

**CONTRIBUTIONS OF ETHNIC WRITING TO
CANADIAN LITERATURE**

THE GIFTS OF RADIANCE
CONTRIBUTIONS OF ETHNIC WRITING TO CANADIAN
LITERATURE

By

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis proposes a consideration of ethnic literary writing as reshaping Canadian literature from a central position rather than a marginal one. In this sense, my emphasis is on delineating ethnicity, against the current negative trend, as positive difference, as spiritual enrichment. I present my readers with an articulation of “spirituality,” the interior sum total of one’s identity, as fundamental to cultural signification. As I see it, the most relevant contribution that the immigrant can make to his or her new country is a gift of this spirit, which will later translate into national radiance. The 1920s in Canadian literature were marked by an explosion of such gifts, materialized in the highly articulate immigrant voices that caused a rethinking of “mainstream” literature in relation to ethnic writing. The following chapters concentrate on two such competent literary voices, Frederick Philip Grove and Laura Goodman Salverson. Thus, I propose a reading of *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) and *The Viking Heart* (1923) as novels of spiritual transfer that attempt to bring eloquent interpretations of *otherness* into coherent Canadian nation building. Like the two writers under my “investigation,” I am assuming the insider’s position, one that privileges me, as it does them, at least to imagine a negotiation of difference as positive growth.

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Chapter I

Articulating Spiritual Traditions

What is Canadian literature? What is it other than an imaginative performance (in many ways, from many perspectives, and with the purpose of constructing one imaginary identity) of nation building? A nation of nations, Canada has striven towards a definition of its identity in terms that must include but not dissolve, assimilate but not erase, recognize difference as a plus rather than as a minus, and, above all, admit that the country exists because of the many voices that tell its story in the many languages that are spoken and written on its territory. The place of literary writing in this tremendous enterprise of nation building is important because literature is a form of communication that facilitates unique insights into the diverse spiritualities of Canada's cultural landscape.

The 1920s were decisive for the repositioning of nationhood as a mosaic of different others. The rising voices of highly articulate immigrant writers opened up a new perspective on the more profound processes that accompany settlement and relocation. Between the preoccupation with the rural agricultural past and the outlining of the urban industrialized future, the 1920s in Canadian literature emerged as a "watershed" (Harrison 34) in prairie realism that represents both a continuity with and a departure

from “sentimental romances” (Harrison 34) of the prairie such as the novels of Ralph Connor (*Foreigner*, 1909) and Nellie McClung (*Painted Fires*, 1925). While McClung’s novel is a quasi-pastoral romance of an idealized immigrant success story written from an outsider’s idealizing perspective (that is, the writer is not herself an immigrant), Connor’s earlier novel presents an outsider’s “monothematic” portrait of Canadian identity, which outlines an illusory standard Canadian type as “good, clean, worthy in mind and body” (Thompson 161). Connor’s Canadian ideal elides difference and stresses assimilation by erasure as an absolute must:

Out of breeds diverse in traditions, in ideals, in speech, and in manner of life, Saxon and Slav, Teuton, Celt and Gaul, one people is being made.... It would be our wisdom to grip these people to us with living hooks of justice and clarity till all lines of national cleavage disappear and we fuse into a people whose strength will endure the slow shock of time for the honour of our name. (*Foreigner* Preface)

Subsequent to unrealistic, romantic perspectives like Connor’s, the 1920s brought about an increased literary preoccupation with immigration as a complex process of transculturation, and the romance of pioneering was about to give in to the new realism. The latter, heralded in the mid-1920s by Martha Ostenso (*Wild Geese*, 1925), Frederick Philip Grove (*Settlers of the Marsh*, 1925) and Robert Stead (*Grain*, 1925) shifted the focus from the sentimental romance of pioneering to a more accurate, and gloomier, representation of immigrant settlement against the background of the Canadian prairies. Of the three, Martha Ostenso is the one that preserves the greatest degree of romantic perspective, though she presents the special relation of woman with nature in a very dark,

almost demonic manner (thus bringing in a hint of “gothic” as opposed to “sentimental” romance), which may have been inspired by D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love* (1920). Robert Stead, on the other hand, downplays humans’ relation with land, and emphasizes the negative effect of industrialization on both the tradition of farming and on family values. Frederick Philip Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh* expresses the author’s opposition to mechanization and the latter’s dehumanizing effects in a story of settlement that blends realism with romance. In comparison to Grove, Stead and Ostenso, a different perspective of the immigrant settler is offered by Laura Goodman Salverson, who, in *The Viking Heart* (1923) portrays the Icelandic community in Manitoba as a sentimental, romantic construction of the Icelandic paradise (Gimli) on the Canadian prairie.

In focussing my discussion on Grove and Salverson, I want to posit that both writers perform major interventions in Canadian literary life of the 1920s. On the one hand, Frederick Philip Grove’s first novel in English, *Settlers of the Marsh*, produces an “uprising” of the “classical” immigrant story: the writer shifts the focus of settlement from the visible, external struggle with the new land, to the invisible, internal turmoil of the settler. Thus, with the new image of the prairie as a psychological construct more than a physical adversary, Grove re-invents not only himself as a Canadian writer, he also re-positions ethnicity and spiritual traditions within Canadian culture. On the other hand, Laura Salverson’s *The Viking Heart* intervenes in the assumptions of Canadian “mainstream” literature with the presentation of the Icelandic group as a spiritual as well as social contributor to the emerging Canadian nation. Salverson’s Icelanders are a very

well defined national group; they become ethnic by virtue of their migration to Canada. Ethnicity surfaces as a major signifier in the Icelandic identity matrix once the geographical parameters change (i.e. the island is replaced by the prairie) and the Icelanders become settlers. Salverson presents the Icelandic settling process as a reenactment of the old Norse ancestral ritual of the beginning, with the reordering of the new, alien space into a familiar routine and with the preservation of the Icelandic spirit in cultural and literary form. The story of the Icelandic group stands out in Salverson's novel in terms of spiritual conservation and essential contribution to the Canadian mosaic. In my use of the term spirituality I am referring to the essential and ancestral features that define a nation irrespective of that nation's geographic location. These features include the thoughts, philosophy, feelings, and attitudes as well as the behavioral responses to various outside stimuli. I am working a negotiation between my understanding of spirituality as an important component (national and ethnic) which is repositioned but not lost with dislocation, and Grove's definition of spirituality as that which "tells of the old, immemorial dualism between body and mind, body and soul, body and heart. Things material concern the body. [...] Things spiritual concern mind, soul, heart" ("Nationhood" 151). For Grove, spirituality is that unconquerable component of a culturally distinct ethnic group (his reference is mainly to immigrants but he applies the notion to the host culture as well): it is "the realm in which they could assert their individuality" and which encompasses the three "provinces [of] the mental [knowledge and intelligence], the emotional, and the religious" ("Assimilation" 184). My definition

of spirituality differs from Grove's in that I see the "mental" component (i.e., in Grove's words, "information" and "intelligence") as not necessarily part of one's ancestral inheritance, but as a component that can be acquired by learning. I also understand spirituality in the context of its being the main element that maintains a group ethnically alive. Ethnicity, as I use it in the sense of positive difference, becomes interchangeable with spirituality when the perspective is "interior." Thus, while "ethnic" is a term denoting positively or negatively an *other*, it is also a term that defines the group from the outside, by reference to the host nation, within whose geographical borders that group has relocated. Spirituality, however, is a term that defines the group from the inside, by reference to the group's own past, irrespective of any de- or re-territorialization. Spirituality and ethnicity as I see it, are important components -- the former a constant, the latter a variable -- of the group identity. Therefore, my preference for the term "spirituality" instead of culture is prompted by the fact that I see spirituality as a signifier of an interior structure of feeling, whereas culture is the social structure observable by outsiders. In other words, inside the immigrant or relocated group, the center is their spirituality; outside the group, from the dominant or host group's perspective, the center, *their* center, is *their* culture, *their* ethnicity.

In the particular case of Salverson's novel, the preservation of spirituality, as we shall see, is the main element that defines the Icelandic group and keeps it ethnically alive. Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh*, besides introducing a sense of the prairie defined in relation between land and people, foreshadows the new Canadian realism by its powerful

argument against submission to Fate, and by its suggestive rendering of Swedish spirituality through the haunting reference to the mother image. In this context, the remembered mother is described as “ancient” (*Settlers* 59) and the image carries the spiritual values of self-achievement (defined by the dream of the ideal family) which are meant to prevent Grove’s settler from “shivering in an utter void” (*Settlers* 117). The preservation of these values gives meaning to the idea of successful immigration since a “New” Canadian who has allowed his spiritual memory to be erased cannot tell a successful story of relocation.

Salverson’s *The Viking Heart* and Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh* are the two novels that also reshaped the Canadian critical perspective, forcing it into deeper analysis of the ideas of otherness, immigration and Canadian nationalism. As we shall see in the coming chapters dedicated to the two books, both Salverson and Grove fit the profile of the exiled writer, whose position within the landscape of literary discourse is one of filtering consciousness, of connector and interpreter. While both writers took the stance of exile (Salverson from her own Icelandic group, Grove from Germany) their experience of adjustment brings with it novelty and opens up new angles on the understanding of cultural exchange. For such exchange or transculturation to take place, certain conditions are necessary. Firstly, the writer-connector must perform a double translation, back and forth, between the two cultures. Since it is unlikely that such a translation would be accurate, the writer has to invent the bridges that make bi-cultural communication possible. In other words, it is the writer’s task to interpret, to reveal the signification

underlying *otherness*. Secondly, the writer-connector must be able to articulate the points of contact, to “make them glow” (Codrescu 165). Salverson and Grove signal as a point of contact the geographical space of the prairie, and they “make it glow” with the powerful spiritual component that not only defines the ethnic groups of Icelanders and Swedes, but also performs a major intervention in Canadian “mainstream” literature. This intervention translates into a clear re-positioning of ethnicity as a positive difference. Furthermore, it suggests a reading of Canadian literature as a mosaic mapped out by a diversity of significant presences.

Chapter II

Ethnicity and the Writer, History, Literature

Ethnicity and the Writer

The concept of ethnicity has three possible connotations, which Milan Dimic has defined as “positive,” “neutral” and “unpleasant” (“Preface” to *Literatures of Lesser Diffusion* 5). Discussing the etymology of the word ethnicity, Dimic traces back the “rather positive” connotation of the term to the Greek ethnos meaning “nation,” or “people.” He further relates the “neutral” connotation to the “community of physical and mental traits possessed by members of a group as a product of their common heredity and cultural tradition” (Dimic 5). The “unpleasant” connotation is identified by “opposition to the Greek demos, i.e. populace, common (free) people,” and it means “foreign” or “heathen.” Francesco Loriggio, too, distinguishes between the ambivalent meanings of ethnicity, pointing out that the intersecting semantic field traversed by the term touch both the condition into which one is born (ethnicity understood as “race” or “group”) and a “categorization occasioned by status” (Loriggio 26), by the power dynamics active within the larger collective of the nation where “the existential is conjugated with the social” and “some groups are hegemonic and some subordinate” (Loriggio 26).

Ethnicity, as a key word in the study of Canada, branches out into areas of historical evidence as well as into the social and the political. The writing of ethnicity is the filling of a “gap” (Loriggio 29) in history: the writer, fluent in the artful language of literature as well as in one of Canada’s two official languages (English and French), becomes spokesperson for a group and “translates” the group’s memory of “what happened” into an episode that is coherent with the building of the Canadian nation. In other words, Loriggio argues for a consideration of ethnicity as a salient feature of building national consciousness in Canada, and of filling the gaps in the historical memory of the nation. “Biographical and confessional in tone, ethnic literature is in some ways an ethno-history; the authors act as the memory of the group: they are scribes who give voice to those who have lived or live in silence. By their mediation, because they managed to master a language, an experience otherwise lost, left unsaid, is communicated” (Loriggio 29).

Evolving from the mid-nineteenth-century Romantic movement’s idea that cultural difference expressed through linguistic diversity is valuable (Guibernau and Rex 5), ethnicity came into the spotlight of social studies in the 1960s. Ever since, new uses of the term have been triggered by sociologists to account for the positive sentiments of “belonging to one cultural group” (Guibernau and Rex 1). The concept “ethnic” (encompassing all connotations: positive, neutral and unpleasant), is viable in reference to the two interacting groups: *us* and *them*. Thus, any identification of *us* as a complex, socio-cultural group is possible only by comparison with *not us, not like us, them*. This

stands out as a classification sustained by various criteria such as language, customs, religion, and, in the cases of “visible minorities,” race. As an identification of one cultural group in relation to another, ethnicity performs the act of self-identification by mirror-refracting: the striking difference thus revealed by the image of the *other* raises and challenges one’s awareness of the self.

For the purposes of this thesis I will consider the concept of ethnicity as a cultural and spiritual entity, where geographical space plays a highly influential role in the redefinition of identity. It is my contention that ethnicity is only identifiable as such on condition that a relocation factor is taken into account. In other words, a nation can become an ethnic group by virtue of their relocation inside the geographical territory of another nation. This movement can happen in two ways: on the one hand, by actual migration of the group into the geographical space of another nation (by immigration); on the other hand, by a political shift, still determined by border movements, where the group does not actually move, but the “ground” moves under their feet so that, for example one is suddenly “Chicano” or Russian whereas before the shift he or she was Mexican or Latvian. With the relocation comes not only a change in status (be it social or political), but also a change in self-awareness. An important consequence of relocation is that one’s origin suddenly becomes one of the parameters that compose the new identity. Hence, the matrix of one’s identity is significantly modified: origin, otherwise assumed, takes over a forefront, conscious position.

By and large, immigration means relocation, both spatial and spiritual. The immigrant, while attempting to start anew, goes through a process of search for at-least-close substitutes for the lost centers which found his or her spiritual being. While in my use of the term “spiritual” there are echoes of the personal and the psychological, I believe that one’s spirituality transcends the personal because the former is limited neither to self-expression nor to the image of the individual as seen from the outside. Spirituality goes beyond the psychological in that it completes the self-portrait with more profound reflections than the images provided by others. The centers of one’s spirituality can be both private (like eating and dressing habits or time organization) and public (like religious rites, socializing or work etiquette). In this process, more often than not it happens that the private and the public undergo a major shift in significance. Like the shift in identity that comes with relocating or with being relocated, the private and the public can undergo a drastic transformation of meaning. Thus, in the case of major differences between two intersecting cultures (one of which is the host, the other the guest) it may be necessary for the minority culture to face a complete reversal of the meanings of private and public. As a result of this, a major challenge is posed to one’s spirituality. This challenge is the one that triggers the peak point of adaptation and of culture shock.

The “successful” adaptation to all the changes implied by the process of immigration constitutes an instance of assimilation. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the concept of assimilation implies the mechanics of both absorption and of

appropriation as nourishment. Since assimilation features as an inevitable component in the process of immigration and settlement, the immigrant has the choice either to yield to absorption and ultimately to erasure of his or her spiritual being, or to resist. As I see it, constructive resistance can be successfully accomplished on condition that the immigrant activates a selection -- almost censoring -- process of the cultural incoming and outgoing data. In other words, once the immigrant decides to take his or her new life as a constructive path, mutual assimilation could become enriching and profitable for both sides. Hence, applicable to both host and guest, assimilation becomes a "process whereby the individual acquires new ideas, by interpreting presented ideas and experiences in relation to the existing contents of his mind" (*OED*). In other words, both parties adapt, grow within the context of the new space.

While at the beginning of the twentieth century in Canada assimilation was seen as a one-way process, in which the ethnic minority should be unconditionally assimilated into the social and cultural existence of the dominant group, nowadays the policy of multiculturalism acknowledges cultural difference as a state of things that does not necessarily call for uniformity. Hence, it is possible now to discuss assimilation from two different perspectives: one that exposes the process as a performing of cultural dominance and an aggressive reinforcement of power on the part of the dominant group, and the other that presents the dynamics of assimilation as an exchange between the participating cultures. I should make a note here of the distinction between assimilation, viewed as re-creation (by the dominant group, of a new, yet fake, identity for the minority

group) subsequent to erasure, facilitated by “wise” policies of “scatter[ing] the foreign communities among the Canadian” (Woodsworth 234), to assimilation defined as “the adoption by a person or group of the culture of another social group to such a complete extent that the person or group no longer has any particular loyalties to his former culture” (Rose 557-8). Though these two concepts appear similar, their compatibility is problematic in that the former stands out as an instance of “othering,” and the latter as conscious yielding. Moreover, Rose’s definition seems to be a highly theoretical concept, with unlikely real applicability. Assimilation has also been defined as a “process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (Park quoted in Anderson and Frideres 271). More recently, assimilation has been understood in terms of power dynamics as “the dominant group’s attempt to absorb a minority ethnic group on its own terms without regard to the minority’s desires” (Anderson and Frideres 273). Given this view of assimilation (i.e. as imposition) its application undoubtedly causes a dramatic shift of self-awareness on the subordinated and, initially, on the dominant as well. On the one hand, the dominant group assures itself of its superior identity in relation to the assimilated *other*. On the other hand, the subordinate group experiences a demoted sense of privilege, where difference becomes a marring, marginalizing condition.

Language is one of the most important coordinates of identity in the process of coming to terms with one’s new status as immigrant and ethnic minority. Language

defines one as belonging to a certain cultural heritage, distinguishing for instance Slavs from Germans or Latins, Bengalis from Cantonese, or Arabs from Somalis. As it carries the cultural DNA, language points to difference, at the same time isolating the foreign language speaker from the surrounding social system and “restricting him or her to the realm of signification” (Cameron 139). When an immigrant is fluent in two languages and in two cultures, he or she has the mission to translate the significations of his or her culture into the “language” of mainstream Canadian consciousness. Facility in the native language maintains an artificial link with the lost homeland, since the language “at home” goes through rapid changes of which the immigrant is often unaware. Language is a means of self-representation but, when it is an acquired second language, it is also a gateway to the other culture. That is why, in anglophone Canada, while the requirement of the English language can be interpreted as an imposition, it is equally true that it provides the most appropriate means to facilitate cultural awareness and afterwards, exchange.

The articulation of this exchange, as well as of the “dream,” the “mask” or the “anti-self” (Wellek and Warren 78) is made manifest in literature. Thus, the literary work of art, while not rendering reality verbatim (which would turn it into historical writing), may present the author’s imaginary world, his “dream” of life. However imaginary or dreamlike this presentation may be, and however conventional may be the “mask” that hides the real person, it must be remembered that there are “oblique resemblances, topsyturvy mirrors” to be deciphered since the writer’s work is a “conventionalization of his

own experiences, his own life” (Wellek & Warren 79). The anti-self, as a specific form of art, combines imagination with reality (the writer’s reality), and vividly illustrates the relations of particular writers to the cultural and social context from within which they write. In her introduction to *Making a Difference: An Anthology of Canadian Multicultural Literature*, Smaro Kamboureli notes that “when a writer voluntarily takes on the role [of spokesperson for a community] she or he must write out of a space of difference” (Kamboureli 4). She goes on to explain the “difference” as a result of “a writerly belief in language as an act of the imagination, [...] a faith in the power of language [...] to effect change, to make us perceive ourselves and those around us as *otherwise*” (Kamboureli 4). Working with the parameters of fact and fiction, ethnic literature in Canada is not only a social document of change and exchange, it also articulates the ethnic element of Canadian identity from the inside. Ethnic literature works not only for the exchange with the *other*, “mainstream” culture, but it also builds up community self-awareness and upholds the group’s own traditions. Thus, the ethnic writer is one who addresses a double audience: the “mainstream” group, and his or her own ethnic group. He or she then performs a double translation: on the one hand he or she translates his or her culture into Canadian sense, that is he or she makes his or her culture coherent in terms of English-Canadian epistemological coordinates. On the other hand, he or she re-presents his or her culture to his or her own ethnic group, while both performances have in common the refracting medium of language. Both performances confirm the ethnic writer’s paradoxical position of “having a central role while speaking

from the margin” (Pivato, *Literatures* 74). In addressing the mainstream audience in their language (English), the ethnic writer has to interpret his or her culture in terms of the target culture (English-Canadian) and therefore the focus must be on the medium (i.e. the language). When the audience is the writer’s ethnic group the focus shifts to the content because by reading about their own culture in the mainstream language, this audience will be exposed to new meanings of their spirituality that are produced by their refraction through the exterior or alien English language. Ethnic writing of and from immigrant experiences is not only an escape from silence; it is also a reinforcement of the cultural identity of the ethnic group. It is a reminder as well as a reassertion. As for the definition of the ethnic writer, Myrna Kostash’s questions invite a variety of answers: “Am I ethnic because I wrote about Ukrainians or is there something about me in my function as a writer which is ethnic? Does an ethnic who writes, write ethnic literature?” (*Identifications* 138)

Kostash’s questions raise an important point which relates literature to psychology and which deals with the identity of the writer as an artist. In this context, perhaps the ethnic writer is privileged in that he or she, as Freud explains, “is a day-dreamer who finds a way to return from his world of phantasy back to reality” and who, “with his special gifts [...] molds his phantasies into a new kind of reality” (Freud in Wellek & Warren 82). If he is, then his activity is harmless in so far as it does not operate any true alteration of the real world. But in the case of ethnic writing and the perspective it brings to bear on Canadian reality, literature performs its privilege in that it does have

the power to reshape the perception of reality. Take for instance the Icelandic Canadians' reaction to Laura Salverson's *The Viking Heart*, and their indignation at her inaccurately presenting the geography of their homeland. They felt offended firstly by her breaking the language code, that is by her writing in English, and secondly by her focusing too much on the English-Canadian audience and on the medium (language) rather than on the content. In other words, the writer's literary and linguistic re-arrangement of an existing geographical space had the power to create a vivid (and disturbing) mental picture for the Icelandic readers. This brings us back to the issue of language, translation and the discursive mode of ethnic writing.

Within the landscape of literary discourse, the position of the ethnic writer is one of filtering consciousness, of connector and interpreter. The writer's experience of adjustment brings with it novelty and opens up new angles of vision on the understanding of cultural exchange. In this process, the writer should be able to "conceptualize his or her experience" between the two cultures so that it becomes a "new experience" (Codrescu 165). To this kind of rearticulation, the role of the ethnic writer's bilingualism is crucial since language is the tool that empowers the transmitter with strategies for the interpretation and therefore clarification of cross-cultural ambivalences. This rearticulation of culture through language is both an act of imperfect recomposition because "each language frames the world uniquely" (Steiner 270) and an act of power of language to illustrate new views, because it presents the immigrant with the opportunity to read and see himself or herself through the codes of the "mainstream" reader. The

structure of language carries with it the codes of cultural identity and the symbolic significance of the act of communication. It follows that the writer's skill serves the ultimate purpose of "short-circuiting" (Codrescu 207) these codes into meaningful cultural transfer. While aiming to subvert the hegemony of mainstream canons, the ethnic writer challenges the mainstream narrative discourse to consider the *us* and the *them* as interchangeable and dynamic entities.

History

The 1920s in Canada followed the Red Scare in the United States and the Winnipeg strike, both in 1919. The latter especially impacted Canadian society in a traumatic manner, which "caused political shock-waves ... down to the present [1988]" (McNaught 226). Presumably such a wave was caused by the fact that, as it later came out, the leaders and instigators of the strike were "British-born" not, as it had allegedly been stated by the government, "'alien scum' who wished to subvert British law and order" (McNaught 226).

Early in 1922, Canada took a significant step towards autonomy from the Union Jack when she did not obey the British request to send a contingent to Europe, and the following year Canada, through Ernest Lapointe signed a treaty without the imprimatur

of the British crown, thus marking the beginning of Canada's future negotiation of treaties without any in-betweens.

In the mid-twenties, the "spiralling North American boom" (McNaught 237) had strong echoes in Canada, which was going through turbulent times. On the one hand, there was remarkable growth due to the rapid expansion of mining, pulp and paper industries, and secondary manufacturing; many Canadians prospered as a result of the car industry boom and the improvement of the highway system. On the other hand, such enthusiasms were weighed down by the 1922 Nova Scotia strike, which was caused by the British Empire Steel Corporation's announcement of a 37.5% wage cut, and which ended with the King government sending in strike-break police and arresting strike leaders on charges of sedition. The mid-decade was also marked by prohibition (in all provinces except Quebec) which inevitably brought about bootlegging and smuggling, and culminated with the 1925 "rum-running" scandal where the Customs Department was exposed as being massively involved in illegal alcohol trafficking with the US. The "constitutional crisis" of 1926 ended with the party system's acceptance of an "emerging socialist farmer – labour group" (McNaught 245). Geographically, Canada's progress and (her) restlessness were divided between the different economic evolutions on the two coasts. Though the Pacific coast prospered as a result of the flourishing mining and forest industries as well as of the increased shipping favoured by the 1914 opening of the Panama Canal, on the Atlantic coast the Maritime Rights Movement was expressing regional discontent (McNaught 245).

In spite of the brief recession of 1920-1924, doubled by the 1920 near-drought conditions in the southern Prairies, the Canadian economy in the twenties emerged with a higher growth rate than in the first decade of the twentieth century. The success came from the area of consumer durables -- such as electrical appliances, cars, radios -- whose affordability gave the people a sense of economic welfare. But this growth diverted the public's attention from seriously stricken areas, such as farming and fishing in the East, and the crisis in the iron and steel industries. As a result of these problems, migration to the USA reached nearly a million throughout the decade. After a slowdown in the flow of immigration to Canada, by 1924-1925 the inflow had resumed in spite of the protests of the Extreme Right, represented by the Saskatchewan and Alberta Ku-Klux-Klan organizations, which strongly called for an end to immigration and which targeted Catholics in particular. Towards the end of the decade, as the nation was about to experience the shock of the New York stock market crash, Canada was caught up in the disputed issue of women's rights: in 1928 the Supreme Court ruled that, since the BNA Act did not define women as "persons," they were not entitled to hold public office. A year later, the British Privy Council reversed the Court's decision and women were legally declared "persons" (McNaught 245).

Literature

The new economic and political Canada, with its “general air of change, excitement and confidence” impacted upon the development of Canadian literature in the sense that the latter was aiming at a status “commensurate with the country’s new [position] as an independent nation” (Pacey, “The Writer” 4). The written word illustrated the literary trends of the decade in the founding of four magazines: *The Canadian Bookman* (1919-1939), *The Canadian Forum* (1920-present), *The Canadian Historical Review* (1920-present), and *The Dalhousie Review* (1921-present). In an attempt to boost literary life, some of these magazines overrated the value of Canadian literary productions. Take this example from the *Canadian Bookman* in 1926: “Dr. Silcox, principal of the Ottawa Normal School, in an address on Canadian Literature last month, comparing Canadian Literature with that of the United States, said that much of our literature was superior to anything produced by any other country in any century of our era” (Pacey, “The Writer” 5). The magazines produced a “new nationalism” (Pacey 8) which led to the organization of the Canadian Authors’ Association in 1921. The Association worked for the proliferation of histories, anthologies and “master works” of Canadian literature, which largely reflected the “spirit of literary nationalism and optimism characteristic of the 1920s” (Pacey, “The Writer” 10). To promote the creation and appreciation of national literature, the Association organized summer schools on Canadian literature (the first one in June 1926), and sponsored lecture tours by writers.

The literature written during the 1920s in Canada ranged from philosophical and travel writing to essays, autobiographies, poetry and fiction. Though “having high standards of historical scholarship” (Goudge 103), philosophical writing “had a mind of its own” in that it remained focused on the past, looking down on contemporary thought. The travel books of the twenties, of which the most representative are Sarah MacNaughton’s *My Canadian Memories* (1920) and Peggy Webling’s *Peggy* (1924) were highly popular because they were pervaded by a cheerful and uplifting spirit. The whole vision of *otherness* appeared to have shifted from an “insurmountable barrier to friendship” to “comic disadvantage” (Waterston 109):

Once controversial ethnic groups now roused little interest. Indians seemed comic; French Canadians were dismissed with laughing tales about their evasion of conscription. The New Canadians out West, generally “lumped” together as ‘Galicians’, with their ungrudging, undespairing work, appeared to show ‘just those qualities which are desirable’ on the prairies. (Waterston 109)

The Canadian fiction of the 1920s was under the spell of the Prairie: of the settling pioneer’s struggle with the land. The immigrant writer then was experiencing a unique phenomenon, which Malcolm Ross described as a “naturalization into mainstream Canadian literature.” Kenneth McNaught explains that

This phenomenon meant not only the enrichment of the artist’s palette; it also meant an incredible extension of the sense we have of our position in time... We are not really a young people, even if we are a rather young nation; we are as old as the British, the Poles, the Hungarians, the children of Israel. As John Moss put it in *Patterns of Isolation*, ‘the newcomers to Canada are neither absolved, nor relieved of their participation in the world they left behind. (McNaught, *Canada* 405)

In today's critical terms, this "naturalization" would translate as inclusion which, as Smaro Kamboureli observes "is synonymous with exclusion" (*Making a Difference* 2). Kamboureli reasons that the inclusion of all the writers living and writing in Canada under the category "Canadian" may eliminate the "marginality" or "visibility" attributed to ethnic writers, but at the same time it performs an erasure, a denial even, of the individual contribution that a culture brings to the literary "mainstream." Therefore, by inclusion under "Canadian," difference is excluded by lack of focus (*Making a Difference* 3)

This brings us to the issue of assimilation and to the English-Canadian attitude towards the rising literary voices of writers from the *other* (ethnic) side. While the English-Canadian literature of the decade had been influenced by the extremist fears in the USA of certain races' non-assimilability into the American dream, there were some believers in assimilation understood as the "suppression of alien cultural qualities and the inculcation of essentially British ones" (Craig 7). In *MacLean's* in 1928 Frederick Philip Grove points to pro-assimilationist theory as an imposition on the aliens of the Anglo-Canadian social and cultural "status quo" (Craig 8). In what follows I will be discussing the two major views on immigration and assimilation that characterized the 1920s in Canadian literary writing: on the one hand, the English-Canadian view, represented by J.S. Woodsworth and Rev. Charles Gordon (alias Ralph Connor), and, on the other hand, the immigrant view, represented by Frederick Philip Grove and Laura Goodman Salverson.

The appearance of Woodsworth's book *Strangers within Our Gates* (1909) was an example of an English-Canadian defence against the dynamics of change brought about by immigration. The English-Canadian view insisted on an "immobilization of social change" (Craig 53) as a defence against any anarchic influences that might infiltrate from Eastern Europe and on increasing English-Canadian interest in immigrant issues. In his "Introduction," Woodsworth writes: "There is a danger and it is national! Either we must educate and elevate the incoming multitudes or they will drag us and our children down to a lower level. We must see to it that the civilization and ideals of South Eastern Europe are not transplanted to and perpetuated on our virgin soil" (*Strangers* 8).

Woodsworth's view of assimilation was largely based on the religious assumptions, according to which Protestantism meant progress, civilization and enlightenment (Craig 27), and therefore conversion (both religious and cultural) was the first and most important step to becoming Canadian. *Strangers within Our Gates* is a compilation of statistics, photos and classifications of people according to race (one chapter is entitled "Levantine Races"), geographical origin ("Southeastern Europe," "The Balkan States"), and most of all by stereotypes that were common in the pseudo-scientific rhetoric of race at the turn of the century. For example, Woodsworth says: "The Hungarians are inclined to be clannish. [They] are better educated than the Slavs" (*Strangers* 118). Of the Macedonians he says: "They are said to refuse work, and to prefer to starve rather than labour" (*Strangers* 122). At the same time he plays fair by including pictures of very poor British immigrants "who have been given a chance"

(*Strangers* 53), and he quotes the English magistrate who was reprimanding a young criminal: “You are a disgrace to your country. Why don’t you go to Canada?” (*Strangers* 49). Likewise, to complete the confusing impression that he creates, Woodsworth acknowledges the fact that Canada was not a waste land when the British came: “Throughout the long years before the coming of the white man the Indian possessed the land” (*Strangers* 16). While he views the immigrants as “wastage” that needs to be recycled into the Canadian nation, Woodsworth presents the “chosen” segment of the British as responsible for the “salvation” of these immigrants through civilization. This idea of salvation of the aliens from their corrupt religions and inferior lifestyles into the progressive, civilized British order, worked its way into the fiction of Ralph Connor. His *The Foreigner* (1909) was among the most widely read Canadian literary works to state the supremacy of English-Canadians. Terrence Craig even states that it is “basically a fictionalized version of *Strangers Within Our Gates*” (Craig 30). Both books were published in the same year (1909) and both Connor and Woodsworth were ministers in Winnipeg at the time, which might explain the common religious approach to assimilation. Like Woodsworth, Connor works with stereotypes: his English-Canadians are virile, strong-willed and capable of significant achievements; on the other side of the “fence” he presents “the alert Polak, the heavy Croatian, [and] the naughty Magyar” (*Foreigner* 14), the drunkard Indian, and the avaricious Jew. One important point to make here is that both Connor and Woodsworth discriminate against Eastern Europeans culturally, not racially: in the preface to *Strangers* Woodsworth defines the immigrants as

“white” and “foreign,” throughout the novel, Connor shows a paternal sympathy for the “motly” Galicians and their primitive folkways. The assimilation of Kalman Kalmar, who in the end poses as the “ideal” immigrant is an illustration of Connor’s idea that “these people exist as an undigested foreign mass” and that they can “be digested and absorbed” (*Foreigner* 255). Connor’s recipe to the threat posed by immigration insists that immigrants must needs adapt to the British ideal and the Canadians are responsible for the success of this mission. This idea of inclusion, even if by “digestion and absorption,” that is by complete assimilation, does not lead to a marginalized position of the immigrant. Rather it displays a certain amount of flexibility of Canadianness that will later echo in Frederick Philip Grove’s message to the Old and New Canadians.

In all fairness then, the English-Canadian point of view was politely rather than vulgarly discriminatory, since it directed (though vaguely) its prejudices against the British as well. “Vitriolic examples of racist fiction” (Craig 49) like Hilda G. Howard’s *The Writing on the Wall* (1921) were counterattacked by the strong, ‘assimilated’ and now assimilating voices of writers like Frederick Philip Grove, Laura Salverson or Martha Ostenso.

In describing Nellie McClung’s heroine, Helmi Milander, as the successfully assimilated immigrant, Terrence Craig states that “her experience seems atypical” (Craig 52). I must say that the adjective used by the critic raises the problem of inclusion or uniformization. In other words, how does one decide what “typical” immigrant experience is? And, since we are venturing into an evaluation and a critique of

stereotyping, I wonder how far such a statement is from stereotyping? Does this imply that any immigrant whose experience does not follow the prescription of “typical” is not authentic?

After 1919, the English–Canadian tendency to freeze literature into an English–Canadian pattern met with strong opposition from the part of the “authentic” immigrant voices who, not only fluent in English but also in literary techniques, began to re-shape the image of Canada as a country of emotional as well as social and literary transformations. The figure of the new Canadian, as it comes out of the pages of the twenties’ fiction is “both essential and existential, i.e. [he or she] unites with the community in order to make the dream of success possible and, at the same time, in the struggle with community, [the Canadian] defines himself” (Mathews 3). While complaining on behalf of the immigrants about inappropriate living conditions, the lack of official support, and about unsuitable land, the new writers of the 1920s expose the unhealthy practices of English-Canadian assimilation (Grove), celebrate the immigrant as a carrier of significant culture and traditions (Grove, Salverson), re-create historical events by means of fictional accounts (Frederick Niven), romanticize the prairie (Martha Ostenso), or re-direct the readers’ attention from “a fabled past or a romanticized present towards the actual conditions of Canadian life” (Pacey, “The Writer” 168) (Grove, Callaghan). For the purpose of my thesis I will focus in what follows on Laura Goodman Salverson’s and Frederick Philip Grove’s work.

Quite knowledgeable in Canadian history preceding the arrival of the Icelandic colonists, Laura Salverson gives full attention to the construction of the Icelandic saga in North America, unveiling various instances of cultural discrimination against immigrants in Canada. Drawing heavily on her family's own immigrant experience, Salverson wrote from inside the "fictional image of immigrant Canada" (Neijmann 196). In *The Viking Heart* (1923) she exemplifies, in a fictionalized manner, one family's experience of the 1875 Icelandic mass migration induced by the disastrous volcanic eruption in Iceland. Not only does Salverson trace the romanticized settling and "becoming" of an Icelandic family in Canada, but she also exercises her theory and personal conviction that the Icelandic people are a superior category of settlers and the Icelandic culture a highly intellectual one. Her purpose for writing is accounted for from the sincere point of view of an immigrant's daughter fighting her way not only into a new culture but also into a new language that cannot (and perhaps should not) contain enough subtleties to render the depths of the Icelandic soul.

It may be that, like myself, some child of immigrants longs to justify her race as something more than a hewer of wood; dreams in the starlight of the lonely prairie of some fair burnt offering to lay upon the altar of her New Country, out of the love of a small, passionate heart. How to do that, in a strange new language? How to do it, in the face of poverty and isolation, and the cold indifference of an alien people? How to hold fast to a purpose that no one counts as precious as a new turned furrow, a pelt of furs, or a load of grain? (*The Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* 521)

The image of the prairie as a hostile environment is one of the themes dominating the immigrant writing of the twenties. But, as Harrison says, this is mostly the result of the

“immigrant’s own frame of mind” (Harrison 36). Disappointed by his own illusion of romantic pioneering, the farmer blames everything on the hostile land, on the hostile, uncontrollable Moira (the Greek Fate) that restricts the immigrant to his or her predestined life. Icelandic Canadian writing is especially prone to relying heavily on a belief in predestination seen as a transplanting onto Canadian soil of the Old Icelandic myth of ominous fate: “Fate plays a major role in Norse mythology. During the last stages of the Viking Age (which included the time when Iceland was settled), or even during the whole of the pagan period in Scandinavia, fate was the only power in which people really believed. A belief in fate still characterizes many Icelanders even after a millenium of Christianity” (Neijmann 15). Faced with the Canadian prairie, the Icelandic fatalism inter-reacted with the new environment in an extension of the old tradition. Moreover, it informed prairie realism with the tradition of heroic non-subordination to fate, which made possible a realist portraying of the settler’s interaction with and taming of the land.

This Icelandic tradition has found a perfect equivalent in Frederick Philip Grove’s presentation of a hero whose stance is pervaded by “tragic inevitability” (Pacey 191) and who is controlled by forces that he cannot decipher. The most celebrated of the prairie writers, Frederick Philip Grove portrayed, in exquisite detail, the “Janus-faced Canada,” clinging between the “rural agricultural past” (Harrison 100) and the future of the city and the machine. He strongly opposed the industrialization of farming life, because he believed it only led to dehumanization and to the impossibility of people finding a retreat

in nature. Thus, by losing primordial contact with nature, the individual loses the self (because nature is a significant part of the complete self), and his or her tragic stance is redirected from an external conflict (individual vs. nature) towards an internal one (individual vs. self, the *other*, the stranger within). Grove paid his tribute to nature by describing it in celebratory detail, always doing justice to its sweetness as well as to its harshness. Acknowledged as realism, his work reviewed the interaction between the prairie and the settler as a form of “landscaping,” in which romantic idealism is replaced by an “objectification” of the prairie from inside the settler’s mind. Grove himself accounts for how the view works. He explains that “the creative spirit [...] will place itself and thereby the reader in the heart of things in such a way that they look on at what is happening from the inside, as if they were themselves a world-consciousness which has its ramifications in all human beings” (“Realism in Literature” 76). Grove described the prairie as a landscape of significance, drawing his readers’ attention to the fact that nature always “vibrates” with (in some cases against) its dwellers.

Moreover, he assumed the privileged position of spokesperson for both New and Old Canadians. When addressing Old Canadians from the inside (i.e. being one of them), Grove toyed with the idea of double insight since he took on the Whitmanic voice that “contains [the] multitudes” of both sides. In other words, when describing and explaining New Canadians to Old, Grove is both *we*, *you* (the Old Canadians) and *they* (the new Canadians).

Do *you*, Mr. Canadian Citizen, think that these people have no contribution to make to *our* intellectual and spiritual life? Would *you* willingly limit the Canadian ideal to the exclusion of wealth of meaning, the beauty, and the depth of view, which these people can impart to *our* soul's picture of life? [...] These people are willing to assimilate themselves; but if denied this outlet for *their* inner energies, energies that can contribute to the spiritual growth of Canada, *they* have only one alternative [...] that is to conquer *you* [...] by the strength of *their* unconquerable spirit. ("Canadians" 172), (*italics mine*)

Indeed, when he speaks of the energies that help construct Canada spiritually (that is, "mentally, emotionally and religiously"; "Assimilation" 184), he describes his own creative and writerly energy. Perhaps it is this doubleness too, one that allows Grove the use of metaphor as a transfer or substitution of meaning from one cultural space (Europe) to another (North America). Ultimately Grove identifies himself with the Western-Canadian pioneers. The image of the writer pioneer that he constructs against the crude background of literary wilderness features him as a tragic "type" (*In Search of Myself* 225). When he presents the "taming" of the natural environment, Grove speaks metaphorically of the "taming" of the literary environment and the writer's predicament, who "cannot settle down and enjoy the fruit of his labour" (*Search* 225). Like the pioneer, the writer is engaged in "re-shaping" and doing away with the very condition of his environment, an activity which gives him justification to exist. The pioneer eventually tames the wilderness, thus erasing his condition. Likewise, the writer eventually writes himself -- through the use of imagination -- into a condition that leaves him "limp as a rag, [...] a bore to others" (*Search of Myself* 373) and "dying to himself" (*Search of Myself* 387).

Pioneers in Canadian letters, Frederick Philip Grove and Laura Salverson exemplify a new attitude towards immigrants in the 1920s. On the one hand, this attitude is oriented to defend the position of the immigrant *other* under the form of an exposition of the latter's superiority given by an age-old hearkening to culture and traditions (Laura Salverson). On the other hand, Frederick Philip Grove writes this position as superiority taken for granted and, not focused on, but converted into a role of spokesperson situated on both sides of the Canadian identity spectrum: the *us* and the *them*. Assuming the voice that knowledgeably articulates the immigrant story from inside the ethnic group, Salverson and Grove intervene in mainstream Canadian literature by placing themselves in a paradoxically central position. I suggest they are attempting to present the English-Canadian culture with an image (the ethnic image) that constitutes an important facet of the Canadian self. While doing that, they assume a narratorial detachment: Grove's more "clinical" (John Moss 197), Salverson's more sympathetic. Evidently addressing the English-Canadian reader, they show how the Canadian (non-hyphenated) *I* is an other (a Swede's or Icelander's other). Interestingly, they do not capitalize on the unity of this *I*. Rather, they show these refracted others as distinct and spiritually strong entities. They show that the ideal Canadian *I* is plural.

Chapter III

The Icelandic Heart

In 1875 some 1400 Icelanders made their way to Canada. It was the first mass Icelandic emigration after the famine of 1868, the earthquake of 1872 and the devastating volcanic eruption of 1875. By 1874, about a fifth of the Icelandic people had emigrated to Canada, and in 1875 they set out for Manitoba, where they intended to apply their ancestral laws of migration and settlement. “With law the land shall be built” was the motto which they had inherited from their ancestors, the Norwegian immigrants to Iceland a thousand years earlier (Neijmann 66).

The Icelandic resettlement subsequent to the volcanic eruption of 1875 is fictionalized in Laura Salverson’s *The Viking Heart* (1923). The novel’s account of the Icelandic migration is unique in Canadian literature in that the author offers, for the first time in the English language, an “insider’s viewpoint of the immigrant fate” (Neijmann 173). Presumably, Salverson’s immigrant authority comes from her position inside her ethnic group. However, Salverson, born in Winnipeg in 1890, would have experienced the immigrant fate indirectly, through her parents, she being an “immigrant’s daughter.” Therefore, Salverson would have experienced a history of her Icelandic heritage through the memory created by her parents’ stories. Through them, she would understand the fate

of the immigrant, and she would want to articulate the position of her “foreign” group within the Canadian nation. As a third generation immigrant writer (defined by David Arnason as “a writer of Icelandic descent writing in English”; *Identifications* 59), Salverson’s view of Iceland was shaped into an image, into an ancestral construct of the mind, filtered through the consciences of her parents. Surely aware of her position as indirect representer, Salverson does not intend to merely echo the story of Icelandic settlement in Canada. On the one hand, she “explains” the Icelander as a superior, highly civilized being; on the other hand, she attempts to reveal the spiritual significance of the Icelandic story for the building of the new Canadian nation. In *Confessions of an Immigrant’s Daughter* she explains her purpose for writing *The Viking Heart*:

I wanted to write a story which would define the price any foreign group must pay for its place in the national life of the country of its adoption. I wanted this payment to express spiritual values, which, to my way of thinking are the true measure of national greatness, the only riches that abide, and which make a nation endure. (509-10)

Settlement viewed as spiritual enrichment helps shape up the Icelandic tile in the Canadian mosaic, and more than that, it helps fit the newly attained shape into the whole process of articulating the new Canadian nation’s emerging identity. It is possible then, given the reading I suggest, to understand Salverson’s novel as an exemplification of the Icelandic heart or spirituality re-presented in a totally new light, befitting of the new Canadian cultural and literary background which at the time (the 1920s) was itself undergoing construction.

The payment Salverson talks about is the very contribution that the Icelandic immigrant group made to the Canadian mosaic: a new tile, bringing with it a profound spirituality, ancestral values, and a unique settling experience; in short, the Icelandic heart. More literally, this payment is the offering of the life of the precious son, Thor. On the one hand, at the time of Salverson's writing, the Icelandic community was being faced with the urge to resist assimilation and thus to protect the Icelandic heritage from being dissolved into Canadian culture (Neijmann 181). On the other hand, the Canadian literary world of the 1920s was continuing, as MacLulich points out, "the argument between realism and idealism" (*Between Europe and America* 89), which informed Canadian fiction with a tension between "romantic and realistic ways of portraying the world" ("Novel" 43). In writing *The Viking Heart* Laura Salverson was highly influenced by this tension. Hence she constructed the story as a tribute paid to Icelandic myths and as an idealized reality which makes it possible for Canada to harbour Gimli¹, the Norse paradise on earth. Salverson begins her novel with an idyllic presentation of life in the Old Country prior to immigration. Since the Canadian-born writer has no active memory of the Icelandic past (before and at the time of the volcanic eruption), the result is a romanticized perspective, a presentation of an idealized time, in soft hues of nostalgia.

They left the cheerful room and went outside into a fairyland of northern beauty.[...] The sun had just showed his smiling face out of the green sea. The rays of his smile which, fan-shaped, had preceded him, were spreading like threads of gold over a roseleaf and lavender field. On the sea a golden pathway

¹ In Scandinavian mythology, Gimle is the first of the nine worlds in the universe; it is the residence of the Supreme Being, meant to be "the abode of the good after the destruction of the universe" (Pigott 18-19).

burned – a pathway that the gods might tread from earth to heaven. (*Viking Heart* 16)

In her *Viking Heart*, Salverson does present sentimental scenery, but her “picture” also prepares for the natural disaster that is to come with the outburst of the volcano. The background thus set, Salverson also hints at the cosmic and mythical dimension of the place by reference to the “golden pathway.” In other words, this place was the spiritual center of these Icelanders’ world, the Axis Mundi they were about to lose. In her position as a writer from and of the immigrant perspective, Salverson is operating with the same parameters that every immigrant writer does, that is, she is building her “world” by means of a personal double settlement: once in the “mainstream” literary landscape through her authorship, and then in the cultural landscape, through her characters (Neijmann 102). Thus, she, like her parents and their fellow immigrants, puts on the pioneer’s hat and gives literary form to the story of a group who started out as ethnic (the Icelanders began their history of resettlement when they moved from Scandinavia to the island in the early ninth and tenth centuries) and who, by virtue of the Norse belief in Fate and in the heroic battle with it, had to re-settle and re-iterate all the emotional associations that accompany such a passage.

Salverson’s settlement in the literary landscape of Canada quickly faded out of public interest after the publication of her novel, but it has re-emerged with the “recent upsurge of women’s studies and feminist literary criticism” (Neijmann 24). Her work was marginalized possibly because of the negative response from her own people. A “writer

of two worlds” (Neijmann 175), Salverson addressed the Canadian public on the one hand by “translating” Old World ways into New World sense, and on the other hand by writing for the Icelandic (though not exclusively) immigrants, in acknowledgement of their misfortunes and successes. While her Anglo-Canadian audience seemingly appreciated her endeavour (*Confessions of an Immigrant’s Daughter* won her a Governor General’s Award for best Canadian fiction in 1937), her Icelandic Canadian readers, indignant at her “playing fast and loose with their landscape, shrinking it [...] until the volcano came down to the sea” (*Confessions* 513) continued to hold her at arm’s length from their literary world. Of the few printed reactions to *The Viking Heart*, I should mention Jakobina Johnson’s “dislike of Laura’s perceived lack of feeling for what constituted the Icelandic ‘tradition and values’” (Neijmann 210), and Stephan G. Stephansson’s letter to Winifred Reeve,² in which he writes that “although he has not read *The Viking Heart* yet, he considers Laura’s use of Icelandic saga names unpoetic and weak [...] and enough to make one unwilling to pick up the novel for reading” (Neijmann 210). Perhaps this rejection might also be explained by the fact that, unlike other Icelandic Canadian writers of the time, Salverson only published in English and built her characters outside the frame of the Icelandic tradition of the saga. Though it may seem that Salverson follows the pattern of the sagas by concentrating on one small community which revolves around one family (the Lindals), *The Viking Heart* is not limited to presenting the northern Germanic heroic mentality at work in asserting its invincibility of

² Literary critic, novelist and head of the Calgary branch of Canadian authors.

spirit against fate. The novel is also the construction of a world that reaffirms Icelandic ethnicity as holding a privileged (because of bringing traditional Icelandic values such as honour, loyalty, strength and courage) position inside the Canadian nation. In such a world the writer can imagine that she belongs, and thus she “can write [her] own way into the world [she] wants to be a part of” (Marlatt 222). Considering Salverson’s position as a writer *in-between* or *of* two worlds, Marlatt’s comment on the workings of the immigrant imagination as “genuinely struggling to pierce the difference, the foreignness, the mystery of the new place with its other culture” (Marlatt 219) is true of Salverson’s own struggle with her two-fold difference: as an Icelander who writes about and of her heritage in a foreign tongue, and as a Canadian whose heritage is alien to the North American cultural space. This double identity echoes into Salverson’s two pioneering efforts that I mentioned earlier. Thus, I believe that, in her attempt at settling into the literary landscape of 1920s Canada, Salverson features as a writer of and about the Icelandic heritage from an insider’s Icelandic perspective. As a settler in the Canadian cultural landscape, Salverson moves outside of the Icelandic group (assuming the narratorial distance) so that she may explain Icelandicness in coherent Canadian terms. Her negotiation between these dyads is one between her two audiences, and I suggest that her use of the English language as a medium for this process is meant to place the Icelandic group in a position of advantage. Thus, through translation, Icelandicness ceases to appear foreign and unintelligible to English-Canadians. Reading themselves interpreted in English, the Icelanders are in turn invited to learn a new vocabulary of their

culture, in the same way in which the world traveler learns, not only about other cultures, but, by distance, about his or her own.

In *The Viking Heart*, Salverson knits the two traveling selves together and presents a story of becoming Icelandic Canadian. The novel pays tribute to the Icelandic heritage by the subject matter itself, which, on the surface level, is the more or less romanticized dramatization of the Icelandic settlement in Canada. On a deeper level however, *The Viking Heart* is a mythical re-enactment of the ancestral settling of Iceland. The beginning chapter, which contains an apparent “justification” of the Icelandic move to Canada, actually lays the basis for the performance of this ritual passage. Hence, the apocalyptic vision from the first section seems to be detailing T.S. Eliot’s “In the end is my beginning” (Eliot 17) as a symbolic reconstruction of the world, where “for something genuinely new to begin, the vestiges and ruins of the old cycle must be completely destroyed, i.e., to obtain an absolute beginning, the end of a World must be total. Recreation through regeneration is not possible. This is the only way to restore the initial perfection” (Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 51-2). Being a fictionalization of the recovery of the perfect beginning (perfect because it follows destruction), the Icelanders’ journey to Canada fulfils the conditions of a rite of passage, which is a journey from “one mode of being to another, from one existential situation to another” (Eliade, *The Sacred* 180). The Icelanders’ journey to Canada is a passage from one lost center to a new one, a passage from death to life. In Icelandic mythical terms, this “transcendence” is more than a geographical relocation; it is the *utpca* or “the reach beyond.” Emigration viewed in this

way, Neijmann explains, “takes on an ancient glory” and becomes “a natural, almost inevitable consequence of both history and ancestry” (Neijmann 77). The settlement thus conceived is then a consecration, an initiation of the Canadian host into the spiritual values carried by the Icelandic immigrant group.

Salverson’s response to the negative reception of her introductory chapter to *The Viking Heart* draws on the writer’s disappointment with her people’s overlooking its symbolic aspect for the sake of insignificant detail. Towards the end of the *Confessions* she writes: “I certainly knew that the great volcanoes were inland – how should I not, when my father had once lived under the shadow of Mount Hecla! But I did not see that such specific detail was necessary to an introduction that was obviously nothing but symbolic” (*Confessions* 513). Interestingly, *The Viking Heart*’s mapping of the Icelandic settlement complements the “creation of the West Icelandic³ myths [which] involved the re-establishment of the original settlement of Iceland as the symbolic matrix of West Icelandic immigrant history” (Neijmann 313). The introductory chapter ends with a promise encased in Bjorn’s letter to Borga: “Never forget that the stars that shine here are the same you loved in the homeland, nor that the old moon who smiles down at you will be smiling at me also” (*Viking Heart* 48). Bjorn tells her that the cosmic elements contain the same spiritual dimension irrespective of the geographical location. In other words, he reminds Borga of her duty to participate in the mythical ritual of re-enactment “here” (in Canada). These cosmic elements however need to be made sense of in the Icelandic way

³ Icelandic Canadians were known to Icelanders as West Icelanders. (Neijmann 94)

by a performance of the “way of our fathers” (*The Viking Heart* 48), that is, by following the ancestral Icelandic tradition of the heroic “assertion of free will, independence and invincibility of spirit against fate” (Neijmann 14). Chapter I begins after a leap in time, and it is the presentation of one such performance: the birth of the Lindals’ son. Significantly, Salverson skips the traditional moment of the coming of the first born (the Lindals’ daughter, Elizabeth) in favour of “The Coming of Thor” (*The Viking Heart* 49). The first chapter begins with the birth of the son, Borga’s “little storm child” (58), born symbolically during a snowstorm, and named after the Norse god of thunder, Thor. The coming of Thor, apart from reinforcing the Icelandic roots in Canada, will prove a personal contribution and a sacrifice to the New Country: Thor will take on the healing powers of the god after whom he is named (he will become a doctor), and he will die in the service of his country during World War I. Salverson’s application of the mythical god’s dimension in the small community reflects another Icelandic belief, which was an integral part of the process of settlement: the strong sense of fatalism. Fate played a major, yet limited, role in Norse mythology where it was viewed as overpowering physical things only, thus making it possible for the human will and spirit to assert control (Neijmann 307). Icelandic heroism is then the product of an act of choice, of a manifestation of one’s freedom. Paradoxical as it may appear, the individual is viewed as a “prisoner of the past and future – of mythic time – yet he is free to define himself heroically” (Greenway 24). Salverson’s Thor becomes a hero in the Old Icelandic way by assuming a direct confrontation of fate. In other words, he replaces the iron gloves used

by Thor the thunder god with the surgeon's gloves and he partakes of miracle healings where "the use of certain delicate silver plates had made an apparently hopeless limb useful again" (*The Viking Heart* 307). As a symbolic character, who embodies the true Viking, Thor performs traditional rituals that are meant to blend the past and the future. From the past, he takes over the Icelandic *huslestur*⁴ (this practice of reading religious passages followed by discussion and prayer had been part of the daily tradition on the farms since the beginning of Iceland's history (Neijmann)) and with a view to the future he replaces the traditional religious passages by marvelous English poems. This shift is symbolic both of the character's evolution from listener to speaker, and of his place as a mediator in the process of cultural exchange between the Icelandic *huslestur* and the English poem (*Viking* 151). The mediation that Thor performs is through the English language, in the same way in which Salverson herself mediates—through the English language too—the contact of the Old Icelandic tradition with the New Canadian reality.

What Salverson brings new to this perspective is her allowing the reader a peek inside the immigrant world for the sake of unveiling the dialectic of *self* and *other* from the perspective of the *other*. I would say then, that Salverson's novel works towards a presentation of ethnicity as a re-positioning of the parameters of one's identity rather than as a "state of in-between, of loss of self" (Mandel 65). The Lindals and the Johnsons do not lose their selves in the Anglo-Canadian culture. They re-position their centers so that these may befit both the inner Icelandic ritual performances and the new Canadian (to

⁴ House readings (Icelandic)

them) foreign, outer routines. Thus, Salverson's settlers continue to live as Icelanders, at the same time adapting to the outside routine of the English-Canadian life. Besides the instance of the Icelandic tradition of house readings preserved through the reading of English stories, another example of this re-positioning is the appearance of the English teacher, who, once acquainted with the inside (Icelandic) routine, not only commends it, but she also has an open enough mind to catch the connecting points with the outside (Canadian) world. With a humour that pinches English ignorance, Salverson presents her own people through the prejudiced eyes of Miss Wake:

Miss Wake not being quite clear whether it was the Icelander or the Eskimo who has a deep-seated passion for whale oil, had planned on such a campaign of reform -- a whole-souled attack upon the dangers of too much greasy fried food, found herself with an entire list of authorities on this baleful habit to the good and with much time on her hands, when she discovered, to her chagrin that these silly foreigners had a way of ignoring the frying pan. Why, they never even had bacon for breakfast, nor sausages! And when they made those funny thin pancakes, they were outrageously Scotch in the treatment of butter. She found, like that wise singer of the people, that "the plans of mice and men gang oft agley." (137)

As she becomes immersed in the Icelandic community, not only are all Miss Wake's prejudices demolished, but she also comes to learn the Icelandic explicit way of showing respect by the use of the plural pronoun: "she [...] took a liking to timid Mrs. Peterson, [...] learned to say in the singular and plural "kondu sael" and "vertu sael" -- how do you do and farewell" (138). Thus, the lesson she learns is more than one of vocabulary and conversation; she learns the language of a ritual that complements her English upbringing by revealing the importance of explicitly (through language) showing respect for the other. By presenting such instances of cultural exchange, Salverson presents the Icelandic

section of the Canadian nation as an independent, resistant yet not reluctant, ethnic group. Perhaps she over-romanticizes their innocence by presenting their simple joys as childlike manifestations, but at the same time she gives them credit for the strength and determination with which they accept their payments of blood to Canada. These payments, like their entire process of settlement, are a re-enactment of the “old saying of [the] fathers: ‘all things with blood and toil are bought, all joys are cleansed in tears’” (325). Canada is their country, and their dead “live in the life of the country” (325). The idea that the land will accept new dwellers only on condition that there is a life sacrificed completes the view of settlement as ritual performance where all gestures and events are symbolic. Hence, in *The Viking Heart* there are two such events: one is the drowning of little Lillian Hafstein, and the other is Thor Lindal’s death. Symbolically, the little girl’s dead body is carried by Old Joe, the silent Indian, who could understand the sacrifice for what it was and “Like a high priest at the altar he gave the child into her [mother’s] keeping” (134). Salverson makes explicit the significance of Lillian’s death as a sign “that already Canada had laid its tendrils about her [Mrs.Hafstein’s] heart. That in the very giving of her dead to its keeping, she had bound herself to it irrevocably. She had made in her grief a first bitter payment toward Canadianship for herself and her daughter” (136). Thor’s death is presented as a heroic performance of the “old saying of [the] fathers” that “all things with blood and toil are bought” (325). Thor’s death is heroic because it brings about his mother’s “sudden passion for this wide, quiet land” (324-5), and it concludes the immigrant quest for the “spiritual necessity” (325) that is, for the

soul. Salverson ends her novel by infusing Icelandic nobility of soul to the larger soul of the Canadian nation: “Out of the hearts of men, out of their joys and tears, their toil and tribulation, springs that elusive and holy thing, the soul of a Nation. Out of the sore travailings of men and out of their quiet death, spring hope and faith, and that great love which, transcending the grave, revitalizes life and makes a nation indestructible” (326). Salverson writes Iceland’s place in this more or less imaginary construct of an “indestructible nation” as central, as the heart that ‘pumps’ love into Canadian consciousness. As we shall see later on, in the chapter dedicated to Frederick Philip Grove’s *Settlers of the Marsh*, this special love seems to be the very essence that the immigrant pursues because it gives his or her presence here meaning, it roots him or her in the Canadian soil.

Rather than presenting the Icelandic–Canadian interaction as a game of imposition, Salverson lays out the Icelandic characteristic dualism (“the simultaneous drive towards assimilation and cultural retention”; Matthiasson 204-5) to show how this tendency can offer a model of cohesion to the Canadian culture. Having once experienced survival under settlement conditions, the Icelanders know better than to dismiss the ethnic position as a marginalized condition. With their still influential literature in Icelandic and with their strong community that values above all education and literary culture, the Icelandic ethnic group are today an example of ethnic pride in the sense of positioning themselves within the Canadian identity not as the inarticulate and oppressed *other* but as *an other*, *an other* piece, immigrant but Canadian, without which the puzzle

would be incomplete. That would then explain why “Icelandic Canadians [...] for more than 100 years have sought to become non-hyphenated Canadians” (Matthiasson 204-5) that is, “Icelanders with a mission: to be Icelanders in a non-Icelandic environment” (Gunnarsdottir translated by Neijmann 82). Hyphenation implies conjoining, division or affixation. The hyphen as a conjoiner “underlines sameness” (Wah *Description*), but it also signals inbetweenness, since it links “two part adjectives or noun modifiers which contain the sense “between” (Swan 555). Therefore, being Icelandic-Canadian would mean inhabiting a space conceived of as suspension between the two cultures (Icelandic and Canadian), being both and neither at the same time. As a divisor, the hyphen “compounds difference” (Wah *Description*), it separates Icelandic from Canadian. As an affixer, the hyphen suggests addition and it reinforces the idea of margin. Therefore, Icelandic could be read as an attachment or addition to Canadian, a named margin. I want to posit that the Icelandic “mission” is to define themselves against all the above implications of the hyphen. Icelanders reject the hyphen because they don’t position their culture either as united or as separated from the Canadian one. Hence, they reject the shifting positionality of the hyphen because they situate themselves in a central, non-hybrid position from which they irradiate their old spirituality into the young Canadian nation.

The process of settlement that unfolds in *The Viking Heart* addresses the two cultures, the Icelandic and the Canadian, in the Canadian idiom. While some critics consider this choice of language a “justification” of assimilation (Neijmann 184), which

brought about the Icelandic Canadian rejection, I would think that Salverson's attempt is a necessary "translation" that both serves the explication of the Icelandic culture and opens up a new perspective on Canadian identity defined in dynamic relation with the ethnic *other*. Thus, Salverson presents this Icelandic *other* as part of the new Canadian nation which acknowledges its other component nations. At the same time this strategy allows the Icelandic Canadian group to preserve their "very private form of ethnicity which [does] not interfere with their public life in Canada" (Neijmann 368-9). Such "private" ethnicity maintains the spiritual link with Icelandic origins and promotes the Icelandic "heart" as an enrichment to Canadian culture rather than nostalgia for a lost center.

Chapter IV

The Grove Canon

At the time of his emergence as a writer in Canada in the early 1920s, Frederick Philip Grove was equally praised and blamed, and his novel *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) was both banned from public display and applauded as a landmark in the formation and further development of Canadian prairie fiction. Though an immigrant himself writing about immigrants and immigration, Grove's work was never marginalized by the label "ethnic." Interestingly, his writing has been discussed (then as now) as a charting of the transformation of Canada's cultural wilderness into cultivated settlement. In the present chapter I intend to show how Grove's settling into Canadian mainstream literature involves several levels of cultural shift: his ethnic immigrant questioned through the protagonist; the spiritual translation of Swedish ancestral values into new Canadian reality through a revised understanding of marriage; the settler's (Grove's too) disorientation between Swedish and English that results in troubling silence.

As Smaro Kamboureli states in *Scandalous Bodies*, Grove's ethnicity is problematic (27) in that it does not point to a specific origin. In other words, Grove is a Canadian writer of German origin, with vast knowledge of the European philosophic,

artistic and literary tradition (spanning from, to name but a few, Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Nietzsche, Bergson and Pascal to Marx, Flaubert and Gide) who, in an effort to blur his German background and to re-shape the reality of the Canadian settling experience, writes about Swedish immigrants (in *Settlers of the Marsh*) and pretends (and does quite a good job of it) to be the insider's voice who translates the settlers' Old World spirit (i.e. thoughts and feelings) into New World sense. However, if we agree with Walter Benjamin's definition of the origin as "an eddy in the stream of becoming" rather than as "the process by which the existent came into being" (Benjamin 45), Grove's own origin is precisely such a swirling eddy of self-appraisal. While blocking out the German component of his origin, Grove is constantly re-writing himself in recurrent circles that compose his bower of safety against outside intrusion. One might even argue that Grove shrewdly infiltrates the ranks of the "unexamined" segment of society. In his article "The Unexamined," Ross Chambers presents the interaction between the host and the guest groups in terms of power dynamics that feature the dominant white groups as the "invisible, unmarked examiner" who performs an act of exoticization (i.e. an underrating of the other by a recognition of his or her being different in the sense of foreign, hence uncanny) on the "visible marked examined" group (Chambers 146). Grove's purpose moves away from mere examination of the *other*, and heads towards an insight position that allows him to be heard and listened to when presenting this *other* not as "visible," "exotic," "foreign," but as settler and pioneer ready to clear land and to build Canada.

While strenuously re-inventing himself, Grove performs a re-definition and a re-discovery of Canada as an ideal place for new beginnings. *Settlers'* narrating character, Niels Lindstedt, sees Canada as "a way out" (*Settlers* 38) of the ancestral (Scandinavian) subordination to Fate and a way to establish new roots through heirs: "if he had children, they would be rooted here... He might become rooted himself then..." (*Settlers* 46). Niels's dream of (up)rootedness is a complex matter, to be dealt with later in the chapter. But Grove, the writer behind the voice of his character, must have experienced the same struggle of the pioneer. The Canadian literary landscape of the 1920s was as untamed and as incomprehensible to him as the "lot" of land was to Niels. The writer, like the pioneer has to start over and to "prove up" with every book that he writes. The pioneer, like the writer has to re-compose his identity, the former behind the success or failure of his yearly harvest, the latter behind his characters. And while the pioneer "makes" Canada, the writer writes this making into a more or less fictionalized form. In this formidable enterprise, Grove positions himself as mediator and insider with some knowledge of the outside ways. In my use of the terms inside-outside I understand the former as a position of centrality within a given cultural space. Namely, when the writer assumes the insider's position within his or her ethnic group (in Grove's case the ethnicity is not specific, for Grove is "a spokesman" for the whole immigrant "race"), he or she becomes the authority that informs the outside, that is, the dominant group. But given the (ethnic writer's) use of and fluency in the English language as the medium of communication, he or she is able to access the inside of the dominant group as well. In this I see the ethnic

writer's privilege: moving in and out of two worlds, injecting each with significant doses of the other, negotiating difference as positive growth. As far as the term outside is concerned, while I like to conceptualize it as a refuge, as an escape from the wilderness and isolation that can be the result of an "excess of interiority" (Codrescu 202), the outside is the position of cultural distance from the target group (whether dominant or ethnic). Within this inside-outside context, I suggest, Frederick Philip Grove plays the earlier stated "unexamined" role, who, instead of exposing the "New Canadian" as "foreign" (i.e. inferior), performs a double translation: on the one hand for the Old Canadians (by whom he means earlier, Anglo settlers), of the foreign into Canadian settling experience, and, on the other hand, for the foreign, of the dominant Old Canadian into welcoming host. In this sense, when addressing both in the speech "Canadians Old and New" that I have quoted earlier, his "use of pronouns is strategic" (Kamboureli, *Scandalous* 32): "Learn *our* language, obey *our* laws, and help *us* to make *them*" (176) (*italics mine*). Grove includes himself in everything that is Canadian, because he sees himself not only as "part of the tradition" but also as a creator and writer of this tradition. His books are "of a man who is at home, not just 'over here'" (Malcolm Ross vi), and therefore he can address the dominant segment of Canadian society from a detached, presumably objective yet never an uninformed outsider's point of view: "What, at the present moment, do you, the average citizen of this country, do in order to make the newcomer feel at home? Anything or nothing? First of all, you call him a "foreigner"-- a

title of honor, indeed, since it implies that likely he has seen more of the world than you have seen -- unless you have traveled. (“Canadians” 170)

Critiquing Ross’s readiness to acknowledge Grove as a Canadian, Smaro Kamboureli claims that Grove’s fabrication of a mixed identity was not accidental (that is, he intentionally chose to be descending from Scottish and English blood) and that his “alleged” erudition exceeds even “the highest, most stringent expectations of immigrants” (Kamboureli, *Scandalous* 33). But I wonder if, given his physical appearance, his knowledge of English and possibly a German accent which could pass for a Scottish (therefore Anglo-Celtic) one, he would have been better choosing an Eastern European or Southern European origin? Or Asian perhaps? African? Another point on which I have to disagree with Kamboureli is the idea of “immigrant expectation” which, to me sounds dangerously close to stereotyping. Or, to formulate it interrogatively, I wonder why immigrants are “expected” to be and to behave in a certain manner so that they may “qualify” as such? Is the image of an erudite immigrant wishful thinking, a particular, “atypical case”?

I would think that Grove, apart from political reasons, wanted to “blot out” his Germanness because he was enlightened enough to realize that the future can be built without clinging to the past. This may be an oversimplified way of accounting for Grove’s extreme emotional privacy, but I suggest that he must have been aware that, in a Nietzschean way, for one to be able to move forward without any waste of energy, one has to “redirect one’s passions towards a more worthy goal” (Knonägel 24-5). Felix Paul

Greve, who said in 1904, “I am not an artist; the work of art is for me but a last resort; it’s the need for money that makes me write” (“Interview” with Andre Gide), became Frederick Philip Grove who said in 1931: “we artists grope for the stars; [...] For, after all, my way of living is conditioned by my aims in writing; or, in other words, I am a writer first and a living being only secondarily” (“Apologia” 192-3). His struggle against the past and towards the present, and his transformation from Greve into Grove did not happen by a magic twist. Grove never completely erased or destroyed his German origin. He couldn’t and didn’t mean to. He couldn’t because being German (as being French or English or Russian) is part of one’s spiritual being and it takes generations of forgetfulness to annihilate it. Grove is German in his detached tone, in his ‘cold’ approach to emotional episodes, in his playing by the strict rule, with no spectacular coups, and in the gloominess he likely learnt from Wagner. Grove didn’t mean to sever his German links because he considered that Germany “[wa]s the one really instructive country where Americans ought to go...” (Grove, *Letters* 12). He provides examples of what not to imitate from Germany in the German characters from the *Settlers*, the Dahlbecks, whom he presents as “slow” and “thoroughly despicable” (Grove, *Letters* 13).

Apparently begun in German, Grove’s “settling” book not only constructs a vision of immigrant alienation, it also rearranges this vision into the canon of the Canadian novel through translation, or “remodeling”: “I have another book ready as to contents: The White Range Line House. The one that I started to work on in German. But of course, I’ll *remodel* that if I write in English” (Grove cited in Makow 120) (*italics*

mine). The publication, in 1925, of *Settlers of the Marsh* proved to be “an unmitigated disaster” (*In Search of Myself* 387), a Canadian re-iteration of the way in which Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* had been met with critical disapproval. The only difference though was that the French public had showed increased interest in the outcast book, while the Canadian public – except for the “honourable exception” (*In Search of Myself* 381) of London, Ontario - conformed to the official “diagnosis.”

Its [*Settlers*] publication became a public scandal. [...] reviewers called it ‘filthy’- W.T. Allison, over the radio; Lorne Pierce nearly lost his job over it; people who had been ready to lionize me cut me dead in the street. [...] it was the old story of Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* over again. A serious work of art was classed as pornography. (*Search* 381)

However, not all reviewers sided with this classification, and in early 1925 *The Canadian Bookman* advertised the coming publication of *Settlers* under “The Big Books of 1925” in a favourable, though “normally hyperbolic” (for the *Bookman*) manner which also flattered the novel for reflecting the 1920s’ Canadian literary vacillation between realism and romance (MacLulich, *Between Europe* 89).

No stronger romance has come from the pen of a Canadian writer. It is a realistic study, outspoken and tellingly powerful, of life in pioneer districts of the Western Plains of Canada. The hero suffers moral disintegration and then fights his way back through the process of regeneration. This book will be widely discussed and it would seem that ‘the great Canadian novel’ has really been introduced. (“Big Books” 126)

Though the *Bookman* presented the author as Frederick *William* Grove, the writer found the ad “cheering” (Grove, *Letters* 20). The publication of the novel followed and the biased and superficial readings of it resulted in a public scandal that saddened and

embittered Grove to such an extent that on November 18, 1925 he produced a vitriolic critique of Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (1925). The latter had received public acclaim and won the Dodd-Mead Prize the same year. Grove's interest in Ostenso's book and his frustration at its reception is explained by the fact that *Wild Geese*, like his *Settlers*, deals with the life of settlers in the Manitoba bush. Thus, in a letter to Austin Bothwell, Grove ungracefully accuses Ostenso of immaturity: "The book is deplorably, even unusually immature[...]. All this is, of course, only natural when an immature young girl sits down to write a book, not because that book cries in her to be written; but because she has the itch to write. She knows nothing of the grim things in life" (Grove, *Letters* 25).

Critics sometimes unfavourably compared *Settlers* with *Wild Geese*, although Grove had his allies in the dispute. None of them, however, showed such bitterness as he did. Thus, Arthur Phelps writes in the *Winnipeg Free Press*: "If ever there was a piece of well written and promising immaturity constituting a good story it is the \$13,500 prize novel *Wild Geese*. If ever there was a piece of seasoned workmanship foot-fast in the gumbo it is Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh*. The Ostenso book is interesting, romantic, unsatisfying" (Grove, *Letters* 43). Of those who responded positively to Grove's book, worth mentioning is J. S. Woodsworth (author of *Strangers within our Gates*) who writes in his letter to Grove in March 1927: "A year ago I read your book *Settlers of the Marsh* with much interest – I regret that it has been so bitterly attacked" (Grove, *Letters* 96). Woodsworth shared with Grove both an awareness of the plight of the immigrant while homesteading on the Canadian prairie and an interest in the immigration debate of the

1920s. Like Woodsworth, Grove saw himself on the one hand as a spokesperson for the immigrant and, on the other hand, as a representative of the Canadian hosts.

In 1928 Raymond Knister published a review of *Settlers* in the *Ontario Library Review*, where he criticized the novel as being “in some instances [...] downright awkward and childish, as when every few pages we are shown the depravity of the ‘fallen woman’ the hero has married by the fact that she plasters her face with powder” (Grove, *Letters* 266). Grove not only replies, but he seems deeply hurt by the surface reading of his book and he offers an explanation for Clara as a character whose “every appearance [...] makes a new, necessary step in an inevitable tragedy, pondered over for a matter of decades.” He reproaches the critic with not having taken “the pains to approach the book in that spirit in which every thing must be approached which is ‘done’ ” (Grove, *Letters* 266). Furthermore, Grove, who had himself been so disrespectful and unprofessional about Ostensó’s book, recommends respect and professionalism: “I have never answered a review and do not intend this to be an answer; but perhaps you will pardon a man twice your age if he says that he is not impressed by any critical acumen displayed. Which, of course, has nothing whatever to do with my personal relationship to the ‘critic’ ” (Grove, *Letters* 266).

In an earlier letter addressed to E.J. Moore in November 1925 Grove states that the purpose of writing *Settlers of the Marsh* was to “present the reaction of the Western Canadian landscape on the settler, and that of the settler on the landscape” (Grove, *Letters* 28). Interestingly, while “depicting the eternal struggle between man and nature”

in the social realist tradition, Grove capitalizes on the perspective from the inside rather than from the outside. He thus claims that the “distinguishing feature of the book [is that] all things are seen [...] from the inside” (Grove, *Letters* 28). His position here is not merely inside the cultural space of the immigrant, but inside the psychology of his protagonist. He goes so far as to use exterior means, such as landscape details to render the character’s interior torment. Take for example the moment before the storm, which prefigures, in minute metaphor, the personal storm that awaits Niels:

The air is breathless: even the slight, wafting flow from the east has ceased. Nature lies prostrate in expectation of the scourge that is coming, coming. The wall of cloud has differentiated: there are two, three waves of almost black; in front, a circling festoon of loose, white flocculent manes, seething, whirling... A winking of light runs through the first wave of black. A distant rumbling heralds the storm.... (*Settlers* 112)

It follows then that Grove’s realism is much more complex than a presentation of a “slice of life;” it presents reflections upon the slice of life. The world he creates in *Settlers* is the more realist as it is full of imperfections and human weaknesses. His characters are the more believable as they are unpredictable and appear to have a “mind of their own,” stubbornly refusing to submit to the reader’s expectations. As for the “insider’s” view, Grove constructs it based on two fears that were very familiar to himself: fear of failure and of silence.

After the whipping that it received upon publication, *Settlers of the Marsh* is nowadays often celebrated as Grove’s best work, and even though some critics stretch their late twentieth century criteria to make sense of a book written in accordance with

late nineteenth century literary criteria, the general attitude towards Grove's work is one that fully acknowledges his contribution to the development of Canadian literary realism. Grove's novel is realist to the extent to which it presents a story of people engaged in commonplace events. Ellen, Niels, Clara, Mrs. Lund and the other actors are immigrants intent on building a new life, and they are presented in the different stages of settling: some are newcomers (like Niels and Nelson), hardly speaking the new language, some are settled (like the Amundsens), some are living the illusion of having successfully settled (like the Lunds), and some are attempting to change rural life by insinuating the proximity of the city with its "unhealthy" influences (like Clara Vogel). But it is nevertheless obvious that these settlers are not strong enough to transcend their circumstances. In this, as Ronald Sutherland demonstrates, Grove is a "literary naturalist" (Sutherland 8). His characters appear to be manipulated by the overall circumstances of their immigrant status, each in turn overpowered by his or her own fate: Ellen, under the cloud of her mother's suffering and her father's abuse; Mr. Lund and Sigurdson, "dumb" victims of dislocation; Clara, outcast by her widowhood; and Niels, haunted by the need for self-realization. The fact that Grove is intent on giving full attention to his characters and to their evolution while downplaying the plot is signalled from the very beginning by the plural in the title: "settlers" is not restricted to Niels, who focalizes the point of view; "settlers" encompasses Niels and his neighbours, and Niels vis-à-vis his neighbours.

Of all the figures and shadows that people the novel, the warden is the least believable character. He is instead the idealized representation of both a parent and the

Canadian civil service. Grove keeps him unnamed on purpose: he is to be a symbol, on the one hand of the reassuring and encouraging parent, since

It was the warden who made him think, remember about the past. It was the warden who slowly, slowly made him see that he was not an outcast, a being despised for what he had done. It was the warden who told him that he, too, placed in the same circumstances, might and probably would have acted as Niels had acted. (*Settlers* 236)

On the other hand, the warden is a symbol of the supportive Canadian public servants who are there to help the unfortunate to correct their wrongdoings. As it appears in the novel, the warden stands for an official form of parenting that was as utopic then as it is now. “To-day, when the warden appears, most of the prisoners – those for whom there is hope, hope of a future outside, or of manhood in some form inside – most of them smile. The warden is a fearless man; he goes unarmed. He is the friend of the unfortunate. He has a way with him that gains their confidence” (*Settlers* 235). In other words, Grove must have thought this a perfect opportunity to present the newcomers with the Canadian prison as an institution intent on educating the inmates rather than on merely punishing them. Apparently, the prison is “modelled after the Stone Mountain penitentiary in Manitoba (founded in 1877)” (Kambourelis 68), and the warden’s “humanist ideology” is inspired from Samuel Lawrence Bedson, the first warden in Manitoba’s penitentiary who wrote in his 1885 Report:

A prisoner is a criminal indeed, but [...] He...must be educated, he must be trained and disciplined precisely as any other member of society, to induce him, if possible, to give out spontaneously from his own nature that which is right... You must redeem the prisoner by sympathy and not by extinguishing in him that which is the strongest inspiration of humanity, that which springs eternal in every man’s

breast except the prisoner's: Hope. Reformation depends entirely upon the amount of this principle you can inspire the prisoner with. (cited in James 39)

Thus it is that, while in prison, Niels completes his education: he takes high school classes, learning "something of French and Latin, of Algebra, Geometry, Science." More than that, he "acquired a vocabulary which would enable him to read real books" (*Settlers* 236). I would think that Grove downplayed the meaning of "real books" to printed papers bound by two covers, because it is obvious from Niels's question ("What had it all to do with the real problems of life?" *Settlers* 236) that the protagonist can't see any link between the world of fiction and his personal reality. Niels's earlier puzzlement with the literary world has remained unchanged ever since Clara had him "try" one of her books, none other than Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. After reading a bit, Niels remains "amazed" and "terrified" (*Settlers* 160) for he cannot see "what it might be written for" (160). He then tries an American novel. This time "he laid it aside because it seemed silly. In vain he searched for something that might enlighten him as to his mentality, that dealt with problems which were his..." (160). There are two things that I believe Grove is trying to convey here: firstly, he launches a critique at the American "mental hollowness" (Grove, *Letters* 12) and secondly, he is saying that the rural and the urban should and cannot be mixed. Clara's ways, Clara's books, Clara herself are out of place on the farm and no good can come of such a mixture. In other words, the reality of the city cannot be forced into the reality of the country without the former becoming distorted, false, indecent. Likewise, Niels is out of place in the city: "On his land he was

master; he knew just how to act. Here in town, people did with him as they pleased. Store-keepers tried to sell him what he did not want; at the hotel they fed him with things he did not like. The banker with whom he had sought no interview dismissed him at his own imperious pleasure" (*Settlers* 102). Given this, it is no wonder that he should fall for the trap of "woman," and no wonder that he should surprisingly for everyone (except himself) apply his pure (Swedish) moral values (marriage) to a situation that he genuinely misunderstands.

Bearing in mind Grove's affirmation that "[he] is not quite sure that [*Settlers*] conveys to others what it conveys to [him]" (*In Search of Myself* 379), I would say that the whole story of Clara and Niels is a total mismatch in which the two inhabit parallel worlds because they never communicate in terms of their differences. On the one hand, Niels imagines her as "the wife," but soon enough, when she doesn't meet even the smallest part of his vision, she becomes "the woman," almost unreal, a grim apparition that haunts Niels and turns his dream into a nightmare: "Children? His eye went dim; his head turned with him as he realized it. No...Children would be a perpetuation of the sin of a moment... He did not want children out of this woman!" (*Settlers* 163). Niels is also intent on self-realization, and this entangles a personal organization of space into a place that bears a familiar routine, thus becoming a home. This organization includes both material and moral ends: land, a house, therefore material prosperity, safety, and a family: wife and children. For the immigrant, the order he creates "is his defence" (Turner 58). To fully understand and be in control of the order he or she creates, is to

induce a feeling of stability, a bower of safety that protects him or her against the confusion of (what he or she perceives as) the outside chaos. For Niels, the material end encompasses the moral; that is, to him self-achievement includes the house and marriage. Because he views sexuality as a “threat to the self” (Knonägel 107), as the dark, “infectious” (*Settlers* 177) drive that threatens to prevent him from self-achievement, Niels finds justification in sexuality only in the context of family life and therefore he marries Clara. His marriage to her fails because he fails to see his wife as a person: Clara, like Ellen, merely embodies Niels’s “mold” (McMullen 74) of the wife. Unfortunately for him, neither woman fits his illusory mold. On the other hand, Clara fails to see Niels other than as physically and economically desirable. She fails to understand that his thoughts and feelings are fundamentally different from hers because he is still attached to his past, and it is this past that is foreign to her, hence incomprehensible and unreal. Their marriage is a strange union of bodies that lacks harmony because the only thing they can communicate to each other is an uncanny feeling (a strange combination of hate and revenge on Clara’s side and will to power on Niels’s) triggered by steep differences forced together.

In her “Afterword” to the 1989 edition of the novel, Kristjana Gunnars asserts that the “*Settlers*’ world is one of impersonal chance meetings” (Gunnars 274). Indeed, while the characters speak to one another, they rarely communicate emotionally, and whenever they do communicate, the medium is never language:

In silence [Niels and Ellen] went to the accustomed place, that natural bower in the fringe of the bush...As they crossed the yard, imponderable things, incomprehensible waves of feeling passed to and fro between them: things too delicate for words; things somehow full of pain and anxious, disquieting anticipation[...] as the silence lengthened – between man and woman, boy and girl – the consciousness arose that the other knew of the decision which was at hand [...] Yet neither spoke; each waited for the other. [...] Furtive glances stole across, to be averted forthwith. Colour came and went in two faces, imperceptible almost, yet divined. [...] He did not trust himself to speak. There was no barrier between them: they looked at each other, as it were, stripped of all conventions, all disguises... (*Settlers* 107-8).

Interestingly enough, Grove presents the feelings of the two as unmodified by the passing of time, as if he meant to say that Niels and Ellen are the perfect couple, whose most intimate and dramatic moments happen in the garden of paradise, and whose relationship is circular, perfect. Thus, twelve years after the above episode, Ellen and Niels meet again, in the same garden:

Again, as they cross the yard in silence, going to the accustomed place – that natural bower in the fringe of the bush – imponderable things, incomprehensible waves of feeling pass to and fro between them: things too delicate for words [...] And as the silence lengthens between them, between man and woman, the consciousness arises in each that the other knows his inmost thought [...] Colour comes and goes in their faces, imperceptible almost – not seen by either, for they avoid each other's eyes – yet divined. (*Settlers* 261)

Apart from the changing of some wording in the two paragraphs, important is the significance of the shift of tenses that Grove performs. The movement from past to present traps time in a circular space (the scene happens in the same place, described by the same spatial metaphors) which is ritually organized (in a garden). Since the present tense can render all three temporal dimensions (past, present and future), Grove's juggling with time can be read as a present gesture that holds a future promise for a

redeemed past. I would also add that, given the fact that I see the central message of the novel to be a disbelief in resignation, a determined refusal to accept fate as the governing force, the present tense situates Ellen and Niels in a reality that erases the past and prepares the future.

Settlers' "not happy but positive" ending (Moss 200) holds both a promise (that of the vision) and a resolution. Both are significant traits of the new Canadian realism, as opposed to the classic Russian one where "suffering gives life meaning" and where vision is built on pathos and the greatness of sacrifice. *Settlers'* open ending is one that removes the novel from the pattern of naturalism (Sutherland, "What Was" 8). Besides prefiguring Niels's return to Ellen, the chapter "Ellen Again" serves as a statement of fate-confrontation. In emphasizing this theme, Grove made a very modernist choice: if the reader was disappointed by the ending which annuls the Hardy-like finale and deprives Niels of the tragic stance, the writer offers satisfaction by deleting the initial conclusion from the published version:

[Niels and Ellen] are sitting together in a small room, at winter time, the winter of life: with the wind howling and stalking outside; the wind of the world. In the stove nearby a fire is roaring, radiating its genial warmth. A lamp is shedding its homely light from above over head and shoulders. And as they look at each other with a quiet smile, they are listening to the pitter patter of little feet sounding down from above, where the children are romping for a few minutes before they bolt into their beds. (Grove, "Collection", folder 5 [3])

This deleted paragraph presents a seriously flawed vision in that it displays an unconvincing image of Niels as the good husband whose consuming passion for the land is subdued into a "quiet smile." The language used also points to the vision's illusory

materiality, since the “roaring” fire radiates a “genial” (i.e. unreal if read as an extension of “genie”) warmth.

Smaro Kamboureli considers Grove’s particular realism “selective” (*Scandalous Bodies* 51) on account of the fact that it “refrains from representing those immigrants whose experiences were predicated on the socioeconomic and symbolic values attached to ‘wastage’” (Kamboureli 51). In other words, she reproaches Grove for using the image of the immigrant as “wastage” in a misleading manner since all the characters in the novel are Northern European – therefore not belonging to the “undesirables” (such as Southern and Eastern Europeans, Asians or Africans). Hence, Niels’s lamentation that “he looked upon himself as belonging to a special race – a race not comprised in any limited nation, but one that cross-sectioned all nations; a race doomed to everlasting extinction and yet recruited out of the wastage of all other nations” (*Settlers* 139) is “aberrant” (Kamboureli 51). Niels has this thought at a time when he had been rejected by Ellen, had been “scolded” for not “doing his dooty by the country” (*Settlers* 134), that is, for not producing heirs, had found out about Bobby’s depravity of going to “bad places” (*Settlers* 138), and had himself been exposed to “temptations” that he could not understand and that he found troubling (the incident with the German woman’s exposing herself to him and the encounter with the prostitutes in Minor). Niels is faced with “incomprehensible” events that challenge his view of reality and trigger this brief meditation on the race of immigrant “wastage” that is so unseemingly his and so transparently Grove’s. In my reading, what Grove does is transfer his own alienation to

his protagonist. He communicates his own frustrations and his own very personal isolation through his character. Hence, indeed, Niels is a “foil for Grove” (Kamboureli 46) himself, in some instances an extension of himself. Thus, “it is not Niels who reads *Elements of Political Economy*” (Kamboureli 46) and who eloquently observes the human decay in Sigurdson (*Settlers* 95) and in his wife (*Settlers* 157). These passages, like the one on race, are too literate and erudite for Niels, and they allow the writer’s voice to show through. With this in mind, and with the fact that Grove sees the realist artist as unable to “convincingly represent a character or a happening which finds no echo in himself [thus delimiting] his work by his own personality” (“Realism in Literature” 1982, 61-2). I would think it close to impossible for Grove to have successfully represented those immigrants viewed as “undesirable” by the Canadian authorities: to make his characters believable, he had to have a link, a certain affinity, or to share some spiritual knowledge, if you will, with them. I would also think that, for all his self-aggrandizement, Grove would not have ventured into areas that he felt completely outside of. Besides, had he attempted to represent all perspectives, his work would have fallen somewhere under cubism (which is an attempt to represent an object from all possible perspectives at once) rather than realism. We would perhaps have had prairie cubism instead of prairie realism and then Grove would have been criticized for misrepresenting and mis-appropriating cultural perspectives external to his grasp.

Discussing the same paragraph which presents Niels as belonging to the “special race” (*Settlers*139), Axel Knonägel interprets the “wastage” as directly associated with

Niels's being rejected by Ellen. Thus, he sees the image of the wastage not as an offensive reference to Niels's fellow immigrants, but as a "thinly disguised narrative commentary" (Knonägel 112) which shows Grove's intention to render the protagonist's sense of futility as a self-realized man. In other words, by her rejection, Ellen renders Niels's material ambitions worthless; she produces a gap. Consequently, Niels constructs another vision by re-directing his scope: "A new dream arose: a longing to leave and to go to the very margin of civilization, there to clear a new place.... This way his enormous strength would still have a meaning" (*Settlers* 139).

Niels's alienation is deepened by the revelation of his dream as futile and by his inability to bridge the gap and give it words. He is hardly able to voice his pain and he is even less able to communicate it to another human being. Like Grove, the novel's protagonist is becoming "extra-European" (*Search* 236) by virtue of gradually losing contact with his native Sweden. (Grove, like Niels, is becoming extraneously European, meaning that their Europeanness is becoming extrinsic to their new selves.) I say gradually, because though Niels never travels back, for a significant part of the story he vacillates between Canada and Sweden on the level of language and communication. Thus, his interlocutors address him in Swedish, though constantly negotiating with English, perhaps out of habit or perhaps to show Niels the importance of the "foreign" tongue. This to and fro between languages is also a symbol of Niels's settling, of the perplexing to and fro of the initial contact with the New World culture. As is always the case, this period of beginning is as much confusing for the settling immigrant as it is

alienating, since he or she has to get used (and fast) to the idea that “this is home” and that there has to be a routine attached to it, a routine to be either discovered or re-created. Caught up in this conundrum of the immigrant rite of passage, Niels is thrown in the whirlwind of transitional “re-aggregation” (Healy 91) with no buffering time allowed. His disorientation time upon arrival on the Canadian prairie is considerably compressed and intensified; therefore, his articulacy peters out into silence. Grove himself describes this immigrant silence as “almost eloquent” and “accentuated rather than disturbed by the sibilant hum of the mosquitoes that haunt the air” (“The Flat Prairie” 137-8). In *Settlers of the Marsh*, the “mosquitoes” that accentuate the silence are the hauntingly frequent words of ambiguous qualification *almost*, *somehow* and *something*, which “signal an ongoing search for the precise expression of what is known only in part but not quite” (La Bossière 147). While this kind of discursive mode may seem bewildering, I would say that the writer’s target is precisely his audience. To put it in other words, I suggest that Grove is using this “semantics of privation” (La Bossière 147) to the precise purpose of inciting his reader into sharing with him the reality of settlement as he saw it. The writer is thus giving his reader freedom to personalize the view of a particular event, at the same time drawing attention, I suggest, to the insufficiency of language as sole means of expression. Words empower and disempower, and they sometimes “create confusion” because they “are not the word [*les mots ne sont pas la parole*]... they say nothing... There are no words for the deepest experience... Of course, not everything is unsayable in words, only the living truth” (Ionesco cited in Steiner 52).

After completing the night-school classes at Minor, Niels “knows” English. He never acknowledges that he “speaks” it though, which partly accounts for his silence. His brief conversation with Clara and her “surprise” at his change is a point in the novel that I think can be read as an endorsement or acceptance of the immigrant by the host:

[Niels’s] lips said mechanically, “Have I changed?”

She laughed: a light, silvery, falsetto laugh: the laugh of a woman perfectly sure of herself and very superior to her interlocutor. “Changed?” she repeated. “I should say so. You were a boy then; now you are a man.” Niels’ head was glowing. “I am older.” “Partly,” she conceded. “You have learned to speak, too. When I first met you, you were dumb.” “I did not know any English.” (*Settlers* 53-4)

While some feminist critique may object to Grove’s presentation of the woman as a superficial, flighty and highly sensual character that brings out the dark side of Niels, I would read this as an instance of Grove’s low opinion of Canadian hosts. It is an occasion that Grove does not miss to pinch the English-Canadian loftiness that dismisses anything that does not translate into English as “dumb.” Throughout the novel he repeats the idea of Niels’s silence and associates it with his constant fear of failure (the latter true of both character and writer) in a very realistic representation of every immigrant’s fear that he or she be considered dumb (i.e. stupid) on account of his or her non-fluency or accent in the English language. Similar to the difference stated above between word and speech (French: *mot/parole*), I would add the difference between “knowing” a language and “speaking” it. While the “speaking” of a language can be a mechanical act, the “knowing” implies either of two things: a superficial recognition of sounds by contrast with the mother tongue, or the profound acquaintance with the different levels of

communication that a language can handle. Directing my above point towards Grove's protagonist, I suggest that Niels's silence, his silent "knowing" of the English language or his unreadiness to articulate this knowledge into speech is Grove's message that the profound aspects of human nature are and should remain veiled in silence.

It is then on account of this "knowing" and not "speaking" that Niels becomes an exile, one that "knows" the Canadian ways (Clara's) but does not "speak" them, that is, he fails both to relate to them and to understand them. Niels's "extra-European-ness" is working towards reconciliation between the Old World and the New. He works his self-image out of the painfully low representation where "he looked upon himself as belonging to a special race – a race not comprised in any limited nation, but one that cross-sectioned all nations: a race doomed to everlasting extinction and yet recruited out of the wastage of all other nations" (*Settlers* 139) towards the stance of

a convalescent who has, for many weeks and months, been forbidden to move and who, tentatively, first stirs a finger and then a hand...furtively, almost ashamed of the realization of powers in him returning, re-awakening...He felt as if he must hold still so as not to frighten away what was preparing in him: a new health, a new strength, a new hope, a new life...". (*Settlers* 260)

I would say that the above quotations are evidence of how Grove presents the evolution of the immigrant character from lack of self-esteem to a tentative but promising faith in the future. If we admit that Niels in many respects masks the persona of Frederick Philip Grove, then Niels's almost obsessive insistence to start all over again is a see-through guise of Grove's own obsession with beginning new books. Niels's impulse towards repetition also accounts for his desire to fill painful gaps that come up on his way

towards self-realization. Hence, when Ellen rejects him, his old vision (of a family of his own, with wife and children) undergoes a “gradual negation” (*Settlers* 138) and he replaces it by a new dream that contains “a longing to leave and to go to the very margin of civilization, there to clear a new place; and when it was cleared and people began to settle about it, to move on once more, again to the very edge of pioneerdom, and to start it all over anew...” (*Settlers* 139). While this is a plain definition of the pioneer, it also encompasses a definition of the writer who, upon completion of a book becomes the author outside the text who must relinquish his creation to the public. Therefore, to cover this newly created gap the writer has to repeat the magic, ritual gesture of writing until he becomes “limp as a rag” (*In Search of Myself* 387). In *Settlers* Niels’s obsession is with “driving, driving...” (42, 138, 191), clearing new land and it’s an almost mechanical act of re-construction, returning to the very beginning every time in the hope that all those hampering gaps will be eventually filled or made to disappear.

The main force behind Niels in this “enterprise” is the woman, because she is the completing part of his vision and of his dream. His self-realization depends on material prosperity and a future safety. The latter can be achieved by means of a family made up of wife and children. Niels not only constructs a house, as a personal organization of chaotic space, but he also lays out an imaginary “blueprint” (Knonägel 105) for his wife. In this process, it seems to me that Grove’s protagonist performs an instance of what Spivak calls “othering,” that is, “a projection of one’s codes on to what is perceived to be vacant -- or emptied -- territory of the other” (Turner 8). Niels is so caught up by his

vision that he merely fills the template with depersonalized names: Ellen, Clara. He pays no attention to the person behind the name, since emotional is not one of the elements that fulfil his idea of self-achievement. On the contrary, he considers emotion a hampering element to be repressed. Evidence to support this attitude is the fact that Niels describes the two women (Clara and Ellen) in terms of physical appearance, not once showing a trace of preoccupation with their inner selves. Grove goes to great lengths to record thorough details of clothing, attitude, and expression, all of which point to outside appearance. Hence, Ellen strikes Niels with “her complexion, a pure Scandinavian white” and with the expression on her face that “held him” (*Settlers* 15); Clara is introduced in terms of elaborate clothing and with close attention paid to her face: “She was dressed in a remarkably pretty and becoming way, with ruffles around her plump, smooth skinned, though rather pallid face” (*Settlers* 25). The detail of the face points to the idea of mask and depersonalization that befits Niels’s “blueprint.” Furthermore, Niels is haunted by the two women who represent the physical and the ideal, somehow spiritual side of his wandering self. Clara Vogel is the physical symbol of his desire, the carnal passion that he negates; as a woman she is ephemeral and flighty. “Her last name, Vogel, meaning bird [in German] ” as Smaro Kamboureli states, “may well be intended to suggest her flightiness” (*Scandalous Bodies* 71). In describing Clara’s wardrobe through Niels’s astonished eyes, Grove focuses on the “feathery” details perhaps to suggest the woman’s superficiality, her “feather lightness,” or at least her being perceived as such in the context of the rough countryside. Thus her “chiffonier [was] filled with a multitudinous

arrangement of incomprehensible, silky and fluffy garments, so light and thin that you could crush them in the hollow of your hand” (*Settlers* 149). An equally astonishing revelation for Niels is the fact that his wife is a mask, with dyed hair and lots of make up. The “unmasking” episodes (157, 195) can be read in several ways, but what strikes me as most relevant in the context of Grove’s operating symbols throughout the novel is the arresting difference between appearance and reality which I take as another of Grove’s subtle allusions to the incompatibility between city and country, to the expected misreading of an urban (bourgeois) element in the context of the rural reality. The befitting rural figure (though she too undergoes certain transformations towards femininity) is Ellen, who is presented gradually, as tough, impersonal, rather manly (“She was so utterly impersonal”; *Settlers* 19), then somewhat yielding into a more humane figure (“She seemed taller, slenderer than she had looked; more girlish, younger even; above all, less impersonal”; 75), and in the end, to befit the forty-year old Niels, Ellen is “a middle-aged woman [...] with shell-rimmed glasses, [...] her complexion [...] still that pure Scandinavian white,” with a stern face where “lay hidden the dream, the unfulfilled, uncompromising dream” (257). In Ellen’s figure Grove puts much of Niels’s own dream, his vision, his longing for his mother and for his wife, the mother of his children, a fulfillment of his rootedness. Ellen is therefore the figure charged with the heaviness and darkness of the past and with the promise of the future. Grove has Niels see this and this is why the ultimate feeling that links the two is love not passion. This

love has the power to invert the meaning of the past, from “barrier” to “bond” (“Between them there stands the past; not as a barrier now; as a bond” *Settlers* 263).

This distinction between love and passion is quite unique in the literature of the 1920s, where romance stormed over characters with devastating fits of passion. If we read the two women as embodiments of love (Ellen) and passion (Clara), then Clara’s death becomes more than “a symbol for repressed desire” (Kamboureli 72). It becomes an important step in the re-establishment of order. The message behind her death could be that on the tough, demanding prairie there is no place for weak flightiness and for passions or desires that disconnect the individual from the land. But Clara’s death is the result of murder and this problematizes the idea of subsequent order. With the hate between Clara and Niels escalating to a peak point, the plot is stuck in such a way that only an extreme act can restore interest. Therefore, Grove’s resorting to murder would have been accounted for as a revisitation of Tess d’Urberville’s murder of Alec (she too murders her lover who is the embodiment of her uncontrolled desires). Hardy’s novel ends with the suggestion that Tess will pay with her life for the life taken. Grove moves away from this resolution and in so doing he not only incurs feminist and ethical distaste but he also breaches the credibility of Niels as a viable character. Niels’s rebirth in the last chapter seems to me like a sudden break in the point of view that focalizes the protagonist’s inside.

Settlers of the Marsh is a fictional inquiry into the “battle within” that the immigrant fights. It is Grove’s insistence on the view from inside that paradoxically

justifies the novel's realism, for without inside knowledge of the immigrant experience, how can its outside representation be made believable? In other words, Grove creates the story of a prairie community based on the gaps and silences and ambitions that make up the people's selves from the inside. Grove's novel is important for Canadian writing mainly because his realism does not go by the book, because he is constantly negotiating between the world behind the curtain (how it was) and the world in front of the curtain (how it was seen). *Settlers'* world is one whose reality is best rendered by silence and by linguistic choice. The Canadian prairie surfaces not so much as harsh landscape as it turns into atmosphere, partly, I would say, created by the ghosts that every new settler carries along. In *Unnamed Country*, Dick Harrison speaks about the ghostlessness of the Canadian prairie that is due to a "lack of fiction which makes a place entirely real" (Harrison IX). Grove peoples the Canadian prairie with immigrants' "spirits" and he constructs his stories around these spirits and "the silence of the grave" which accompanies them and which "was still more perfect, still more uncanny and ghostly, because it left the imagination entirely free, without limiting it by even as much as a suggestion" (*Over Prairie Trails* 46).

Grove's *Settlers* does "suggest" a completely new construction of a "Canadian" literary form. Gleaming with flashes of European hints (the intertextual reference to *Madame Bovary* and the revisitation of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*), Grove's novel paradoxically voices a silencing. Thus, it does not record the immigrant loss of identity, of language and of spirit. Rather it recalculates the "loss of" as a "loss into," and

therefore a wandering into silence. Grove's immigrant does not lose his identity to the point where he has to re-invent himself from ground zero. He eventually recuperates the central points of the self, that is, the "things spiritual" ("Nationhood" 151): mind, soul and heart. This re-invention I suggest is not merely of himself (the author and Niels), but of himself as Canadian. Grove's immigrant does not lose his language; he silences it as he wanders into the bilingual (Swedish and English) maze. Is then *Settlers of the Marsh* "an instruction in a tongue somewhat foreign to the ear unattuned to silence" (La Bossière 152)? Or is it instruction in the language of the profoundly Canadian anxiety of settlement? Grove's immigrant does not lose his spirit; he redefines it in terms of spiritual experience, which opposes love to passion, the material and the economic to the emotional. While Grove had the privilege of "fluency" in both cultures (of the immigrant and of the host), he situated himself inside the psychological turmoil of his immigrant character, addressing the outside Canadian reader. Grove performed the double translation I spoke of earlier (between the Old and the New Canadians) by the literal use of past and present. The story of Niels Lindstedt and of his fellow settlers is narrated in the present English language, with constant references (still in English) to the Swedish past, but with an unuttered yet implied future. Thus, *Settlers of the Marsh* may contain future Canadian promises, but the future voice is shrouded in silence.

Chapter V

The Spiritual Settlers

At the beginning of this thesis I portrayed Canadian literature as an imaginative performance of nation building. I also asserted that literary writing holds a special place in the formation of a national consciousness since it is a powerful tool that enables one to peek into the different spiritualities that compose the Canadian mosaic. In the context of Canadian literature, ethnic writers' response to their being downplayed as mute because foreign hence inferior, exploded in the 1920s. It was at that time that the image of the "ideal" ("digestible") immigrant was exposed as illusory. Earlier novels of romantic pioneering (Connor's *Foreigner* [1909]) had presented the immigrant as devoid of spiritual substance, such that he or she could be completely melted away into the English-Canadian culture. Laura Salverson's attempt to pioneer, on the one hand, her own position as an Icelandic Canadian writer and on the other hand an insight into the "foreign" Icelandic group using the English language, at the time did not work as a double achievement like she perhaps had hoped. It brought her isolation and exiled her from her own ethnic group. I would say that had she been applauded by the members of her community, the larger Canadian audience might have paid closer attention to her message.

Frederick Philip Grove's self-infatuation, nevertheless substantiated by his erudition, and his fabricated identity outside the context of any specific group, have problematized his ethnicity to the extent to which it can only be approached in terms of his writing. In other words, Grove's ethnicity should be judged only on condition that we have a clear definition of an ethnic writer. Therefore, is Grove ethnic because he was not born in Canada and he writes about immigrants? Or is he ethnic because he speaks for a "race" inside the Canadian nation? On the one hand, Grove's writing is ethnic to the extent to which he articulates Canadian identity from inside its multi-ethnic component. However, Grove's "performance" of the ethnic narrative is open to critique because he does not write as an escape from silence. He does not narrate the stories of certain ethnic groups, and he does not encase his created "world" in a crystal bowl, thus making its "foreignness" transparent. Instead of "explaining" the plurality of Canada (in which he firmly believed), he shows *how* Canada is plural, all the time emphasizing the uniting force of "here." On the other hand, Salverson presents the Icelandic segment of Canada with the purpose of "explaining" their ethnicity as a distinguishing trait. She does put her Icelanders in a crystal bowl and her writing moves around it, highlighting flashes of different everyday instances. She makes sure to focus on the Icelandic specificity of these instances. The writer assumes a position inside the Icelandic group, however never completely detached from the Canadian audience. In this stance, she translates from one spirituality (Icelandic) for both cultures: Canadian and Icelandic. While she makes her characters transparent to outside scrutiny, she does so not to expose them as inferior and

uncivilized, but to expose the dominant group's preconceptions and cultural blindness. In this sense, the episode with the "teaching" of Miss Wake, the English teacher (*Viking* 137-9), stands out as an instance of the immigrant's re-positioning of his or her identity centers for the sake of adaptation to the outside routine of English-Canadian life. But this episode is also an exemplification of the defeat of the European ritual of conquest, where "the other" is considered to "exist only as an empty sign" (Turner 8) on to which the Europeans transferred their "own codes of cultural recognition" (Turner 8). Miss Wake's behaviour fits the pattern of the European (English, Spanish or French) whose colonizing ritual was based on a denial or emptying out of the indigenous cultures to justify the imposition of their own colonizing "codes of cultural recognition" (Turner 8). By applying the same "procedure," the Anglo-Canadian dominant group was attempting to assimilate the immigrant minority ("sub-European," inferior because of non-Anglo origin). The *other* Europeans, in this case Icelanders, were commonly labelled as uncivilized and primitive, in need of absorption by the "superior" English group. As a result of having her stereotypes overturned, Miss Wake feels "chagrined" and her "esteemed superiority" goes through a severe "diminishing" (*Viking* 137).

Laura Salverson and Frederick Philip Grove reshaped Canadian writing with their choice of subject matter, which, while not new in itself (the settlement of the prairies had been dealt with by earlier writers), was presented from new perspectives. Laura Salverson chose an insider's point of view, that is, a spokesperson *from* the Icelandic crystal bowl *to* the English-Canadian audience. Thus, the writer exercises her narratorial privilege of

accessing the immigrant world of Gimli both as one of their own and as a “tourist” into their world. In this “fluid” point of view she compacted the story of memory within the story of imagination. *The Viking Heart* records an imagined community of Icelanders that is based on the memory created by Salverson’s parents. While, for the purpose of her book, Salverson “imagines” the community, she “reports” the unimagined (i.e. real) specificity of the Icelandic character and way of life. Her immigrants are performers of sacred rituals of re-generation and re-presentation of the Icelandic spirit, of the heart. In so doing, the members of the community not only justify their existence as spiritual beings, keen on preserving their ancestral stance, but they also place and adjust the Icelandic tile in the Canadian mosaic. Thus, the Icelandic component of the Canadian nation comes out as a statement of spiritual strength that intervenes in the host culture’s representation of the immigrant through a subversion of the stereotypical view of “foreign” as inferior. This component demands readjustment on the part of the host culture’s representation of itself as complete and shows it to be in need of the link (provided by the Icelandic spirit) to a history that views emigration and settlement as an act of ancient glory. As Dick Harrison notes, Canada’s prairies “lacked the fiction which makes a place entirely real” (*Unnamed Country* IX). Writers like Grove and Salverson imagined and named the missing “ghosts” of the Manitoba prairie. Grove invented the prairie ghosts and he imagined the fiction of their reality; Salverson “translated” the Icelandic ghosts into Canadian history.

Grove's perspective, while opening up the gates to realism, offers the story of a unique ritual of relocation: the land is "cosmicized and then inhabited" (Eliade, *The Myth* 10). By cosmicization Eliade means organization, reinstatement of cosmos in chaos. He explains how this necessary ritual is common to any process of "settlement in a new, unknown country" where "every territory occupied for the purpose of being inhabited or utilized as *Lebensraum*⁵ is first of all transformed from chaos into cosmos; that is, through the effect of ritual this space is given a "form" which makes it become real" (*The Myth* 10-11). Grove shows this ritual of cosmicization in the symbolic importance of the house and in the cultivation of the land: "Amundsen's house represented a future; this one [the Lunds'], the past: Amundsen's growth, this one, decay" (*Settlers* 28). By building the house in a certain way, with "the front room, a sort of hall: a wide, hardwood staircase, without banisters so far, [that] led up into the upper story. Behind the front room lay the dining room from which a door led to the lean-to kitchen to the east" and upstairs "two rooms [...], half joined, half parted by a little landing" (*Settlers* 88), Niels lays the foundation for his new reality. Between Amundsen's and Lund's houses (which represent the future and the past respectively), Niels's represents the present, which is organized yet unfurnished, that is, nonpersonalized. For the time being and in expectancy of "the wife," Niels's house is a place of absence. By contrast, Salverson's characters live in houses that are not only organized spaces, but they are places of intense presence, where Icelandic spirituality is narrated into dynamic plot.

⁵ Living space (Germ.)

With *Settlers*, the narrating perspective concentrates on a downplaying of the plot in favour of the character. Grove's settler is a fictional yet convincing recreation of the writer's theory of the "New" Canadians who "have something to give as well as receive; and what they have to give is vastly more than the motive power of arm and back; they bring a spiritual heritage as well as their brawn" ("Canadians Old and New" 174). Different from Salverson, who presents spirituality as an explicit performance of principles and rituals, Grove includes spirituality in his protagonist's vision. Although he too presents ritual performances, Grove never explicitly identifies them as such. Niels's spirituality, as it is dramatically contrasted to Clara's superficiality, covers two of the three "provinces" that Grove claims to compose the spiritual realm: the emotional and, to a certain extent, the religious.

Very strong on the emotional side, Niels's vision carries with it the "trick of ancestry" that paradoxically keeps him back and drives him forward. He is well aware of the inherited belief in Fate which "had been fixed from all eternity" (*Settlers* 38) and which he has to overcome. He is also aware that his emigration "had given him a second sight, had awakened powers of vision and sympathy in him which were far beyond his education and upbringing" (*Settlers* 64). I would read Niels's determination to build the house in terms of a ritual re-construction of his vision of Canada as the new locus of his transplanted and adapted spirituality, as an organized spiritual space, his "refuge, his hermitage..." (240); Niels's house becomes his sacred cabin where the "roof symbolizes the vault of heaven, the floor the Earth, the four walls the four directions of cosmic

space” (Eliade, *Myth and Reality* 46). The fact that the house is much more than a shelter for Niels is sustained by the changes in meaning that the house has throughout the novel: thus, it starts as a materialization of his hope, “his home;[...] what he had wished and longed and worked for” (*Settlers* 88), then it becomes a place “he entered only when it could not be helped” (*Settlers* 177), a place which “would always remind him of, always oppress him with, the thought of the years which he had lived here, not alone...” (*Settlers* 242), and in the end, between the lines, it is again part of the vision which “arises between them [Ellen and Niels], shared by both” (*Settlers* 265).

As far as the religious realm of Niels’s spirituality is concerned, it is silenced from early in the novel, with a very brief statement that both denounces and announces an intriguing silence over the matter. Sitting at table with the Lunds, Niels remarks: “No grace was said” (*Settlers* 32). Strangely enough, there is little mention of church: Nelson’s wedding takes “place at the end of the regular service in the German church at Odensee. The pastor, in courtesy to the young people, merely changed into English for the ceremony” (*Settlers* 51); at Amundsen’s funeral the German pastor gives some kind of service in the kitchen. These suppressed references show that the religious is part of a loss; it is part of an absence perhaps replaced by the mother image which Niels attaches to moments of homely emotion: “He longed to be with his mother, to feel her gnarled, calloused fingers rumpling his hair, and to hear her crooning voice droning some old tune...” (*Settlers* 59). Seriously doubting the idea of divinity (“Who was God anyway?” *Settlers* 117), Niels turns the image of his unfortunate mother into his religion, to which

he repeatedly turns through visions hauntingly reminding him of his heritage, and of the power that lies dead inside: “There was pity in the look of the ancient mother: pity with him who was going astray: pity with him, not because of what assailed him from without; but pity with what he was in his heart...” (59). As an act of reparation for all of his mother’s miseries, Niels constructs his life in Canada on steps that his mother would have taken, and he ends up wondering, hoping that his mother has somehow managed to survive in him (*Settlers* 117).

The house in Salverson’s view is a place both of material progress and of spiritual continuity. Although it does not have the same powerful influence on the lives of the characters, as it does in Grove’s novel, the house is part of the measure of welfare and “proving up” in the immigrant’s life. Its spiritual dimension is reinforced by the fact that all the rituals that attest to Icelandic ancestry happen inside the house: the making of the coffee, the readings and the singing. Especially the last two bear a strong emotional value in that they not only foster the Icelandic tradition, but they also signal the powerful link between mother and son. As a child, little Thor listens to his mother’s readings; as a man, he is the one to do the readings for his mother. Moreover, and very importantly, it is through Thor and his readings in English that the Icelandic tradition begins to be blended into the Canadian culture. It is interesting how this specifically Icelandic tradition of house reading is aligned to the Canadian context through language, yet not modified by translation: Thor reads to his mother English poems, sharing with her not only the *other* new language but also bits of the *other* culture. Canada and Iceland come together again

in Thor's response to his mother's appeal not to forget his Norse blood: "Breathes there a man with soul so dead who never to himself has said: This is my own, my native land," [...] I am not likely to forget the heritage of my fathers, but I can best prove my Norse blood by honouring this country which is mine" (*Viking* 294).

Thus, Salverson's book works towards a definition of the Canadian identity in exclusive relation and not by contrast with the other, meaning that as they are presented in *The Viking Heart*, the Icelanders are as much Canadians by virtue of their loyalty to the land. They refuse the hyphen because they are neither divided from, attached to nor lost into the Canadian nation; they are an important component, which informs this nation.

Grove's "New" Canadian, on the other hand, though not entirely assimilated, leaves the naming of the origin unuttered, because it remains inside, very private. His settler has to wage a different war within, in order to tame the outer reality. Perhaps in this lies the thrill that Grove injected into the Canadian realist novel: reality is controlled from the inside, therefore it is basically subjective, and it can be constructed and deconstructed with tools that come from the inside. Niels Lindstedt constructs his own reality around the ambition of proving up and his "blueprint" (Knonägel 105) of self-achievement features house and family. Because he is under extreme pressure to control his emotions, Niels becomes mechanically inhuman. He builds his vision around the image of "wife," which excludes any consideration of passion, and love becomes a state of the mind rather than an emotion. This love induces wisdom and self-control: "It is not

passion that will unite them; what will unite them is love... They are quieter, less apt to rush at conclusions, to close in a struggle with life..." (*Settlers* 263).

Similarly, I suggest, in *The Viking Heart*, whose characters are swept up and down by emotional crises, there is one character who turns away from passion, because she gets totally entangled in the material temptations of the New World. Ninna turns away from her family and she becomes extra-Icelandic. Perhaps she represents a spiritual hollowness that is non-Icelandic and hence she must be assimilated into the English culture. However, Ninna will not know passionless, wisdom-giving love like Niels because unlike him, whose marriage is meant to fulfill his Swedish dream, she gets married to get away from her Icelandic family. Nonetheless, in the context of settlement and the building of nation, Grove and Salverson use the symbol of love, as a central element able to build a strong Canadian nation. Niels and Thor are the two heroes who, by their gift of unique love (spirit, soul and heart) embody the "New" Canadian.

One key symbol that is common to both novels is the mother figure. Both Salverson and Grove connect the mother with one's origin and the preservation of one's spirituality. In *The Viking Heart* the mother image is more obviously down to earth in the sense that Salverson presents the relationship of mother and child (with emphasis on the mother-son) as part of the plot, and as part of the spiritual connection with the past (the house readings performed by mother and son). Symbolically, I would say, Salverson performs a reversion of roles: the mother who once taught her son (then a little boy) lets herself be taught by him (now a man). This reversion echoes the larger scale re-

positioning of the Icelandic tradition within the Canadian nation. The mother-child exchange of knowledge inside the family echoes the host-guest exchange inside the nation. In *Settlers of the Marsh* the mother image accompanies the protagonist's vision and signals his quest for a coherent self. As he watches Sigurdson in his last moments, Niels meditates on the meaning of his (Niels's) being "a workman in God's garden" (*Settlers* 117). In this paradisaical stance, the mother image overlaps with Sigurdson's:

Here lay a lump of flesh, being transformed in its agony from flesh in which dwelt thought, feeling, a soul, into flesh that would rot and feed worms till it became clay... Once a woman had been, his mother. She had been young, pretty, pulsating, vibrating in every fibre with life: at best she was a heap of brittle bones...(*Settlers* 117).

This reflection prompts Niels's identity questions: "Does she live on? In him, Niels?"(117) Interestingly, Grove opposes the mother image - carrier of spiritual values - to the other image, of Ellen's mother, which denigrates the idea of marriage into an abominable reunion. Niels's dream survives the challenge because it carries the pure Swedish, "ancient mother" values, untouched by the bitterness of immigrant struggle. With *Settlers of the Marsh*, Frederick Philip Grove challenges Canadian culture to rethink the process of settlement as Canadian experience. The main achievement of the novel is that it does fulfill the author's highest aspiration in life: it produces a "gap" in the conscience of its reader and then it "exact[s] from the reader the energy and intelligence" (Steiner 78-9) to fill it with his or her personal interpretation. Thus, Grove's declared "sum and substance of achievement," the "gap" (*Settlers* 117) is the one that intervenes in Canadian cultural life.

Laura Salverson's *The Viking Heart* proposes a spiritual "enlightenment" of Canadianness. It presents Canadian cultural life with its Icelandic component, it ultimately recomposes Canadian identity as a mosaic of "hearts" (spiritualities) of which, Salverson claims, one of the most powerful is the Viking. The spiritualities (Icelandic and Swedish) that Salverson and Grove interjected into Canadian culture in the 1920s have become peculiar to this place, to "here." Hence, I propose this answer to Northrop Frye's famous question "Where is here?": it is where the mosaic of hearts (i.e. Canada's ethnicities) becomes radiant, glowing with Canadian spirit.

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