominence of the coterie of which he claims to have been a member: "of that group there was not one, except myself, who, that day, was not known beyond the confines of his country."

Grove implies that, had he not moved to the New World, he, too, would have found recognition. The audience unavailable in Canada would have been his in Europe. Yet all is not lost, for he can still attack the issue of his demoralizing anonymity. He can speak out, through his art: "If I could explain, to someone, why I had failed, the explanation might more than compensate for the failure to have made myself heard so far. Could I explain it? I did not know. I saw the reasons clearly enough. I must try. And 'to someone'? To whom? To whom but my friend the young Frenchman who was now a man of seventy or more." Grove clearly identifies his audience as European. Now uttered after years of obscurity and silence, this long talk — the "explanation" — will be directed to the sympathetic listener from whom his travels have separated him. Bypassing the uncomprehending Canadians who have so far paid no attention, the document becomes "addressed," and transmissible. Furthermore, the explanation "might more than compensate" for the years of being unheard. Being unheard and unacknowledged is, it seems, an inspiring experience, and the lack of encouraging social relations leads to literary work. Much later in *In Search of Myself*, when he fails to establish himself in the regular network of Canadian life, Grove feels again the "terrible need" to communicate; he wants to write: "the less congenial my surroundings became, the more insistently did my old aims and aspirations try to raise their buried heads. . . ."

In trying to "explain" his feelings of failure and isolation, Grove constructs an elaborate European background to his Canadian life, making sure his readers will understand the fitness of his having selected the famous Frenchman as a receiver of his communiqué. He tells us that his magnificent home, "Castle Thurow," was a "world in itself," sumptuous and secure. And even when young Grove was away from home, on his continental travels, he was part of a definable community, attached as he was to his admired and well-known mother: "No matter where my mother went, she dropped automatically into milieus where it established a higher claim to attention and even distinction to have written a notable book, to have painted an enduring picture, to have carved a fascinating statue than to have amassed wealth or even to have ruled nations." When he grew up, Grove acquired social credentials like his mother's: "I had a talent for forming the centre of certain groups. . . . I don't know what it was that

gave me this power of forming a nucleus of crystallization; I only knew I had it." Certainly, these elements of the narrative — the "world in itself" of the boyhood home, the "milieus" in every city, the "certain groups" of which Grove was the "nucleus" — establish a sense of social coherence in Grove's early life.

In the Canadian west there were no "milieus," and standards for community membership were opposite to those Grove attributes to the European circles he knew: here, wealth and political power carried the day. And if Grove once had a talent for being a "nucleus," he lost it in the New World, where he seems to have repelled rather than attracted social particles. Even when he takes up a teaching career, he remains socially isolated, and resists assimilation. As principal of the Winkler school in Manitoba he finds that "any sort of social life simply did not exist for me. Even as a farmhand I had . . . had more human contacts. . . ." When he marries, he draws his wife into the void; at Gladstone, "socially, we lived, apart from the Anglican minister's family, in as complete isolation as at Winkler."

Significantly, Grove describes his social predicament in a linguistic conceit. He writes: "I felt an exile. I was an exile. I did not live among people of my own kind; among people who, metaphorically, spoke my language. . . ." During the Great War, the people of Gladstone became suspicious of Grove's foreign origins and he despaired at the possibility of declaring his special kind of allegiance to Canada: "what could the people of Gladstone know about that? Could I even try to explain it to them? I should have had to speak an English to them as foreign as, let me say Czech. I had not even published any one of my books." Grove's concept of "language" here shows how deeply he felt the restrictions on expression in his new life. He felt as alienated, linguistically, as the monolingual traveller among foreign speakers. And Grove's thoughts on his "language" problems lead him directly to the idea of a specialized, literary use of his alien tongue, as the final sentence in the last-quoted passage shows. With writing and publication come feelings of belonging to some cultural community — remote or near. If Grove could believe that his language and "explanation" were intelligible and heeded in another place, he could ignore the hostility of the communities where he more or less temporarily resided. He could rely, as Susanna Moodie did, on the long-distance social connections brought about by publication.

But unlike Susanna Moodie, Grove had recourse to no reliable audience or social group abroad. As Spettigue has shown, Grove even in Europe existed on the dim margins of society. The few social ties which endured during the final period of his European life were negative ones, which he cut with his flight. Grove had no residual connections with his origins; there was no one in his life to receive letters-home, and no social group with which he could whole-heartedly identify and which could figure as an audience. His relationship to the distant

audience postulated in the "Prologue" is a fantasy, but a functional one rhetorically for it yields the formal occasion of the narrative.

Through *In Search of Myself*, Grove argues that his failure to discover a more immediate audience is a corollary of the immaturity of Canadian culture. Nearly a century earlier, John Richardson, who desired a reverent audience almost as much as Grove did and who was also overtaken by poverty and obscurity, published similar grievances about Canada's disregard of its artists. Grove's and Richardson's ideas on art and culture spring from similar social experiences. In *Eight Years in Canada* Richardson told about his experiences here and his disappointed attempts to fit into Canadian society after having returned for the official purpose of dispatching reports of the Canadian political situation to the London *Times*. Settled in a village in Upper Canada, Richardson felt that he was being buried alive. Immobilized by financial attachments, Richardson took a morbid view of permanent residence; his morose depression was relieved only by his irritation at local manners and his yearning for a more hospitable milieu. Similarly, Grove at the end of his life settled at Simcoe, Ontario, and committed himself through mortgage and other indebtedness to permanent residence. The situation aroused in him feelings like Richardson's: anxiety over powerlessness and demise, as well as expostulations against the indifference shown him by the Canadian community. But unlike Richardson, who finally sold up and moved on, Grove would travel no more. He lived his last years at Simcoe, and died there, although not without first expressing his desire to be on his way again. Remembering his earlier wanderings, he writes: "If there were no responsibilities involved, I should gladly leave the place I live in and join the army of those who are on the road; and if, as it would be bound to do, such a course, at my age, led to my physical breakdown, I would still take a savage sort of satisfaction out of the fact that I should 'crack up' by the side of the trail, by way of protest against what we call civilization." If he could keep moving, Grove's feelings of alienation would have meaning: his death would be a "protest" and public statement. But as long as he stays put, he faces all the social signs of his failure and powerlessness; his worries about debt suggest a recurrence of the desperation which led to his flight from Germany.

In Search of Myself compensates for the anonymity Grove experienced in North America by creating an identity for him. In this respect, *In Search of Myself* is a rhetorically successful text, its success demonstrated by the numerous reiterations of this fabricated biography in commentary on Grove's work. Right into the 1970's, until Spettigue's researches received wide attention, critics repeated the story of Grove's eminent beginnings in Europe, finding it, perhaps, especially appropriate to some current ideas about the neglect of Canadian art and artists.⁸ Once launched in a referential form, Grove's fictions about himself made their way into the public domain as information.

IN SEARCH OF MYSELF is a product of inauspicious residence, *Over Prairie Trails* a product of propitious itinerancy. Stationed permanently at Simcoe, with no hope of escape through renewed travel, Grove turned to fantasy to explain his alienation. On the road, however, in the earlier period described in *Over Prairie Trails*, the actual form of Grove's life accounted for his alienation, and he needed no fictions to explain his view of himself and his environment. In *In Search of Myself*, he describes this interval when domestic arrangements necessitated — or invited — weekly travels, as the “happiest year of our lives” and *Over Prairie Trails* as an “inspired book.”

Over Prairie Trails describes the winter of 1917-18, when Grove taught in Gladstone; his wife and daughter lived in an isolated teacherage at Falmouth, thirty-five miles away, where Mrs. Grove taught. Each Friday, Grove travelled by horse and buggy or, later in the winter, by horse and sleigh, to Falmouth. Each Sunday he returned to Gladstone. In making these trips, Grove showed that his attachments were elsewhere than in Gladstone, where he worked. At the same time, by working and living five days a week in Gladstone, he made himself only a visitor at Falmouth. In effect, he belonged nowhere — except on the road, as he travelled the route that became for this season the axis of his life.

As in classic travel narrative, the journey is all in *Over Prairie Trails*. Only the most meagre details hint at the conditions of the traveller's life at each end of the axis. The self-aggrandizing “I” of *In Search of Myself*, extravagantly accumulating attributes, looming ever larger, is not present in *Over Prairie Trails*. Here Grove doesn't have to tell about his wonderful beginnings, for the features of his discourse will tell enough. The structure of his text: narrative coextensive with itinerary; the logic of his text: inference drawn from first-hand observation; the semantic character of his text: literal reference secured by expert diction — all these features signify that the writer is a man of inquiring spirit, educated eye, and authoritative voice. Here the travels can predominate over the traveller, who is only their agent. The travels are a text in themselves, a “thing of beauty,” a *raison d'être*. Grove writes in his preface: “These drives . . . soon became what made my life worth living.”⁹

Each week's drive is an encounter with exotic desolation. Although his itinerary connects established communities and passes through settled areas, Grove is the only traveller abroad in the seven drives reported; he seldom sees the tracks of other travellers, and the few farms he passes show only negligible human signs. Grove likes this emptiness. During the drive described in the chapter “Fog,” he experiences a benign isolation: “I was shut in, closed off from the world around. . . . It was like a very small room, this space of light — the buggy itself, in darkness, forming an alcove to it, in which my hand knew every well-appointed detail.

Gradually, while I was warming up, a sense of infinite comfort came, and with it the enjoyment of the elvish aspect." In the chapter "Snow," the very absence of human contact seems to reinforce his pleasure in his travels: "None of the farms which I passed showed the slightest signs of life. I had wrapped up again and sat in comparative comfort and at ease, enjoying the clear sparkle and glitter of the snow." Out here, on the road, the silence surrounding the solitary traveller makes a psychological shelter. Free of impinging opinions, his mentality ranges round him as he scrutinizes natural phenomena. He is the sole human factor, positioned centrally, a "nucleus" again.

After his description of the "elvish" comfort discovered in the fog, Grove's observations begin to work outward from this privacy to acquire materials for his text: "I began to watch the fog. By bending over towards the dashboard and looking into the soon arrested glare I could make out the component parts of the fog." His analyses of fog, of hoarfrost, of snow and drift, are like Thoreau's examinations of seaweed in *Cape Cod* (1865), or of phosphorescent wood in *The Maine Woods* (1864). The informational status of these writings — first-hand, factual, exhaustive — gives Thoreau and Grove the right to speak, and claim an audience. With their work towards discovering the natural world through expert watchfulness and precise, often scientific language, they make places for themselves. Like Thoreau, who became a "large owner in the Merrimack intervals," Grove appropriated parts of the terrain, making small rooms and private places.

For each writer, this literary tenancy offset his economic exclusion from other forms of ownership. In both *A Search for America* and *In Search of Myself*, Grove praises the easy terms on which Thoreau engaged poverty. However, this aspect of Thoreau's life seems to have remained an unattainable (and probably undesired) ideal for Grove, and the disparities between Thoreau's career and Grove's are conspicuous. Thoreau stayed put, productively; Grove felt only baleful despair when domiciled permanently at Simcoe. Thoreau's righteous pleasure in the decency of poverty need only be compared with Grove's nearly senile fantasies about wealth in *In Search of Myself* to reveal the distinctions separating the social mentalities of the two writers.

But when Grove speaks frankly about his travels, he can achieve the kind of heightened documentation that Thoreau had made out of his voyage on the Concord and Merrimack, his excursions to Cape Cod and his expeditions to the forests of Maine. In Chapter 4, "Snow," Grove surmounts a drift as high as the adjacent treetops, and reaches a moment of nearly unnerving perception:

What lay to the right or left seemed not to concern me. I watched [the horses] work. They went in bounds, working beautifully together. . . . It probably did not take more than five minutes, maybe considerably less, before we had reached the

top, but to me it seemed like hours of nearly fruitless endeavour. I did not realize at first that we were high. I shall never forget the weird kind of astonishment when the fact came home to me that what snapped and crackled in the snow under the horses' hoofs, were the tops of trees. Nor shall the feeling of estrangement, as it were — as if I were not myself, but looking on from the outside at the adventure of somebody who yet was I — the feeling of other-worldliness, if you will pardon the word, ever fade from my memory — a feeling of having been carried beyond my depth where I could not swim — which came over me when with two quick glances to right and left I took in the fact that there were no longer any trees to either side, that I was above the forest world which had so often engulfed me.

In this instant of exultant travel, Grove has journeyed farther than ever before, into an "other-worldliness." Riding high, Grove and his aerial sleigh are more than an image of transcendence: they are an actuality. No fictions are necessary to redeem Grove's sense of self. Neither argument nor vehemence is required to "explain" the author's claim to his audience's regard. He enjoys the rhetorical privilege of the travel writer; having gone to such lengths, he commands his reader's attention with his far-fetched news.

Grove's dangerous travels repudiate sedentary values and, on the whole, the townspeople are against his drives: they advise against his excursions; once they literally stand in his way, causing a serious delay. "I disliked the town," Grove writes, "the town disliked me." His successful travels are in effect subversive; they show his independence of the community which tries to absorb him and his contempt for the civic delegation which blocks his exit from the school one Friday afternoon. Grove's dealings with the communities in which he taught seem always to have assumed this political character and perhaps only in this winter of 1917-18 did he have the clear opportunity to resist the coercion of school boards.

Overcoming the social obstacles that would stop him in his tracks, Grove gets on his way. But it is not just his resolute departure which expresses his independence. His investigations of nature — skies, mists, temperatures — have a result beyond their informativeness; they also show that he does not share the outlook of the townspeople he leaves behind each Friday. "I am aware," he writes, "that nobody — nobody whom I know, at least — takes the slightest interest in such things." This way of speaking, this exhaustive and precise report of natural surroundings, is not valued by the community. Grove's narrative, then, does not address the population of Gladstone, for it is indifferent, but some other group which shares his refined sensitivity to nature. The more involved and subtle his discoveries as a naturalist, the further Grove distinguishes himself from the community in which he lives.

BEFORE THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, the naturalist's art in America had traditional connections with a European audience. John and William Bartram, the Philadelphia traveller-naturalists, and John Audubon, for instance, looked to European sponsors for their public. So did the eighteenth-century French traveller St. Jean de Crèvecoeur see the proper recipients of observations of America as European. Crèvecoeur settled down for ten years in pre-revolutionary America, but his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) shows that his watchful, inquiring attitude made his residence only a sojourn in a foreign place. When the fictional narrator of that book begins his project of sending reports on the American scene — natural and social — to a European correspondent, his wife warns him that his work will alienate him from the local community, set him going hither and yon and do him no good in the long run. He proceeds nonetheless — and eventually finds himself irreversibly estranged from American society, a persecuted victim of republican hysteria. The consequences of Grove's activities as an observer are certainly less catastrophic; he only makes his annual transfer to another school district. Further, he does not know Crèvecoeur's certainty that his informational writings will find an interested public abroad. But he does mark, with his excursions and methodical notations, the same separation from indigenous culture and economy which was the lot of Crèvecoeur's narrator.

The comparison between Grove and Crèvecoeur's farmer also pertains to *The Turn of the Year*, for in parts of that book Grove represents himself as a country-dweller, ordinarily involved in agrarian life, just as the narrator of the *Letters* is involved in farm work until he begins his investigative excursions. These parts begin and end Grove's book. The central part of his text recounts a series of bicycle journeys between Falmouth and a more northerly settlement, Leifur. There, in the middle section, he is on the road again, set apart as he is in *Over Prairie Trails*.

Three of the first six chapters of the book describe the seasons. (The other three, intermingled, are fragmentary fictions.) In these descriptive chapters, Grove often uses "we" to represent the observer, thereby suggesting a community of perception of which the narrator is part. For example, he becomes a spokesman for local experience when he writes: "we follow the tracks of the rabbits to where they have gnawed the boles of the young aspens; and we read the interlacing, busy-looking spools of the prairie-chickens. . . ." ¹⁰ In these chapters, Grove presents cyclical time, recurrences rather than occurrences, and his perspective is fixed and local. However, in the long Chapter 7, "The Gloom of Summer," which comprises one-third of the text, he abandons the pronominal plural and the cyclical chronology. At the same time he returns to a linear

chronology and to the journey form for narrative structure. Grove is on his own again.

As in *Over Prairie Trails*, Grove in "The Gloom of Summer" is separated from his family — Mrs. Grove and their child remain at Falmouth while he teaches a summer term at Leifur — and he makes weekly twenty-five mile journeys to pass his weekends with them. Once more, he belongs nowhere — at neither Leifur nor Falmouth — having given up the social membership suggested in the earlier parts of the book.

Travelling north from Falmouth for the first time, Grove finds that he has come far. He enters a strange region remote from the strawberry-covered fields around the cottage at Falmouth:

Dark, unknown, and gloomy, the shade of night seemed to crouch in these woods, ready to leap out on the clearings and the road, as soon as the sun should sink, threatening with incomprehensible potentialities. Somehow these woods reminded me of Darwin's description of the forests of Tierra del Fuego.

Although Grove is less than twenty-five miles from his point of departure, he is on an exotic adventure, making discoveries as marvellous as Darwin's. Like Thoreau, who could discover unheard-of wonders only a few miles out of Concord, Grove is alert to every sign of foreignness. His sojourn at Leifur has a macabre aspect, and the sullen northern summer has an estranging effect on the visitor. The woods, says Grove, are "gloomy, elemental, terrible in their gloom." Certainly, there is no question of staying on in this murky location, and Grove departs promptly when the term ends.

To other parts of the Manitoba landscape Grove expresses fond attachment. When he and his family first saw the isolated teacherage at Falmouth, Grove felt he had finally come home:

The nearest farm was a mile away. The desolation of it all touched the innermost chords of my soul and made them vibrate.

It was nothing short of a revelation. I was at home here. (*In Search of Myself*)

This was Grove's second homecoming. The first occurred, he says, during an expedition to the Arctic in his youth. His journey across the Siberian steppes touched those "innermost chords," too: "the steppe got under my skin and into my blood. . . . only when I struck my roots into the west of Canada did I feel at home again. . . ." Grove made no Arctic expedition; his experience of the steppes is a fantasy. And, in a way, his homecoming at Falmouth is a fantasy, too. He installed his family in this vast and, to him, endearing desolation but he himself stayed at Gladstone. And the "roots" he struck in the Canadian west were shallow and portable. Except for the few early chapters of *The Turn of the Year*, Grove's descriptions of the Canadian landscape are those of an alien wayfarer. His most perfect art — *Over Prairie Trails* and "The Gloom of Summer" — follows

the formal values of the travel genre and Grove at his best as an artist was Grove telling the story of his travels.

Over Prairie Trails seems not only “inspired” but also inevitable. Yet so is *In Search of Myself* a necessary complement to the earlier document. Grove went out from no clearly defined point of departure; certainly he did not originate in Gladstone and his audience was not to be found there. As he says over and over in *In Search of Myself*, he has no proper audience: he speaks another language, his voice is unheard, his manuscripts are returned to him unread. Up against this silent void, Grove constructs, in *In Search of Myself*, a meticulously imagined system of origins and a vehement sense of having come from somewhere. He cannot entertain any idea of going back there; the return trip would be as fantastical as the Siberian expedition, the destination as illusory as Castle Thurow. But he can map out the course of his art towards the culture he left behind. He can postulate the “Frenchman,” the listener who shares his values and outlook, and thus make his writings transmissible. With his fictions of his origins, Grove makes his own audience for the story of his travels.

We can compare Grove to Susanna Moodie in his feelings of social estrangement and his compensatory literary activity. But he finally differs from her in his extraordinary loneliness. Grove belonged nowhere; he had burned his bridges. Even before he crossed the Atlantic, he had been rejected by the groups to which he yearned to belong. Felix Paul Greve was dead to the world he left behind him; in extricating himself from shady and even criminal involvements in Germany, he feigned suicide.¹¹ Crossing the Atlantic, he didn’t even carry with him his own name. The “silence of the grave” which Mrs. Moodie felt closing over her as former attachments shrivelled was something Grove brought on himself. When he broke the silence with his writing, he wrote in English, thereby only indirectly addressing the literate German readers to whom his values and discursive arguments speak. But Canadian readers intercepted the message from the New World; when Grove finally did discover his audience, it was North American and not European. The “Frenchman” was surely not attending to Grove’s “explanation,” but Canadians were, at last.

A writer’s choice of genre reflects the social context of his utterance — situation determines genre. Certainly, this is true of Grove’s travel writings. Alien, aloof, disregarded in the community where he lived, he adopted rhetorical strategies generically directed towards a distant audience. But the converse is also true: Grove’s choice of non-fiction genre, and his manipulation of its informational conventions, created a social context for him and his art. The response of Canadian readers to *In Search of Myself* put him in the place he wanted to be. Relishing Grove’s impeccable pseudo-credentials, glad to stand in for the famous “Frenchman,” the Canadian literati perpetuated Grove’s fantasies of eminent

beginnings, publicized his frustrations and acclaimed his achievements. With his story of his travels, Grove stepped out of his voiceless, classless anonymity and situated himself.

NOTES

- ¹ Pursuing a train of inconsistencies in Grove's various accounts of himself, Douglas Spettigue published *Frederick Philip Grove* in 1969, "Frederick Philip Grove: A Report from Europe" (*Queen's Quarterly*, 78) in 1971, "The Grove Enigma Resolved" (*Queen's Quarterly*, 79) in 1972, and *FPG: The European Years* (Ottawa: Oberon Press) in 1973. References to Spettigue's findings are to those reported in this last publication.
- ² See, especially, Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950; Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1969), pp. 38-39. "Address" is part of Burke's overall concept of "identification" — the process by which the use of language reinforces, structures, even creates social groupings and "hierarchies" — which is noticeably applicable to a case like Grove's, where social concerns are explicit.
- ³ Succinct statements of sociolinguistic principles appear in John J. Gumperz's introduction to *Directions in Sociolinguistics*, ed. Gumperz and Hymes (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972), pp. 1-25, and in Dell Hymes's "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life," pp. 35-71, in that collection. In *Foundations of Sociolinguistics* (1974; rpt. London: Tavistock, 1977), Hymes surveys more extensively the possibilities for study of ways of speaking in relation to notions of speech community, speech situation and speech genre, as well as noting the convergence of interest of sociolinguistics and literary theory. See, especially, pp. 45-66.
- ⁴ I use here James L. Kinneavy's definition of informative discourse, as he presents it in *A Theory of Discourse* (1970; New York: Norton, 1980), pp. 77-193. Kinneavy maintains that the three essential elements of information are factuality, comprehensiveness and "surprise value." All three elements exist conventionally in travel narrative; the travel narrator speaks exhaustively about what he has witnessed firsthand, and his subject is by definition foreign — new and "surprising" — to his stay-at-home audience.
- ⁵ Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1962), p. xv.
- ⁶ Frederick Philip Grove, *A Search for America* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971), p. 39.
- ⁷ Frederick Philip Grove, *In Search of Myself* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), p. 181.
- ⁸ See, for example, even Carleton Stanley's review article on Desmond Pacey's *Frederick Philip Grove*, "Frederick Philip Grove" (*Dalhousie Review*, 26 [1946], pp. 434-41), which retails the most luminous details of Grove's inventions. Twenty-five years later an article on "Grove and Existentialism" (*Canadian Literature*, 43 [1970], pp. 67-76) by Frank Birbalsingh dutifully opens with the same old stuff. Grove's imposture, however, must have its greatest success in W. B. Holliday's "Frederick Philip Grove: An Impression" (*Canadian Literature*, 3 [1960], pp. 17-22). The author, who lived for a time with the Groves at Simcoe, presents eye-witness corroboration of Grove's fantasies, finding him "a patrician by nature as well as by birth," one who "as an affluent youth . . . had moved with ease in the great cities of Europe," and so on. In *FPG: The European Years*,

Spettigue makes an insightful observation on this whole process of verification; he suggests that Pacey's consultation of the manuscript of *In Search of Myself* and his publication of pseudo-information from it in *Frederick Philip Grove* (1945) added to the documentary weight of *In Search of Myself* when it appeared the following year.

- ⁹ Frederick Philip Grove, *Over Prairie Trails* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970), p. xiii.
- ¹⁰ Frederick Philip Grove, *The Turn of the Year* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929), p. 21.
- ¹¹ See Spettigue, *FPG: The European Years*, pp. 161-68.

from WHALE CONSTELLATIONS

Kristjana Gunnars

1

then grandfather rose
 at dawn with the men.
 their open boat rocked
 by the pier, their hand
 harpoons & arrows pointed
 at night, at familiar
 whale. they circled, aimed
 just degrees away;
 partly visible, they knew
 it was there.

now we face north
 emptied of past years.
 like two outer stars we circle
 ursa major, a great bear.
 on a black & open night
 we walk under seven stars