Book Reviews

Irene Gammel, *Sexualizing Power in Naturalism: Theodore Dreiser and Frederick Philip Grove.* Calgary: U Calgary P, 1994. pp. 272. $24.95.

Some writers, for whatever reason, never seem to go away. Dreiser and Grove are among these; and no matter what kinds of doubts are raised about their abilities, Grove's in particular, their presence is unavoidable. That they have been coupled by critics in Canada, at least for several decades, suggests shared affinities, despite Camille La Bossière's assertion that "there is dissonance in the comparison" (149). Irene Gammel's study, which endeavours to compare them bearing dissonance in mind, should become the indispensable text for any further studies of either or both.

Entitled *Sexualizing Power in Naturalism: Theodore Dreiser and Frederick Philip Grove,* Gammel emphasizes the three nodes of her reading of these authors. While their styles and ideologies can hardly be dissociated from naturalism, the coupling of sexuality and power indicates clearly Gammel's position: "In naturalist fiction, it is the principle of power itself that is sexualized" (12). Because of naturalism's gender bias, however, the exertion of power is structured toward the advantage of certain kinds of males, assisted by the connivance of their authors. The argument is developed primarily through a thorough, cautious reading of Foucault, as well as contemporary French feminists and their American counterparts. The result is a refreshing rereading of Dreiser and Grove that gives greater scope to the feminist voices of their texts and deftly moves their texts away from the monologic discourse that critics have for the most part structured them as.

The book is organized into 5 parts, the first of which opens naturalism to a Foucauldian reading. These chapters argue convincingly that the naturalist desire to find the truth of sexuality designed to unsettle bourgeois faith in its social and pyschological norms is often belied by their texts. Combining both a use of Foucault and feminisms, Gammel argues that naturalism, particularly as exemplified in Dreiser's and Grove's fictions, is ideologically contradictory and therefore available to dialogic confrontation. Its contradictions turn upon sexuality

and power characterized both by "its resisting impulses and its opposite function as the arm of power; its inscription of desire as a driving force of consumer culture and as a force that often moves beyond the boundaries of the systems of order that wish to contain it" (54). Woman as the sign of resistance and the force that must be contained becomes the ambivalent subject and object of the power with which naturalism is charged.

The second and third sections pursue this ambivalence primarily in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and Grove's early German novel *Fanny Essler.* For both authors the protagonists of these novels pose profound challenges as representatives of the "new woman," and their challenges are sufficient to indicate the central contradiction of naturalism's preoccupation with sexuality. For Dreiser, it leads to a crisis that "reflects his (feminist) commitment to inscribing in naturalism women's new powers, but it also reveals his simultaneous (antifeminist) attempt to contain these very powers with the boundaries of the genre" (98). While a similar conclusion is drawn in respect of Grove's portrayal of Fanny Essler (118), Gammel problematizes Essler's role for Grove by demonstrating how she was not only distortingly based on the story of his first wife, Baroness Elsa, but also formed the subtext of his own fictionalized life story in *A Search for America.* As a consequence, Grove in Canada is able to project himself androgynously into his texts so that the narrator, often ideologically aligned with Grove himself, "continues to hover on the borderline between (stereotypical) masculinity and femininity, between narrative subject- and object-positions." By doing so, "the novel's overt claim of his rebirth as a 'new' man is subverted by the novel's covert intertext" (149).

The final two sections examine bourgeois and patriarchal modes of power and the response they elicit. Here, despite an effort to maintain the dialogical force of naturalism, it becomes increasingly apparent that women are excessively contained by the discursive powers of naturalism. Dreiser's naturalism is exposed as an "old boy's club," showing that "the (homo)eroticized male complicity on its subjugation (and, perhaps, its continued fear) of the female body" (184). Grove arrives steadfastly, once his German roots seem safely occulted, at the same position: "The male—patriarchal—reality position triumphs, with the feminist voices of rebellion contained within the genre's boundaries" (230). The opening of a dialogic text is firmly closed.

While space does not permit a full engagement with some of the book's positions, I would like to raise two small points and a make a querulous remark. Bearing in mind that these novels are most fruitfully construed as dialogic, it should be noted that the occasional overture to Virgil could be more carefully integrated into the argument. While it is possible to invoke "Virgilian telos" (199) as a way of qualifying Sam Clark's behaviour in Grove's *The Master of the Mill,* general support for Gammel's argument can be found in recent Virgilian criti-

cism that reads Virgil as equally dialogic through which Dido and other antagonists of Aeneis's mission are endowed with more strategic force than earlier, more sentimental interpretations allow. Next, a more supple understanding of the Latin verb *gigno* could be developed in the discussion of Dreiser's *The "Genius."* While it is true that "to beget and to produce" are appropriate classical meanings of the word which are in close agreement with Zola's emphasis upon the writer's life as ceaseless production, the meaning of "genius" in the story is also affected by the fact that the genius is an artist. Drawing upon the notion of genius as tutelary deity as it survives in the expression "genius loci," both English and German writers of the late eighteenth century were pleased to construct the writer and artist in what became a standard Romantic sense as divinely inspired, rather than simply toiling away at imitating nature. Finally, my minor complaint: if Grove was in search of America and found Canada, is it possible to distinguish these two writers as respectively Canadian and American? Needless to say, to pose the question thus can tend toward a certain essentialism which would be somewhat inappropriate in a study designed to distinguish ways of writing the male and female body. Nor does the argument make any claims about national difference. Nevertheless, the concluding paragraphs of the chapter on *A Search for America* raises tantalizing questions about the protagonist's "borderline status," as well as the fact that he "deliberately speaks from the margins," which are clearly seen as "margins of America" (148). As Marshall McLuhan once remarked, Canada is a borderline case, and he is only one among many who have noted the same condition, as Russell Brown has exhaustively documented in *Borderlines and Borderlands in English Canada: The Written Line* (McLuhan cited in Brown 16). Grove, as Gammel and others have often argued, is himself a borderline case and, as such, is suggestive of something that might distinguish him from Dreiser. But when I ask for this, I am only asking for just a little more dessert, and neither my observations nor this comment are meant in any to way to detract from the achievement of this study.

Gammel's project is manifold, designed to conjoin Dreiser and Grove in an exemplary essay in comparative literature. Knowledgeably based in Foucault and French feminisms, it points clearly and subtly at the voices of women in their texts that are at once opened and closed by the ideology of naturalism. Thus Gammel is able to construct the dialogic form of their work and the many ways it is imbricated with aspects of the authors' lives, thus showing herself to be a superlative resisting reader. Inevitably, given the control exercised by the authors over their work, Gammel's efforts to expose their dialogic character is somewhat frustrated. Their work constitutes a crisis, but a crisis contained. It has frequently been noted that Grove's "sympathies," as he once remarked, "were always with the women" (Grove 224), but his

mind, finally, was with the men. Sympathy can only go so far, under such circumstances.

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Zohreh T. Sullivan. *Narratives of Empire: The Fictions of Rudyard Kipling.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993. pp. ix, 199. $49.95.

To pose Kipling thoroughly and effectively as a site of inquiry for a decolonizing cultural critique, a scholar must recognize, I think, Kipling's complex multifacetedness as a writing subject, his inscription of a multiplicity of interdependent yet incommensurate subject positions and perspectives. Kipling represents and, to an appreciable degree, constitutes what Edward Said describes as modern imperialism's "consolidated vision"; he writes "from the perspective of a massive colonial system whose economy, functioning, and history had acquired the status of a virtual fact of nature" (Said 134). Yet Kipling is also the writer who registers and represents the imperial project—most particularly the British imperial project in India—as an emotionally and psychically fraught, deeply personal concern; he is the writer formed in and by that project, one who, in his nonage, prattled Urdu to Indian attendants by day and dutifully lisped English "Good Nights" to parents, who suffered the all-too-typical, mid-childhood "abandonment" of solitary repatriation to England, and who, duly submitted to the complex trials of English schooling, returned in late adolescence to an India at once strange and familiar. To state the case more concisely, Kipling envisions his "empire" from a totalizing, synoptic perspective and, at the same time, from various, shifting, unstable perspectives of subjective engagement. Very aptly, then, Zohreh T. Sullivan considers the quintessential British imperial author as "the quintessentially divided imperial subject" (6), whose writing manifests "the competing forces of imperial representation and domination" (9) and "gives voice to the full fragmentation of the colonizer's many subject positions and ambivalences" (11).

Narratives of Empire: The Fictions of Rudyard Kipling opens with the observation that Kipling's fiction "is haunted by a variety of familial configurations" (1), which coincide with yet problematize British colonial discourse's generalized inscription of "[t]he metaphor of empire as