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Review of *F. P. Grove in Europe and Canada: Translated Lives* By Klaus Martens

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F. P. Grove in Europe and Canada: Translated Lives. By Klaus Martens. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001. Photographs, illustrations, afterword, notes, bibliography, index. xxxii + 351pp. \$34.95.

Canada's leading prairie author Frederick Philip Grove (1879-1948) had a predilection for strong and silent heroes: the unforgettable Niels Lindstedt in *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), Abe Spalding in *Fruits of the Earth* (1933), John Elliot in *Our Daily Bread* (1928). Grove's fictional landscape was a multicultural pot-pourri of immigrants from Sweden, Iceland, Germany, and Russia with new-world men and women transforming the prairie wilderness into fertile and flourishing settlements. Yet Grove, aka German author and translator Felix Paul Greve, was also a literary con man who led his audience down the garden path in a fictionalized autobiography, *In Search of Myself* (1946), a story that produced literary furor in 1973 when Douglas O. Spettigue published the first biography of this enigmatic writer.

In this richly detailed new biography, Klaus Martens explores Grove's German origins with meticulous detective work; he situates the author within Europe's turn-of-the-century culture of translation, before following Grove to the United States and then to Canada. The

tale is riveting, with numerous peaks and highlights. The reader is intrigued to learn of Grove's life in Sparta, Kentucky, in 1911, where the young author-immigrant was likely working as a teacher and trying his hand at tobacco farming, a somewhat quixotic enterprise for Grove, a fastidious and cerebral man with a lifelong love of stunningly elegant clothing but who also loved to pose as swarthy hobo, farm worker, and tree pruner in *A Search for America* (1927). Severe floods along the Eagle Creek spoiled the crop in Sparta in 1911, forcing farmers to take out heavy loans and mortgages or leading them to abandon farming altogether. No doubt Grove's profound sympathy for the western farmer was born here.

Not only is this biography meticulously researched, it is fun to read, as Martens explores Grove's life and work with sympathy and irony. Fascinating too is Grove's life with Elsa Ploetz, today better known as the New York Dada artist Baroness Elsa. A rich selection of illustrations and photographs of Grove and his world in Europe and in America further enhances the reader's enjoyment and appreciation of this new biography. Martens has given us an important resource that ultimately opens up a new window on the life and works of Canada's leading prairie pioneer author.

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