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The Pioneer Dream in Transition:
A Thematic Study of Selected Works of
Canadian Prairie Fiction

A Thesis

presented to the

Department of English

Lakehead University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the

degree of Master of Arts

by

© Vivian Hay

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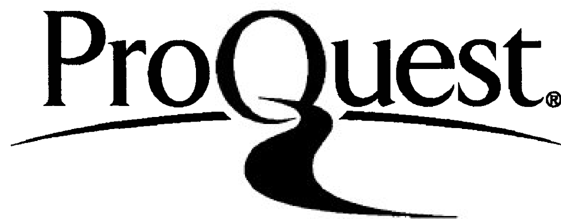

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Dedication

In memory of my grandparents, Edward and Sarah Tompkins, who were Canadian pioneers.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my appreciation to Lakehead University for the research grant which encouraged my studies in Canadian prairie fiction. My appreciation is also extended to Mr. Richard Bennett and his staff at the Elizabeth Dafoe Library, University of Manitoba, and to Mr. Leonard Grove of Toronto, for their helpfulness in directing my research of the Frederick Philip Grove Collection. The assistance of Public Archives Canada and the Canada Permanent Trust Co. in Ottawa is also acknowledged in my research of the Robert Stead papers. The reminiscences of Mr. Barney Ostenso are also gratefully acknowledged.

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Abstract

The pioneer dream, as a romantic theme in Canadian prairie fiction, portrayed the homesteader's quest for a paradisial life of wealth, freedom and happiness on the Canadian prairie. This same theme, treated in a realistic manner, was expanded to include the harsh personal sacrifices which accompanied the pioneer's romantic quest. This thesis will concentrate upon the novels of three authors that deal with the theme of the pioneer dream: Robert Stead's *The Homesteaders* (1916), *Neighbours* (1922), and *Grain* (1926); Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* (1925); and Frederick Philip Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925). The principal concern in this study is the transition from a romantic to a realistic novel in Canadian prairie fiction: *Settlers of the Marsh*, *Wild Geese*, and *Grain*. Stead's *The Homesteaders* and *Neighbours* are used to illustrate the romantic traditions of prairie fiction which viewed the West as a Garden of Eden and a golden land of opportunity.

This study attempts to show how Stead, Ostenso and Grove decided to recast a theme which for fifty years had fitted perfectly into the fictional mold of the regional idyll. Each author exposes and rejects the materialistic nature of the pioneer dream by revealing both the romantic promise of the prairie and the harsh consequences suffered

by the pioneer. In this transition from a romantic to a realistic treatment of a familiar theme, strong new themes emerge in these three novels of 1925: isolation, the narrow-mindedness of the pioneer outlook, and the disintegration of the family. The element of spiritual renewal which concludes each novel is cast within the realistic framework of the pioneer's experiences on the Canadian prairie.

Introduction

The watershed between romantic and realistic Canadian prairie fiction occurred with the publication of three novels: Settlers of the Marsh (1925) by Frederick Philip Grove, Wild Geese (1925) by Martha Ostenso, and Grain (1926) by Robert J. C. Stead. Each novel reworked a familiar theme which had first appeared fifty years before in Alexander Begg's Dot It Down (1871), a theme which had served Canadian romantic fiction well in the novels of Arthur Stringer, Nellie McClung and Ralph Connor. The theme of the pioneer dream as it was used in these three later, more sombre novels of prairie homesteading, developed an ironic tension which is outlined by Susan Wood Glicksohn in her introduction to the 1973 edition of Stead's The Homesteaders:

> . . . It is a national version of the Quest theme--the story of a dream that is lost in the finding. The pioneer sets out, a young man with high ideals, to seek both freedom and material success . . . in a new world. The pioneer finds himself, an aging man without the ideals and freedom he lost somewhere in the grinding work of surviving, pursuing a meaningless material success. . . .[1]

The idealistic nature of the pioneer's quest for a golden land of opportunity was emphasized by the romantic regional idylls of Ralph Connor, Nellie McClung, Arthur Stringer, and Robert Stead.[2] The ironic and more sombre aftermath of the

pioneer's romantic dream was detected by Laura Goodman Salverson in The Viking Heart (1923) and suggested in the realistic prairie fiction which followed: Settlers of the Marsh, Wild Geese and Grain. These realistic novels deal with aspects of the pioneer dream motif which were totally ignored in the regional idylls: the harshness of the prairie environment with which the homesteaders had to cope, the repressive personal isolation experienced on the prairie, and the disintegration of the family.

Desmond Pacey, in his interpretation of the development of Canadian prose fiction in Creative Writing in Canada and Literary History of Canada, sees a gradual blending of the historical romance of the Confederation period with the regional idyll of the early twentieth century and finally the development of the realistic novel of the 1920s:

> If the regional idyll blends on one side into the historical romance, it blends on the other into realistic fiction. . . . The differences, again, are differences of tone and attitude rather than of substance. The novels to be considered now, are, generally speaking, more sombre in tone, they probe more deeply into the lives of their characters, they treat more intensively the social environment, and they are less given to sentimental evasions. They seek, with varying degrees of success, to record and interpret the processes of ordinary life.[3]

T. D. MacLulich, in his article "Novel and Romance" objects to Pacey's theory of progression and claims that Pacey's theory of progression in Canadian fiction has an unfair and "built-in bias" towards realism. MacLulich states his objections to a historical theory which he considers

simplistic:

> The theory of a development towards realism has gained wide credence largely because critics have started with a built-in bias in its favour; they have felt, on what appear to be fundamentally moral grounds, that a progression towards realism <u>ought</u> to have taken place. The writer should face up to his social obligations; fiction should depict the actual world, not some escapist fantasy-land: these have been tacit critical axioms. Therefore, critics have equated realistic with "serious" fiction and non-realistic with less serious, more "popular" fiction. Realism and non-realism have been turned into value-judgments rather than simply being used as descriptive categories.[4]

MacLulich claims that both romantic and realistic attitudes are aesthetically valuable, and points to a historical progression in Canadian fiction in which romantic strains are evident in the realistic novels of Grove, Callaghan and MacLennan:

> Rather than a steady progression towards realism, the development of Canadian fiction reveals a tension between the romance and novel, between "romantic" and "realistic" ways of portraying the world.[5]

With his emphasis upon the blending of romance into realism, Pacey may have sensed the tension which MacLulich is emphasizing. Yet the aesthetic concerns of MacLulich and the historical concerns of Pacey are not irreconcilable. T. D. MacLulich has quite rightly qualified Pacey's theory of a "blending" of romance into realism in Canadian fiction.

The theory of a creative tension between romance and realism has particular merit in considering the theme of the pioneer dream as developed in the three novels studied. The problem facing these transitional authors seemed to be

which romantic elements to retain and which to discard in developing the new realistic thrust of the pioneer dream. Each author did so with varying degrees of aesthetic success in the thematic tension. The entire literary career of Robert Stead reveals an uneasy balance between romanticism and realism. The structure of Wild Geese projects an ironic tension between romanticism and realism which is developed effectively. Settlers of the Marsh blends realism with melodramatic characterization and the romantic dream of Niels Lindstedt for perfect happiness. Thus the term "realistic fiction" should not be applied in any purist sense to the historical watershed represented by these novels of 1925.

The term, realistic fiction, when applied to the thematic direction of Settlers of the Marsh, Wild Geese, and Grain refers to the subject matter which created an ironic tension. Romantic interpretations of the pioneer dream had dealt only with the idyllic vision of the prairie as a golden land of opportunity. The novels of 1925 in addition emphasized the darker aftermath of the pioneer dream, the personal price which the pioneer paid in attempting to achieve his romantic vision. In Grove's Settlers of the Marsh, the romantic dream of an innocent young settler, Niels Lindstedt, leads to harsh tragic consequences. In Ostenso's Wild Geese, the materialistic obsession of Caleb Gare is the instrument of destruction for his own family. In Stead's Grain, an unquestioned acceptance of the pioneer dream leads to the

destruction of Gander's personal life. These harsher aspects of prairie homesteading which were virtually ignored by the romantic regional idyll, are included in the more ironic pattern of life portrayed in realistic prairie fiction.

Despite the popularity of the purely romantic regional idyll, novels which provided a thematic tension between romanticism and realism did exist before 1925 among Canadian prairie novels. Even the earliest pioneer novel, Dot It Down (1871), written by Alexander Begg, is more than a sentimental love story set in the Red River Settlement as it provides "considerable accurate description of the conditions in both the Red River Settlement and the surrounding area, especially concerning the buffalo hunts, the farming techniques, the religious life, the political situation, and the dichotomy between the influences on the life of the settlement from Canada and the United States."[6] The lesser known pioneer novels of such early twentieth-century authors as H. H. Bashford and E. A. Wharton Gill represent the gradual shifting of the romantic view of prairie homesteading held by their popular contemporaries, Stringer, McClung, and Connor, to a more realistic view.[7]

In The Manitoban: A Romance (1904), H. H. Bashford conveys the double-edged nature of the pioneer dream within the conventional sentimental love plot. The English hero expresses his romantic dream of the Canadian prairie to his beloved:

"It's the goal of my desires. And it will be just the sort of life I love. And in time I'll get land, and cattle, and wheat." . . . [He] had been exultant as the gates of this promised land had swung open before him, with its visions of limitless prairies and its glamour of galloping and gold.[8]

Bashford soon satirizes this romantic illusion about Canadian homesteading in an ironic encounter between Charlie, a young English immigrant, and the Canadian farmers at the prairie train station:

"Are you goin' to work fer old man Luke?" he asked.
". . . You'll like it," he said.
"It's like Heaven," said another.
"There's no night there," observed a third.[9]

In a romantic Victorian scene where neighbouring homesteaders are gathered before a parlour piano, Bashford conveys Charlie's poignant realization of the dichotomy represented by the pioneer dream:

And a strange and rather battered little community it was, recruited from various lonely shanties, gathered here in Jack's parlour and wrapped about by the greatness of the plains--men, who had grown proof against disappointment and content with hardship, hiding with an instinctive unselfishness their several difficulties. . . . And poverty--how poor they were, how absolutely dependent on each year's crop for the maintenance of home and independence. And glamour--how long ago it had fled away before the stern realities of mortgaged land and frozen wheat, debts, and folly and bad luck. . . . At the close of the song the picture [of an English garden] vanished suddenly--and there again were the white plains, frozen, empty, immeasurable, and here were Jack and Tom and the rest in the little lean-to parlour.[10]

Despite the harshness of prairie homesteading, one of Charlie's neighbours decides to return to Canada after a brief visit to England:

> Why had he let himself drift thus dangerously away from life, from the real bitter peaceful life that had once been his and must assuredly be so again?[11]

This element of spiritual renewal gained through real struggle, a feature of the pioneer dream motif in The Settlers of the Marsh, Wild Geese and Grain, is evident in this novel of 1904 which bears all the earmarks of conventional romantic fiction.

E. A. Wharton Gill, another early prairie novelist, also reveals both the romantic and realistic nature of the pioneer dream in his novels, Love in Manitoba (1911) and A Manitoba Chore Boy (1912). In A Manitoba Chore Boy, seventeen year old Tom Lester notes that the Manitoba prairie with its "long stretches of dull, brown, dead-looking grass"[12] bears little resemblance to a garden. He also draws an ironic contrast between his romantic illusions about prairie farming and the reality which he encountered, in his description of a hailstorm:

> . . . The wheat fields were as flat as if they had been rolled, and a lot of the grain pounded and driven into the ground. . . . The hailstorm, like the mosquito, did not appear in any of the emigration literature they sent me when I wrote to that office in London.[13]

The element of spiritual renewal through struggle, a feature of the realistic treatment of the pioneer dream in the 1920s is also evident in this early prairie novel:

> I think I must have experienced now all the varieties which go to the making of the Manitoban climate, and, take it 'for all in all,' I like it; it's all on a grand scale, and there is none of the ever-lasting drizzle, which used to make me feel so muggy and dis-

contented with the world, and myself, 'at home'.[14]

Obviously the ironic tension between romantic illusions about prairie homesteading and the harsh realities which faced the pioneer was well-defined in these early prairie novels.

Rudy Wiebe, in a childhood memory of the prairie, recognizes the thematic complexity of fiction which attempts to define the pioneer's relationship with the land:

> I got out. The grass crunched dry as crumbs and in every direction the earth so flat another two steps would place me at the horizon, looking into the abyss of the universe. There is too much here, the line of the sky and grass rolls in upon you and silences you think too impossibly thin to remain in any part recognizably yourself. . . . In that wanting to find it is rooted . . . the feeling that to touch this land with words requires an architectural structure; to break into the space of the reader's mind with space of this western landscape and the people in it you must build a structure of fiction like an engineer builds a bridge or a skyscraper over and into space. A poem, a lyric will not do. You must lay great black steel lines of fiction, break up that space with huge design and, like fiction of the Russian steppes, build giant artifact. No song can do that; it must be giant fiction.
>
> The way a man feels with and lives with that living earth with which he is always laboring to live. Farmer or writer.[15]

In a letter written by Grove to E. J. Moore, the advertising manager of Ryerson Press (Nov. 21, 1925), the author of Settlers of the Marsh explained his method of adding dimension to the theme of the pioneer dream and thus writing "giant fiction":

> In writing Settlers of the Marsh, the author aimed at presenting the reaction of the Western Canadian landscape on the settler, and that of the settler on the landscape. He tries to present

> circumstances, conflicts, tragedies which do not merely happen but which spring with necessity from character and environment.
>
> At the same time, in depicting the eternal struggle, which forms the background of his work, between man and nature, he aimed at laying the stress, not so much on the external, economic things, on outward failure or success, as on the inner consequences of all happenings for the souls of the men and women involved.
>
> He himself considers as the distinguishing feature of his book the fact that all things are seen, as it were, from the inside, and weighted according as they widen or narrow down the hero's or the heroine's humanity.[16]

This statement could just as easily have been used as a foreword for Wild Geese or Grain. All three transitional novels: Settlers of the Marsh, Grain, and Wild Geese, add dimension to the theme of the pioneer dream through an ironic tension between romantic illusions and the "new discomforting truths"[17] of survival: the pioneer's quest for wealth in a land of golden opportunity is accompanied by isolation and family disintegration, while the illusion of heroic victory is accompanied by ultimate defeat. Each novel works through the romantic and realistic elements which make up this thematic tension and ends with some evidence of spiritual renewal.

The romantic aspect of this thematic tension is rooted in the historical reality of the Canadian prairie. The romantic promise of a golden land of opportunity is reflected in the free land offered the new settler in the Canadian West by the Dominion Lands Act of 1872:

> What Canada offered the new settler was set out in the Dominion Lands Act first enacted in 1872, and subsequently amended, though not altered in principle. Under this legislation the settler was granted a quarter section of free land, provided he lived on it and cultivated it for a period of three years. Moreover, an additional 160 acres, adjoining the initial holding could be placed under a three year pre-emption to purchase. A settler had to become a British subject before obtaining the final patent to his land.[18]

This statute attracted many settlers from Europe and also from Eastern Ontario, among them Nellie McClung's family, the Mooneys from Chatsworth in Grey County in 1880 and Robert J. C. Stead's family from Middleville in Lanark County in 1882.[19] Nellie McClung, in Clearing in the West, writes of the evening that her family listened spellbound to the tales which a young man told of his farming experiences on the Canadian prairie where "strawberries were so plentiful and luscious that his oxen's feet were red with them as he ploughed the willing sod."[20] According to McClung, this romantic vision of a golden land of opportunity incited her parents to pack up and move West.

Such unbounded optimism about the potential of prairie homesteading was supported by Clifford Sifton, the federal Minister of the Interior, who promoted the pioneer dream through North American newspaper advertisements and pamphlets. The titles of these pamphlets from the Department of the Interior were meant to entice Canadians who were farming unproductive land, Americans whose frontier lands were rapidly disappearing, and Europeans whose rigid class

structure and poverty made them respond to Sifton's advertisements. These pamphlets, entitled "The Last, Best West" (1906), "The Evolution of the Prairie by the Plow" and "The Wondrous West,"[21] were enormously successful in encouraging immigration to Canada and to the West in particular. The promises of fabulous wheat crops were largely realized by the new prairie homesteaders. From 1896 to 1901, wheat production in Canada increased from 1,855,274 bushels to 26,117,530 bushels with a "further threefold increase" taking place by 1911. Farm acreage in the Canadian west "expanded 125% and the value of field crops quadrupled . . . in the same period".[22] Thus in the early 1900s, a great nationalistic fervour gripped the country. In John Hobson's words of 1906, the dream of a wealthy Canada was becoming a reality:

> "Not only businessmen, but politicians, the clergy, the press, and every other vocable instrument is preaching, praising, prophesying. . . . Now Canada (no longer the United States) is 'God's country, sir!' Now the twentieth century belongs to her. Now her population and her prosperity will swell until she becomes the corner-stone of the temple of the British Empire."[23]

Thus it would seem a natural literary development for the romantic regional idyll to echo the euphoric mood and nationalistic spirit prevalent among politicians and Canadian citizens alike. According to Dick Harrison in his work, <u>Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction</u>, the image of the prairie as a "Garden of Eden" in

the best-selling novels of Ralph Connor, Nellie McClung, Arthur Stringer and R. J. C. Stead appealed to the public of that time:

> Like Eden, their West has no past, only a present beginning when the settler arrives, and a better future. This was, of course, a time of boom and optimism and, for the writers at least, a time of agrarian ideals. The free, independent farmer is in their eyes the most productive citizen and likely to be the happiest and most virtuous because of the enobling effects of his honest labour and continual contact with Nature.[24]

In Harrison's view, the recurrent garden motif in these romantic regional idylls "generally could be dismissed as simply another way of looking at the prairie without seeing it. To some extent, the imagination is not transforming the reality but escaping from it."[25] Certainly the British poet, Rupert Brooke, who toured the Canadian West after the completion of the C.P.R. in 1885, found that the "windswept and empty" prairie needed a romantic gloss:

> A European can find nothing to satisfy the hunger of his heart. The air is too thin to breathe. He requires haunted woods, and the friendly presence of ghosts. . . . So, I imagine, a Canadian would feel our woods and fields heavy with the past and the invisible and suffer claustrophobia in an English countryside beneath the dreadful pressure of immortals.[26]

The popularity of the romantic pioneer dream in Canadian prairie fiction created a tendency to ignore any harsh realities which the new settlers may actually have faced. In Ralph Connor's The Sky Pilot (1898), the actual death of the "sleeping" Sky Pilot at the conclusion of the

novel is minimized by the final description of the prairie as an English garden complete with "the song of the Swan" and the promise of spring flowers:

> And where the flowers had been, the violets and the wind-flowers and the clematis and the columbine and all the ferns and flowering shrubs, there lay the snow. Everywhere the snow, pure, white, and myriad-gemmed, but every flake a flower's shroud.[27]

In similar fashion, Nellie McClung describes the young heroine of Sowing Seeds in Danny (1912) in terms of garden imagery which suggests a world of Victorian sweetness and light:

> Pearl Watson was like the rugged little anemone, the wind flower that lifts its head from the cheerless prairie. No kind hand softens the heat or the cold, nor tempers the wind, and yet the very winds that blow upon it and the hot sun that beats upon it bring to it a grace, a hardiness, a fragrance of good cheer, that gladdens the hearts of all who pass that way.[28]

In Arthur Stringer's novel, The Prairie Wife (1915), the heroine, Chaddy McKail, describes homesteading as an idyllic life in a Garden of Eden:

> Life is so simple and honest, so back to first principles! . . . We've got a roof and a bed and a fire. That's all. And what is there, really, after that? We have to eat, of course, but we really live well. There's all the game we want, especially wild duck and prairie chicken, to say nothing of jack rabbit. Dinky-Dunk [Angus Argyll McKail] sallies out and pots them as we need. . . . I can't analyze my feelings. But the prairie brings a great peace to my soul. It is so rich, so maternal, so generous. It seems to brood under a passion to give, to yield up, to surrender all that is asked of it. And it so so tranquil. It seems like a bosom breathed on it by the breath of God.[29]

The fusion of romantic garden imagery with prairie homestead-

ing sometimes achieves humorous dimensions as is revealed in this passage from Stead's Neighbours (1922):

> The sun was almost setting on the eighth day, and the prairie, now gorgeous in its spring fluffery of anemones, had taken on its evening richness of green when we at length drew up close to the bank of the gully on Fourteen. . . . There are certain thrills of accomplishment, certain epochs of development, which come only once in a lifetime. . . . But the greatest is when he first looks upon land he can call his own. . . .
> "What do you say, Jean?"
> But Jean was looking at the sunset, where the Master Artist was splashing pastels of bronze and copper against a background of silver and champagne.
> "Wonderful, wonderful!" she murmured.[30]

Despite the unintentional humour of this passage, only Stead, of the authors quoted, links the pioneer's happiness to individual accomplishment rather than to the prairie as another Garden of Eden.

Archibald MacMechan, in his analysis of Canadian fiction in Headwaters of Canadian Literature (1924) reveals his impatience with the limited approach of such regional idylls:

> Regarded as a whole, Canadian fiction is tame. It bears everywhere the stamp of the amateur. Nowhere can be traced that fiery conviction which alone brings forth a masterpiece. Modern problems are as yet untouched, unapproached. Direct honest realism is also sadly to seek, though subjects are crying aloud for the treatment on every side. If the truth were told about life in the west . . . or about Canadian farms, . . . the world would be astonished and enlightened. So far Canadian fiction is conventional, decent, unambitious, *bourgeois*. It has nowhere risen to the heights or plumbed the depths of life in Canada. . . . The Canadian novel is yet to come.[31]

It is not as if the fuller "truth" depicting the harsh

aftermath of the pioneer's romantic dream did not exist. Barry Broadfoot in a collection of historical documents entitled The Pioneer Years 1895-1914: Memories of Settlers Who Opened the West, records both the romantic and realistic aspects of the pioneer dream in a woman's memories of her father in Wilcox, Saskatchewan:

> I think now that the fact that he was getting it for free and not paying so much an acre made it better land than it ever was. . . . My father, he always was a dreamer and he saw a whole community of white farmhouses and red barns and driveways lined with big green trees and fat cattle in the fields. This was what gave him his sense of well-being. How could he know that Billy would run off back to Iowa before the fall came! That Jessie, the youngest, would die of pneumonia that winter and no doctor for 50, 100 miles it seemed like. That we'd live for years in a sod shack and then a tarpaper affair that wasn't any better really, and that half our neighbours would just pack up and leave. . . .[32]

It is in the autobiographies rather than in the fiction of Stead, McClung and Salverson that one receives the historical irony of the pioneer dream. In an article written for the Canadian Geographic Journal in 1933[33] to which reference is made later in this thesis, Stead recalls the full significance of the pioneer dream for his own family who travelled West from Eastern Ontario.

McClung provides one of the most dramatic accounts of the romantic and realistic aspects of pioneer life in Clearing in the West (1935) when she recalls the death of the family's cow, Lady:

> And the nights that followed were terrible when the wolves fought and cursed and cried over her and we had to hear them, and see them too, for it was clear moonlight and they seemed to come from the four corners of the world, snarling, snapping, hungry ghouls, grey, lean and terrible. It was on one of these nights that we saw for the first time the Northern lights in all their majesty and beauty . . . [with] pale green and rose and lilac streamers fluttering and dancing like long lines of fairies' petticoats hung out to dry on a windy day. . . . Long after the last bone of Lady was gone, the wolves still came back on the moonlight nights hoping that some other evil thing had befallen us, and their cries were so horrible that I had to sleep with my head under the pillow instead of on it.[34]

As well as the harshness associated with Nature, McClung also recognized the harsh personal consequences of the pioneer dream:

> Wheat farmers are so intent on raising wheat they have no time to watch the sunset or raise flowers, plant trees, or do anything to make their homes beautiful. . . . You know how the McFaddens live--they haven't spoken for ten years--quarrelled over something, and froze; and take a pride in their silence. . . . They have narrow, single-track minds, with no outlet--prisoners of silence and temper; and the poor little boys are living in that atmosphere, which is about as healthy as a dark cellar.[35]

Both Grove and Salverson state the value of not only remembering the harshness of pioneer life but also translating it into the pattern of life portrayed by fiction. In the foreword of her autobiography, Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter, Salverson remembers the poverty, disease and

social inequality which her Icelandic family endured in nineteenth century Winnipeg and states that the harshness associated with the pioneer dream should have a place in fiction:

> Priceless things unknown in the recent past which I for one rejoice to bury without a single tear. Then why write a book about it? Why not let it lie in dusty peace with all the other debris of disenchantment and frustration? . . . It was of the dreamer that I was principally thinking. The lonely, under-privileged dreamer, so seldom understood, and even more seldom successful in the things of this world. . . . But when all is said and done it is by reason of its dream that nations live and mankind advances from the brute to human structure. . . . For dreams have a vitality which outride time and to that incontestable fact I must pin my hope that the substance of this book has merit pertinent to the future.[36]

In The Viking Heart (1923), Salverson does remain faithful to her autobiographical objective of reflecting both the romantic illusions and harsher realities of the pioneer dream.

Grove, in his autobiography, In Search of Myself, also felt bound to record the ironic tension represented by the pioneer experience:

> At a glance I could survey the prairie country from Kansas to Saskatchewan or Alberta; and at a thought I could evaluate, in my own way, of course, the implications of pioneer life. . . . These people, the pioneers, reaffirmed me in my conception of what often takes the form of a tragic experience; the age-old conflict between human desire and the stubborn resistance of nature.[37]

Like Salverson, Grove saw himself as a recorder whose pioneer novels would "set down, in one comprehensive picture, all that had crystallized out, in [his] mind, in reaction to all

[he] had seen, heard, and felt . . in a form which would stand forever."[38]

The deciding factor as to the literary treatment of the pioneer dream seems to have been a matter of personal choice and even of artistic integrity. If an author followed public expectations, then a romantic interpretation rather than a realistic interpretation of the pioneer dream was the logical choice. Writing about the literary fashion of the early twenties, W. L. Morton reached the following conclusion:

> Life in Manitoba was still too simple and realistic in itself for realistic literature either to inform or inspire. The public therefore continued to follow the old favourites, Nellie McClung and Ralph Connor, though Mrs. McClung had ceased to develop and Ralph Connor's meagre talent had long since been played out. The reading public, which was very limited, was not yet prepared, apart from a small group in Winnipeg, to relish the strong meat of which so much of the [new realistic] literature of the day consisted. On the shelves of Russell Lang's, the chief Winnipeg bookstore and a place of musty charm, were crowded the English classics; the Victorian writers were dominant, and modern prose and verse appeared only in discreet selection and modest reserve.[39]

A. J. M. Smith suggests the reason for this popular distrust of realistic Canadian literature in an essay entitled "Wanted--Canadian Criticism":

> Of realism we are afraid--apparently because there is an impression that it wishes to discredit the picture of our great dominion as a country where all the women are chaste and the men too pure to touch them if they weren't. Irony is not understood. Cynicism is felt to be disrespectful, unmanly. The idea that any subject whatever is susceptible of artistic treatment and that praise or blame is to be conferred after a consideration, not of its moral, but its aesthetic harmony is a proposition that

> will take years to knock into the heads of people.[40]

The emergence of <u>Settlers of the Marsh</u>, <u>Wild Geese</u>, and <u>Grain</u> as powerful realistic treatments of the pioneer dream was the product of the more critical social and economic conditions on the prairie which followed World War I. W. L. Morton notes the gap between the willingness in Manitoba to revolutionize political institutions and the absence of a similar appreciation for change in prairie fiction:

> Thus when a new and native author Martha Ostenso, published in [1925] a novel, <u>Wild Geese</u>, a graceful and promising story of the Interlake . . . it caused a mild scandal and much shocked discussion in communities, a record of the life of any one of which would have revealed true stories of the same kind. . . . [Grove's] novels . . . which aroused in the local critics pride that authentic literature was at last being produced in Manitoba, in the public merely provoked resentment at what they thought a harsh and uncalled-for portrayal of the worse aspects of rural life.[41]

The unpopularity of realistic fiction in Manitoba was signalled by the banning of <u>Settlers of the Marsh</u> from the Winnipeg library and by Lorne Pierce's persecution at Ryerson Press for having encouraged the publication of <u>Settlers of the Marsh</u> in the first place:

> . . . The temperance, prohibition and moral reform agencies all climbed over my back when the book <u>Settlers</u> came out. They were especially malignant in my own church. And at the height of it the General Manager of the Publishing House lost his nerve. . . . That [congratulations,] coming from Meighen, made the General Manager very happy, and so far as I was concerned the barrage was lifted.[42]

Prime Minister Meighen's congratulations to Ryerson Press credited the publishing company with "having sufficient literary insight to accept a manuscript like Settlers of the Marsh and enough guts . . . to publish it."[43]

Wild Geese, also published in 1925, was clearly intended as a realistic portrayal of pioneer life as observed by Ostenso during her brief teaching career on the northern frontier of Manitoba. While the American literary world welcomed Ostenso's first novel with a $13,500 prize,[44] public ire in Manitoba revealed a lag in the appreciation of the Canadian reading public for such realism.

While Settlers of the Marsh and Wild Geese were obviously part of the "literary ferment . . . stirring on the prairies in the mid-twenties,"[45] it is ironic that another novel of pioneer realism, Grain (1926), was virtually ignored by the public and literary critics alike. Probably the farming routine of its laconic hero, Gander Stake, was too much of a departure from the conventional prairie novel of sensational adventure and sentimentality. As Thomas Saunders emphasized in his introduction to the New Canadian Library

edition of Grain, Stead's novel "is a different and gentler realism than is found in Wild Geese and Settlers of the Marsh."[46] Another factor in explaining the novel's lack of recognition was that Stead's early pioneer novels, The Homesteaders, Neighbours and The Smoking Flax, had established the author's reputation as a writer of popular romantic fiction:

> Unfortunately, it was not a following that was prepared for a novel of the character of Grain, and showed its disapproval in the area where such disapproval is usually shown--in a dropping off of sales. But it was not only the popular reader who was misled by it as well. Some of the immediate criticism was favourable; but subsequent criticism in the main, has written off Stead as a writer of small consequence, and has refused to take him seriously. The result has been that one of the best novels to come out of the prairies in the twenties has suffered a long and undeserved obscurity.[47]

The literary transition in Canada from the romantic regional idylls of Nellie McClung, Ralph Connor and Arthur Stringer to a more realistic interpretation of the pioneer experience was not an easy process. Yet the romantic attitudes of the regional idyll with its Garden of Eden imagery, stereotyped characterization and melodramatic adventures was only a partial treatment of the pioneer dream. The pioneer's initial romantic dream of the prairie as a golden land of opportunity had been left unchallenged. It remained for Settlers of the Marsh, Wild Geese, and Grain to portray the realistic and often harsh aftermath of the pioneer dream. Although the transition in Canadian prairie

fiction from a romantic to a realistic treatment of this theme was gradual, the simultaneous appearance of these three novels made the literary transition an irrevocable one.

Notes

Introduction

[1]Susan Wood Glicksohn, introduction to _The Homesteaders_ by Robert J. C. Stead (1916; rpt. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. xx.

[2]The romantic prairie fiction of Robert J. C. Stead includes _The Bail Jumper_ (1914), _The Cowpuncher_ (1918), _Dennison Grant_ (1920), as well as those novels which deal specifically with the theme of the pioneer dream: _The Homesteaders_ (1916), _Neighbours_ (1922) and _The Smoking Flax_ (1924).

[3]Desmond Pacey, _Creative Writing in Canada_ (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1952), p. 171.

[4]T. D. MacLulich, "Novel and Romance," _Canadian Literature_, No. 70 (Autumn, 1976), p. 42.

[5]_Ibid._, p. 43.

[6]Gordon D. McLeod, "A Descriptive Bibliography of the Canadian Prairie Novel 1871-1970," PhD thesis, The University of Manitoba, 1974, p. 4.

[7]_Ibid._, p. ix.

[8]Henry Howarth Bashford, _The Manitoban: A Romance_ (New York: John Lane, 1904), p. 5.

[9]_Ibid._, p. 15.

[10]_Ibid._, pp. 85-88.

[11]_Ibid._, p. 249.

[12]E. A. Wharton Gill, _A Manitoba Chore Boy: The Experiences of a Young Emigrant Told from His Letters_ (London: A Religious Tract Society, 1912), p. 14.

[13]_Ibid._, p. 55.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

[15] Rudy Wiebe, "Passage by Land," *Canadian Literature*, No. 48 (Spring, 1971), pp. 26, 27.

[16] Letter from Frederick Philip Grove to E. J. Moore dated Nov. 21, 1925, The Frederick Philip Grove Collection, Archives, Manuscripts, and Rare Books, Elizabeth Dafoe Library, University of Manitoba, Box 1, Folder 15.

[17] Donald Pizer, *Realism and Naturalism in Nineteenth Century American Literature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), p. 13.

[18] Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1974), p. 56.

[19] Eric Callum Thompson, "A Critical Study of the Poetry and Prose of Robert J. C. Stead: Prairie Poet and Novelist," MA thesis, The University of New Brunswick, 1965, p. 3.

[20] Nellie McClung, *Clearing in the West* (Toronto: Thomas Allen Ltd., 1935), p. 30.

[21] Brown and Cook, p. 60.

[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 50.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

[24] Dick Harrison, *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1977), p. 33.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Lewis H. Thomas, "British Visitors' Perceptions of the West, 1885-1914," in *Prairie Perspectives 2*, ed. A. W. Rasporich and H. C. Klassen (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada Ltd., 1973), p. 185.

[27]Ralph Connor, The Sky Pilot: A Tale of the Foothills (Toronto: The Westminister Company Limited, 1899), pp. 299, 300.

[28]Nellie McClung, Sowing Seeds in Danny (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), pp. 3, 4.

[29]Arthur Stringer, The Prairie Wife: A Novel (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Publishers, 1915), pp. 42, 251.

[30]Robert J. C. Stead, Neighbours (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1922), pp. 68, 69.

[31]Archibald MacMechan, Headwaters of Canadian Literature (1924; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), pp. 215, 235.

[32]Barry Broadfoot, The Pioneer Years 1895-1914: Memories of Settlers Who Opened the West (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1976), pp. 87, 88.

[33]Robert Stead, "The Old Prairie Homestead," Canadian Geographical Journal (July, 1933), p. 14.

[34]McClung, Clearing in the West, pp. 76, 77.

[35]Ibid., p. 235.

[36]Laura Goodman Salverson, Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter (1939; rpt. Montreal: The Reprint Society of Canada Ltd., 1949), pp. 10, 9.

[37]Frederick Philip Grove, In Search of Myself (1946; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1974), p. 226.

[38]Ibid., pp. 229, 230.

[39]W. L. Morton, Manitoba: A History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), pp. 418, 419.

[40]A. J. M. Smith, "Wanted--Canadian Criticism" in Towards A View of Canadian Letters: Selected Critical Essays

(1928-1971) (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 169.

[41]Morton, pp. 381,418.

[42]Desmond Pacey, editor's note following F. P. Grove's letter to H. C. Miller (Nov. 14, 1926) in The Letters of Frederick Philip Grove, ed. Desmond Pacey (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 42.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Carlyle King, "Introduction" to Wild Geese by Martha Ostenso (1925; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1961), p. vii.

[45]Thomas Saunders, "Introduction" to Grain by Robert J. C. Stead (1926; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1969), p. v.

[46]Ibid., p. vii.

[47]Ibid., p. vi.

Chapter I

Robert Stead: The Pioneer Dream in Transition

One might expect that Robert J. C. Stead's childhood experiences on a Manitoba homestead would lead naturally to a portrayal of the romantic and realistic aspects of the pioneer dream in his prairie fiction. Yet the literary career of Stead reveals a definite reluctance to come to terms with the actual hardships accompanying the pioneer's romantic quest. The fact that Stead was aware of the double-edged nature of this theme is evident in the following passage from his article, "The Old Prairie Homestead" (1933):

> Migration . . . meant plunging into an untried country concerning which they had heard fabulous tales of land that could be ploughed without stumping and stoning, but where the hazards of Nature were in proportion to her prodigality. It meant a long and expensive journey through the United States, and their capital was small; it meant years of loneliness and perhaps hardship; abandonment of the old familiar scenes around which was wrapped the glamour of childhood; separation from relatives and the associates of a life-time. It takes courage to migrate.[1]

However, Stead's customary position was to adhere to an essentially romantic interpretation of the pioneer dream in his poetry and in his early fiction, and to downplay the hardships involved. The prairie as a golden land of opportunity is the theme of the author's memories in an article entitled "Manitoba in the Early Eighties" (1936):

> The silver-leafed wolf willow crumpled under the colter, the roots of prairie rose bushes crackled on the share, but the plow went on and on! Right across the farm; right across the whole quarter section, with not a stump and not a stone to stay its course! What an experience for men and women who had toiled half a lifetime to clear a few acres in the East! It was the dawn of a new era, the realization of hopes that had seemed immeasurably sanguine. Hardship and disappointment, and sometimes failure, followed in the wake of that prairie plow, but a land which yielded its fertility as a gentle cow might yield her milk had a way of wrapping itself about the hearts of its people. Perhaps that is why you seldom hear a Westerner speak ill of the West.[2]

The element of spiritual renewal which Stead recognizes as a product of this process is left vaguely defined as a romantic feature of the prairie itself.

Stead defined romantic literature as "that which gives scope to imagination and idealization" and stated emphatically that "the occasion for imagination and idealization has not disappeared from Western Canada."[3] The essentially romantic nature of pioneering remains intact from Stead's point of view:

> But romance did not pass out with the buffalo, or give up the ghost with the whistle of the first locomotive. . . . Little though her presence was suspected, her touch illuminated the life of the pioneer; viewed through the distance of half-a-century her finger-prints are visible on his nation-building; the aura of her presence still colours a period in our national life which is rapidly passing into history.[4]

The author's unwillingness to reflect the theme of the pioneer dream with much realism stems from Stead's belief that romantic literature fosters Canadian nationalism:

> A nation's literature is the father and mother of

> the nation's sentiment. Without national sentiment population is merely an accumulation of individuals; with national sentiment it is a cohesive whole, a dynamic force with unbounded possibilities. Even the shock of war does not produce an abiding national sentiment unless there are men and women of literary ability to wrap a halo of glory around the sacrifices and achievements of the struggle.[5]

Stead's decision "to wrap a halo of glory" around the prairie homesteader is probably related to his career in the federal civil service. Appointed in 1919 to the publicity staff of the department of immigration and colonization and later superintendent of publicity for national parks and natural resources,[6] Stead had reason to continue a romantic interpretation of the prairie as a golden land of opportunity in his literary work. Thus Stead's early pioneer novels: The Homesteaders (1916), Neighbours (1922), and The Smoking Flax (1924) reveal many of the romantic conventions of the early prairie fiction of Ralph Connor and Nellie McClung with its paradisial imagery, stereotyped heroes and heroines, and melodramatic plots with happy endings. Robert Stead's plan "to paint prairie life as true to conditions as my ability will permit"[7] was not enacted until 1926 and the publication of Grain.

Yet a study of Stead's early prairie novels which reflect an essentially romantic treatment of the pioneer dream offers glimpses of the author's evolution towards a realistic appraisal of the same theme in Grain. In many respects, The Homesteaders is similar to Grain's serious treatment of the pioneer dream. Both aspects of the pioneer dream are presented

thematically: prairie homesteading as a romantic experience in a land of golden opportunity and then as a materialistic goal involving great personal sacrifice. Professor Allison recognizes a new trend in Stead's development of the theme of the pioneer dream in his evaluation of The Homesteaders which appeared in the Winnipeg Telegram (December 9, 1916):

> Mr. Stead develops this domestic struggle between the forces of light and darkness, of idealism and Mammon in the main part of his narrative. And no one can read these chapters, so tragic, so intense, without being profoundly moved. He gives us a picture of the state of affairs in thousands of homes in this western country. . . . Every man in this country who is worshipping the god Success ought to read this illuminating story. It seems to me that I have never read a book conveying such a message to successful farmers of the prairie provinces.[8]

The first five chapters of The Homesteaders deal with the romantic dreams of a newly-wed Eastern Ontario couple, John and Mary Harris, who travel west in 1882 to farm a prairie homestead "in the mysteries of the unknown"[9] Manitoba. The remaining twenty chapters, with titles such as "Crumbling Castles", "The Price of 'Success'", and "The Lure of Easy Money," develop the darker realities of the pioneer dream: the materialistic drive which costs John Harris his personal honour and his family stability.

The romantic promise of the theme appears in the early chapters as Stead develops the love story between Mary and John Harris with John's dream of making a fortune in the West:

> "And so you are going to Manitoba?" she said at length.

> "Yes. There are possibilities there. It's a gamble, and that is why I didn't want to share it with you--at first. I thought I would spend a year; locate a homestead; get some kind of a house built; perhaps break some land. Then I would come back."
>
> . . . .
>
> "And we shall build our own home, and live our own lives, and love each other--always,--only, for ever and ever?" she breathed.
>
> "For ever and ever," he answered.
>
> A waterfowl cut the air in his sharp, whistling flight. The last white shimmer of daylight faded from the surface of the lake. The lovers floated on, gently, joyously, into their ocean of hope and happiness. (pp. 6, 8)

John Harris views their dream as "a tide, which taken at its flood, might lead him on to fortune" (p. 10) in a land of golden opportunity. His new wife, "naturally of romantic temperament," views their journey west as a glamorous "knightly adventure" (p. 16). However it is Mary who first perceives the harsher aspects of their quest, while her husband remains preoccupied with materialistic concerns:

> Harris' thoughts were on his team, on the two cows trudging behind, and on the multiplicity of arrangements which his new life would present for decision and settlement. But his wife gazed silently out over the ocean of snow. The rays of the sun fell gratefully on her cheeks, pale and somewhat wan with her long journey. But the sun went down, and the western sky, cloudless and measureless, faded from gold to copper, and from copper to silver, and from silver to lead. Turning uncomfortably in her crowded seat the girl could see, far beyond the last of the teams, the road over which they had travelled, stretching away until it lost itself, a point in the gathering darkness. To the west it lost itself over the shoulder of the prairie. . . . The men had ceased to shout to each other; the cattle plodded uncomplainingly; silently they moved in the midst of a silence expanding into the infinite. It was her first sight of the prairie, and a strange mixture of emotions, of awe, and loneliness, and a certain indifference to personal consequences, welled up within her. (pp. 32, 33)

This descriptive passage of the settlers' migration west, as well as Stead's detailed exposition on choosing "the best quarter" of 160 acres, shows that Stead is first among the three authors discussed in this study at providing realistic documentation of pioneering. Yet Stead's ambivalence between a romantic and realistic interpretation of the work of the pioneer is revealed in his following comment about spring seeding:

> It was a life of hard, persistent work--of loneliness, privation, and hardship. But it was also a life of courage, of health, of resourcefulness, of a wild, exhilarating freedom found only in God's open spaces. (p. 63)

The material success of John's romantic vision is substantiated by the pioneers' first crop:

> Any disappointment which had been occasioned by backward conditions earlier in the season was effaced by the wonderful crop which now crowned the efforts of the pioneers. On their finest Eastern farms they had seen nothing to equal the great stand of wheat and oats which now enveloped them, neck-high, whenever they invaded it. (p. 70)

Yet material success is accompanied by family division as Mary remains dissatisfied with the realities of prairie life. Her disillusionment forms an ironic counterpart to her husband's satisfaction with his materialistic quest:

> A strange moodiness had come over her, and even with him at home she had at times given way to fits of downheartedness which seemed altogether alien to her nature.
>
> But this morning as he drove the well-worn trail, a burnished sun mounted higher and higher ahead of him, and with it his own spirits rose until he found himself whistling and boyishly building castles in the air. But his castles, as he told himself, had

> solid foundations; indeed, they were not even speculations, but already might be accepted as assured accomplishments. (p. 73)

When John Harris returns from Emerson ten days later, he faces a scene with the dramatic potential of Judith Gare's attempt to kill her father in Wild Geese. For Mary Harris, mentally unbalanced from the isolation of their prairie homestead, the pioneer dream has become a nightmare:

> The lantern burned dimly, but it was not at the lantern he looked. In the farthest corner, scarcely visible in the feeble light, stood his wife, and at her shoulder was the gun, trained steadily upon him. (p. 75)

As if Stead became disconcerted with the effects of isolation upon the Harris family, he concludes the early chapters of the novel upon a romantic note:

> So, in high spirits, they planned for their winter. . . . The little sod house was warm and snug, and as the men played checkers while the women sewed, what cared the pioneers for the snow and the cold and the wind whistling across the plains? (pp. 78, 79)

As for Mary Harris's "strange gloom," Stead attributes it to impending childbirth. These incredible turns of the plot provide evidence of the uneasy balance between realistic and romantic attitudes in Stead's early fiction, a feature which A. T. Elder calls "limited realism":

> The details are accurate, but carefully selected, and despite occasional references to the hardship of life on the prairies, the privations of the settlers are submerged in a generally buoyant tone.[10]

The latter two-thirds of the novel focuses upon the economic developments which lead John Harris to the material

fulfillment of his pioneer dream twenty-five years later:

> Harris was among the first to sense the change in the times, and a beautiful section of railway land that lay next to his homestead he bought at four dollars an acre. The first crop more than paid for the land, and Harris suddenly found himself on the way to riches. (p. 96)

However, his dream of "easy riches" has cost him "twenty-five years of pitched battle with circumstances--sometimes in victory, sometimes in defeat, but never in despair; always with a load of expense about him, always with the problem of income and outlay to be solved" (p. 93). The materialistic nature of the pioneer dream is shown to be a consuming ambition which also costs John Harris his happiness:

> The joy that came with the realization that fortune had knocked at his door and he had heard was the controlling emotion of his heart for a year or more. But gradually, like a fog blown across a moonlit night, came a sense of chill and disappointment. If only he had bought two sections! (p. 96)

His daughter Beulah later comments upon her family's ironic decline:

> "I put in my first years in a sod-house, and there was more real happiness romping up and down the land then than there is now. In those days everybody was so poor that money didn't count. . . . It's different now." (p. 99)

Happiness and freedom have proven to be illusory aspects of the pioneer dream, and it is Beulah who questions the validity of her father's quest:

> "I think it's all nonsense, this day-an'-night work," persisted Beulah. "Is there never going to be any let-up to it?"
>
> . . . .
>
> "Jim," she said, after a while, when the noise

> of the milking was drowned in the creamy froth, "I'm getting near the end of this kind of thing. Father's getting more and more set on money all the time. He thinks I should slave along too to pile up more beside what he's got already, but I'm not going to do it much longer." (pp. 92, 98)

Beulah's statement that her father's "heart's in the right place--but a long way in" (p. 93), is a perceptive observation of the changes wrought upon John Harris's character by twenty-five years of dedication to the pioneer dream of easy riches. Dick Harrison writes of the familiar figure of the prairie patriarch:

> Because of the change in John Harris, his household assumes a pattern which will reappear again and again in the work of Grove, Martha Ostenso, Arthur Storey and others. It includes the 'prairie patriarch' filled with the righteousness of his own purpose, but in fact a land-hungry, work-intoxicated tyrant. The farm women are subjugated, culturally and emotionally starved, and filled with a smouldering rebellion.[11]

This rebelliousness against John Harris's quest leads to a major thematic development which appears later in <u>Grain</u>; that is, "the need in farm life for an expanded horizon."[12] Beulah obeys her impulse to live for "something in the world besides wheat and cows" (p. 138), and leaves the farm for a new frontier in the foothills of Alberta. Mary Harris follows her daughter when John Harris becomes determined to sell their homestead to Americans "as a goin' concern," and to invest the forty thousand dollars in a fraudulent land scheme. Stead has introduced a theme familiar in Grove's prairie novels: the tragic inevitability of family disintegration as a side effect of the pioneer dream:

> Allan knew something of the depth of the nature of his parents, and he knew that beneath an undemonstrative exterior they cherished in secret a love proportionate to the strength of their characters. But the long course down which they had walked together seemed now to be separating, through neither will nor power of their own; it was as though straight parallel lines suddenly turned apart, and neither lost its straightness in the turning. (p. 177)

Stead again drops the unpleasant effects of the pioneer dream and turns to romantic melodrama, stock characters and improbable coincidence to develop the remainder of the novel. These "stylistic affectations," according to George Woodcock's editorial in Canadian Literature (Summer, 1974), hopelessly scar The Homesteaders and make it a difficult book to read.[13] By replacing the realistic trends of this novel with romantic elements, Stead does create a confusing thematic development. The trends of family disintegration and the need for expanded horizons in pioneer life which were developed through Beulah Harris are weakened through Stead's description of her idyllic life on a ranch in Alberta, and by her conventional romance with Jim Travers. The remainder of the novel is pure melodrama involving the attempt of the villainous Riles and Gardiner to defraud John Harris of his life savings through an investment in a mythical coal mine, a murder attempt, and the subsequent R.C.M.P. pursuit of Gardiner on horseback. The reconciliation of Mary and John Harris and the legality which returns to them their original land grant dilutes the realistic impact and tragedy associated with John Harris's obsessive pioneer dream. Without these

weak romantic stylisms, The Homesteaders might have rivalled Grove's portrayal of family disintegration in Our Daily Bread.

With the publication of Neighbours in 1922, Stead returned to a purely romantic interpretation of the pioneer dream in his idyllic story of four youthful homesteaders in Saskatchewan. A. T. Elder writes of Neighbours:

> Neighbours . . . presents a Saskatchewan prairie almost devoid of wind, dust, drought, hail, grasshoppers, mosquitoes, blazing heat and freezing cold. . . .[14]

Prem Varma, in his annotated bibliography of Robert Stead's works and criticism, associates this swing to romanticism with Stead's sensitivity to the poor reception of Dennison Grant (1920):

> Stead reverted to the romantic format and, in both Neighbours and The Smoking Flax, wrote the typically popular novel complete with perfect setting and happy ending.[15]

Certainly Stead wrapped "a halo of glory" around the realities of homesteading in Neighbours, and the novel's buoyant tone was well-received by the Canadian Bookman (Oct. 1922):

> We must record that this book takes Mr. Stead far beyond the rank gained for him by its clever but melodramatic predecessors, and establishes him among the most capable literary portrayers of Canadian life. It is, in fact, the book of a poet, with a real passion for the Saskatchewan prairie and a fine skill in depicting the enthusiasms of youth in that young, and free, and 1,500-feet-high country. . . .[16]

Stead depicts "the enthusiasms of youth" for the West as a golden land of opportunity, and links the ambitions of Frank Hall and Jack Lane to their need for wider horizons than

Eastern Ontario:

> "Go west!" he said, emphatically. "Go west! I am beginning to think it's the only thing for a young fellow to do, anyway. What is there here for us? Drudge away in the mill, seven to six, seven to six, seven to six, seven to six, week in, month in, year in; then, some day, caught on a shaft, and they stop the mill just long enough to untangle your remains. And that is life! By God, Frank, it's not life--as I see it--as I'm going to see it!"[17]

The necessity for wider horizons in life is a major theme in Grain, and Stead seems convinced in his early novels as well that pioneering resulted in a restrictive outlook. However, the impact of this theme is weakened considerably in Neighbours by the author's choice of a conventional romantic heroine, Jean Lane, who as an erstwhile painter develops Stead's theme:

> I knew that artist had given Jean an instant's glimpse into life, and it was none the easier for me to suggest the loneliness of a homestead "somewhere west of Manitoba."
>
> "Do you think you could dip your brush in--in the Saskatchewan?" I ventured.
>
> She was gazing dreamily across the still river, and in the rich draperies of Autumn which were mirrored at her feet there was no fairer flower than Jean. (p. 23)

With Stead's emphasis upon the conventional romance of Jean Lane and Frank Hall, the possibility of any serious thematic development is nullified. As one contemporary review from the Hamilton Spectator (Oct. 25, 1922) noted, Neighbours lacks a sense of reality and substance:

> Both the love theme and the plot are condemned as being slight and lacking in quality. Jean is described as an "insufferable prig", and her marriage to Frank at the end is considered unnatural.[18]

Stead's theme of the need for broader creative horizons in pioneer life is developed solely through Jean's qualms about marrying Frank and her infatuation with an English remittance man who is nicknamed "Spoof" by his neighbours. Jean foresees that "the deadly routine" (p. 261) of homesteading and marriage would destroy her love for a man like Frank whose "vision . . . is bounded by the corner posts of Fourteen" (p. 263). Spoof, however, realizes the narrowness of pioneering and retains the wider horizons of his cultured outlook so that "Section Two can never hold" him within the boundaries of a land grant (p. 265). As Jean romanticizes for pages in developing this major theme, the reader appreciates Stead's gift for wry humour:

> ". . . I've seen him watch the sunset in the pond; watch the colors change and blend and run in little ripples with a touch of breeze as though the water had been stirred with a feather; I've seen him sit for hours watching the ambers and saffrons and champagnes of the prairie sunset, and. . ."
> "And that's why he got so little plowing done." (p. 267)

Frank's sarcasm at least reveals some contact with reality which the novel as a whole does not. Neighbours is not as satisfying a treatment of the pioneer dream as The Homesteaders because the romantic illusions of youth are never challenged. The implications of isolation, interminable routine and struggle are submerged beneath the superficial trials of a conventional romance. Jean's concluding statement provides an ironic comment upon the

artificiality of pioneer life in Neighbours:

> "Dreams do come true, if they're properly staged," she said when she could speak. (p. 315)

The Smoking Flax (1924) continues Robert Stead's series of pioneer novels which treat the pioneer dream in a romantic fashion. Although Stead emphasizes in this novel that such unpleasant realities as family disintegration, interminable hard work and a narrow pioneer mentality do exist on prairie homesteads, his choice of a romantic protagonist weakens the impact of his portrayal of the Stake family. Stead presents the illusions and realities associated with pioneering from the point of view of Cal Beach, a sociology graduate who as a farmhand on the Stake farm welcomes the opportunity for a true-to-life experiment:

> Here, now, was no musty text-book; here was life, throbbing, pulsating, grinding, to which the text-book bore no closer relationship than does the photograph to the living soul.[19]

However, such a realistic approach is compromised by the romantic characterization of Cal Beach, whose scholarly zeal for farming obscures reality:

> Cal found a strange new zest in his labors all that week. . . . In an instant it drained the drudgery from his toil, revealing those rich social deposits which drudgery so often conceals; it gave purpose to his life; it invested the meanest surrounding with mystery and romance. (p. 91)

Yet the romantic illusion of heroic struggle implied in Cal's experiment is not realized; instead, he discovers that the grinding hard work becomes de-humanizing and restrictive:

> In those first days all the horse power of his engines was needed to drive the physical machine; nothing was left for romantic adventures. . . . Their minds trudged around in a deep-grooved circle, like a captive bear around a post; rarely climbing to the top of the post for an observation; never excursioning into the vast unknown that lay just beyond the circle. To them there was no unknown; the world lay complete within their deep-grooved circle; complete and fully comprehended. (pp. 70-71)

In developing this major theme of his prairie fiction, the need for broader horizons in pioneer life, Stead presents Jackson Stake Sr. as the product of a restrictive dream to turn his homestead into "a valuable possession and a place of plenty":

> What Jackson Stake mistook for determination in his own character was really stubbornness; the stubbornness which had grappled with this scrubland farm and converted it, little by little and year by year, into a valuable possession and a place of plenty; and bent environment to its will--that was the great strength of purpose, more negative perhaps than positive, which under a hearty exterior dominated Jackson Stake. He appeared genial and pliable, but when crossed he was hard as rock. (p. 97)

As the tyrannical prairie patriarch who will reappear in _Wild Geese_ and Grove's prairie novels, Jackson Stake has been the instrument of his own family's disintegration. His elder son, Jackson Stake Jr., left the farm because his father refused to pay him wages. His daughter, Minnie followed the same pattern in order to type in a lawyer's office in Plainville. The contrast between the romantic illusions of Cal Beach as an outsider and the realities about pioneering known by Mrs. Stake becomes sharpened in their conversation:

> . "I expect to find it a great life."

> "Don' over-expect yourself. It's a great life, all right, if you don' have to live it. That's why everybody's leavin' the farm for the city." (p. 47)

Stead's pattern of "limited realism" in his early novels becomes apparent in The Smoking Flax as he drops the unpleasant realities of pioneering which are thrust upon Cal Beach: the endless routine of hard work, the resulting narrow-mindedness and obsession with materialism, and the disintegration of the family as a working unit. As he did in The Homesteaders, Stead forces a more optimistic tone upon his portrayal of pioneering by means of conventional romantic stylisms: a happy love story between Cal Beach and Minnie Stake, a melodramatic blackmail scheme involving Jackson Stake Jr. and Cal, and a series of highly coincidental events which assure a happy ending. The theme of self-sacrifice and regeneration which Stead associates with Gander Stake in Grain, is introduced in The Smoking Flax with Cal's decision to ignore the threats of Jackson Stake Jr., and to become "sane again" (p. 220) by leaving Minnie and the Stake farm. A similar self-sacrifice appears with the suicide of Jackson Stake Jr. for the sake of his illegitimate son, Reed. However the seriousness which this theme merits is lost within the welter of coincidental events that conclude the novel on a romantic note. Laurence Ricou in Vertical Man/ Horizontal Prairie recognizes that The Smoking Flax forms a bridge between the "sentimental romance", Neighbours and the serious realistic novel, Grain because it "reflects Stead's

ambiguous feeling that the prairie is both the seat of spiritual nourishment, and, in the labour it demands, liable to frustrate the very life to which it is suited."[20]

<u>Grain</u> is certainly Stead's most honest and credible novel in depicting the illusions and realities associated with the theme of the pioneer dream. One is tempted to speculate about what prompted Stead to abandon his lucrative formula for romantic fiction; perhaps <u>Grain</u> was prompted by the insistence of his childhood memories. Robert Stead, in the following interview published in <u>Canadian Bookman</u> (April 1923), reveals that he experienced the same compulsion as Gander Stake to escape the restrictiveness of pioneer life:

> Farming as a Life job, made no great appeal to the lad. At sixteen he knew enough about it not to wish to work on a farm any more. He was already sniffing the air for printer's ink. . . . Local papers had accepted some of his stuff, and some of it had caught the eyes of larger editors and found a niche farther afield. To widen his Path of Chance Robert accepted the first job that came to hand, that of a clerk in a country store.[21]

<u>Grain</u>, called "the best story of grain fields in the United States or Canada, that was ever written,"[22] is probably a realistic reflection of the author's youth spent on a Manitoba homestead.

Decades passed before the novel was awarded any literary importance as a realistic prairie novel. A review in the <u>Saturday Review of Literature</u> (Feb. 5, 1927) suggests the reasons why the novel didn't achieve more widespread popularity:

> Grain is solid, prosaic fiction, realistically depicting the Manitoba prairie farmers, which if it soars to no very lofty heights, sinks to no depths of squalor too often found in tales of the soil.[23]

The transition from Stead's earlier romantic prairie novels appears to have been too extreme for his readers. E. C. Thompson in his thesis points out that the author's customary formula did not appear:

> Grain, then, breaks the pattern of the standard Stead novel by powerfully focussing attention on a single individual; by disregarding the usual melodramatic plot; and by forsaking the usual rhetorical exposition of a western "problem".[24]

Certainly the novel's critical reception was disappointing for the author. As president of the Rotary Club, Stead was still trying to promote sales of Grain on his speaking tours throughout Eastern Canada in 1932 and 1933.[25] Stead's belief in the artistic merit of Grain is obvious in his letter to McClelland and Stewart dated July 22, 1935:

> My own Grain . . . was described by a Canadian reviewer as another Maria Chapdelaine. . . . The New York Sun commended me for having "the courage to avoid the conventional ending"; the Los Angeles Times said "The author . . . has completely mastered the spirit of life in contact with things primitive," and the Denver News said "It assumes the proportions of an epic". Other prominent American papers were equally complimentary. Among Canadian papers published in the prairie country and therefore qualified to speak with some authority, the Winnipeg Free Press said "It is the best thing the author has written"; the Calgary Herald, "The most powerful novel of the West that Mr. Stead has yet written; "the Regina Leader, "Grain will give a conception of the prairies nearer to reality than all except two or three novels which portray the West", and "Nowhere can be found more faithful descriptions of what life in the prairie country really is"; and the Edmonton Journal said "Mr. Stead is pre-eminently the novelist of the prairies."[26]

However positive Stead may have found these reviews, the comments were for the most part generalizations which left the novel in the stream of documentary prairie realism. The fact that Stead had intended a realistic study of the pioneer mentality is suggested by the various titles which he offered his publisher: A Son of the Soil, A Soldier of the Soil, Aftermath, No Man's Orders, and Half a Hero. At the suggestion of one of his friends, Stead also included the tentative title, Gander, a tongue-in-cheek reference to Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese. His publisher, Doran, dismissed all these and called the novel Grain.[27]

The critical emphasis upon documentary social realism continued with Wilfred Eggleston's assessment in The Frontier and Canadian Letters (1957) that "Grain gave the farm people of the wheat lands their first authentic portraits of people and setting by one of themselves."[28] Desmond Pacey's critical evaluation of the novel in the Literary History of Canada is a good example of the limitations of the social realism label:

> Grain, however, is a much more consistently realistic novel than either Neighbours or The Smoking Flax. . . . The early part of the novel is written in the light, chatty, humorous style of Neighbours, and deals in an interesting and lively way with the ordinary incidents of a boy's life on the Prairie: his early experiences as a schoolboy, hunter, harvester, and farm hand and the first stirrings of sex.[29]

Although Pacey recognizes the excellent analysis of Gander Stake's "motives and state of mind," he still includes Grain

in the same category as the author's other prairie novels which present "a basically accurate picture of prairie life."[30] How one can omit Jo Burge from a discussion of "Gander's motives and state of mind" seems to point to a serious misreading of the novel. The ill-starred love story between Gander Stake and Jo Burge provides the true focus of the novel, rather than the general details of prairie life provided by Stead.

Leslie Mundwiler, in his critical article, "Robert Stead--Home in the First Place" which appeared in Essays on Canadian Writing (Summer, 1978), feels that Desmond Pacey's application of the term realism concerning Stead's work has lacked proper definition:

> Perhaps Stead's work has been approached by critics most frequently by way of the jargon of realism. Whenever realism is applied as a historical tag or a mark of approval, questions are begged (and usually go unanswered). What does Desmond Pacey mean, for example, when he states that "Grain . . . is a much more consistently realistic novel than either Neighbours or The Smoking Flax?" He may mean that Grain follows the program of realism of certain American authors (or certain French authors) more closely than the other novels do. He may mean that Grain more closely approaches an objective observation language. He may mean that the character and incident in Grain are more closely corroborated by what is known of the social history of the time and place. He may mean that Grain describes certain matters--sexual relationships, antagonisms within the family, etc.--with more candidness than the other novels did. . . . And, of course, Pacey may mean, simply that Grain is closer than the other books to his own view of reality. The example may be an unfair one, since Pacey's comment on Stead is necessarily an abbreviated one, but the application of realism to Stead's work on any of the levels of meaning suggested above must be carefully qualified.

> Above all, the jargon of realism, largely derived from scientific ideology, must not mask or distort the richness of the work.[31]

Frank Davey's article, "Rereading Stead's Grain" (1979), stresses the same psychological realism introduced by Edward McCourt's assertion thirty years before that "anyone familiar with a farming community has met Gander Stake. There are thousands like him all over the West and wherever men earn their living from the soil."[32] Davey takes Leslie Mundwiler's cue and states that Stead avoids literary labelling by going through all "the modes--irony, realism, naturalism, pastoral, romance"[33] to realize the convincing characterization of Gander Stake. His article attempts to refute the banality and powerlessness often attributed to Grain by outlining the Freudian implications of Stead's portrayal of an ordinary prairie farm boy whose blind loyalty to his father's pioneer dream costs him his love for Jo Burge.

Grain is not an isolated work of art in Robert Stead's career: the harsh realities associated with the pioneer dream had been introduced, if not developed, in The Homesteaders and The Smoking Flax. However Grain does not drop the realistic features of isolation, disintegration of the family, and a restrictive pioneer outlook as unpleasant features of homesteading; rather they are developed into a credible artistic pattern. On a more sophisticated level than in his earlier novels, Stead emphasizes the inner psychological realism described by Grove in It Needs To Be

Said. The quiet subtlety of Stead's portrayal of Gander Stake adds to the credibility of a story enacted on the silent Canadian prairie.

Stead introduces Gander Stake through the use of an impersonal narrator who emphasizes the ordinary nature of the protagonist:

> The eleventh of April, 1896, is not generally known to be a date of special significance, yet it was on that day, or, to be more exact, that night, that the hero of this narrative made his entry into a not overhospitable world. Perhaps the term hero, with its suggestion of high enterprise, sits inappropriately upon the chief character of a somewhat commonplace tale; there was in Gander Stake little of that quality which is associated with the clash of righteous steel or the impact of noble purposes. Yet that he was without heroic fibre I will not admit, and you who bear with me through these pages shall judge whether or not the word is wholly unwarranted.[34]

The conventional romantic conception of the heroic pioneer has been altered by Stead's disarmingly "commonplace tale" of a second generation Manitoba farm boy. Neither is the sugary sentimentality of The Homesteaders, the academic artificiality of The Smoking Flax nor the cocoon-like world of Neighbours found in this mundane account of young Gander's childhood on a prairie farm. Gander Stake's view of the world is naturally limited to the pioneer homestead of his birth and the one place where he will always feel comfortable:

> As soon as he could walk Gander was allowed to visit the wide, wide world on his own account. . . . As his effective range increased he roved further and further afield, pursuing gophers and butterflies, and proving all things by the child's simple test of thrusting them in his mouth. . . . He protested regularly against being put to sleep in the little

> box bed which succeeded his cradle, but he loved to lie in the grass under the afternoon sun, and he gave his father and mother more than one uneasy hour by his protracted naps in distant corners of the farm. (pp. 19, 20)

Gander's whole world revolves about the farm. Stead employs the details of the Stakes' make-shift log cabin to symbolize the lack of time which the family has to devote to one another (pp. 18, 19). Dick Harrison makes this point clear in his critical work Unnamed Country:

> . . . The priorities of materialistic values over human ones are emphasized when Jackson cannot use the old house for a granary: "It is one thing to live in a house with rotten sills, but quite another to risk the year's harvest in it" (p. 85).[35]

Susie Stake also seems too preoccupied with delegating farm chores to show Gander any of the affection which she feels for him on his first day at school (p. 39). Within the rigid conservatism of the Stake family in which the primary concern in life is material success, there is little room for affection, a reality which triggers the same incapacity for human love in the boy:

> He was the foster-child of the family collie, Queenie, in whom he confided all his troubles and who was usually the first to locate him when he wandered too far from home. . . . He liked his mother, tolerated his father, and hated his brother Jackson. But he loved Queenie. (p. 20)

Indeed there seems to be no time at all for Gander's boyhood as by "the summer he was ten years old Gander began to take a man's place on the farm" (p. 40). In a family where the primary concern is the "need of bringing more land under

cultivation, to grow more wheat" (p. 41), it seems natural for Gander to forsake his boyhood and schooling without regret:

> Gander was dull; learning came to him with difficulty; books were bothersome, and he was not disposed to be bothered. . . . For Gander was a farmer born and bred; he had an eye for horses and a knack with machinery; the mysteries of the self-binder he had solved before he was nine, but the mysteries of cube root he had not solved when he left school--nor since. He knew more than any of his teachers about the profession by which he was to make his livelihood, but he regarded their book-learning as non-essential and irrelevant--neither of which words would he have understood. (p. 40)

The primary theme in Grain, and one which was introduced in Stead's earlier prairie novels, is the theme of the restricted horizons of pioneer life. A serious consideration of this theme is developed through the love story between Gander Stake and Jo Burge, who are children of neighbouring homesteaders. This love story is a distinct departure from Stead's conventional romances in his earlier romantic novels because it is written with quiet conviction and with a steady hand on Gander's tragic acceptance of his father's pioneer dream. The love story develops subtly because there is no rebellion or external conflict to add dramatic intensity to the romance, a feature of Ostenso's style in Wild Geese. It also develops with tragic inevitability when one considers Gander's narrow-minded upbringing.

Nothing in Gander's peculiarly unaffectionate family has prepared him for the importance of human love, and Stead

carefully allies Gander's sexual frustration with the limits imposed upon his initiative by the farm:

> He began to be conscious of a yearning to be alone with Jo Burge. . . . He had no clear idea of why he wanted to be alone with her and less of how it was to be accomplished, as he was not of an inventive mind except in his experiments with machinery. . . Working about the farm, harnessing his horses, shuttling up and down the black fields on his sulky plough, the figure of Josephine Burge fluttered before him, beckoning, beckoning.
> . . . .
> Jo was for him, for no one else. And he had not the courage to assert his right. That was why he despised himself as he turned black furrows in his father's field, and blacker thoughts in his own mind. (pp. 67, 68)

It is Frank Davey's contention in "Rereading Stead's Grain," that the frustrated love between Gander and Jo Burge is a direct result of the "overtly Freudian character of Gander's anger"[36] towards his undemonstrative mother. Frank Davey's Freudian interpretations of the novel certainly lead to many valid perceptions; however, the "oedipal dramas" between mother and son seem to be a misreading. Stead makes it clear that Gander has little use for his mother, who "was disposed to give orders"; instead, his attentions are galvanized upon his father:

> He loved to work in the fields with his father, for there they worked as man and man; Jackson Stake was much too wise a driver to let this colt feel the rein. Perhaps he had learned something from his experience with his first born. Or perhaps it was that Gander appealed to him differently. (p. 59)

Gordon Turner, in his article "The Incest Bond in Stead's Grain," describes the subtle tyranny of Gander's father which

leads Gander to accept unconsciously his father's quest:

> From an early age Gander seems to fit securely into the life of his family. He likes the calm surface and work-routines of the farm. There is very little overt pressure upon Gander to behave in a particular way; the pressures for him to act properly in those situations which demand decorum are subtle. Gander feels through the set of his father's mouth or his mother's glance what should be done.[37]

Thus his father's unspoken commitment to materialism became "ingrained in Gander without his actually knowing it":[38]

> He was working for his father and with his father and that was enough. Gander was still in the tribal stage of development; his individualism was swallowed up in the family group. (p. 42)

Thus it is the unreasonable limitations set by Gander's acceptance of his father's quest, not anger against his mother, which directs the course of his romance with Jo Burge.

The first crisis in the love story serves to highlight the conflict caused by Gander's restrictive nature. When his parents leave him in charge of the farm for a few days, Gander intends to court Jo, yet "another herd-boy on horseback" seems to prevent the realization of his plan:

> Gander's pulses were thumping and a slow rage was gathering in his heart. Was he not to have even the school section to himself? He resented this other presence; it interfered with his plans. Everything seemed to interfere with his plans, even his most careful plans. Virtue was being thrust upon him, intolerably thrust upon him.
>
> From somewhere it came into Gander's mind that forces which he did not understand persisted in overriding him. His independence was being challenged, his right to manhood denied. He seemed to be under orders. (p. 73)

It is really the Stakes' work ethic which makes Gander believe

that his interest in Jo Burge is wrong, because materialism, not love, has been the priority in his family's moral code. When the "herd-boy" turns out to be Jo Burge, "Gander's bold purposes seeped from him like water in a sieve" (p. 75) and his inner conflict prevents him from extending the boundaries of his own life to include the girl. Thus when Jo later falls asleep under a tree, Gander cannot decide what to say or do:

> For a long time Gander sat beside her, wondering if she really was asleep or if this was a subtle feminine play to test him. Leaning low over her face he stooped until almost he had touched her lips. Yet he did not touch them; something seemed to hold him back. He rose impatiently to his feet and walked aimlessly about among the willows; coming upon his saddle, where he had thrown it upon the grass, he fussed with its straps and girth without knowing he did so, buckling and unbuckling, lacing and unlacing. When he returned to the girl she was sitting up. (p. 77)

The sexual tension of the scene is symbolized by an impending storm and this mood is aggravated by Gander's exultation as he attends to his clearly-defined responsibilities to the cattle:

> They were off at a gallop, rounding up the milling herd and crowding them back against the wind. A few great drops splattered on Gander's shirt; his shouts were whipped from his mouth unheard. Yet for the moment he was happy, and Jo was not uppermost in his thoughts. Here was rain, rain! Rain, the first love of every farmer, the bride of every dry, thirsty field, the mother of every crop that grows! (p. 79)

When the "promised rain" fails to appear, Stead makes it clear that for Gander such a disappointment is a tragedy:

> The girl and boy drew up again together, and

> Gander's jaw was grim and set. There was something fearful and majestic about him as he gazed defiantly at the empty sky; defiantly, perhaps, at God.
> The girl watched him for the moment as he sat launching his soul against the inevitable. She, too, was rooted in the soil, and knew something of the mocking tragedy of rain that threatens but does not come. It was as though the heavens flirted with the earth, arousing her hope and passion, only to draw away in cold and beautiful disdain. (p. 79)

Stead carefully avoids any sentimental overtones in this scene of adolescent love in order to reveal that the restrictiveness of Gander's nature will lead to real tragedy. Gander's hesitancy in expressing his love for Jo Burge is a direct result of his obsession with the Stake family's materialistic quest. Gander's repressed sexual desire naturally turns to a member of this comfortable family unit, his sister Minnie, who crawls into Gander's bed when she is frightened by the outbreak of the storm that night. When a neighbour stops by the Stake homestead in order to inquire about the children's welfare, Gander's sense of guilt is apparent:

> Gander would not have liked to confess that she was in his bed, but his heart was beating steadily again. (p. 82)

Frank Davey, in "Rereading Stead's Grain," states that Gander "appears abruptly to resolve to give up his courtship of Jo, and . . . we do intuit the connection Gander is making. . . ."[39] The following passage is used by Davey to confirm the incestuous interest which Gander has for his sister:

> That spark of desire for Jo had been quenched, or at least subdued, by his curious reaction to the

> trust and hero-worship of his sister Minnie during the storm that night when they were alone in the house together. Gander was not a deep psychologist, but he had been unable to escape the conclusion that Jo was Tommy's sister, just as Minnie was his sister. (p. 104)

Stead's decision to portray sexual abuse as one of the harsher realities associated with pioneer isolation is part of his new honesty in portraying the pioneer dream. Grove also includes the problem of incest and pregnancy on an isolated homestead in an edited portion of his Latter Day Pioneers manuscript.[40]

If incest is a feature of pioneer isolation, Stead makes it clear from the progress of the love story that Gander's restrictive pioneer mentality is also:

> Back in his memory he carried that word of hers, "Bill, [Gander] I've always been your girl." Some day, he supposed, he would ask her to make that promise good, for his simple mind accepted it as a promise for the future as well as a declaration of the past. In the meantime he was tremendously busy with other things--and Jo could wait. She waited. When Gander did not return to the school section that day after the storm, Jo, with the intuition of her sex, guessed that it was not because he didn't care but because he cared too much. . . . One thing gave her assurance: if Gander paid small attention to her, he paid less to anyone else. He was wrapped up in the affairs of the farm. (p. 105)

Brought up in a family where only the materialistic welfare of the farm has any value, Gander has no understanding of the importance of self-discipline and timing in his courtship of Jo Burge. Thus Stead orchestrates the love story and central theme dealing with the restrictiveness of the pioneer dream as a way of life. Frank Davey offers the following theory

to explain Stead's success at writing a realistic love story:

> . . . Gander's feelings for Jo Burge overwhelmingly form the core of Grain for any reader--despite the prominence given in various chapter openings to the historical forces of war and mechanization that frame the action. It is as though Stead himself, while initially believing himself to be writing a naturalistic novel of historical and biological determinism, found his own complex longings for the woman taking over the narrative. . . .[41]

While such an analysis of Stead's creative process may be questionable, it is obvious that none of the stereotyped romantic love plots of Stead's early pioneer novels approximates the realism of the love between Gander Stake and Jo Burge in Grain.

Events on a larger scale which involve family, community and nation, emphasize the unnatural restrictiveness of Gander Stake's obsessive loyalty to the land. Marking the passage of the pioneer era, the Stakes leave their old log house for a new frame dwelling. Yet the advent of a new house, a symbol of material and spiritual progress in prairie fiction,[42] does not bring about the satisfaction which had been part of Jackson Stake's dream:

> "Jumping Jack rabbits! I've paid out more money-- . . . I figgered when I built a house I would be at the end of it. So I was, but not the end I figgered. An now Minnie's raisin' a war cry for a piano. Huh! You'd think farmin' was an industry, instead of a pursoot" (p. 86).

Neither Gander Stake nor his father understands that the pioneer era, as well as their original log house, has "vanished

forever" (p. 85). With the outbreak of World War I, both men cling to their narrow-minded materialistic outlook:

> On the way they talked of the war, as something distant and impersonal, something to be settled in Europe. But it had its practical application, too.
> "It'll likely boost the price o' wheat," Jackson confided in his son. It was impossible for him to keep this important prospect entirely to himself. "I mind my father tellin' about the price o' wheat the time o' the American civil war. Two dollars a bushel, I think it went to."
> "Gee! If it would do that again!" said Gander, and for the moment lost himself in the contemplation of such possibilities. (p. 90)

Lost in his dream of material gain, Gander does not understand Jo's patriotic fervour when he meets her in town: ". . . Today she seemed to place him at a disadvantage. There was a light in her eyes which he could not fathom or understand. In the dusk father and son drove silently home together" (p. 92). The significance of Gander's retreat to the familiar isolation of the Stakes' homestead is not lost in this final sentence.

In the following lyrical description of a prairie harvest, Stead employs war imagery to indicate Gander's choice of the family homestead as his battleground:

> The sudden call for men had created a shortage of harvest labour, and Gander attacked the ripened fields with more than his usual vigour.
> . . . .
> She [Minnie] would watch from the house until Gander turned the far corner of the field; then, when she saw his reel glittering in the sun on the homeward stretch, she would leave in time to intercept him at the nearest corner. . . . It was a never-failing fascination to her to watch the bright knives shuttling in the wheat, and the ruddy stems falling

> on the canvas and being swept up the elevator to the deck. . . . (pp. 94, 95)

The demands of the war and of Jo Burge are lost in Gander's sense of fulfillment with the modern efficiency of a steam-powered threshing machine:

> Gander . . . knew the thrill that comes only to those who hold great power in the hollow of their hands. Jo Burge? This--power--this mighty thing that sprang at his touch--this was life! (p. 101)

After the harvest is over, Gander renews the restrictive bond to his father's pioneer dream:

> "I'll stick to you, Dad," he said, "till the cows come home."
> "Yep, I kind o' figger you will," said Jackson Stake. It was the most intimate talk the two had had together, and it filled them with a glow of domestic affection that held them in silence for some minutes. (p. 113)

Stead is careful to reveal that this romantic "glow of domestic affection" hides a family which is really in a state of disintegration. The remaining members of the family, Susie Stake, Jackson Stake Jr., Minnie Stake and Hamilton are alienated from one another because they do not share the pioneer dream of Gander and his father. Susie Stake, for example, has little basis for communication with Gander:

> The boy shuffled off toward the house. He was fond in a natural sort of way of his mother, but he had no sympathy with her lamentations over his brother Jackie. . . .
> "Hello, Mother! Always bakin'!" said Gander, with an effort at amiability.
> Susie Stake looked up quickly. As her face and hair whitened with premature age her dark eyes seemed to grow sharper and darker; now they caught and held Gander as on two tines of a fork. (p. 114)

As his mother worries about the whereabouts of her older son, Jackie, and imminent departure of Minnie for a business college in Winnipeg, Gander reacts with anger and then embarrassment at his mother's concern. Gander's world remains comfortable within the boundaries of the Stake homestead as he assures his mother that he won't "light out, whatever happens" (p. 115).

Stead develops the restrictiveness of the pioneer dream to reveal another type of alienation, that of Gander's insensitivity and basic alienation from Nature:

> It was a long, slow haul to the market town, under a sky curtained with grey clouds and shaking an occasional threatening snowflake in the air, by stark clumps of leafless poplars, along trails rutted smooth with the broad tires of many wagons, through a world in which Nature had already hibernated for her long sleep until another spring. As Gander crouched on his blankets his cap down about his ears, his collar up around them, he, too, might have been a lifeless thing but for the occasional automatic word of command or suggestion to his horses. It was a great opportunity to think, and in his way Gander made use of it. He wondered what price his load would bring, and how many bushels he carried in that heaving box. He wondered whether he would spend an hour or two in town; maybe get a haircut at the barber's shop and pick up the latest gossip in the poolroom. Perhaps, too, he thought a little of that dark cloud which hung over all the world, and even sometimes wrapped its noisome mists about his heart. And when he thought of that he thought of Jo Burge. Still, he supposed that sometime--That would be the natural thing, and Gander lived close to nature. Her beauties may fall upon blind eyes, her harmonies upon deaf ears, but her instincts, unerring, stir in every clod. (pp. 119-120)

The irony of Gander's alienation from the paradisial land which holds his allegiance is recognized by Dick Harrison in Unnamed Country when Gander is shown how to plant cabbages by

his mother (p. 150):

> When we reflect upon the garden image of the prairie in Stead's early work, the irony is massive, hard even to grasp. Whether or not Stead was aware of it, he could not have found a better way of exploding the prelapsarian image of the farmer as innocent, ennobled by his contact with nature. . . . Paradoxically, it is Gander who is not at home with growing things other than cash crops and must be shown how to plant a cabbage.[43]

Like Martha Ostenso, Robert Stead seems to sense the sterility of Gander's materialistic quest.

The next meeting between Jo Burge and Gander reveals that Gander has certainly not been "ennobled by his contact with nature" over the intervening years. The estrangement between the two is marked by the critical scene in which Gander again meets Jo by the grove of willows where they had pledged their love as adolescents. This time the restrictiveness of Gander's way of life is threatened not only by the girl's overt criticism of Gander's failure to enlist, but also by her admiration for Dick Claus, who has enlisted in the Canadian army. Gander, who has no intention of enlisting and strutting "like prairie chickens . . . doin' a square dance" (p. 131), reacts with characteristic anger at Jo's criticism of his isolated way of life:

> Gander's fire was up, too. His was a slow fire, but suddenly it blazed up as though swept by a prairie wind. "Well, if you're goin' to be his pardner, you ought to learn his dance," he cried. "See--I'll show you." He seized her by the arm. "Form fours! Form two-deep! 'Shun! As you were! 'Shun! As you were!" He suited grotesque movements to his commands, jerking her about until she wrenched herself from his grasp. "That's the way to lick the Germans," he explained.
> . . . Something new had broken out in Gander. She

> read it in his eye, in the twist of his face, in the pose of his body like an animal set to spring. A horror of fear swept her. (p. 131)

This scene in which an infuriated Gander attacks Jo Burge could be interpreted as a scene of attempted rape. Frank Davey points to the imagery which would convey the impression of sexual violence:

> The emphasis on "touch," "abhorrence," the "loosened skirt" makes this scene unmistakeably for us, Stead, and both characters one of symbolic rape--the classic male expression of anger against woman. The usual components of the rape fantasy--the dichotomy of strong man versus fragile woman, the eroticization of violence, and the male illusion of himself as rescuer--are all present.[44]

Certainly these symbolic overtones reveal the degeneration of Gander whose anger could lead him to hurting the woman he loves.

Yet a case can be made for another reason for Jo's fear other than that of sexual violence. One should not isolate this symbolism from the preceding conversation about the war. The "horror of fear" which sweeps over Jo, the "something new" which she intuits about Gander is the tragic narrow-mindedness, the realization of a major flaw in this man whom she has loved since childhood:

> "Besides, I got too much spirit to be a soldier," he said.
> "Too much what?"
> "Too much spirit. . . .
> She was so long in answering that for a moment he thought she had found his argument beyond reply.
> "So that's it?" she said, at length. "You're too good to take orders? Too big a man to be told what to do? If everybody was like you, who'd stop the Germans?" (p. 131)

Thus the anger and violence of this scene arises from the lovers' awareness of the realities which separate them:

> The girl moved off across the prairie, at first slowly, but quickening her pace as she regained control of her muscles, while Gander stood as one rooted to the spot, watching her through a flood of self-abasement. When she disappeared over a ridge he turned and slowly made his way northward to his father's house. (p. 133)

Characteristically Gander remains within the restrictive horizons of "his father's house" and pioneer dream:

> After the incident with Jo Burge, Gander became more than ever a creature of his father's farm. He ploughed and harrowed early and late, and found his companionship with his horses and machinery. From even his father and mother he withdrew as into a shell. (p. 134)

The tragic irony of Gander's entrenched position is that his parents do not appreciate his sacrifice for their material welfare; in fact, "it would have been a solace to their pride" (p. 134) if he had enlisted. Gander's opportunities to broaden the horizons of his life end with two developments which Stead announces at the conclusion of Chapter 15 and the beginning of Chapter 16:

> The marriage of Richard Claus and Josephine Burge took place in September. . . . Peace had returned. (pp. 140, 141)

The remaining chapters point out the meaningless routine and personal loss which become the price of Gander's choice to anchor himself to the Stakes' pioneer dream:

> For Gander the furrow was that unending routine which encircled his father's farm. It was a routine from which he had no desire to be disturbed. . . . His life was on the farm, where he left other people

> alone and asked only that they do the same to him.
> . . . .
> Jo had been his, but she had slipped away; that had been the price of his four years of safety. Well, some others had paid another price. Walter Peters, Tommy Burge, for example. Gander had accepted his fate as final; it had not even occurred to him to suppose that he could transfer his affections. He had taken it for granted that he would just go on--and on. (pp. 141, 142)

The abrupt introduction of Jerry Chansley, a sophisticated city girl, would seem to mark the author's return to a conventional romance in order to rescue the grimly deterministic trend of <u>Grain</u>. However the whole force of the conclusion does not accomplish the usual optimistic tone of Stead's early novels, and the author remains true to Gander's nature. When Jerry tries to jostle Gander out of his "furrow" by urging him to meet new people and learn new ideas, he reacts with characteristic rage and the next day learns "that Elsie's cousin had gone back to the city" (p. 165).

The concluding six chapters develop a subplot which involves Cal and Reed Beach who were introduced in <u>The Smoking Flax</u>, and this combination is usually condemned by literary critics. Edward A. McCourt claims that "the attempted interweaving fails almost completely,"[45] an assessment echoed by Desmond Pacey in the <u>Literary History of Canada</u>:

> . . . The last section of the novel, however, dealing with the early post-war years, is less satisfactory: the plot concerning Jackson Stake, Cal and Reed Beach, and Minnie Stake, intrudes on Gander's story, and makes the last chapters unnecessarily difficult to follow.[46]

Yet Stead approaches the conclusion of "Gander's story" when

Gander decides to leave the farm, with the same care that he introduced "the hero of this narrative" (p. 15). The introduction of these new characters, confusing as it may be, provides an effective foil for Gander's stubborn attempts to make life stand still. The ultimate folly of Gander's choice to live a pioneer dream which has disappeared becomes clear. For example, the introduction of Cal Beach, a university-educated farmhand, heralds the end of the pioneer era to which Gander is clinging:

> Cal's arrival proved to be but the beginning of changes on the Stake farm. Cal had a perfect mania for changes. After his day's work was done in the fields and he should have been content to rest and smoke, he was busy piling up the firewood that lay in a heap in front of the house, hauling gravel to fill mud holes in the yard, straightening into neat rows the farm implements and vehicles. . . . In all of these operations Cal had the active support of the little boy Reed, and sometimes of Hamilton, but Gander and Grit held aloof. They regarded these changes with suspicion. (p. 166)

Gander's sense of security is threatened by his awareness "that he was being ousted out of the premier position on his own father's farm and supplanted by this mysterious man and boy who had come overnight from nowhere" (p. 166). The return of the prodigal son, Jackson Stake Jr., also foreshadows the end of Gander's life in the shadow of his father's pioneer dream:

> The inheritance of the farm, until that moment, never had crossed Gander's mind. He looked upon the farm as the common possession of his father and himself, with Hamilton, Minnie, and his mother holding secondary interests. That his father would one day die was a contingency upon which he never

> had dwelt. Jackie's unexpected return put a new face on the whole situation. For the first time Gander began to realize that his father was growing old. It might not be so many years-- (p. 169)

Gander's apprehensiveness and suspicions about the mysterious relationship between Cal and Reed, whose father was supposedly "killed in the war" (p. 167), and between Cal and his brother Jackie (p. 170), foreshadow Gander's eventual awareness that neither the farm nor his family will offer the same haven of security for him again. The sense of urgency created by these seemingly confusing events is consistent with the compelling factors which will eject Gander from the Stake homestead.

Stead concludes Grain with the end of two dreams in Gander's life: his father's pioneer dream and his dream of winning Jo Burge. In his introduction to the New Canadian Library edition, Thomas Saunders finds that "the contrived, unnatural ending . . . is the most serious flaw in Grain":

> Young people, of course, leave the farm for the city all the time. But all we have learned of Gander Stake up to this final denouement would lead us to believe that he would not be one of them. If ever a character belonged on the farm, it was he. His leaving it and the young woman who was his only other love in life contrives an ending that may have been pleasing to the author but is completely unconvincing in itself. The loss of Gander's one love should have led him to lose himself, not in the city, but in his other love, the land.[47]

However, as Dick Harrison has perceived in his study, Gander has never shown any sentimental love for Nature and is actually alienated from the land despite his loyalty to farming routine.

Like Ostenso and Grove, Stead has revealed the illusory promise of the pioneer dream of a life close to a beneficient Nature:

> The three writers have little in common stylistically. What they do share is a recognition that in spite of material progress, the English-speaking settlers remain spiritually alienated from the land. Their work is both a decisive sign of disillusionment with the romance of pioneering and an admission that man has found no honest imaginative conception of the prairie that can place him in harmony with it.[48]

It is Jo Burge who senses Gander's unsettled feelings about his life when he offers her a ride home one evening:

> "Thanks, Gander; that's good of you," she said. "But what's the matter? You're out of your beat a little, are you not, tonight?" (p. 180)

Gander offers to help Jo's ailing husband, Dick Claus, with the spring seeding and this new "selflessness" on Gander's part reveals that while he may be disillusioned with the pioneer dream, he is still clinging to his love for Jo Claus (pp. 190, 194). The fortunes of Gander's misdirected quest and his love for Jo have been inextricably linked throughout the novel, and it seems fitting that both dreams should end together. It is Minnie who points out to Gander the need for self-sacrifice in ending both dreams and in facing a new reality:

> "Everyone must say you have been very noble. <u>Dick knows</u>. Don't imagine he doesn't know. But it's turning out differently from what all of us--including Dick--expected. And now what are you going to do about it?"
>
> "Do about it? Nothin'. What can I do about it?"
>
> She held him close to her for a minute, weighing Gander's disposition, his reserve, his independence,

> his rejection of all discipline, wondering how far she could go. Then--
> "If I were you, I would get out, Gander. The world is big. If you get out you may forget--at least, you will get away from the edge of the precipice. If you stay here you will always be in danger of slipping over." (p. 202)

Forced to spend the night at the Claus farm because of a violent storm, Gander remembers another storm years ago when he and Jo had pledged their love. Drawing an analogy to the circular pattern of ploughing fields, Gander realizes what a high price he has paid since then for his loyalty to the pioneer dream of his father:

> And, while his thoughts circled many fields, always it came back to one centre. . . . As he lay there, fighting through a mist that was not of the rain, for the first time in his life he looked Gander Stake in the face.
> "You haven' made much of it, Gander, have you?" he demanded bitterly. "Not very much of it. You wouldn't take discipline--I think that's what they call it, that 'Form fours' stuff--and here you are. . . . Here you are." Then, with a bitter jest at himself, "And where are you?" (p. 206)

Gander Stake, finding no harmony with any aspect of his restrictive life, feels compelled to leave. With a new decisiveness, Gander abruptly leaves the Claus farm after leaving Jo a note which explains only that he has decided to accept Jerry Chansley's offer of a job in a city garage. As Thomas Saunders did, Edward McCourt also finds this decision to leave the farm totally out of character with the Gander Stake "which Stead has so honestly and convincingly created."[49] Yet Stead has emphasized throughout the novel that Gander's pioneer mentality has left no room for

imagination. He has always taken the path of least resistance and with Jerry Chansley's letter in his pocket, Gander does make a realistic decision which carries "events to their logical conclusion."[50]

Nor is Stead's emphasis upon spiritual renewal at the conclusion of Grain an attempt to romanticize the realities which he has associated with Gander's loyalty to the pioneer dream. Robert Stead, like Frederick Philip Grove, has separated romantic illusion from reality and then associated spiritual renewal with the struggle of Gander Stake to overcome the limitations of his pioneer quest. For the successful veneer of Gander's existence has masked the inner realities of failure: a life spent in isolation with the routine of crops and profits, the disintegration of the Stake family, and ultimate personal defeat in losing the only girl he loved. The image of Gander Stake moving beyond the limited horizons of his pioneer lifestyle concludes the novel:

> Then he stole silently through the door and started his car. Jo, awake in her room upstairs, fancied she heard the sound of the motor. She ran to her window just as a flash of lightning revealed Gander's car lurching down the muddy road. (p. 207)

In writing Grain, Stead exercised consummate control over the realistic implications of the pioneer dream. He seems, with this later novel, to have recognized his former limitations with the use of romantic stylisms. Thus his customary idyllic treatment of the pioneer dream is missing from Grain, and Stead's familiar romantic style also disappears.

Stead did attempt a thematic tension between the pioneer's romantic dream of an idyllic prairie life and its attendant hardships in his two earlier novels, *The Homesteaders* and *The Smoking Flax*. However, the improbabilities created by Stead's use of this thematic tension detracted from both novels and from the new realistic thrust of their common theme. *Neighbours*, with its purely romantic treatment of the pioneer dream, belongs at the opposite end of the spectrum from *Grain*. The tension between romantic and realistic aspects of the pioneer dream varies in degree throughout Stead's prairie fiction with *Grain* clearly belonging to the realistic extreme of the spectrum.

Notes

Chapter I

[1]Robert Stead, "The Old Prairie Homestead," Canadian Geographic Journal, VII, No. 1 (July, 1933), p. 14.

[2]Robert Stead, "Manitoba in the Early Eighties," Robert Stead Papers, Public Archives Canada, MG 30 D74, Vol. 8, Folder 2.

[3]Robert Stead, "Has Romance Gone From The Canadian West?", Robert Stead Papers, PAC, MG 30 D74, Vol. 5, Folder 5.

[4]Stead, "The Old Prairie Homestead," p. 13.

[5]Robert Stead, "Literature As A National Asset," Robert Stead Papers, PAC, MG 30 D74, Vol. 8, Folder 2.

[6]Norah Story, The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature (Toronto, London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 776.

[7]Robert Stead to T. Fisher Unwin Publishers, Nov. 14, 1912, "Correspondence," Robert Stead Papers, PAC, MG 30 D74, Vol. 1, Folder 3.

8 Eric Callum Thompson, "A Critical Study of the Poetry and Prose of Robert J. C. Stead: Prairie Poet and Novelist," MA thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1965, p. 171.

[9]Robert J. C. Stead, The Homesteaders: A Novel of the Canadian West (1916; rpt. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 19.

[10]A. T. Elder, "Western Panorama: Settings and Themes in Robert J. C. Stead," in Writers of the Prairies, ed. Donald G. Stephens (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 30.

[11]Dick Harrison, Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1977), p. 33.

[12]Elder, p. 33.

[13]George Woodcock, "Where Did It All Begin?", Canadian Literature, 61 (Summer, 1974), p. 5.

[14]Elder, p. 30.

[15]Prem Varma, "Robert Stead: An Annotated Bibliography," Essays On Canadian Writing, 17 (Spring 1980), p. 144.

[16]Review of Neighbours, Canadian Bookman, IV, No. 10 (October 1922), p. 261.

[17]Robert Stead, Neighbours (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1922), p. 20.

[18]Varma, p. 202.

[19]Robert Stead, The Smoking Flax (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Publishers, 1924), pp. 87-88.

[20]Laurence Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 25.

[21]Kathleen K. Bowker, "Robert Stead: An Interview," Canadian Bookman, V, No. 4 (April 1923), p. 99.

[22]Dante M. Pierce, editorial in Iowa Homestead, 24 May 1928, as quoted by Robert Stead to John McClelland, May 30, 1928, "Correspondence," Robert Stead Papers, PAC, MG 30 D74, Vol. 1, Folder 10.

[23]Varma, p. 204.

[24]Thompson, p. 218.

[25]Ibid., p. 180.

[26]Robert Stead to John McClelland, July 22, 1935, "Correspondence," Robert Stead Papers, PAC, MG 30 D74, Vol. 1, Folder 12.

[27]Thompson, p. 179.

[28]Wilfred Eggleston, The Frontier and Canadian Letters (1957; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1977), pp. 144, 145.

[29]Desmond Pacey, "Fiction, 1920-1940," in Literary History of Canada, gen. ed., Carl F. Klinck (Reprinted with corrections; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 67.

[30]Ibid., pp. 677-678.

[31]Leslie Mundwiler, "Robert Stead--Home in the First Place," Essays on Canadian Writing, 11 (Summer 1978), p. 199.

[32]Edward A. McCourt, The Canadian West in Fiction (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1949), p. 84.

[33]Frank Davey, "Rereading Stead's Grain," Studies in Canadian Literature, IV, No. 1 (Winter 1979), pp. 23, 24.

[34]Robert J. C. Stead, Grain (1926; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1963), p. 15. All subsequent references to Grain belong to this edition.

[35]Harrison, p. 132.

[36]Davey, p. 12.

[37]Gordon Turner, "The Incest Bond in Stead's Grain," The Sphinx 2, 3 (1977), p. 23.

[38]Ibid., p. 24.

[39]Davey, p. 15.

[40]F. P. Grove, typescript, "Being the first book of a three-book series, Latter Day Pioneers," Frederick Philip Grove Collection, Department of Archives, Manuscripts and Rare Books, Elizabeth Dafoe Library, University of Manitoba, Box X, Folder 1, p. 111. This manuscript was later edited and published as Settlers of the Marsh.

[41]Davey, p. 15.

[42]Susan Jackel, "The House on the Prairies," *Canadian Literature*, 42 (Autumn 1969), p. 46.

[43]Harrison, pp. 106-107.

[44]Davey, p. 13.

[45]McCourt, p. 87.

[46]Pacey, "Fiction: 1920-1940," p. 677.

[47]Thomas Saunders, introduction to *Grain*, pp. ix-x.

[48]Harrison, p. 101.

[49]McCourt, p. 87.

[50]*Ibid*.

Chapter II

Martha Ostenso: The Pioneer Dream in Transition

Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese has been termed "truly a pioneer among novels about pioneers."[1] The theme of the pioneer dream, already well-developed in romantic prairie fiction, was given new force by Martha Ostenso in her attempt to reflect the harsh realities of Canadian pioneer life in Wild Geese. In terms of literary style, however, the novel was not as innovative as the quotation above might imply.

Wild Geese is a literary compromise reflecting a tension between romanticism and realism.[2] In 1926, W. E. MacLellan termed Ostenso's realism "delicate";[3] probably the author's blend of romantic tone and characterization with a realistic rendering of the pioneer dream accounts for MacLellan's impression. The villainous Caleb Gare, the elements of melodrama and highly-charged suspense, and the conventional romance between Lind Archer and Mark Jordan all belong to the romantic heritage of prairie fiction. Robert Stead had gradually foregone these conventions as he progressed toward the publication of Grain. Frederick Philip Grove always abhorred such romantic superficialities. In Wild Geese, Ostenso succeeded in striking a compromise between some of the popular conventions of romantic fiction and the realistic treatment of the harsh effects of the pioneer dream.

One senses in the novel's construction a counterpoint of romanticism and realism which was suitable for the popular literary taste of 1925. W. E. MacLellan was one critic who recognized the realistic core of the novel's theme and heralded Wild Geese as a positive step toward life-like Canadian fiction:

> Truthfulness is the distinguished characteristic of the book. There is not an incident in it which might not have happened in the surroundings, not a character introduced which might not have been a logical product or part of the conditions. That is why I hold that Wild Geese, written by a real Canadian girl, wholly 'made in Canada' although of foreign parentage, is our first and only piece of real Canadian light literature. . . .[4]

The same realistic strength was noted by a contemporary American critic, Stuart Sherman, in his detailed review of Wild Geese which appeared in the November 8, 1925, edition of the New York Herald Tribune:

> She grips her human theme as a man takes hold of plow handles, driving the colter in. She conspicuously excels where the young novelist is ordinarily weak: in . . . seeing the thing through, and thus pre-establishing lucidity and order in the movement of her narrative.
>
> We have had a tremendous crop of these rambling "farm novels," and one grows a little weary of the stuff raked up from various hayfields and baled in the same fashion. Miss Ostenso gives us courage to begin again by bringing the old material sharply into the focus of her intention and discarding everything that is not pertinent to that.[5]

What Ostenso discarded as irrelevant to her treatment of the theme of the pioneer dream was the romantic illusion of the prairie as a land of golden opportunity. Ostenso introduces a realistic interpretation of the theme *in medias*

res with details of the nightmarish exploitation of the Gare family by its aging patriarch, Caleb Gare. There are no golden illusions left for Caleb Gare: what remains is the grim necessity of enslaving his family in order to satisfy his obsessive desire for land and power.

Martha Ostenso never compromises the realistic theme of Wild Geese with its grim reminder of the personal losses which accompany a pioneer's goal of material success. The romantic features of the novel act as a foil which emphasize the personal cost which the Gare family has paid in order to realize a materialistic dream. The realistic strength of Wild Geese, with its compelling portrayal of an isolated pioneer family, must have suited the requirements[6] of the literary contest sponsored by Pictorial Review, Dodd, Mead and Co., and Famous Players-Lasky Corporation as Wild Geese was awarded the first novel prize of $13,500. The hybrid literary style of Wild Geese, despite its realistic theme, is revealed in the choice of titles of the novel written by "the novelist from nowhere" as one reviewer called Martha Ostenso. The prosaic and distinctly North American title, Wild Geese appeared in the serial publication of the novel in The Pictorial Review as well as the Dodd, Mead edition in 1925.[7] The English edition, however, carried the romantic subtitle, The Passionate Flight.[8]

The realistic thrust of the novel stems from the autobiographical background of Martha Ostenso. Unlike Robert

Stead, Martha Ostenso had not experienced the realities of pioneer homesteading through her family life. Nor did she experience pioneer life for any prolonged period of time as Grove did. After emigrating from Norway to the United States in 1902, the Ostenso family moved from one "little town" to another throughout Minnesota and South Dakota[9] following the father's occupation as a butter-maker.[10]

During the fall of 1918, Martha Ostenso taught school in Hayland, Manitoba, a remote rural locality a few hundred miles northwest of Winnipeg.[11] In a passage from Grant Overton's The Women Who Make Our Novels, Ostenso defines her experiences in Hayland as the creative catalyst for Wild Geese:

> It was during a summer vacation from my university work that I went into the lake district of Manitoba, well toward the frontier of that northern civilization. My novel, 'Wild Geese', lay there, waiting to be put into words. Here was the raw material out of which Little Towns were made. Here was human nature stark, unattired in the convention of a smoother, softer life. A thousand stories are there still to be written.[12]

It was common for a rural teacher to board with one of the local families and Ostenso stayed on a farm owned by Alexander Hay of Hayland.[13] Mr. Barney Ostenso links Wild Geese to his sister's experiences in this pioneer community and identifies Aggie Hay, one of her young students, as the inspiration for Judith Gare.[14] However, Mrs. Aggie Hutchison (née Hay) denies that Wild Geese has any basis in actual fact and states that the novel "is only a story . . . which hurt

the beautiful people of the North country."[15] She does admit that there is some degree of similarity between Judith Gare and herself; however, she is reluctant to discuss the novel further. Her father, Alexander Hay, had resented Ostenso's claim that the Hay family was the prototype of the fictional Gares, and his decision was to remain silent on this issue. Mrs. Hutchison's remarks, of course, are a subjective interpretation.

Like Lind Archer, the teacher in her novel, Ostenso's experiences in Hayland seem to have been an unpleasant cultural shock:

> She admitted that hardships had to be endured at that time. Her words, typical of a dramatic mode of expression she has to friends who asked her about teaching were, "I want to forget". . . . Her friends believe that many of the characters in Wild Geese were met during the brief teaching experience.[16]

One of her former students in offering the reason for Ostenso's brief teaching career said that "Miss Ostenso was a very clever, a very good teacher but she didn't stay very long. think she was a little lonely--a little out of place--perhaps."[17] Certainly the aesthetic nature of Martha Ostenso rebelled at the features of pioneer homesteading which were realities for her--the oppressive isolation and loneliness which is described in the title poem of her sole book of poetry, A Far Land (1924):

> Dark cannot blot the dark
> In the place I know,
> Wind cannot blow

> The wind of that stormed land,
> Where stillness falls
> On sudden wings like a band
> Of quiet birds on ruined walls.[18]

Ostenso's dislike of isolation and perhaps the "Little Towns" of her childhood must have had its effect upon her portrayal of life in Oeland. How much the characterization of the Gares reflects her experiences with the Hay family in 1918 will remain in doubt.

Yet the realistic "weaving" of the theme of the pioneer dream in Wild Geese is clearly a result of Ostenso's brief stay in Hayland. Some of her memories of this are found in several early poems which appeared in A Far Land, but were written during the period between 1918 and 1924 when Ostenso was a student at University of Manitoba and Columbia University.[19] The themes of isolation and "death-in-life" which figure prominently in Wild Geese are introduced in several of these early poems. In addition, A Far Land is similar to Wild Geese in its blend of realistic and romantic attitudes.

A Far Land consists of forty-three lyrics, mostly conventional romantic expressions about nature, love and death. The New York Times review faulted the collection for its weak themes:

> . . . There is still to be found the woman poet who will speak out. And this reticence, even if it lend something of charm at times, leads so generally to weakness of thought and expression that the attainment as a whole suffers.[20]

Yet some poems from this collection introduce the themes which were meaningful for Ostenso and which she wove into the harsh pattern of <u>Wild Geese</u>. "Lexicon," for example, develops the theme of personal isolation in the midst of Nature's beauty as the poet describes a Romantic pastoral scene of "simple grasses" and crickets' songs:

> There are dark, human things
> You know not, simple grasses,
> Colder than the cold wings
> Of the lone wild duck that passes
> Hereover in the late Fall; . . .
> I have learned dark things
> You know not, simple grasses,--
> Teach me what your cricket sings
> Until my learning passes. (11.1-5, 13-16)

As Clara Thomas points out, Ostenso's "Wasteland" describes the same wilderness isolation as A. J. M. Smith's poem of the same title; however, the following lines from Ostenso's poem convey a grimmer isolation:[21]

> Here the lichens cling
> To the grey rocks
> . . . .
> Here's a wrinkled grape
> Like a blue knot
> On a thread--the shape
> Of life caught
> In the death rot. .
> Here a man may own
> His bare soul instead
> Of beauty blown
> Rose, 'tis said.
> But his soul is dead. (11. 1-2, 11-15, 21-25)

Such extreme spiritual isolation, which Clara Thomas has termed "death-in-life,"[22] is similar to Caleb Gare's existence in <u>Wild Geese</u>.

"The Farmer's Wife" reflects upon the disintegration of the pioneer family and the isolation which accompanies the homesteader's obsession with the pioneer dream:

> He will not hold the soil again
> In his two hands, nor will his face
> Lift to the power of the rain
> That early April brings this place.
>
> To the south his orchard lies,
> His naked wheat-fields to the west.
> And well will <u>they</u> know when he dies
> He loved me only second best. (ll. 9-16)

One has the uncanny feeling that this bitter conversation actually occurred and that Martha Ostenso transferred it to the plight of Amelia Gare in her first novel.

The final poem in this selection, "So I Say," reflects the author's ability to create the dramatic tension of a realistic theme within the framework of a romantic style:

> Down into the unrevealed land
> Of my long cherished sorrow
> Shall I unfaltering go.
> Well I know the way: On either hand
> Unvoiced and still of wing,
> Snared in nets of shade
> The wild and glistening
> Birds of ecstasy complain and fade.
> . . . .
> So I say. And yet I sing
> To a fairy harp, and faintly hear
> The sunlit hoofs, a-dancing near,
> And like the foam-thin sea-shell dare
> Not tell the truer, darker thing,
> Nor whisper of it anywhere. (ll. 1-8, 15-20)

The critical reception of the romantic style of <u>Wild Geese</u> has undergone a transition since the publication of the novel in 1925. Certainly there was no popular clamour for realism in prairie fiction in 1925; the contemporary

reviews revealed enthusiasm for the familiar romantic style which modified the grim realism of Wild Geese.

A comparison between the critical response to Wild Geese and Settlers of the Marsh reveals the popularity of the familiar features of romantic prairie fiction. In 1925, a lengthy critical comparison of these two novels appeared in The Winnipeg Tribune Magazine under the headline "Realism in Manitoba Novels".[23] The subtitle emphasized the realistic interpretation of the pioneer dream: "In Wild Geese and Settlers of the Marsh Miss Martha Ostenso and Mr. Frederick Grove Produce Works of Near Genius--Land Hunger of Foreign-born Depicted--Both Stories Epics of the Soil." Professor W. T. Allison then proceeded to describe the compelling realism of these new versions of the pioneer dream:

> After reading either Wild Geese or Settlers of the Marsh, the native Canadian will have a new conception of what is implied in the process which we vaguely call nation-building. He will understand, as never before, the dramatic value of another very suggestive word, land-hunger, for in the two strong male characters in these novels this desire amounted to a passion even an obsession.[24]

Despite the thematic similarity, Allison's review favours Wild Geese over Settlers of the Marsh. Allison's character analysis of Caleb Gare reveals the reviewer's immediate appreciation of a stock romantic villain and a romantic interpretation of farming in the midst of Nature's beauty:

> Caleb Gare is the dominating character in Miss

> Ostenso's novel of the soil. He rules his family, wife, sons, and daughters with an iron hand, bends every energy, and practises the most niggardly economy in order to accumulate more land. His cynical meanness to his wife and children and vulpine dealings with his neighbors are thrown up in high relief against the drama of the seasons and the pageant of never-ceasing toil on the land.[25]

Niels Lindstedt, the protagonist of Grove's novel, is a singularly undramatic pioneer:

> He is the antithesis of Caleb Gare in his slow-going perseverance, his shyness, his laconic speech, his tardy mental processes, but at one with him in his determination to subdue the soil and to make himself a commanding figure in the countryside.[26]

The love stories, rather than the pioneer realities of both novels receive the most critical attention. Of course, Wild Geese is again closer to the norm of romantic prairie fiction. Allison welcomes the "prodigal hand" of Ostenso in providing "her readers with no less than three love stories" which issue "happily in . . . Judith's elopement with her Icelandic hero."[27] On the other hand, the awkward love affair between Niels and Ellen Amundsen in Settlers of the Marsh is a matter for some disbelief:

> A slow-going Swede obsessed by land-hunger might be able to preserve silence for so long a time though I doubt it, but no Canadian could manage such a heroic feat of self-repression.[28]

Although both novels are disparaged for their lack of humour and brutal sexual realism, it is Settlers of the Marsh which is criticized for the "bitterness of soul, insanity, murder, and expiation"[29]--sordid elements which impede the progress of the love story.

It is clear that Allison lost sight of the new realistic dimensions of the theme which he announced at the beginning of his review. The elements of isolation, disintegration of the family and alienation from the land were ignored while the familiar romantic conventions of villains, dramatic moral conflicts and entertaining love stories were applauded. The hybrid realism of Wild Geese, which seemed closer to familiar romantic prairie fiction, accounted for its more favourable reception. Grove's single-minded emphasis upon the harshness of the pioneer dream in Settlers of the Marsh lacked the same comfortable familiarity offered by the romantic style of Wild Geese.

Allison's biased review must have been fuel for Frederick Philip Grove's growing anger over the reception of Wild Geese. On Oct. 10, 1925, Austin Bothwell had praised the novel in Grove's presence at a meeting of the Canadian Authors' Association.[30] The author of Settlers of the Marsh replied with a scathing letter to Bothwell (Nov. 18, 1925) which outlined the romantic flaws of the "deplorably, even unusually immature"[31] Wild Geese. The "immature" qualities of Martha Ostenso's treatment of the pioneer dream were described for Bothwell as being the novel's romantic stock characters, conventional love story, and one-dimensional villain. Grove's protest was so extreme that one suspects that the author was infuriated that Martha Ostenso had somehow allied her hybrid literary style to a tragic (and

hence realistic) rendering of the pioneer dream.

Like Grove, most modern critics have since been uncomfortable with the romantic features of Wild Geese. John Moss, in Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel, feels that the novel's hybrid literary style makes it a lesser novel than Settlers of the Marsh:

> Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, set further north in Manitoba, is as brooding, but the gloom is relieved by romantic alternatives throughout, instead of only at the conclusion. This makes it, unfortunately, a lesser novel, although still undeniably powerful and unsettling.[32]

Roy W. Meyer, in The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century, finds the general romantic tone "annoying":

> Wild Geese is an impressive first novel, despite annoying stylistic tricks and a tendency toward overdramatization of materials.[33]

Carlyle King, in his 1971 introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of Wild Geese, points out the romantic elements of the novel as "obvious weaknesses":[34] the sentimental lapses, conventional love story and melodramatic death scene. At the same time, he recognizes the strong realistic development of the theme by Ostenso:

> The author's hand is steady, however, in the main matters of the novel: the domestic conflict of the Gares and the life of the land in a northern outpost of civilization.[35]

Desmond Pacey's criticism of Wild Geese appears to be more pragmatic. While remaining noncommittal about the novel's literary antecedents, Pacey's praise in Creative Writing in Canada is directed towards the powerful

characterization, vivid description and unified structure and tone of Wild Geese.[36] In the Literary History of Canada, Pacey is unequivocal in his statement about the role of Wild Geese in the evolution of realistic Canadian fiction:

> . . . Wild Geese itself is the single most consistent piece of western realism to appear before the novels of Frederick Philip Grove, and has a niche of its own in the history of this phase of our literary development.[37]

Dick Harrison, in Unnamed Country, also focuses upon the pragmatic achievement of Wild Geese as a realistic work of art and goes one step further than Pacey by suggesting that the romantic features of the plot are functional literary devices:

> From the success of Wild Geese it is evident that romantic plotting and characterization could not have been what kept Connor and McClung out of the first rank of western novelists. And on the prairie, of all places, with its precarious balance of dream and nightmare, romance in one form or another is bound to continue showing its value as a way of capturing subjective experience. The earlier romances had just been too superficial, sentimental, and moralistic to reach what was going on between the settlers and the prairie. The new fiction seemed "realistic" regardless of technique because the authors were now engaging this elemental relationship between man and land. Wild Geese could be seen as a demonic counterpoint to the idyllic romances, a wholesome antidote because it grants the true power to some of the dark forces in human and external nature.[38]

In evaluating the spectrum of critical opinion concerning the romantic and realistic features of Wild Geese, it would seem that the pragmatic approach of Dick Harrison has particular merit. No excuses have to be made for Ostenso's

hybrid literary style as she kept a steady hand not only on the realistic theme but also on most of the romantic and realistic contrasts which structure the novel.

Wild Geese introduces the reader to the centre of the quest pattern which develops the theme of the pioneer dream: that is, to the harsh realities of the Gare family's existence. Thus the conventional young pioneer's romantic illusions of the prairie as a golden land of opportunity are bypassed by Ostenso. Instead, she portrays the disconcerting realities of pioneer life in northern Manitoba after the illusions have disappeared. The wild geese which fly far overhead carrying the romantic connotation of "a magnificent seeking through solitude . . . an endless quest" (p. 239), have little to do with the slavery of a family to meaningless greed. Thus even the title of the novel makes the reader aware of the ironic tension drawn between romantic illusion and harsh reality.

The realistic force of the theme is accomplished through the actions of the aging patriarch, Caleb Gare, who drives his family to work his prosperous homestead because he is unable to work it alone and is too niggardly to hire fieldhands. Caleb's total control of the five members of his family: his wife, Amelia; daughters, Judith and Ellen; and sons, Martin and Charlie, is implied in the first sentence of the novel: "It was not openly spoken of, but the family was waiting for Caleb Gare" (p. 11). The romantic

aspects of this first scene with its interplay of darkness and light,[39] and atmosphere of apprehension create a dramatic introduction for Caleb Gare:

> Then the door opened. At first, Caleb seemed to be a huge man. As he drew into the centre of the kitchen, Lind could see that he was, if anything, below medium height, but that his tremendous shoulders and massive head, which loomed forward from the rest of his body, gave him a towering appearance. . . . His eyes were little beads of light that sought Lind out where she sat in the lamp glow of the other room. (p. 13)

Martha Ostenso's portrayal of the pioneer as a giant links Caleb Gare to Gander Stake and Niels Lindstedt;[40] however, there is nothing heroic about Caleb's vulture-like appearance.

If Lind Archer possessed any romantic illusions about pioneers as heroes, they are soon shattered by Judith's revelation of her father's character:

> "You see--" said Judith, then began on another line. "He loves to ride around in the cart to show the Icelanders how much spare time he has during the busy season, while the rest of us slave around in the muck all day." (p. 13)

When Caleb is questioned later by Mark Jordan about his plans for the Gare children, the restrictiveness of the Gare family takes on the menacing note of slavery:

> "But it wouldn't hurt them to get out for awhile. They might do better at something other than farming, if they got a chance."
> Caleb's face seemed to close in upon itself like a folding door.
> "No--no. Not my children. They're too close to the land," he said. "The Gares are farmers, from way back. No Gare ever did good at anything else. No--they'll not leave--they'll not leave." (p. 155)

There seems to be no limit to the work load imposed by Caleb's

materialistic obsession with his land:

> Caleb felt a glow of satisfaction as he stood there on the ridge peering out over his land until the last light had gone. He could hold all this, and more--add to it year after year--add to his herd of pure-bred Holsteins and his drove of horses--raise more sheep--experiment with turkey and goose for the winter markets in the south--all this as long as he held the whip hand over Amelia. Amelia's word would start the children, then it would be all over--the results of his labour would be swept from these fields like chaff from a barn floor. (pp. 19,20)

The "whip hand" which Caleb holds over Amelia is his knowledge of her illegitimate son, Mark Jordan, who coincidentally has come to live on the neighbouring Klovacz farm. The following passage, one of the rare references to the Gares' early homesteading days, clearly defines the psychological "genesis"[41] of the tyrannical Caleb Gare, a fact which Grove claimed was nonexistent in his review of Wild Geese:

> Amelia had loved the boy's father, that he knew. The knowledge had eaten bitterly into his being when he was a younger man and had sought to possess Amelia in a manner different from the way in which he possessed her now. In that earlier passion of the blood he had found himself eternally frustrated. The man who had been gored to death by a bull on his own farm in the distant south had taken Amelia's soul with him. . . . His control over her, being one of the brain only, although it achieved his ends, also at moments galled him with the reminder that the spirit of her had ever eluded him. (p. 20)

In Martha Ostenso's view, it is the Gares' blighted marriage which produces Caleb's demonic obsession with land and power and his family's pattern of meaningless survival:

> But in the life in the Gare household there was no apparent change, no growth or maturing of dreams or

> fears, no evidence of crises in personal struggle, no peak of achievement rapturously reached. There was no outward emotion or expressed thought save that which led as a great tributary to the flow of Caleb's ambition. He talked now day and night of nothing but the livestock, circled the fields by day in the cart or walked abroad with his lantern alone at night. . . . The early summer season was to him a terrific, prolonged hour of passion during which he was blind and deaf and dumb to everything save the impulse which bound him to the land. (p. 75)

It is Caleb Gare's flax field, "his pride--his great hope" (p. 101), which offers him a substitute for human love:

> While he was raptly considering the tender field of flax--now in blue flower--Amelia did not exist to him. There was a transcendent power in this blue field of flax that lifted a man above the petty artifices of birth, life, and death. . . .
>
> Caleb . . . would creep between the wires and run his hand across the flowering, gentle tops of the growth. A stealthy caress--more intimate than any he had ever given to woman. (p. 119)

This vision of prosperity, which is Caleb's real love, is only a "tedious dream" (p. 22) for the overworked members of his family. For them, the dream has no meaning and has long since disappeared in the drudgery associated with the land. The family's welfare is a secondary concern for Caleb Gare as Ostenso reveals. Ellen's impaired eyesight is ignored by her father, who considers glasses an expensive remedy. Martin's dislocated shoulder which occurs during haying is equated with the cost of a day's farm labour. Judith's need for new shoes is ignored for as long as possible. It is Ellen's suitor, Malcolm, who recognizes the price in terms of humanity which Caleb has paid in his headlong pursuit of materialism:

> Malcolm was silent. His eyes roved admiringly over the rich flax, and around northward to the acres of luxuriant tame hay and rye grass. Caleb Gare was a prosperous man. A mean man, he knew, but his children would live after him--his children would be established in comfort for the rest of their lives on this land--and he, Malcolm, a wanderer, hearing ever a call in the wind, a summons to far lakes and lonely forests. (p. 134)

The pioneer dream, however, has offered little "comfort" to the Gare family and Caleb's willful neglect of his children in deference to his materialistic quest is suggested by images of stunted plant growth:

> Caleb's sons--Caleb's children, what were they? Well born, it was true, and not out of wedlock. But twisted and gnarled and stunted as the growth of the bush land he owned, and barren as had been his acres before he had put his own life's blood into them for a meagre yield. (p. 59)

Ostenso follows this stark revelation with a reference to the "soft wind" moving Caleb's hair with "a gesture of infinite pity." This obvious example of pathetic fallacy is often referred to as one of Ostenso's unfortunate lapses into sentimentalism. Yet a definite degree of sympathy has already been established by the author in her portrayal of the Gares' loveless marriage.

Despite his heartlessness in his treatment of his family, Caleb Gare is by no means a romantic, one-dimensional, melodramatic villain. With Caleb's tragic genesis established, the author has provided a degree of psychological validity for his obsession with his land. In realistic terms, the responsibility for the disintegration of the Gare family is

shared by Caleb and to a lesser extent by Amelia. In this manner Ostenso avoids the romantic characterization of a villain and a hapless heroine, and establishes a more creative tension between romanticism and realism in her characterization of Caleb and Amelia Gare.

For despite her victimization at the hands of her husband, Amelia shares some responsibility for the destruction of her family. Clara Thomas does not share this view in her article, "Martha Ostenso's Trial of Strength," with her claim that Amelia "never loses the reader's sympathy and pity";[42] however, it seems obvious that through her marked separation of romantic love and family, Amelia does lose some of the reader's sympathy. Several passages which develop Amelia's thoughts about her family contain the same imagery of stunted plant growth which was first associated with Caleb's neglect of his children. This "life-denying"[43] imagery contains little sympathy for Amelia's romantic obsession:

> She had seen Mark Jordan. He was a man of the world. . . . His face was proud, sensitive. He must never know. She would break under Caleb rather than have him know, Caleb's children could wither and fall like rotten plants after frost--everything could fall into dissolution. He was his father's son, Mark Jordan, the son of the only man she had ever loved. (p. 88)

The romantic superficiality of Amelia's secret belies an actual spiritual malignancy which creates an effect of horror, as well as pity:

> She would bend and inure them to the land like implements, just as Caleb wished her to do. She

> would see them dry and fade into fruitlessness and grow old long before their time, but her heart would keep within itself and there would be no pity in her for the destruction of their youth. (p. 88)

The parallel structure of these sentences tends to emphasize the ironic contrasts formed by Amelia's statements about love. In one passage, Amelia even shares Caleb's obsessive pioneer dream:

> Her eyes wandered to the fields to tame hay and ryegrass that lay beyond the sheep pasture. There would be a tremendous yield this year. Always before, the sight of growth had thrilled her. Now her mind was dulled by the sight of it. Growth--with death in its wake. (p. 88)

Ironically, the pioneer dream which has been used by Caleb and Amelia to justify the family's existence has been the instrument of its destruction.

The theme of isolation in its many facets is integral to Ostenso's interpretation of the pioneer dream as a harsh life devoid of romantic illusions. Isolation becomes the thematic catalyst which highlights the destructive effects of a pioneer's obsession with land and power. In the most obvious sense of isolation, the Gare homestead is geographically isolated on Manitoba's northern frontier as Robert G. Lawrence points out:

> The nearest village large enough to support a store and a church is Yellow Point, about ten miles to the southeast; the nearest railway siding, some thirty miles northwest of Oeland, is Nykerk. Caleb Gare occasionally sends beef cattle there, but Judith, at seventeen, has never seen a train. The novel includes infrequent vague references to the

> distant "city in the south," which only a few residents of Oeland have ever visited.[44]

Lind Archer and Mark Jordan, who had never lived in an area as isolated as Oeland, remain romantic outsiders whose conventional romance creates an ironic tension for the powerful story of the Gares. The two visitors to this land of isolation discuss its peculiar effects upon the local inhabitants:

> "The silence is awful. You feel things going on, invisibly. There is that eternal sky--light and darkness--the endless plains of snow--a few fir trees, maybe a hill or a frozen stream. And the human beings are like totems--figures of wood with mysterious legends upon them that you can never make out." (p. 78)

Another ironic feature of this geographical isolation is Caleb's alienation from the land which he professes to love. This isolation is basic to the novel despite Ostenso's contradiction in an early chapter:

> . . . Caleb, who could not be characterized in the terms of human virtue or human vice--a spiritual counterpart of the land, as harsh, as demanding, as tyrannical as the very soil from which he drew his existence. (p. 33)

For W. H. Magee, this symbolic confusion flaws the novel:

> The author <u>states</u> that Caleb Gare is a symbol of the cruelty of the land, and makes him very cruel indeed. What she has neglected to do is to make the land itself seem cruel. It seems attractive throughout. The Gares are subject not to a hostile Nature but to an unmotivated melodramatic villain.[45]

Magee seems to feel that the remainder of the novel should develop this initial identification between a cruel landscape and the cruelty of Caleb Gare. Yet Ostenso's customary technique in Wild Geese stresses an ironic tension between the romantic and beautiful Oeland and the real grimness of the Gares' slavery to their land. The quotation referred to by Magee nullifies this ironic tension (p. 33) and appears to be a lapse in a literary technique which has proven very effective. The Gares are shown to be subject to the same exploitation as the land, and in Ostenso's view of the pioneer dream, both the family and the land are misused by a man motivated solely by greed. Ostenso's occasional lapse from this ironic contrast between pastoral beauty and human cruelty probably arose from the author's own feelings of isolation during her stay in Hayland, an environment which she herself found hostile.

The characteristically romantic natural description in Wild Geese does serve a functional purpose in the development of the theme of the pioneer dream. Pastoral description forms an effective foil for the misery produced by Caleb's greed:

> It was April and the little buds were opening stickily on the elms, and tinging their boughs with purple and brown. The cottonwoods were festooned with ragged catkins. A softness was unfurling like silk ribbons in the pale air, and the earth was breaking into tiny warm rifts from which stole a new green. . . . It was a time of intense wonder in the north, after the long,

> harsh months when the heart is shut out from communion with the earth. (p. 25)

Ostenso recognizes the basic alienation of the Gares from the land in an early conversation between Lind Archer and Fusi Aronson, a neighbouring homesteader:

> "I was just thinking how lucky you people are up here to have spring so close to you," Lind said, glancing up at him.
> "Yes, we are very, very lucky," he responded slowly, carefully. "But few of us know it."
> "Don't you think most of the farmers realize it--in one way or another?"
> "No," he said. "Here the spirit feels only what the land can bring to the mouth. In the spring we know only that there is coming a winter. There is too much selfishness here--like everywhere." (p. 31)

It is Caleb's obsessiveness which alienates the overworked Gares from the beauty of their own land and especially from their father's quest:

> Ellen and Charlie hitched the horses to the two rakes, and Judith and Martin went ahead with the mowing machines. It was deadening work, so that after a while the spirit forgot to follow the horses up and down, up and down, in the bright heat that rose from the earth and fell from the bare, cloudless sky. The nostrils began to ache from the sweet, hot, dusty smell of the hay. The hands grew dry and swollen from the reins, the sun lay like a hot iron on the shoulders, no matter which way one turned.
> . . . .
> Martin looked back and saw that Ellen was faring none too well. It would have been cheaper in the end to have hired a man. Caleb must have had some other reason for not taking on extra help. It was his idea, apparently, to blind them all with work--an extra man would give them time for thinking, and dreaming. (p. 142)

The ironic tension formed between Oeland's romantic pastoral isolation and the actual slavery produced by Caleb's greed

is very effective. There was no need for Ostenso to force a symbolic identification between Caleb Gare and the land as tyrants as Magee suggested.

In his single-minded drive to expand the boundaries of his land, Caleb Gare creates another extension of the Gares' isolation: that is from their own community of pioneer homesteaders. The pioneer dream of Caleb Gare begins to take on criminal overtones as he blackmails his neighbours in order to gain Fusi Aronson's valuable timber-land (p. 59) and Thorvald Thorvaldson's grazing land (p. 147). Caleb's complete lack of ideals sets him apart from more honourable families like the Bjarnassons and Klovaczs. The Gares' social isolation is complete as Caleb forbids even church attendance and neighbourly visits; ironically, only Caleb attends church and reports the sermon with complete righteousness to his family.

Personal isolation is stressed in Ostenso's interpretation of the crippling psychological effects of the pioneer dream:

> The Teacher was lonely, and even more conscious of the stark loneliness of Amelia, of Judith, of Ellen and Martin, each within himself. Work did not destroy the loneliness; work was only a fog in which they moved so that they might not see the loneliness of each other. (p. 33)

If Caleb's killing work pace prevents individual dreams and hopes, it also destroys familial bonds as brother and sister work far apart in the fields:

> Days came when the loam was black and rich with rain. Judith and Martin, being the strongest of the workers under Caleb Gare, carried the soil's heaviest burden. Judith mounted the seeder and wove like a great dumb shuttle back and forth, up and down, across the rough tapestry of the land. In the adjacent field Martin worked with the bowed, unquestioning resignation of an old unfruitful man. Occasionally, Judith threw a glance at him. Then she would scowl and exclaim profanely to the plodding horse. (p. 34)

With a deceptively soft voice, Caleb tyrannizes and isolates each family member so that all efforts are directed towards his own singular dream of land-holding and profit. Ellen's dream of leaving the farm with her suitor, Martin's dream of a new house, and Amelia's pride in Mark Jordan are all tempered and even thwarted by Caleb's soft-voiced tyranny. The best example of Caleb's methods occurs after the violent scene in the barn between Judith and her father over her forbidden liaison with Sven Sandbo. As Judith lies tied to the barn floor for an entire day, the following conversation takes place between Caleb and Amelia:

> "She's in the barn," said Caleb when the family had made an effort to eat supper and no mention had been made of Judith.
>
> He need not have said that. Everyone knew where she was. Everyone had been told to keep out of the barn all day.
>
> "Now, what shall we do with her, eh? What shall we do with her, mother?" he turned amiably to Amelia, who was white and speechless.
>
> He leaned back in his chair and assumed the pose of a judge.
>
> "There are no courts near enough by to do the right thing," he went on softly, as if he were talking to himself. "So we shall have to do the best we can by ourselves--by ourselves." (p. 167)

To Lind Archer, the unnatural personal isolation enforced by Caleb's materialistic dream translates into a family "of prisoners being escorted to stone quarries by armed guards" (p. 179). Judith's punishment for her murderous rage against her father is solitary confinement:

> Conversation between Caleb and the rest of the family had practically ceased, and the only bond now was the work that went on without interruption and without question. . . . . Judith had become only a pair of hands that did what they were told. She spoke to no one, looked at no one. . . . Lind knew that it could not go on like this, that the fire in Judith would break out in some still more turbulent form the longer she was kept under control. (p. 170)

Of all the Gare children, only Judith seems to intuit the belief that her father's exploitation of the land and his family is fundamentally wrong. It is Judith, like Beulah Harris in Robert Stead's The Homesteaders, who sees the fallacy in her father's pioneer dream:

> After another hour's work, Judith, looking up, saw Martin entering the gate from the pasture with three cows that were about to calve. More money for Caleb Gare, more toil for the workers under him. He had nearly twice as many cattle this year as three years ago: and no hired man to help with their care, because Martin and Judith were old enough to do it together, and Judith strong enough to do it alone when Martin was other wise occupied. In a hollow in the pasture she saw the sheep grazing, all of them shorn now, shorn of dollars and dollars worth of wool that would go toward the acquisition of more sheep . . . and more sheep . . . but not more freedom for the workers under Caleb Gare, not more joy in living. (p. 91)

The strongly moralistic tone of the conflict between Judith and her father may seem to belong to the conventional

"world of romance," with Judith symbolizing "the impulse to work in harmony with Nature" and Caleb clearly symbolizing "the impulse to dominate and exploit it for gain."[46] Yet the clearcut struggle between good and evil in Wild Geese does not belong to the stereotyped variety found in romantic prairie fiction. Ostenso adds the elements of violence and sexuality to her realistic vision of pioneer obsession. Thus the tension between romanticism and realism is central to the moral conflict of the novel.

Ostenso carefully links Judith's rebellion against her father to his misuse of the land. Judith's identification with the land may seem to be a familiar romantic concept; yet there is a sensual element to Judith's union with Nature that may have startled the readers of Wild Geese in 1925. At the same time, the author integrates Judith's scene in the woods with the theme of the pioneer dream. The emphasis is clearly on spiritual regeneration, a quest for a better direction in life than the deadening process of Caleb's materialistic dream:

> Not knowing fully what she was doing, Judith took off all her clothing and lay flat on the damp ground with the waxy feeling of new, sunless vegetation under her. . . . .
>
> Oh, how knowing the bare earth was, as if it might have a heart and a mind hidden here in the woods. The fields that Caleb had tilled had no tenderness, she knew. . . . She had opened like a tight bud. There was no going back now into the darkness. (p. 53)

Spiritually, Judith has broken her father's demonic pattern

of life in a scene which has sacramental overtones of the Garden of Eden.

Lawrence Ricou, however, in his critical study of prairie fiction Vertical Man/Horizontal World, tends to view the moral conflict between father and daughter in terms of romantic melodrama with good and evil belonging to distinctly black and white categories:

> Among the Gare children only one, Judith, having grown up with more of her mother than her father in her, constantly fights Caleb's tyranny.
> . . . .
> In spite of Amelia's subdued acceptance of life under a tyrant, Judith is very much her mother's daughter; mother and daughter have a mutually strengthening influence on one another.[47]

Yet Ostenso is just as careful to avoid romantic stereotyping in the characterization of Judith as she was earlier in the novel with the characterization of Caleb and Amelia. Any identification of Judith with virtue has little to do with conventional definitions of a romantic heroine. Judith is very much her father's daughter, and her unbowed stubbornness is notable for its resemblance to Caleb's unswerving ambition. The fact that their characters are roughly equal in determination intensifies and makes their conflict more plausible:

> She [Judith] would have struck Caleb today had it not been for Amelia. Always pity stood in the way of the tide of violence she felt would break from her. Pity for Amelia, who would get what Caleb did not dare mete out to her, Judith. (p. 53)

The moral isolation of mother and daughter, rather than any

"mutually strengthening influence," is only too clear as Amelia urges her daughter not to antagonize Caleb:

> "What makes you so stupid, child?" she asked, a little anxiously.
> Suddenly Judith sprang to her feet. Her face was white.
> "Who're you to be talkin' to me?" she cried harshly. "You don't know--anything--about me! I don't belong to you--or him. I don't belong here. . . ." (p. 221)

Judith's capacity for violence and rebellion differentiates her from the conventional virtuous heroines of romantic melodrama. Judith Gare is a new heroine in Canadian prairie fiction with her rough, physical mannerisms reflecting the harshness of her pioneer environment:

> She had a great, defiant body, her chest high and broad as a boy's; her hair was wild-locked and black and shone on top of her head with a bluish luster; her eyes were in sullen repose now, long and narrow; her lips were rich and drooped at the corners. She wore overalls and a heavy sweater, and stood squarely on her feet, as if prepared to take or give a blow. (p. 11)

Judith Gare adds two elements to the romantic characterization of a prairie heroine which Ostenso implies are realistic features of pioneer isolation--violence and sexuality. Mark Jordan explains these developments to Lind Archer early in the novel:

> "Life here at Oeland . . . may seem a negation but it's only a reflection from so few exterior natural objects that it has the semblance of negation. These people are thrown inward upon themselves, their passions stored up, they are intensified figures of life with no outward expression--no releasing gesture." (p. 78)

Certainly the realistic conflict between father and daughter

with its overtones of violence and sexuality provides the theme of the pioneer dream in Wild Geese with its dramatic impact.

However, at the time of the novel's publication, a charge of melodramatic sensationalism was often brought against the undercurrent of violence and explicit sexuality in Wild Geese. Grove protested in his letter to Austin Bothwell dated Nov. 18, 1925 that Wild Geese lacked artistry "in dealing with these things":

> The petty "sexiness" of many passages makes a mature person smile. One cannot avoid the suspicion that that sort of thing was sprinkled in as a spice or with an eye to the "movies".[48]

Another review of the novel, found in The New York Times (Oct. 18, 1925), also faulted the novel's sensationalism:

> Overstatement spoils the stress of this domestic tragedy. Its beauty is tacked on, rather than organic, an added prettiness for literary effect. . . . There is every reason to believe that Miss Ostenso's next novel will be of greater merit. Having succeeded in a tour de force, she may then forget the moving pictures.[49]

Probably both Grove and The New York Times reviewer were referring to the attempted ax murder of Caleb by Judith. Yet the violent language and physical abuse in this scene is functional to the development of the theme, as these elements reveal the obsessive value which Caleb puts upon his land, and the secondary value which he places upon his daughter's welfare:

> ". . . A bitch like your mother, eh? Come here and I'll show ye it pays to be decent!" He took another

> step toward her. Judith's hand swept down and grasped the handle of the ax.
> She straightened like a flash and flung it with all her strength at Caleb's head. . . . The ax was buried in the rotten wall behind his head.
> "So--that's your little trick, is it? Well!" He sprang forward and seized Judith by the wrists, throwing her to the floor. Then he snatched a coil of rope from the wall and tied her hand and foot to the manger.
> Judith was too stunned by the violence of her own act to struggle. . . . He would be insane with rage. Murder, perhaps . . . everything going, now . . . everything going, now . . . everything closing in . . . only the land, and the cattle, and the manure. . . . (p. 166)

The moral judgment of the reader in this scene would weigh against Caleb for the willful abuse of his daughter. For readers of 1925 to make such an untraditional judgment against a father in the case of his daughter's attempt to kill him is a tribute to Wild Geese as a transitional novel. In his critical study, Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel, John Moss points to the fiction of the mid-1920's to support his claim that the use of violence in a novel "demands a moral response to the conflict that generates it."[50] According to Moss, this moral response expanded the reader's consciousness in new directions. Certainly Ostenso employed violence in Wild Geese to reveal the harsh realities associated with the theme of the pioneer dream. In the ax scene for example, Ostenso handles violence with a firm hand on her theme and on the psychological motivations of Caleb, the tyrannical father who forbids Judith her suitor, and Judith, the strong-willed daughter who rejects her father's quest. Neither

Robert Stead nor Frederick Philip Grove deals with violence in as functional a manner as Martha Ostenso.

The frank treatment of sexuality in _Wild Geese_ is linked to the sterility of Caleb Gare's obsessive pioneer dream and to Judith's struggle to forge her own personal identity and spiritual renewal. When Sven proposes marriage to Judith, the reader of 1925 would expect the conventional acceptance of romantic fiction. However marriage, in Judith's experience, is equated with tyranny and even physical abuse. The unconventional wrestling scene between the two lovers in _Wild Geese_ is another scene which could be charged with sensationalism; however, it is actually a portrayal of Judith's divided state of mind as she tests the nature of Sven's love:

> As their movements increased in swiftness and strength, Sven forgot to laugh and became as serious as Judith. It did not occur to him that he might have to use his real energy in defending himself until he saw that the girl's face was set and hard, her eyes burning.
> . . . .
> They were two stark elements, striving for mastery over each other. (pp. 85, 86)

In this embrace, Sven displays none of the potential for physical abuse of which Caleb is capable, and Sven's initial proposal is accepted with the conventional kiss of romantic fiction.

Judith's love affair with Sven Sandbo is associated with the first moral victory in the novel: the first movement

towards spiritual renewal and away from the "death-in-life" existence of Caleb Gare:

> Caleb had, in the past, made it clear that young Sven Sandbo was not welcome on the place. His smile and the easy swagger of his shoulders were a little too impudent. . . . .
> Sven was walking across the open stretch between his own home and the brush that belonged to Fusi Aronson on the north. From here one could not be seen by anyone at the Gares'. (p. 73)

Significantly for readers of popular romantic fiction, the love affair between Sven and Judith is a life-giving, joyous union symbolic of spiritual renewal. A happy ending to the grimness of the pioneer dream seems assured:

> Soon there would be no good-bys. They would have a snug cottage in town, and Sven would go to his work every day, but at night they would be together again--all night. . . . It seemed that it was already true, that Caleb, and the cattle, and the land, and sweat, and hay dust, were gone forever. (p. 165)

Ostenso's choice of a pond setting for the lovers' meeting develops the symbolic use of water as an agent of spiritual regeneration, a feature of Robert Stead's novels, The Smoking Flax and Grain.[51] Yet the romantic love plot does not exist apart from the central theme as even the sexual union of the two lovers by a woodland pool is witnessed by the silent Caleb Gare:

> He crept along slowly, taking care not to step on dry branches. As the light fell he could make out low voices that seemed to come from a hollow. Now he could look down and see them, seated together, their arms about each other on the bank above the pool. Caleb drew his hand slowly across the lower part of his face. He turned and went noiselessly

> back to the edge of the pasture, then north to where the mare was tied. (p. 165)

Caleb's despicable punishment of his daughter, whom he ties up with the same dispatch as his mare, again underscores the harshness of Ostenso's vision of family disintegration:

> She lay until the diagonal shadow that fell within the door of the barn lay toward the west instead of the east: until the rope had chafed red circles about her wrists, and her hair was full of bits of dry manure. (p. 166)

Conventional moralisms against sex and violence in literature as expressed by P. G. C. Campbell in the August 1927 issue of Queen's Quarterly[52] seem to have no relevance in Martha Ostenso's world of pioneer isolation. When Judith's pregnancy necessitates her final escape from Caleb Gare, her fertility becomes a true affirmation of life, a spiritual victory over the destructiveness of her father's quest:

> And the knowledge that Amelia had guessed the truth about her bored dully in to her brain. . They were not fine enough to know. They would denounce her for the thing she regarded with pride. She belonged to another, clear brave world of instincts, she told herself. They were muddled, confused souls, not daring to live honestly. Living only for the earth, and the product of the soil, they were meagre and warped. (p. 224)

Thus the elements of sexuality and violence introduced in Wild Geese are presented as healthy reactions against Caleb Gare's obsessive pioneer dream. Ostenso has employed the popular features of romantic prairie fiction--happy love stories, clearcut moral struggles and a paradisial prairie--to introduce the features of pioneer life which were real

for Martha Ostenso: isolation, "death-in-life" routine, and the disintegration of the family.

The conclusion of a novel should convey the author's final thematic statement. The final statement which Ostenso makes about the obsessiveness unleashed by the pioneer dream is the death of Caleb Gare. The melodramatic overtones of moral retribution set the tone for the conclusion of Wild Geese, with the axe, symbolizing Caleb's destruction of his own family, falling down from the barn wall (p. 230). Judith has already eloped with Sven and escaped her father's tyrannical way of life. A brush fire lit by Caleb's sworn enemy, Fusi Aronson, burns out of control and accomplishes moral retribution for Caleb's crimes against the Gare family.

The death of Caleb Gare, entrapped in muskeg and encircled by fire, has invited much critical contention. Grove, in his letter to Austin Bothwell, called it "twaddle" that a man could "by mistake run into a slough which he knows."[53] Yet the "mistake" again reflects Caleb's obsession with saving his "beautiful flax, rich and strong":

> He saw presently that it was of no use trying to plow a fire-guard. He would have to burn the flax a distance inward from the bush without plowing. . . . Damn the muskeg! And yet--the autumn had been extremely dry. Perhaps it would hold the weight of a man. No--no, this was madness. The muskeg had not been dry for years. All summer it had been full of water holes. (p. 235)

Caleb then loses all sense of proportion as he decides to risk his life for the sake of his flax:

> He picked up the lantern which was still lighted, and rushed toward the muskeg. A shattering rage at the fire seized him. It seemed to be taunting him with human ingenuity. He would beat it with all its tricks. The earth under him became black and began to give beneath his feet like cushions. He ran on blindly, conscious only of the direction in which the flax field lay. (p. 236)

Ostenso, despite the romantic melodramatic tone of this scene, has convincingly developed the obsession which Caleb's flax field has always represented:

> He had given his soul to the flax . . . well, it would go with him. He could see it shimmering still, grey-silver, where the light of the fire fell upon it. The earth was closing ice-cold, tight, tight, about his body . . . but the flax would go with him . . . the flax. . . . (p. 237)

W. J. Keith identifies the romantic antecedents of Caleb's death in a slough by citing similar deaths in romances such as Sir Walter Scott's Bride of Lammermoor and R. D. Blackmore's Lorna Doone.[54] Certainly the following description is exaggerated and melodramatic:

> Then suddenly, something seemed to be tugging at his feet. He could not release them. . . . But the strength in the earth was irresistible. . . . But the insidious force in the earth drew him in deeper. . . . He reached his arms outward toward the flax, as if in supplication to its generous breadth. . . . Ah, the over-strong embrace of the earth. (pp. 236, 237)

Dick Harrison, in Unnamed Country, refers to the Biblical reference to Caleb and an area in Canaan which "eateth up the inhabitants thereof" (Numbers 13: 32). Yet for Harrison, Caleb's death is a realistic outgrowth of his own character:

> Ostenso may not have intended Caleb's death in the muskeg as an instance of the land eating up

> its inhabitants, but she certainly presents Caleb as seeking the promised land at all costs.[55]

David Arnason, in his PhD thesis "Realism in Canadian Prairie Fiction" offers a Freudian interpretation of Caleb sinking into the womb of his mistress, the land.[56] Such an interpretation seems to be perfectly valid considering Caleb's obsession with his land.

However, Martha Ostenso's depiction of the muskeg as an instrument of retribution creates a serious flaw in the author's realistic vision of the pioneer dream, for this romantic catastrophe does not complement the realistic trends which Ostenso has set for the theme of the pioneer dream. Throughout <u>Wild Geese</u>, Caleb Gare has <u>actively</u> exploited the land for its profit and overworked his family to accomplish his materialistic advances. The central conflict of the novel has centred upon Caleb's obsession and Judith's rebellion against her father's misdirected quest. In all these developments the land has remained passive with the focus being placed upon human responsibility. By ignoring these central thematic trends and including a heavy-handed, melodramatic death scene, Ostenso lost the effective compromise between realism and romanticism which she held throughout the novel.

The author's stylistic problem with Caleb's death seems to originate with the romantic elopement of Judith and Sven, an event which satisfied the customary expectations for

a happy ending in popular prairie fiction. Yet Judith's role as the opponent who rejects Caleb's pioneer dream has been integral to the development of this theme. Her absence at the conclusion of the novel seriously flaws the author's final thematic statement. Caleb's death need not have been at the hands of a vengeful, personified Nature. A more realistic form of moral retribution might have been conveyed if the dictatorial Caleb Gare had become the victim of a farm accident while overseeing his land and his family, including Judith. The novel's compromise between romanticism and realism would have been continued without weakening the realistic thrust of the theme.

The romantic trend of the conclusion is revealed again in the last chapter which pictures a return to the paradisial prairie of romantic fiction:

> October came, and the languid peace of Indian summer. In the early morning a milky scud hid the horizon. And over everything was a profound silence, as if somewhere a hand had been raised commanding reverence. It was a time of rest on the Gare farm.
>
> . . . .
>
> . . . There had come a change in the mood of the earth. (pp. 238, 239)

Wild Geese, a powerful tale of human greed, isolation and the destruction of a family, has never had anything to do with "the mood of the earth." Spiritual renewal has not been portrayed as a gift of Nature but rather as the fruits of Judith's struggle against the destructiveness of her father's materialistic quest. Only in her inconsistent treatment of

the land does Martha Ostenso veer the powerful course of her first novel from a realistic consideration of the pioneer dream.

Notes

Chapter II

[1]Marion Smith, "Period Pieces," Canadian Literature, 10 (Autumn 1961), p. 74.

[2]T. D. MacLulich, "Novel and Romance," Canadian Literature, 70 (Autumn 1976), p. 43.

[3]W. E. MacLellan, "Real 'Canadian Literature'," The Dalhousie Review, VI, No. 1 (April 1926), p. 19.

[4]Ibid., p. 22.

[5]Stuart Sherman, "Saga Stuff from Minnesota," New York Herald Tribune Books: A Weekly Review of Contemporary Literature, 8 Nov. 1925, p. 1, cols. 2-3.

[6]Fred Lewis Pattee, The New American Literature 1890-1930 (New York: Cooper Square Publishers Inc., 1968), pp. 465, 466.

Pattee outlines the realistic emphasis which was expected from manuscripts entered in American magazine contests of the period as follows:

> The first quality demanded is originality: something having an atmosphere, a "feeling" that is different, modern, alive. Second, the treatment must be realistic. Everywhere the thrill of actuality: life as really lived by men and women, unidealized, untinted. Third, there must be no plot, no artificial ordering of episodes to a culmination at the end. . . . Instead of plot, a series of episodes illustrative of the current of living in the area under observation.
>
> The fourth demand concerns characterization, a major canon of late. . . . Each character, so far as the novelist is able to accomplish it, must live before the reader vividly, completely, and so compellingly that there shall always be the feeling of actuality. As to the background, it must always be merely background, the drop-curtain before which the action moves.

[7]Carlyle King, introduction to Wild Geese by Martha

Ostenso (1925; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1961), p. vii. All subsequent reference to Wild Geese in this chapter belong to this edition.

[8]Robert G. Lawrence, "The Geography of Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese", Journal of Canadian Fiction, 16 (1976), p. 114.

[9]Grant Overton, The Women Who Make Our Novels revised edition, Essay Index Reprint Series (1928; rpt. New York: Books for Libraries Press, Inc., 1967), p. 247.

[10]Stanley Stanko, telephone interview on June 4, 1982. Mr. Stanko, of London, Ontario, is the literary executor for the unpublished works of Martha Ostenso. He is currently writing the author's biography.

[11]Lawrence, p. 112.

[12]Overton, p. 247.

[13]Barney Ostenso, correspondence dated May 10, 1982. Mr. Ostenso, the elder brother of Martha Ostenso, resides in Brainerd, Minnesota.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Mrs. Aggie Hutchison (née Hay), telephone interview on June 20, 1982. Mrs. Hutchison resides in Burnaby, B. C.

[16]Lyn Tallman, "Martha Ostenso: The Interesting Beginnings of a Writer", The Western Home Monthly (March 1927), p. 30.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Martha Ostenso, A Far Land (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1924), p. 11.

[19]Tallman, p. 30.

[20]"Minstrels Celebrating the Dawn of a New Year", The New York Times, 28 Oct., 1924, p. 19, col. 3.

[21]Clara Thomas, "Martha Ostenso's Trial of Strength," in *Writers of the Prairies*, ed. Donald G. Stephens (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), p. 40.

[22]*Ibid*.

[23]W. T. Allison, "Realism In Manitoba Novels," *The Winnipeg Tribune Magazine*, 21 Nov. 1925, p. 13.

[24]*Ibid*., col. 2.

[25]*Ibid*., col. 2, 3.

[26]Ibid., col. 3, 4.

[27]*Ibid*., col. 4, 5.

[28]*Ibid*., col. 5.

[29]*Ibid*.

[30]Desmond Pacey, ed., *The Letters of Frederick Philip Grove* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 26.

[31]*Ibid*. This letter from Grove to Austin Bothwell (Nov. 18, 1925) provides the author's detailed criticism of *Wild Geese* published the same fall as *Settlers of the Marsh*. The letter is also found among Grove's correspondence in The Frederick Philip Grove Collection, Archives, Manuscripts, and Rare Books, Elizabeth Dafoe Library, University of Manitoba, Box 3, Folder 7.

[32]John Moss, *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 14.

[33]Roy W. Meyer, *The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 225.

[34]King, p. viii.

[35]*Ibid*.

[36]Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1952), p. 172.

[37]Desmond Pacey, "Fiction, 1920-1940," in Literary History of Canada, gen. ed., Carl F. Klinck (Reprinted with corrections; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 678.

[38]Dick Harrison, Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1977), p. 109.

[39]Alexander Henry Jones, "Martha Ostenso's Novels: A Study of Three Dominant Themes," MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1970, p. 8.

[40]Nancy W. Fraser, "The Development of Realism in Canadian Literature During the 1920's," Dalhousie Review, LVII, No. 2 (Summer 1977), p. 296.

[41]Letter from Grove to Austin Bothwell (Nov. 18, 1925), The Frederick Philip Grove Collection, Box 3, Folder 7.

[42]Thomas, p. 42.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Lawrence, p. 110.

[45]W. H. Magee, "Trends in the English Canadian Novel in the Twentieth Century," PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1950, p. 92.

[46]Harrison, p. 111.

[47]Lawrence Ricou, Vertical Man/Horizontal World (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1973), pp. 76, 78.

[48]Letter from F. P. Grove to Austin Bothwell (Nov. 18, 1925), The Frederick Philip Grove Collection, Box 3, Folder 7.

[49]"Earth Hunger," review of Wild Geese, The New York Times, 18 October 1925, p. 16, col. 1.

[50]Moss, p. 12.

[51]Harrison, p. 91.

[52]P. G. C. Campbell, "Sex in Fiction," Queen's Quarterly, 35 (August 1927), p. 83.

[53]Letter from F. P. Grove to Austin Bothwell (Nov. 18, 1925), The Frederick Philip Grove Collection, Box 3, Folder 7.

[54]W. J. Keith, "Wild Geese: The Death of Caleb Gare," Studies in Canadian Literature, 3, No. 2 (Summer 1978), p. 275.

[55]Harrison, p. 112.

[56]David Arnason, "The Development of Prairie Realism: Robert J. C. Stead, Douglas Durkin, Martha Ostenso, and Frederick Philip Grove," PhD thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1980, p. 150.

Chapter III

Frederick Philip Grove: The Pioneer Dream in Transition

When Frederick Philip Grove settled in Haskett, Manitoba as a teacher in 1912, he allegedly brought with him the experiences of twenty years of wandering as an itinerant farm-hand throughout the pioneer West:

> . . . I could truthfully call my knowledge of the pioneering section of the west of the North-American continent unique. At a glance I could survey the prairie country from Kansas to Saskatchewan or Alberta; and at a thought I could evaluate, in my own way, of course, the implications of pioneer life.[1]

Grove's observations in In Search of Myself reveal that he was aware of the tension between romantic misconceptions and the realities of pioneer life:

> I felt an exile. I was an exile. I did not live among people of my own kind; among people who, metaphorically, spoke my language; among people who shared a single one of my interests. The only sort of what, with a stretch of the imagination, could be called literary art with which I ever came into living contact, consisted of the "tall" tales of the west; and they stood in flagrant contradiction to the squalid reality I saw all about. (p. 235)

As a teacher in several rural Manitoba towns, Winkler, Gladstone, Eden and Rapid City, Grove's period of exile ended. He clearly found the Manitoba prairie inspiring in terms of the realistic pioneer novels which he planned to complete:

> For up there, in that bush-country which we entered

> within an hour of what was then fast driving from Gladstone, we were in precisely the sort of country with which not a few of my novels dealt, whether they were written or only planned. . . . Though the homesteads which were scattered throughout this forest land were of the regular size, a hundred and sixty acres, most of them had only a few acres of cleared land to show; they were still, very largely, as they should have been left. . . .
>
> Once more something clicked in my mind; this was the landscape in which Niels Lindstedt had lived; Len Sterner, Mrs. Lund; and many other creatures of my brain. As the car proceeded over the outrageous roads, I slipped into a state of profound excitement. (p. 299)

Grove's first glimpse of Falmouth and the surrounding Big Grassy Marsh district in 1917 certainly provoked in him a different reaction from that of Ostenso to Hayland. The literary promise of the Falmouth-Gladstone area in Manitoba was realized by Grove in his two collections of sketches, Over Prairie Trails, and The Turn of the Year, and in four novels dealing with the prairie pioneer: Settlers of the Marsh, Our Daily Bread, The Yoke of Life and Fruits of the Earth.

Yet Grove's enthusiasm for his pioneer environment did not extend to the realities of pioneer life which the author allegedly had observed during his years of travelling from one prairie farm to another. The harsh realities of isolation, obsessive materialism and family disintegration presented a tragic pattern to Grove. In In Search of Myself, he described the tragic aftermath of the pioneer's romantic dream of wealth and happiness:

> The recurrence of certain types; dominant types,

> rigid types, of a single-minded preoccupation with the specifically-pioneering task, is, in my books, certainly not due to any liking on my part for that type. . . . And it is itself a tragic type. Its whole endeavour is bent upon reshaping and doing away with the very condition in its environment which gives it its economic and historic justification; and when it has been done away with; when the environment is tamed, the task is done; and the pioneer has used up, in doing it, the span of life allotted to him. He suddenly realizes that he has been working for a purpose which has defeated its end. He cannot, now, settle down to enjoy the fruit of his labour. (p. 224)
>
> . . . .
>
> These people, the pioneers, reaffirmed me in my conception of what often takes the form of a tragic experience; the age-old conflict between human desire and the stubborn resistance of nature. (p. 227)

Grove's realistic vision of the pioneer dream emphasizes the materialistic obsession underlying the quest and can be applied to Grove's pioneer patriarchs: John Elliot in Our Daily Bread, Abe Spalding in Fruits of the Earth, and Ellen Amundsen's father in Settlers of the Marsh. Yet in Grove's first pioneer novel, Settlers of the Marsh, the emphasis is primarily on the establishment of a family and secondarily on materialistic advancement.

It was natural for Grove to include the harsh effects of the pioneer dream upon family life as he evidently found sentimental love stories in the romantic tradition to be a poor reflection of reality. The materialistic dream of the pioneer was actually achieved at great cost in terms of human love:

> For the purposes of the pioneer conquest of nature certain qualities are needed, in man, which are incompatible with that tender devotion which alone

> can turn the relation of the sexes into a thing of beauty. Untamed land is a hard taskmaster; but, as a rule, the task is tackled only by men who are fit for it and, therefore, more or less unfit for that other task of sublimating physical needs into the iridescent play of desire and satisfaction which characterizes the sexual relation in more "advanced", more "sophisticated" civilizations. . . I believe that in my books, grim as they may seem, I have made room for that tragedy, too. (p. 224)

In a letter to Desmond Pacey dated August 3, 1945, Mrs. Grove took issue with the "grim" marriages of loveless slavery in Grove's pioneer novels:

> I agree entirely with your criticism of his women. I used to argue with him over that--also over his treatment of sex. In fact I once got him started to write a novel dealing with a normal, happy marriage, but he did not finish [it].[2]

In Grove's experience, the harsh realities of the pioneer environment were not conducive to "normal, happy" marriages as he explains in the following passage from In Search of Myself:

> A pioneering world, like the nomadic world of the steppes, is a man's world. Man stands at the centre of things; man bears the brunt of the battle; woman is relegated to the tasks of helper. It is an unfortunate arrangement of nature that the burden of slavery, for such it is in all but name, should be biologically aggravated. As it is, it cannot be helped; and any artistic presentation has to take it into account. (p. 224)

Grove, like Stead and Ostenso, sensed the narrow-minded outlook towards life on many of the pioneer farms where he worked, and he reveals why his "sympathies were always with the women" in his novels, for example, Mrs. Amundsen, Mrs. Lund, Ellen and Clara in Settlers of the Marsh:

> When I met with them, they almost invariably guessed at first sight that my conformity with the common run of harvest-hands was neither more nor less than a disguise. Any such relation was usually inaugurated by my casual picking up of some book or even some magazine, often many years old, which I found in the rarely-used parlours of such houses as I entered for the purpose of applying for work to the husband. The presence of that book or magazine betrayed at a glance that someone in this family-group had his eyes bent on something other than the soil underfoot; and usually it was the woman. (In Search of Myself, p. 225)

For Grove, these harsh realities of pioneer family life were not reflected in the superficial love plots of romantic fiction:

> If the novel is to be read, it must interest, of course. Personally, I have certain aversions. Thus marriage, to me, is a beginning, not an end: the problem of sex is broached, not solved at the altar. For that reason I abominate the common love-story--the story of prenuptial love--almost as violently as I abhor the gramophone, the telephone, or the radio. In life, both young men and young maids are peculiarly uninteresting at a time when they see each other as they are not.[3]

In light of this statement by Grove, W. J. Keith finds it curious that he chose a domestic vision in Settlers of the Marsh:

> It is, in fact, the only Grove novel in which a love-situation may be said to occupy the forefront of the narrative. Even in The Yoke of Life, the emphasis is rather on Len Sterner's temperament than on his human relations. His love for Lydia is a part of his story, and important because it inhibits the achievement of his other aims, but he has no vision of domesticity like Niels. Despite his general scorn for contemporary taste, one cannot help wondering if in this early work . . . Grove did create a story of love-relationships because he believed that the novel-form demanded it. He may also have felt that the comprehensive nature of his aims in fiction necessitated treatment of the subject.[4]

Grove may also have felt that the materialistic nature of the pioneer dream had already been treated in his novel, A Search for America, which had already been written but not yet published.[5] It remained for Settlers of the Marsh to outline the domestic realities which accompanied the pioneer dream.

A reading of Grove's autobiography, In Search of Myself, reveals a link between Grove's experiences and his portrayal of Niels Lindstedt, whose cultural isolation in a new country leads to a dream of domestic happiness. Grove expresses his desire for a real home in the following passage:

> I surrendered, for a few days, to a desperate longing for some sort of home, some place of my own, even for that which was farthest out of my reach--mere human contacts.
> . . . .
> A vision arose quite spontaneously, the moment the idea had taken shape. I would build a shack on some hillside overlooking a stream and the woods. I seemed to see the shack and the whole of its setting. . . . and with a sort of surprise I came to the conclusion that I was within a few hundred miles of the very place; it was in the Pembina Mountains, on the Canadian side, not very far from the little town of Manitou in Manitoba. (pp. 235, 237)

Grove's dream of establishing "an island of domestic life in the wilderness" (p. 301) and of writing was realized as the economically-pressed Groves both took teaching positions in order to free Grove for his writing. In 1917, Mrs. Grove taught in Falmouth, thirty-four miles from Gladstone, where Grove was principal of the high school. The thirty-six weekend trips made by Grove and his horses between Gladstone

and Falmouth provided Grove with the material for the seven drives described in Over Prairie Trails, published in 1922. The Turn of the Year, another series of sketches, appeared in 1923.

Grove's exuberance at achieving his dream is evident in the following:

> For me, it was a period of recuperation; matters spiritual as well as material fell once more into their proper places. In that respect these drives had, on me, the effect of poetry; under their influence matters resumed their proper proportions. This period, therefore, remains to me the climax of my life. (p. 308)

Grove's happiness with "this backwoods bushland" which he termed "God's own earth and second only to Paradise"[6] became the unifying mood of Over Prairie Trails. In addition to its prevailing tone of optimism, there was much in Over Prairie Trails which would appeal to the reader of romantic prairie fiction: the heroic figure of Grove who emerges victorious after his struggles along snow-packed country roads, Grove's imaginative natural description written with a naturalist's love for the outdoors and the sincere love of the narrator for his wife and little girl who wait patiently for his arrival each weekend. An appreciative review from the Winnipeg Tribune (Dec. 4, 1923) seems to place Grove squarely in the romantic literary tradition:

> There are two things that have mightily impressed me in Mr. Grove's books, his Wordsworthian appreciation of the minute life of Nature and his interpretation of the kinship of man with Nature.[7]

Yet the popular acclaim which followed the publication of Over Prairie Trails and The Turn of the Year was not sought by Grove as one suspects was the case with Stead's early romantic formulas. The subject matter of sketches is necessarily limited and Grove's grim vision of pioneer reality just did not emerge strongly in these works. The tragic cost of the pioneer dream appears in Over Prairie Trails only in passing:

> Once I passed the skeleton of a stable--the remnant of the buildings put up by a pioneer settler who had to give in after having wasted effort and substance and worn his knuckles to the bones. The wilderness uses human material up. . . . (p. 11)

The harsh realities of pioneer existence are not dealt with by Grove as he drives by the isolated homesteads which in 1917 "were still three, four miles apart" (p. 10). The seven essays are permeated with the joy of a dream fulfilled as Joan Hind-Smith noted in her study of Grove in Three Voices.[8] Grove concludes Over Prairie Trails with a reflection of his own self-satisfaction:

> At six o'clock next morning I was on the road again. Both I and the horses had shaken off the nightmare, and through a sprinkling, dusting fall of snow we made the correction line and finally home in the best of moods and conditions. (p. 146)

In the foreword of Grove's next series of sketches, The Turn of the Year, the author's friend and mentor, Arthur L. Phelps, felt compelled to remove Grove from the romantic literary tradition:

> It is a little unfair to Mr. Grove to say he is a

> nature writer. He is more than that. In his work nature is seldom, even momentarily, viewed apart from humanity. As it rains, there is a man watching the rain. As the seasons operate man is seen accommodating himself.[9]

Certainly Grove did add the human dimension to his second series of sketches and his interpretation of the pioneer dream did appear more explicitly in The Turn of the Year. One sketch entitled "The Sower" outlines the romantic promise and real hardships which face an Icelandic family drawn to North America by the land grants and "homes of freedom across the seas" (p. 59). The unending work and isolation eventually destroys the family's dream of freedom as well as the family itself. In its place is left the figure of the prairie patriarch obsessed solely with his land:

> In the beginning, he was still thinking of his children in all he did. But he ceased dreaming of a better house: the log-shack was good enough for him, now that he was all alone. Then he heard, in one of the yearly letters which he received, that his wife was doing well in the city, she and the girls hiring out as domestic servants, and the boy working in a garage; and so they began to fade from his life and became a memory, detached from himself; and their place was taken by a strange idea in his mind: he was working for God, not for Man. Seeding and reaping became an obsession with him. . . . (The Turn of the Year, pp. 60-61)

Grove's essential respect for the ability of the pioneer, if not the pattern of his quest, is fundamental in his novels. One essay entitled "The Harvester" establishes this concept of pioneering as a heroic enterprise:

> And as I looked down upon him from my height, he became a symbol to me of harvesting man: of the toiler of the earth, of him who feeds the teeming

> millions of other worlds . . . his master is one, his master is God.
>
> . . . .
>
> This man was to me, on that evening, while we were rattling along the road the incarnation of all that is fine and noble in bodily labour: of the joy of muscle and sinew. . . . I almost envied him his strength as I surely envied him his avocation; for such it was that made him turn to the work he did. (The Turn of the Year, pp. 206, 210)

Neither essay would completely remove Grove from the romantic tradition of prairie fiction. The moral didacticism of both is conventionally Victorian as is the harvester who represents the romantic kinship of the farmer with his prairie environment.

It remained for Settlers of the Marsh, Grove's first pioneer novel, to treat the harsh realities associated with the pioneer dream and to introduce the literary tradition of naturalism to Canadian prairie fiction. The comfortable world of moral parables associated with Ralph Connor disappears and in its place is a hostile, deterministic world:

> Settlers of the Marsh is an examination of the fate-ordained forces which shape our lives. We are manipulated not only by our natures which we cannot control, but by our environments which are equally unmanageable. Niels has been shaped by a simple peasant's background and the image of his mother. He was in no way prepared to be the husband of the sophisticated Clara. The long estrangement of the true mates, Niels and Ellen, was caused by the cruelty of Ellen's father to her mother, and by the backbreaking pioneer environment. All these things were beyond the control of the central characters.[10]

"The revelation of an entirely new side"[11] to Grove's works separates Settlers of the Marsh from Over Prairie Trails and

The Turn of the Year:

> His first books to find publication were pleasant nature descriptions of prairie life. Then he took up the novel and tinged his chapters too often with what he calls "realism," but which went far into the sordid side of life.[12]

W. T. Allison also equates Grove's realistic vision of the pioneer with "sordid happenings in the life of the disappointed lover, bitterness of soul, insanity, murder, [and] expiation."[13] In particular, Ellen Amundsen's account of her father's brutal sexual abuse of her dying mother provoked the reviewer's call for the censorship of a novel which "should be kept under lock and key by parents of boys and girls in their teens."[14] Lorne Pierce of Ryerson Press had suggested deleting the details of the Amundsen marriage when he first read Grove's Pioneers manuscript, later published as Settlers of the Marsh:

> I told Grove I had been unable to lay down his manuscript and had read it on into the morning. I was so deeply impressed as a matter of fact, that I assured him of publication. He seemed pleased but not unduly elated, especially when I told him that the great length of the manuscript would require drastic cutting. There was an episode in the story that did not seem to me essential, and I felt that those few pages would cause more trouble than they were worth. Some people would read this incident, and miss the strength and excellence of the whole book. Grove was white with anger, and with surprising vehemence declared that he would vouch for its accuracy. He gave the impression that he had either been personally involved or knew intimately a similar situation. He made it seem that his integrity was at stake. I said that an editor was bound at some time or other to fight for his life, but he ought to make sure that he chose the battle ground himself and that no one else chose it for him. Since he felt as

> he did, I would accept it, and go the full distance with him.[15]

It would seem that Grove expected the worthiness of his pioneer realism to be recognized at first glance. Certainly the author was incredulous and bitter at the Winnipeg radio broadcast of W. T. Allison, who reviewed Settlers of the Marsh and "denounced it as obscene or something of that kind?".[16] The thematic implications of the novel's realistic treatment of the pioneer dream were lost to its readers according to Grove:

> Personally, I thought it a great book; personally, I loved it as a beautiful thing; but. . . . [To] this day I am not quite sure that it conveys to others what it conveys to me. If it does, nobody has ever said so. (In Search of Myself, p. 379)

The public reaction to Settlers of the Marsh was merciless in Manitoba against a pioneer novel whose focus left the general social realities of ploughing, marsh fires, and blizzards, and emphasized the harsh personal effects of pioneering upon the family. Grove's novel was banned from the Winnipeg Public Library,[17] Lorne Pierce nearly lost his job[18] at Ryerson Press, and the Groves became social outcasts in Rapid City. One of the most moving documents in the Grove Collection at the University of Manitoba is a petition with many signatures of citizens from Rapid City who support the school board's refusal to dismiss Mrs. Grove as a teacher of Grades VI and VIII, a request made by the Rapid City Returned Soldiers' Association.[19] Grove provides some insight into

the reason for the denouncement of his attempt at a realistic portrayal of the pioneer in another excerpt from In Search of Myself:

> . . . Pioneers . . . went, in my opinion, too deep into human nature . . . like Ibsen's dramas it refused to stay on the stage and came out, beyond the footlights, into real life.
> The book was too real, too true. In that land of the imagination, where matters work themselves out to more valid conclusions than in real life . . . I had described what happened no more; but even in that fuller form it was in Shaw's phrase, an unpleasant novel. (p. 379)

The uproar in Manitoba over Grove's "unpleasant novel" was understood, but not condoned by J. S. Woodsworth, Winnipeg M.P., who wrote the following letter to Grove:

> I know that Manitoba is not very responsive or congenial soil but all the more do we need someone who will reveal us to ourselves. The most discouraging feature of our life today is the isolation--physical and spiritual--of those who here and there across this vast land are trying to think out their own thoughts and live out their own lives. . . . But out of the West there seems to be a glimmer of light and those from other lands may yet lead us out of the wilderness. A year ago I read your book Settlers of the Marsh with much interest--I regret that it has been so bitterly attacked. As a matter of fact I sent it on to my daughter who had a year in a rural school and who I thought would appreciate it.[20]

Grove's heightened sensitivity to the public lack of appreciation for his first novel must be put into perspective. Desmond Pacey, in his introduction to Frederick Philip Grove, a collection of critical reviews of Grove's works, makes an important distinction between the Manitoba furor and the national critical reception of Settlers of the Marsh:

> What impresses me with the reviews, in the light of Grove's own and other people's allusions to the failure of Canadian criticism to appreciate his work, is their generally sympathetic and perceptive nature. All of his books had a good press, and if they did not become best-sellers it was not because reviewers ignored or damned them. Even Settlers of the Marsh, which Grove alleged was attacked by the reviewers for its alleged obscenity, was in fact given a very respectful reading--and, indeed, most of the reviews that I have discovered make a point of defending the book's morality.[21]

Certainly Grove's grasp of the realities which tempered the romantic pioneer dream was appreciated by the following selection of newspaper reviews of Settlers of the Marsh:

> His understanding of the influence of the primitive pioneer life upon human nature is deep, and he has utilized it to enable his readers to grasp the full force of the tragedy he depicts.[22]

> A first novel, it is mature in thought, well-constructed. It has distinction in style and a theme that is real, not just contrived.[23]

> The novel is a profound treatment of sexual love. . . . The tragedy that results is revealed with stupendous power, and the restoration of the man is effected with great art.[24]

The tone of this collection of reviews is one of respect for a new and powerful interpretation of the Canadian pioneer.

When Macmillan Co. of Canada refused to publish the original three-volume Pioneers because of its length rather than its frankness, Ryerson Press agreed to publish the work in an edited, one-volume form. Grove "went to work slashing the book to pieces"[25] in order to comply with his publisher's request. In order to ascertain the material which Grove must have considered crucial in his realistic portrayal of

the pioneer dream, it is useful to compare the Pioneers typescripts[26] with the edited version published as Settlers of the Marsh. The sections which Grove removed were the "flat areas"[27] of the manuscript which described with documentary realism the social aspects of prairie homesteading: the conversations between neighbours, bush fires, epidemics, and blizzards. What was concentrated upon was the powerful psychological portrayal of Niels Lindstedt, not the type of social documentary which Stead presented in The Homesteaders. Grove makes his identification with inner realism clear in an unpublished article, "The Novel--Romantic and Realistic":

> Narrative art which, within the narrow limits of pure narration, lays the emphasis on the event or the situation I call Romantic; narrative art which lays the emphasis on character I call Realistic.[28]

Grove's concern with psychological realism is also evident in a letter written to a fellow novelist, Raymond Knister:

> I might say that I have recently read with much interest, your book White Narcissus. . . . I was greatly struck with the development of the unique situation and its tragic possibilities. In fact, the first half of the book seemed to me to pave a gradual approach to something that would be enormous. Then the interest scatters. All those farming activities of the quasi-hero (quasi; for the girl is the real heroine) do not interest me; they distract my attention from the fundamental problem confronting the girl.[29]

The typescript of the 1917-1923 Pioneers manuscript reveals the "farming activities" edited by Grove because they did not focus upon his central tragic vision of Niels

Lindstedt. The first five pages of the Pioneers typescript which introduce "Niels Lindstedt's entrance into the Canadian West" with a harvest scene were edited.[30] Instead of the conversation between Niels and his fellow harvesters found in the original typescript, Grove's emphasis is upon isolation in the introductory paragraphs of Settlers of the Marsh:

> On the road leading north from the little prairie town Minor two men were fighting their way through the gathering dusk.
>
> . . . .
>
> Both would have liked to talk, to tell and to listen to stories of danger, of being lost, of hair-breadth escapes: the influence of the prairie snow-storm made itself felt. But whenever one of them spoke, the wind snatched his word from his lips and threw it aloft.[31]

The hostility of the prairie landscape is conveyed by the blinding snowstorm, darkness and cold. This impression is reinforced by the suspicious homesteader who turns Niels and his friend, Nelson, away from his door. The edited version shows no similarity to the original introduction with its pastoral atmosphere and strong sense of pioneer community.

The realistic emphasis in the published novel centred upon pioneer isolation rather than a sense of community. Thus Grove set himself apart from Stead's nationalistic pride in the activities of prairie settlers as described in The Homesteaders. Many scenes reminiscent of Stead's documentary realism appear in the Pioneers typescript but not in the published version. Niels' consideration of various land grants and his excitement at registering his

land title is omitted from the final version.[32] A farm auction which involves Niels with his neighbouring homesteaders is also missing.[33] Lengthy narrations of the pioneer's struggle against his hostile environment were also edited, especially when these passages conveyed a sense of social community. The graphic description of a marsh fire, only briefly mentioned in Settlers of the Marsh (p. 138), was originally several pages in length[34] and was chosen by Grove for his first reading from his Pioneers manuscript at Wesley College. Also edited was the reference to an epidemic which causes much suffering and death in the pioneer community and shows Niels' role in nursing an entire family.[35] Many of the everyday conversations between Niels and his neighbours, the Kahns, the Reimers, and the Bates, do not appear in Settlers of the Marsh. Nor do the two quotations from the preface of the original typescript appear in the published version:

> "Once I saw the skelton of a stable--the remnant of the buildings put up by a pioneer settler who had to give in after having wasted effort and substance and worn his knuckles to the bone. The wilderness uses human material up . . . ."
> (Over Prairie Trails)

> "You see certain wild animals, males and females, spread over the country: black, livid, and all burnt by the sun; fettered to the earth which they dig and stir with invincible obstinacy; they have something like an articulate voice, and when they lift themselves on their feet, they show a human face; and as a matter of fact they are humans. At night they retire into their lairs where they live on black bread, water, and roots: they save other

> men the trouble of seeding, ploughing, and harvesting for their living and thus deserve that they themselves not want the bread they have sown."
> (Les Caractères[36] by La Bruyère)

According to Gordon D. McLeod, the removal of these quotations marks Grove's evolving theory of realism:

> However during the years 1917 to 1924 when this book was being written I think that he did come to major decisions about the meaning of realism and that the omitting of the quotations was dictated by his belief that realism related to literary procedure and not to choice of subject. The quotations might have tied him to the Zola-type realism of which Grove was so critical.[37]

The scenes of social realism, harvesting, auctions, marsh fires and epidemics, may also have been viewed as superficial and discarded by Grove for that reason. Grove's disinterest in social realism is evident in the following statement which he made in an article published in 1931, "Apologia Pro Vita Et Opere Sua":

> Nor are we concerned with depicting, realistically or otherwise, the life of modern Canada or of any section of it. . . . We are concerned with something more fundamental. . . . We are concerned with showing, in the casual disguise of whatever setting we have happened to be thrown into, some of the universally valid and generally human . . . tragic or comic . . . conditions of man's life on earth.[38]

It seems that Grove's emphasis in editing the Pioneers typescript was to intensify the personal quest of the young Swedish immigrant, Niels Lindstedt, and to omit all incidental events and characters which did not reflect upon the psychological realism of Niels' quest. "Thrown" into a hostile prairie winter and experiencing the loneliness of

pioneer isolation, it seems perfectly valid for the young Swedish immigrant, Niels Lindstedt, to dream of the comfort of his own family. Niels' dream of family stability appears early in Chapter 1 of Settlers of the Marsh after miles of walking through a blinding snowstorm in search of shelter:

> A merciless force was slowly numbing them by ceaseless pounding. A vision of some small room, hot with the glow and flicker of an open fire, took possession of Niels. But blindly, automatically he kept up with his companion. (p. 17)

The theme of the pioneer dream has two aspects according to Grove's development of it in Settlers of the Marsh. The first aspect presents the familiar materialistic dream of the homesteader for a land of golden opportunity, and Niels Lindstedt seems to share the materialistic greed of Caleb Gare in Wild Geese and Gander Stake in Grain:

> By some trick in his ancestry there was implanted in him the longing for the land that would be his: with a house of his own and a wife that would go through it like an inspiration: he had come to Canada, the land of the million farmsteads to be had for the asking.
>
> . . . .
>
> In this country there was a way out for him who was young and strong. In Sweden it had seemed to him as if his and everybody's fate had been fixed from all eternity. He could not win out because he had to overcome, not only his own poverty, but that of all his ancestors to boot. . . . (p. 39)

Materialistic success, the realization of wealth in this new land seems within the grasp of Niels, a conscientious, strong young man with the commitment to make his dream a reality:

> Nobody looked down upon him because he was poor. Money came easily: he had saved over a hundred and

> fifty dollars in a few months. . . . But he would hold on to it till he owned his land. . . . (p. 39)

In his early days spent digging wells to raise the necessary money to farm his own land, Niels absorbs the materialistic values of his neighbours. After observing Amundsen's farm with thirty-six acres of cleared land, well-kept livestock and painted frame house, Niels concludes that "whatever Amundsen did, he did right" (p. 19). However, the unfinished and slipshod appearance of the Lund homestead betrays laziness, debt and despair over a dream which has not been realized:

> "One day," Mrs. Lund went on, addressing Niels, "we are going to have everything as it should be. A large, good house; a hot-bed for the garden; real, up-to-date stables; and . . . everything. . . ."
>
> But suddenly he understood far more than the mere words. He understood that this woman knew she was at the end of her life and that life had not kept faith with her. Her voice was only half that with which we tell of a marvellous dream; half it was a passionate protest against the squalour surrounding her: it reared a triumphant vision above the ruins of reality. It was the cry of despair which says, It shall not be so! (p. 33)

In accordance with his friend Nelson's point of view, Niels measures the Lunds' and Amundsen's realization of the pioneer dream with a materialistic yardstick:

> Amundsen's house represented a future; this one, the past: Amundsen's growth; this one, decay. (p. 31)
>
> . . . .
>
> Success and failure! It seemed to depend on who you were, an Amundsen or a Lund. . . . (p. 36)

Certainly Niels shares Nelson's plan to own his own land and the two men outline the materialistic satisfaction and

independence to come:

> High above, far ahead stood an ideal; towards that ideal they walked. (p. 36)

Yet for Grove the materialistic fulfillment of the pioneer dream is secondary as he introduces Niels' consuming desire for a home and family happiness:

> Suddenly, as they were entering the bush, where the moonlight filtered down through the meshes of leafless boughs over head, a vision took hold of Niels: of himself and a woman sitting of a mid-winter night by the light of a lamp and in front of a fire, with the pitter-patter of children's feet sounding down from above: the eternal vision that has moved the world and that was to direct his fate. (p. 36)

Thus for Grove the pioneer dream has two aspects: a materialistic side which is never allowed to become an obsession for Niels in the way it does for Caleb Gare and Gander Stake, and a domestic side which becomes the source of tragedy. Douglas Spettigue, in "Frederick Philip Grove in Manitoba," sees much validity in Grove's dual pioneer dream:

> What brought down on Grove's head the wrath of narrow-minded reviewers was his representation of that force [to tame the land] as the sexual urge. All Niels' labour in clearing land, raising stables and a house, breaking and planting and harvesting is not enough to allay the demand within him--a natural urge culturally conditioned--for a female companion, for sexual release, for a home, and domestic security, for fatherhood, for the perpetuation of himself in the flesh as well as in his works. The breaking of the land is no different in origin from his urge to marry--both are the expression of the same natural impulse . . . of the organism to live on its environment and in living regenerate itself.[39]

In Grove's view, the materialistic fulfillment of the pioneer

dream was much simpler than the fulfillment of Niels' romantic dream involving a fireside scene and the "pitter-patter of children's feet." Niels' dream is repeated several times in the published version and in the typescript suggesting the thematic importance which Grove attached to Niels' quest. The sentimental and hackneyed language which Grove uses in these passages is often criticized; however, like Ostenso, Grove may have intended an ironic contrast between the romantic simplicity of Niels' domestic dream and the uncontrollable tragedy which will follow.

Mrs. Lund, in her account of the realities of hard work and economic hardship which are in store for any young immigrant, concludes with the domestic aspect of the pioneer dream:

> "But you want to get married, of course."
> Niels coloured. He was ill at ease. . . . There must be a flaw in these arguments. (p. 26)

The tragic flaw, of course, lies within Niels himself. Grove explains in his autobiography, <u>In Search of Myself</u>, that his inspiration for Niels Lindstedt came from the confession of a young Swede whom Grove met in Nebraska or South Dakota that "up to the day of his recent marriage, he had not known the difference between male and female" (p. 372). In <u>Settlers of the Marsh</u>, Grove presents a character whose innocence is a "flaw," a pioneer obsessed with a dream of domestic happiness who nevertheless does not know the difference between sexual love and sexual desire. The

romantic superficiality of Niels' vision is suggested by its lack of concrete definition:

> He tried to see the face of the woman but it entirely evaded him. . . . (p. 36)

When Grove introduces an actual woman as the heroine of the love plot, his description of Ellen Amundsen definitely lacks romantic promise in fulfilling Niels' dream:

> Then the girl returned from the creek. As she drove in on the yard, she happened to look at Niels. It was a level, quiet look, unswerving and irresponsive. It did not establish a bond; it held no message, neither of acceptance nor of disapproval; it was not meant to have any meaning for him; it was an undisguised, cool disinterested scrutiny.
>
> Niels coloured under the look. (p. 22)

Like Judith Gare and Jo Burge, Ellen is the realistic counterpart of her pioneer setting. Part of a family for whom work and material success is almost a religion, she has learned to work "like a man," and the astonished Niels watches Ellen handle a powerful team of horses "with calm assurance and unflinching courage" (p. 22).

Grove also introduces the third protagonist in the novel's ill-fated love triangle, Mrs. Vogel, the district prostitute who represents another feature of pioneer isolation. Niels, who is attracted by Mrs. Vogel's "round, coal-black eyes . . . dancing with merriment," cannot assign any reason for his intuition that Mrs. Vogel "by contrast to the other women . . . [was] peculiarly feminine; beside her, the others looked neuter" (p. 29). Yet with his tragic sexual

innocence, Niels considers the possibility of Mrs. Vogel as the woman who will fulfill his dream:

> And she drove on, not without throwing over her shoulder a glance which sent a tingling sensation along Niels' spine.
>
> Woman had never figured as a concrete thing in Niels' thought of his future in this new country. True, he had seen in his visions a wife and children, but the wife had been a symbol merely. Now that he was in the country of his dreams and gaining foothold, it seemed as if individual women were bent on replacing the vague, schematic figures he had in his mind. He found this intrusion strangely disquieting. (p. 40)

With this love triangle, Grove has established the type of classical tragic plot which he equates with realism in an essay published in It Needs To Be Said:

> True realism always develops a conflict in such a manner that we see all sides, understand all sides, sympathize with all sides taken separately, and yet cannot tell how that conflict can be avoided which, as it unfolds itself, crushes our sensibilities. That is the tragic necessity which we find in all great works of literary art and which exalts us as it crushes us; that is the "fate" of the Greek tragedy; it is the inexorable quality of life itself. Give it, and you have given an image of life; . . . namely realism. (It Needs To Be Said, p. 75)

Grove's literary intent of modelling Niels' quest after a classical tragedy adds much of the power to Settlers of the Marsh as a realistic novel. The reality of pioneer isolation clearly leads to Niels' desire for a family:

> These long, lonesome drives were conducive to a great deal of thinking, especially on the way home when the horses could be left to themselves.
>
> But more so still were the lonesome days in the bush. . . . And gradually, as he worked at felling and cutting the trees; but especially in the long evenings, when he sat in that little shanty "up

> north," mechanically keeping the fire going; and most of all when he lay in bed, made wakeful by the mere consciousness of his utter isolation, did he build up a program and a plan for himself and his future.
>
> . . . .
>
> He himself might be forever a stranger in this country; so far he saw it against the background of Sweden. But if he had children, they would be rooted here. . . . He might become rooted himself, through them. . . . (p. 45)

When the face of the woman in his dream emerges as that of Ellen (p. 45), Niels' domestic dream becomes an obsession in the manner of the materialistic obsessions of Caleb Gare and Gander Stake:

> Niels lived in a continual glow of excitement. He worked passionately; he dreamed passionately; and when he lay down at night, he even slept with something like passionate intensity. . . . Now that vision became an obsession. (pp. 48, 49)

Niels' material success is taken as a matter of course in a country where wealth "was merely a question of persevering and hewing straight to the line. Life was simplified" (p. 45). In Niels' view, all "headway" on his land was done in Ellen's name in a romantic dream of the future:

> Everything he did he did for her.
>
> . . . .
>
> He went over to the site of his house where the logs lay ready, squared and notched to be fitted together; and the lumber for floors, partitions, ceilings, rafters, roof, and stairs, neatly piled; doors and windows were stored in the granary. Stones were gathered in a huge pile for the foundation; the cellar was dug. . . .
>
> He went to the clearing where his first breaking lay, seeded to barley. Soon he would add to it. . . . Already he had started to cut the brush. . . .
>
> At last he returned to the granary, his provisional house. It was not lonely now; it was peopled with dreams. He lay awake till dawn; and

> then he looked out into the eastern gates of heaven, aflame with glory. . . . (p. 70)

Niels' romantic dream of a domestic paradise seems closer to reality when Ellen's shyness abates with the death of her father and she and Niels become friends. The materialistic "headway" of Niels' pioneer dream and more importantly, his friendship with Ellen establishes the logical architecture of a plot fashioned after the model of classical Greek tragedy:

> In Settlers of the Marsh the story of the hero, Niels, and the plot of the book move together up to the turning point and then down to the denouement, without there ever being any difficulty in keeping the development of character and the development of the story together. Through the rising action of the story Niels' dream gradually becomes more and more concrete and the possibility of the dream being realized seems to become more and more certain. As we approach the crisis Niels actually finished the White Range-Line House, which is necessary to the realizing of his dream. . . . And though the Clara theme is sounded in the background, and though the determinist theme is also sounded ominously Niels seems to be moving happily towards the consummation of his vision.[40]

In his references to Niels' relationship to Nature, Grove sounds his "determinist theme" and stresses as Stead does in Grain, the spiritual alienation of the pioneer from his land:

> To Niels his doings seemed inconsequential and irrelevant; such was the influence of the boundless landscape which stretched away in the dim light of the moon. . . .
>
> Life had him in its grip and played with him; the vastness of the spaces looked calmly on. (p. 34)

Although Niels wants to "cling to the landscape as something

abiding," the reality of the prairie landscape does not offer this romantic comfort:

> . . . He was a leaf borne along the wind, a prey to things beyond his control, a fragment swept away by torrents. (p. 55)

As his dream becomes an obsession, Niels' social and personal isolation increases. Sharing the realistic visions of Ostenso and Stead, Grove reveals the personal cost of the obsessive pioneer dream:

> But the fight drew sharp lines into his face and made him seem older than he was. He had become reticent again as he had perforce been during his first year in the new country. He never spoke a word beyond what was exactly needed to convey his meaning.
>
> He had grown tremendously strong. Among the harvest crews he enjoyed, though he never fought, the reputation of being a fighter. The men who chaffed everybody else left him alone. . . .
>
> His outlook also had changed. Life seemed irrelevant; success seemed idle. All he did he did mechanically. (p. 57)

When Niels decides to propose to Ellen Amundsen and thus turn his romantic dream into a reality, Grove like Stead, employs ominous storm symbolism to suggest this tragic crisis in the love story:

> 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: like silent discharges between summer clouds that distantly wink at each other in lightning.
>
> The air, too, was charged; its sultriness foreboded a storm.
>
> . . . .
>
> The moment was coming. It had prepared itself. It was rushing along the land of time where neither he nor she could escape it. . . . It stood in front

> of them; and its face was not smiling; it was grimly tragical. . . . (pp. 94, 95)

Yet at the same time, Grove employs imagery which is suggestive of the Garden of Eden imagery found in romantic prairie fiction; however, the imagery is a feature of Grove's inner psychological realism. Rather than to the external environment, this imagery refers to the happiness of the two lovers and emphasizes the integrity of Niels' original dream with Ellen as his mate. Only in Niels' two meetings with Ellen in the woods does Grove veer from the novel's bleak, deterministic prairie setting to a romantic pastoral setting suggestive of the Garden of Eden:

> Birds fluttered up as they touched the bushes: shy birds and bold birds: waxwings, catbirds, towhees--these merely flitted away; blackbirds, kingbirds, and jays--these scolded at them, resenting their intrusion into the home of their young. Bush rabbits sprang up and scampered away in panic: and both of them laughed. . . . The yard was densely overgrown with raspberry canes which held a profusion of heavy, overripe berries. They picked them, eating as they went or offering handfuls to each other. . . .
>
> They crossed the road that led north, past the school house, winding through the virgin bush. And just as they were in its centre, they caught a glimpse of a democrat coming from the south. As if in play, fleeing from pursuit, they plunged into the bush beyond. Behind a thicket of hazel-brush they crouched down, laughing, their movements as simultaneous and nearly instinctive as those of a flock of birds.
>
> . . . .
>
> Breathlessly two human beings listened, their faces flushed: a boy and a girl . . . both were flushed with guilt. . . . (pp. 95-97)

However, in <u>Settlers of the Marsh</u> Grove abandons this resemblance to romantic prairie fiction in the deterministic trends

of Ellen's refusal to marry Niels. The destruction of Niels' dream and his own psychological breakdown is rooted in Ellen's family past: a brutal background of sexual assault, heavy farm work, abortion, and death. These criminal effects of the materialistic pioneer dream had been observed by Grove in his travels throughout pioneer North America. Thus Mrs. Amundsen's pathetic fate achieves reality from the convictions of the author:

> "Mother came in and dragged herself to the bed. It took her half an hour to undress; she lay down with a moan.
> "My father followed her. . . . Then he knelt by his bed and prayed, loud and fervently and long.
> "Suddenly I heard mother's voice mixed with groans, Oh John, don't.
> "I will not repeat the things my father said. An abyss opened as I lay there. The vile, jesting, jocular urgency of it; the words he used to that skelton and ghost of a woman. . . . In order to save mother, I was tempted to betray that I heard. Shame held me back. . . .
> "Once she said, still defending herself, You know, John, it means a child again. You know how often I have been a murderess already. John, Please! Please!
> "God has been good to us, he replied; he took them. . . .
> "And the struggle began again, to end with the defeat of the woman. . . . That night I vowed to myself: No man, whether I liked him or loathed him, was ever to have power over me!" (pp. 112-113)

For Desmond Pacey, the realistic merit of this conversation is undeniable in the following statement from <u>Frederick Philip Grove</u> (1945):

> This tremendous scene of revelation is one of Grove's greatest successes. . . . We are persuaded not only that the harrowing experiences which Ellen recounts are real, but that, given her temperament and circumstances she would have the courage and candour

to tell them.[41]

Certainly the characterization of Ellen, who has been kept at a distance, is sharpened into a realistic focus. It is also to Grove's credit that the scene does not descend to the level of romantic melodrama. For it is another of Grove's literary tenets about realism that the reader must feel a kinship with the characters' actions; that no character be portrayed as a devil or an angel, but rather as a mixture of good and evil as in real life:

> There are writers who paint devil and angels, cowards and heroes. But in a long and observant life I have found none of these. In a long and critical life as a reader I have found men in devils and men in angels; that is, alloys of both devils and angels. (<u>It Needs To Be Said</u>, p. 66)

Both Ellen and Niels appear to be realistic human beings as both are flawed by their innocence and failure to differentiate between sexual love and sexual desire. The Garden of Eden symbolism which dominates the crisis emphasizes the "guilty" lovers who abandon each other and destroy Niels' first dream of domestic happiness in a new land:

> He did not see that over that farmyard there followed him a girl, her hand pressed to her bosom, tears in her eyes; nor that, at the gate, she sank to the ground and sobbed. . . . (p. 113)

With Niels' dream destroyed by the reality of the Amundsens' horrifying marriage, Grove reverts to deterministic Nature imagery in his description of Niels' inner state:

> What was life anyway? A dumb shifting of forces. Grass grew and was trodden down; and it knew not why. He himself--this very afternoon there had been

> in him the joy of grass growing, twigs budding, blossoms opening to the air of spring. The grass had been stepped on; the twig had been broken; the blossoms nipped by frost. . . . (p. 101)

Although his dream of domestic happiness has ended, Niels still feels that he will be able to renew the pioneer dream:

> A new dream rose: a longing to leave and to go to the very margin of civilisation, 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. . . . That way his enormous strength would still have meaning. Woman would have no place in his life. . . .
>
> 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. . . .
>
> But, of course, it was only the dream of the slave who dreams of freedom. . . . (p. 119)

However, Grove is a firm believer in the integrity of personal quests and Niels' hasty adoption of another dream of freedom and happiness contradicts Grove's belief in the merit of personal struggle as stated in the following passage from <u>In Search of Myself</u>:

> I wondered whether there might not be a way to shorten that interval . . . which I must unremittingly slave in order to realize a dream. I should have taken warning at once. In life, there is never a short-cut. . . . You will lose sight of your goal. In life, as often as not, a short-cut is a side-track on which you will go astray. (p. 237)

The next chapter, entitled "Mrs. Lindstedt," reveals Niels' hasty seduction by Clara Vogel and even hastier marriage to the woman who will turn Niels' romantic pioneer dream of domestic happiness and freedom into a nightmare.

From the moment Clara Lindstedt enters "the famous White Range Line House" (p. 122), the reality of Niels' isolation is increased rather than diminished by his new wife:

> "Well," said the woman, laughing again, as the horses pulled, "why don't you say something? . . Congratulate me and . . . him?"
>
> But Bobby said nothing. He was very red as, at the stable, he bent over the traces to unhook them. (p. 122)

In emphasizing Niels' social isolation, Grove, like Ostenso, uses moral grounds for Niels' ostracism from his pioneer community:

> Slowly her team approached, came up, and stood. . . . For a moment silence.
>
> Then her [Ellen's] voice, a mere whisper, full of anguish, "Niels, how could you! . . ."
>
> Without answering he drove past. . . . (p. 126)
>
> . . . .
>
> Occasionally, when he had business with others--and he had more and more such business: the farm grew, the country became settled--he would enter a house where two or three were assembled. At sight of him all would go silent. And yet he was the oldest settler in the Marsh, the one from whom help was expected, encouragement, employment even.
>
> Not a congratulation, not an invitation for neighbourly intercourse: nothing. . . .
>
> Niels could not but be aware of enveloping reticences; he felt as if he were surrounded by a huge vacuum in which the air was too thin for human relationships to flourish. (p. 128)

Niels' ostracism from his fellow pioneers is aggravated by the isolation within his own marriage. Between husband and wife lies a natural aversion rather than a bond and Niels' quickly learns the tragic difference that his innocence has made in fulfilling his dream:

> It had not taken above three days before he

> knew that, if ever there had been in him the true fire that welds two lives together, it had died down. He had made an effort to conquer something like aversion. . . . It was his duty to make the best of a bad bargain. . . .
> Distasteful though they were, he satisfied her strange, ardent, erratic desires. . . . Whenever she came, she overwhelmed him with caresses and protestations of love which were strangely in contrast to her usual, almost ironical coolness. (p. 126)

Niels' romantic vision of a domestic solution to his feelings of exile has ended in his terrible realization that his isolation has become permanent:

> They lived side by side: without common memories in the past, without common interests in the present, without common aims in the future. . . .
> They were strangers; strangers they would remain. (p. 137)

His marriage has also proven to be a sterile union without children to relieve the intense isolation which Niels is experiencing:

> He thought of that vision which had once guided him, goaded him on when he had first started out to conquer the wilderness: the vision of a wife and children. . . .
> Children?
> His eye went dim; his head turned with him as he realised it. No. . . . Children would be a perpetuation of the sin of a moment. . . .
> He did not want children out of this woman! (p. 138)

Like Ostenso, Grove seems aware of the overwhelming reality of prairie isolation as Niels moves through these various levels of isolation towards madness:

> He entered his house only when it could not be helped. . . . But he stared across at it, with unseeing eyes, at that big house which he had built for himself four, five years ago. . . . For himself: No, of that he must not think. . . That way lay insanity. (p. 149)

Certainly Chapters IV and V which describe the inner psychological states of Niels throughout his hellish marriage, isolation, humiliation, and murderous rage, reveal the harsh reality underlying a romantically innocent dream. From the point of view of Niels, Grove achieves his literary aim of portraying inner realism.

Yet these two chapters which mirror Niels' downfall and the loss of his dream are an artistic failure and a descent to the level of romantic melodrama. The weakness lies with Grove's melodramatic characterization of Clara Vogel, the district whore who clearly symbolizes "the devil" in the destruction of Niels' original pioneer dream. The Garden of Eden symbolism which is successfully adapted to reveal the realistic human flaws in Ellen and Niels destroys any realistic appraisal of Clara. Early in the novel, Clara is strongly identified with the archetypal serpent of temptation and sin in the Garden of Eden:

> "I wonder," she said suddenly, "whether you could smile, Mr. Lindstedt?"
>
> This shocked him. He felt as if somebody were piling a crushing weight on him; or as if he were being stripped of his disguises. His chastity felt attacked. He wanted to get away and looked helplessly at the crowd.
>
> . . . .
>
> Mrs. Vogel sat at the other end of the table. Niels looked at her once or twice; but she seemed to avoid his eye; and it suited him so. He was still angry at himself, for an inexplicable feeling of guilt that possessed him. She looked very lovely, he thought; but she looked like sin. She was incomprehensible to him. . . . (pp. 52, 54)

Grove's use of Garden of Eden symbolism seems particularly

clear in his description of Clara's snake-like eyes and allusion to Milton's fallen world in Paradise Lost:

> He had never been quite so close to her before; he had never, since he had been a man, been so close to any woman on earth. And this was an artful woman. She enveloped him in a cloud of delicate scents; she smiled at him from her black, beady eyes. . . .
> He felt as if he were thrown back into chaos. . . . . Something was still stirred in him by this woman, something low, disgraceful. . . . (p. 90)

When Niels refers to Clara as "a relic of ancient temptations" (p. 91) and the figure of his "ancient hostility" (p. 120), the symbolic association of his marriage with the fallen world outside his original dream of Ellen is reinforced. Grove's melodramatic characterization of Clara, the indolent woman of ill repute who is forever lounging about the White Range Line House in her dressing gown, never attains realistic proportions. With Niels' stated belief in the Biblical injunction, "The Wages of Sin is Death," (p. 138), his eventual murder of Clara becomes the poetic justice which Grove claimed to avoid in It Needs To Be Said:

> Nor has realism anything to do with that bubble of the brain, poetic justice. Art is not a sermon. (p. 71)

Grove is trying to portray the spiritual hell of living without a dream, without ideals for the future through Niels' unfortunate marriage to Clara Vogel:

> His doom had overtaken him, irrevocably, irremediably: he was bond-slave to a moment in his life, to a moment in the past, for all future times. . . . (p. 138)

This statement also reflects Grove's identification with the

downfall of Niels as a tragic hero who suffers through his tragic flaw of sexual naivete. To achieve this reality of spiritual hell, Grove slows the tragic momentum of the plot to a stasis suggestive of the suffering of Prometheus:

> It is the fate of human kind. We pile Ossa on Pelion; and for our pains we are chained to a mountain-flank like Prometheus, the bringer of light. . . . (<u>It Needs To Be Said</u>, p. 88)

In emphasizing the psychological deterioration of Niels, it is impossible for Clara to move beyond the villainous role which has been assigned to her. Critics who search for a realistic feature in Clara's characterization often point to this conversation between Clara and Niels:

> ". . . What did you marry me for, anyway?"
>
> "That you know as well as I."
>
> "No," she said, curiously. "I don't. I know why you married me, for what reasons; I don't know what for. The reason is clear enough. You married me because you were such an innocence, such a milk-sop that you could not bear the thought of having gone to bed with a woman who was not your wife. . . . That's why you married me. You wouldn't have needed to bother. I had had what I wanted. I did not ask you for anything beyond. I'm honest. I'm not a sneak who asks for one thing to get another. I did not know all this at the time, that goes without saying. I know it now. Had I known it then, you would never have snared me. At the time I thought you were really in love with me, you really <u>wanted</u> me, you really wanted <u>me</u>! Not only a woman, any woman. Do you know what you did when you married me? You prostituted me if you know what that means. That's what you did. After having made a convenience of me. When you married me, you committed a crime!"
>
> (pp. 153, 154)

Yet W. J. Keith claims that this speech which was intended to show that Niels and Clara were a realistic blend of virtue and evil fails to convince the reader. In his article,

"Frederick Philip Grove: The Art of Settlers of the Marsh as an example," Keith states that such a "set speech" demands "an acute and mature" critical response:

> The "sophisticated" reader will be in danger of falling completely for Clara's eloquent but highly selective and spurious argument; the naive reader will miss even the minimal validity that can be allowed to her position.[42]

Grove's portrayal of Clara as a villain continues with Clara's flagrant adultery (p. 174), Niels' humiliation, and ultimate murderous rage.

The pioneer setting of the Big Marsh District becomes a secondary interest in the realistic portrayal of Niels' psychological breakdown. The materialistic welfare of the farm and its routine exist apart from the domestic tragedy within the White Range Line House:

> The farm was a law unto itself. It demanded his work. Nellie and her oldest filly were both in foal. Two big hay-stacks in the yard, one, monstrously large, in a slough east of the place. While the field-work rested, a new stable was erected, a huge structure with drain channels, built inside of three-inch lumber. Cutting started. The wheat was heavy, sixty acres of it. Before threshing the granary would have to be doubled in capacity. . . . Work galore. . . . (p. 131)
>
> . . . .
>
> The crops grew well; they promised a bountiful harvest. . . . What did it matter? (p. 150)

Without the original integrity of his dream, Niels finds the farm routine meaningless and the materialistic wealth resulting from his work an empty reward. Finally when a vindictive neighbour reveals that Niels had married "the district whore" (p. 177), Niels' shock leads him to madness:

> For a moment he felt that he must pitch forward and faint. Instinctively his trembling hand reached for the machine to steady his swaying body. . . .
>
> The woman saw it and stopped in her rush of words. Her eyes became wide. She realised what she had done: she had swung an axe into a great, towering tree; and the tree had crashed down at a single blow. . . . (p. 178)

In portraying Niels' nightmarish process of marital breakdown, insanity and murder, David Arnason, in his thesis "The Development of Prairie Realism" states that this section of the novel moves "beyond realism to surrealism."[43] This surrealistic quality is conveyed by the description of the landscape and the flashes of light and images which precede Niels' decision to kill Clara:

> Behind him were other sloughs, swampy hollows, their soil churned up, trodden and trampled by wandering cattle into little hillocks tufted with grass, hardened by drying, with muddy holes in between where the feet of the heavy beasts had sunk deep.
>
> Over these foot-traps he tottered, stumbled, fell headlong, picked himself up again. . . . (p. 183)
>
> . . . .
>
> Long, long Niels sat and stared into the dark. There was just starlight enough to show the outlines. . . .
>
> Instantly Niels saw. He did not move. The change did not once release any conscious reaction, any thought.
>
> The next moment the light reappeared at the lower window, in front of the staircase, throwing a dim glow over the sward of grass on the yard. For a moment a figure appeared in the frame of the window; a woman in flimsy, gaudy undress. An arm, almost bare, reached up to draw the blind so that it intercepted the light. (p. 185)

Niels rushes into the house which once symbolized his dream and shoots his wife who has turned the White Range Line

House into a brothel.

The murder of Clara is the high point of the novel for Desmond Pacey, and he states that the novel should have ended there:

> The logical conclusion of the tragic train of events is Niels' murder of his faithless wife; our interest flags as we read of the trial and its aftermath.[44]

Yet Clara has always remained a melodramatic villain and never becomes a realistic woman with the blend of virtue and evil which Grove claimed to seek in realistic characters. The reader, despite the validity of Niels' psychological breakdown, has little or no reaction to the death of the stereotyped Clara Lindstedt. Settlers of the Marsh has never become "the profound artistic treatment of sexual love" which one of the novel's original reviewers called it. The two chapters which describe the unremitting agony of the marriage of Niels and Clara are monotonous, and this section seems to belong to the tradition of romantic melodrama. W. J. Keith takes a more valid critical approach to this section in his belief that "the novel sags dangerously in the scenes involving Niels and Clara, and recovers as soon as the melodramatic action of the murder has taken place."[45]

The thematic importance of the last chapter "Ellen Again" is stressed by Grove in In Search of Myself. He admits to being "afraid of tackling that scene" (p. 372), and claims some presentiment in including his Pioneers manuscript "in the back of the Ford car" among the Groves'

vacation gear for a camping trip to Lake Winnipeg. In a rebirth of literary inspiration, Grove completed the "missing, central, pivotal scene" of Settlers of the Marsh. It is clear that his concern with a realistic ending to his interpretation of the pioneer dream was uppermost in Grove's mind:

> . . . For years I had . . . reacted only to what referred to the human world inhabiting the bush-country of Manitoba as I had "created" it; for the landscape as it lives in this novel and in others, and its human inhabitants as well, were mine, were the product of my mind; yet, to me, they had become more real than any actuality could have been. For years, yes, decades, every figure in this novel, as in others, had, from day to day, sucked my life blood to keep itself going, leaving me limp as a rag, making me a bore to others and a burden to myself. (In Search of Myself, p. 373)

The element of spiritual rebirth, which became Grove's final thematic statement concerning the pioneer dream in Settlers of the Marsh, is evident even in Grove's account of writing the final scene:

> Henceforth, every morning after breakfast, taken in a sort of wistful and apprehensive silence, I withdrew behind a willow-clump on the beach-crest where I had as much privacy as I had ever had in a study. . . . And thus I wrestled with the Lord, trying to force him to delegate to me His power of giving life. . . .
>
> But the scene was written; the last link in the chain of that novel was forged. . . . It was to be, so far, the last but one time that, in my work, the miracle happened by means of which the words, which were my tools, transcended themselves and became entities of their own. (In Search of Myself, p. 374)

Grove's final thematic statement emphasizes the renewal of the pioneer dream through individual struggle and

a willingness to accept an imperfect reality. Niels atones for the murder of Clara through his prison sentence of ten years with hard labour. It is the warden who impresses upon Niels that it is his moral responsibility to shape his old romantic dream of land and a family into a reality:

> It was the warden who held out hope that perhaps within another two, three years. . . . It was the warden who corresponded for him with Bobby Lund. . . .
>
> No, said the warden, Bobby Lund would never dream of accepting the farm as a present; he had his own farm; he was looking after Niels' stock; after his land; he was holding it in trust against his return. . . . It was his, Niels', duty to go back to this land. . . .
>
> It was the warden who spoke to him of Ellen. . . .
> (p. 195)

The ending articulates Grove's own theory of man as a Promethean hero who struggles against his tragic fate and achieves a humanistic victory by not submitting. Thus the novel does not end on the deterministic note which Niels' execution or suicide would have provided. Neither Ostenso nor Stead renews the pioneer dream on such a positive note. Grove had a profound respect for the ordinary pioneer's ability to work his land, deal with the real hardships of prairie isolation, family problems, and endless work, and still not submit to despair. Rather, the pioneer worked through these harsh realities, and in the process became extraordinary. Grove makes this process of adaptation clear in his autobiographical novel, A Search for America:

> My view of life . . . had become, in America, ethical. We come indeed from Hell and climb to Heaven; the Golden Age stands at the never-attainable end of

> history, not at Man's origins. Every step forward is bound to be a compromise; right and wrong are inseparably mixed; the best we can hope for is to make right prevail more and more; to reduce wrong to a smaller and smaller fraction of the whole till it reaches the vanishing point.[46]

Grove's strong convictions concerning the pioneer quest were translated into the theme of spiritual renewal which concludes Settlers of the Marsh. As Dick Harrison points out in Unnamed Country, the conclusion of the novel is vital to a proper reading of Grove's first pioneer novel:

> If the novel had ended, as some would like it to end, at the murder of Clara, then Niels' character would have been left in this state. The novel would have been about a rather unusual little tragedy of innocence rather than about the always tragic necessity of being disillusioned. . . .[47]

Upon his return home, Niels is disillusioned by signs that the pioneer era is ending:

> This prosperity which had invaded the Marsh was unexpected; the old pioneers had receded to the margin of civilisation; a new generation had taken hold. The change was not welcome: he was of the old generation which had been evicted. On almost every farmstead he saw a garage: cars had always been his pet aversion. . . .
>
> The old familiar bluffs had been cleared away. Fields stretched in their places. About the yards straight-lined plantations of imported trees framed the clusters of buildings.
>
> This was no longer the bush land he had loved. . . .
> (p. 196)

Yet in a rather fortuitous turn of the plot, the signs of material decay are not evident on Niels' farm despite his absence of ten years:

> Then the vista opened on his yard. . . . There stood the buildings--granary, stable, cowshed, implement shed, pig-pen, milk-house, and . . .

> dwelling. . . . There was the horse-lot, the garden behind the house, the cow-enclosure north of the entrance, in the bluff. . . . All was as it used to be. (p. 198)

The materialistic aspect of Niels' original quest is still a reality due to Bobby Lund's maintenance of the farm. Niels' more important memories of his romantic dream of a happy marriage are laid to rest with the destruction of Clara's furniture which had been stored by Mrs. Lund:

> Next day he went into the bush and searched till he found the shanty, well hidden in willows; and, piling some brush against the wall, he set fire to it without ever looking inside. (p. 208)

Yet Niels' desire for spiritual renewal does not end with the end of his old romantic dream:

> He reached for that vision as if he wished to hold it, to grasp it with all the tentacles of his mind. But the very next moment he realized that it had eluded him; it had vanished like a spirit into the air. (p. 209)

Grove's emphasis upon the integrity of Niels' domestic quest is clear as Niels reflects upon his basic alienation from the land even "while seeding his field" (p. 207):

> To drown one's thought in labour is very difficult on the farm: everything is conducive to contemplation. No high ambitions lead you away from the present: and yet those ambitions which are indispensable, the lowly ones, are really the highest on earth: the desire for peace and harmony in yourself, your surroundings. . . .
>
> But there were no surroundings--there was no little world, no microcosm revolving within the macrocosm. There was the duty to the farm, the country, the world: cold, abstract things devoid of the living blood. . . . So long as Niels had to avert his eye from old desires, visions, dreams, there was no foundation for his life. (p. 207)

This time Niels forges a new realistic dream of happiness in place of the dream of romantic innocence which had led to tragedy:

> He had come to the conclusion that, if he found the girl still living in the bush, he would take it as a sign that once more there would be peace, once more there would be some semblance of life left for him in the future. (p. 203)

For Thomas Saunders, in his introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of _Settlers of the Marsh_, the happy ending to the novel is "faulty," and he concurs with Desmond Pacey that the novel "should have ended with the tragedy."[48] Yet Grove saw a vast difference between the happy ending of romantic fiction and the happy ending of a realistic novel:

> The demand for the happy ending is the demand of a childish mind. Our country is in its childhood; so we deify success. But success is failure in its highest sense. (_It Needs To Be Said_, p. 89)

Although Grove states that he once was discouraged by the strong similarities between _Pioneers_ and Hamsun's _Growth of the Soil_, the endings of both novels set them apart:

> In Hamsun's book I came to see a thing I abhorred, namely, romanticism; which means essentially a view of life in which circumstance is conquered by endeavour only if endeavour is aided by the _deus ex machina_. In other words, as I expressed it to myself, if man is justified by faith instead of by works; or if faith persists in the face of the strongest disproof and is ultimately upheld by an external intervention, natural or supernatural. . . . That has never been my view.
> (_In Search of Myself_, p. 357)

Thus Grove's "happy ending" is achieved through human intervention, and a renewal of his original dream in a more

realistic and imperfect sense.

Niels' final vision of his mother and Old Sigurdsen was pencilled in beside Grove's ink handwriting in the original Pioneers manuscript[49] and suggests that it was an important addition which stressed the novel's thematic statement of renewal:

> These two, in vision and memory, seemed to blend, to melt together. Both looked at him, in this new vision, out of one face in which, now his, now her lines gained the ascendancy. . . .
> The wistful face of his mother relaxed in a knowing smile: yes, such was she who had borne him. . . .
> The old man's face took her place: he was moving his lips and muttered, "H'm . . . tya." (p. 210)

Dick Harrison suggests in Unnamed Country that this composite vision relates Niels' early sentimental vision of idealistic happiness with his more realistic vision of Ellen:

> Sigurdsen suggests both sexuality and creatural decay, the two things Niels could not accept, in others or himself, and here they are incorporated into Niels's guiding vision. The mother's face relaxing into a "knowing smile" is on the one hand a sad falling away from the ideal of purity it had been to Niels's acceptance of himself and life. This composite vision is the clearest evidence we have that Niels has been matured and not simply subdued by his experience of seventeen years.[50]

The reconciliation of the middle-aged Ellen and Niels presents a realistic mixture of happiness and sadness, the mistakes of the past and the hopes for the future (p. 212). Thus the realistic possibility of renewing his dream is presented to Niels:

> Her features were no longer round; they were square; but her complexion was still that pure, Scandinavian

> white; her hair, straw-yellow, streaked with grey. . . . But now as then it was the expression that held him: hers was the face of a girl, not a woman; it was stern, to be sure; but in this sternness lay hidden the dream, the unfulfilled, uncompromising dream of a virgin child. . . .
> . . . .
> . . . His memory re-awoke: he saw her again as she had been in the years of their intimacy, their brotherhood: she was she, after all: the only woman. . . . (pp. 211, 213)

Niels has restored his original dream and this renewal is signalled by Grove's return to idyllic Garden of Eden imagery in his description of Niels' and Ellen's reconciliation:

> Spring breezes amble through the bush: a meadow lark sings on the nearby clearing; robins chase each other in the grass.
> And as the silence lengthens between them, between man and woman, the consciousness arises in each that the other knows his inmost thought: that both have secretly, almost reluctantly, faced the same hope. . .
> Light-green, virgin, the bush rears all about. Aspen leaves shiver, reflecting little points of light from their still glossy surface. (p. 215)

Yet the realization of his dream has been at great personal cost, and again Grove emphasizes that dreams are achieved through realistic struggle and inner strength:

> These two have been parted; and parting has opened their eyes. They have suffered; suffering has made then sweet, not made them bitter. Life has involved them in guilt; regret and repentance have led them together; they know that never again must they part. It is not passion that will unite them; what will unite them is love. . . .
> They are older. Both feel it. Older than they were when they threaded these thickets before. They are quieter, less apt to rush at conclusions, to close in a struggle with life. . . . (p. 216)

Grove's selected use of Garden of Eden imagery in this novel

reveals his belief that paradise has never belonged to the prairie itself, but to a well-earned state of personal happiness. For Grove, such spiritual renewal is the realistic outcome of the ideals and hardships imposed by the pioneer dream:

> As they go, a vision arises between them, shared by both. (p. 217)

The original happy ending of romantic fiction appeared in the epilogue of the Pioneers manuscript in which it is revealed that Niels and Ellen have lived forty years together with their three children.[51] This epilogue was omitted from the published version probably because it reminded Grove of the romantic tradition. Grove's conclusion coincided with his realistic appraisal of quests like the pioneer dream:

> But it is also one of the fundamental tenets of my creed that an ideal realized would be an ideal destroyed. If God revealed Himself, He would be dead. The aim, the ideal, to be of value as a guide must be unattainable.
> (It Needs To Be Said, p. 88)

Grain, Wild Geese and Settlers of the Marsh had shown that the romantic ideals associated with the prairie and with the pioneer dream were unattainable. These novels reshaped the conventional romantic treatment of the pioneer dream into a new form which revealed an honest disillusionment with the romance of pioneering. Stead, Ostenso and Grove all recognized through the experiences of their own lives that the pioneer dream imposed its own cost upon the Canadian prairie settler: isolation, narrow-mindedness, and

even family disintegration.

The transition from romantic to realistic considerations of the theme of the pioneer dream was a difficult one which seemed sordid and grim to Canadians who in 1925 were hardly removed from the pioneering stage. Certainly the romantic promise of the prairie had been validated by politicians and writers alike as a Canadian paradise where a life of easy riches, freedom and happiness awaited the new settler. The reading public expected a romantic interpretation of pioneering to be verified in their literature if not in their own lives. Thus the conventional and somewhat dishonest portrayal of the pioneer dream was welcomed in the romantic novels of Arthur Stringer, Ralph Connor, Nellie McClung and the early Robert Stead. No better synopsis of the romantic interpretation of the pioneer dream exists than in Robert Stead's poem, "The Homesteader":

> Far away from the din of the city,
> I dwell on the prairie alone,
> With no one to praise or to pity,
> And all the broad earth for my own;
> The fields to allure me to labor,
> The shanty to shelter my sleep,
> A league and a half to a neighbor--
> And Collie to watch if I weep.
>
> . . . .
>
> I follow the plough in the breaking,
> I tap the rich treasures of Time--
> The treasure is here for the taking,
> And taking it isn't a crime;
> I ride on the rack or the reaper
> To harvest the fruit of my hand,
> And daily I know the deeper
> I'm rooting my soul in the land.[52]

It is a basic irony of the new realistic prairie fiction that the settler is actually spiritually alienated from his land rather than firmly rooted in the security of a fulfilled dream. _Grain_, _Wild Geese_ and _Settlers of the Marsh_ are remarkably similar in their emphasis upon the harsh costs which follow the original romantic dream of the pioneer. The obsessiveness of materialism, the enslavement of the Gare and Stake families to a dream of wealth, and the resultant pattern of narrow-mindedness, sexual abuse, and violence which follow, all suggest a hellish existence rather than a prairie paradise. The biographical evidence concerning Grove and Ostenso suggests that the realistic subject matter which they used in approaching the conventional theme of the pioneer dream was part of the authors' experiences in observing the pioneer. The unswerving honesty of Stead's portrayal of Gander Stake invites the same autobiographical comparison.

While the subject matter used by these three authors in their realistic treatment of the pioneer dream is similar, the literary techniques used by each author to reflect this new realistic thrust are very different. Robert Stead gradually abandons the stereotyped characterization, melodramatic conflict, and paradisial imagery of _The Homesteaders_, _Neighbours_, and _The Smoking Flax_ to adopt a low-keyed, deterministic portrayal of a farm boy's unquestioning acceptance of the pioneer dream. Stead's realistic implications concerning Gander Stake's narrow existence are so

subtly portrayed that his contemporary readers, accustomed to the sensational romantic plots of Stead's novels, ignored his transition to realism in Grain.

The more powerful literary style of Wild Geese and Settlers of the Marsh drew attention to the harsh realities of pioneering presented in these two novels. Martha Ostenso employs an ironic counterpoint of romantic attitudes to underscore the actual isolation and "death-in-life" existence produced by the Gares' materialistic quest. Despite Grove's denunciation of Wild Geese as "trash," he was probably well aware that the novel's mixed literary style highlights the same harsh realities as Settlers of the Marsh. Ostenso's mixture of romantic and realistic attitudes in Wild Geese presents a more subtle approach to a new interpretation of a familiar theme, and perhaps this factor saved her from the same social ostracism which Manitoba readers inflicted upon Grove for his uncompromising realism.

Frederick Philip Grove's emphasis upon the psychological realities of pioneer life which destroy Niels Lindstedt's quest for domestic happiness was a powerful and unsettling interpretation of the pioneer dream for contemporary readers of Settlers of the Marsh. With its harsh presentation of family life, Settlers of the Marsh bypasses the materialistic genesis of the pioneer dream as treated in Wild Geese and Grain and deals with the theme primarily on a domestic level. Grove never again treated the theme of the

pioneer dream in the same manner as his first novel since he was probably quite sensitive about the critical uproar in his own province. <u>Our Daily Bread</u>, <u>Fruits of the Earth</u> and <u>The Yoke of Life</u> gave greater emphasis to the hardships imposed by the pioneer dream as a materialistic quest.

<u>Our Daily Bread</u> (1928) presents the fifty-five year old pioneer, John Elliot at a point in his life when the pioneer dream would seem to have been realized. Yet over the years Elliot's obsession with his successful farm has alienated him from his wife Martha. His dream of a closely knit patriarchal family ends as every one of his ten children move away from the Elliot homestead left to decay in their father's old age. This emphasis upon the emptiness of the pioneer quest is also revealed in <u>The Yoke of Life</u> (1930) in which the long-term hardships and poverty associated with working the family homestead cost Len Sterner his dream of higher education. <u>Fruits of the Earth</u> (1933) is Grove's most successful portrayal of the romantic promise of the pioneer dream and the harsh price of its realization. In the process of accumulating wealth and land, Abe Spalding and his wife Ruth gradually drift apart, and the rift between father and children deepens as three of his children move away to pursue another way of life. With tragic irony, Abe's beloved son Charlie dies in a wagon accident because of his father's consuming desire to get one more load of wheat to town. Abe Spalding's romantic pioneer dream, like his mansion already

showing signs of weathering, is levelled by these tragic events within his family.

As in all Grove's novels, the thematic direction of the pioneer dream in his first novel, Settlers of the Marsh, contains the central insight which shapes prairie realism:

> Niels is misled, in a sense, by the "virgin" land into believing he can begin anew and impose order upon chaos in a way he cannot do. Thus the imagination is drawn out, pursuing a freedom which does not exist. . . . The imagination, committing Grove's pioneers to dreams and visions in this way, is as much a destructive as a creative force.[53]

While all three authors seemed well aware of the double-edged nature of the pioneer dream, none of them left the theme in such a nearly defined irony. The reality of the Canadian pioneer's experiences with romantic illusions and real hardships did not result in the complete destruction of his original quest. The pioneer dream of the prairie as a land of golden opportunity was actually achieved, if only in gradual steps, through the extraordinary capacity of ordinary settlers to overcome the hardships imposed by a harsh and alien landscape. Thus Grain, Wild Geese and Settlers of the Marsh conclude their realistic interpretations of the pioneer dream on a strong note of spiritual renewal. The reader of these early realistic prairie novels is left not with the ashes of a destroyed dream but with the Phoenix-like renewal of the pioneer spirit.

Notes

Chapter III

[1]Frederick Philip Grove, In Search of Myself (1946; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1974), p. 226. All subsequent references are to this New Canadian Library edition.

[2]Mrs. Grove, letter to Desmond Pacey dated August 3, 1945, in Letters of Frederick Philip Grove, ed. Desmond Pacey (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), first note, p. 469.

[3]Frederick Philip Grove, It Needs To Be Said (Toronto: The MacMillan Co. of Canada Ltd., 1929), p. 124.

[4]W. J. Keith, "The Art of Frederick Philip Grove: Settlers of the Marsh as an example," Journal of Canadian Studies, IX, No. 3 (1974), p. 35.

[5]Douglas O. Spettigue, Frederick Philip Grove (Toronto: The Copp Clark Publishing Co., 1969), p. 60.

[6]Frederick Philip Grove, Over Prairie Trails (1922; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1957), p. 15.

[7]Ivanhoe, review of The Turn of the Year, Winnipeg Tribune, 3 December 1923, in Frederick Philip Grove: Critical Views on Canadian Writers, ed. Desmond Pacey (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1970), p. 101.

[8]Joan Hind-Smith, Three Voices (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co. Ltd., 1975), p. 144.

[9]Arthur L. Phelps, "Foreword" to The Turn of the Year by Frederick Philip Grove (Toronto: The MacMillan Co. of Canada Ltd., 1923), p. 11. Phelps was Head of the English Department at Wesley College, University of Manitoba from 1921-1945.

[10]Hind-Smith, p. 152.

[11]W. K., "Frederick Philip Grove," Canadian Bookman, VIII, No. 4 (April 1926), p. 110.

[12]M.O.H., review of It Needs To Be Said, The Globe, 30 March 1929, in Frederick Philip Grove: Critical Views on Canadian Writers, ed. Desmond Pacey, p. 141.

[13]W. T. Allison, "Realism In Manitoba Novels," The Winnipeg Tribune Magazine, 21 November 1925, p. 13.

[14]Ibid., p. 14.

[15]"In Search of Frederick Philip Grove," radio documentary in two parts, produced by Allan Anderson for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Sept. 5 and 12, 1962 as cited in Three Voices by Joan Hind-Smith (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin and Co. Ltd., 1975), p. 150.

[16]F. P. Grove to Miss Eayrs, Oct. 10, 1946, "Correspondence," Frederick Philip Grove Collection, Department of Archives Manuscripts and Rare Books, Elizabeth Dafoe Library, University of Manitoba, Box 1, Folder 11.

[17]Desmond Pacey, ed., The Letters of Frederick Philip Grove (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), first note, p. 29.

[18]Ibid., third note, p. 42.

[19]Petition to Rapid City School Board, Box 4, Folder 3.

[20]Hon. J. S. Woodsworth M.P. to F. P. Grove, March 1, 1927, "Correspondence," Frederick Philip Grove Collection, Box 3, Folder 11.

[21]Desmond Pacey, ed., "Introduction" to Frederick Philip Grove: Critical Views on Canadian Writers, p. 7.

[22]Unsigned review of Settlers of the Marsh, The Montreal Daily Star, 31 Oct. 1925, in Frederick Philip Grove: Critical Views on Canadian Writers, ed. Desmond Pacey, p. 106.

[23]Austin Bothwell, "A Canadian Bookshelf," Saskatoon Phoenix, 14 November 1925, in Frederick Philip Grove: Critical Views on Canadian Writers, ed. Desmond Pacey, p. 110.

[24]Unsigned review of Settlers of the Marsh, The

Acadian, Wolfville, N.S., 4 Feb. 1926, "Newspaper Clippings," Frederick Philip Grove Collection, Box 21, Folder 5.

[25]Grove, In Search of Myself, p. 379.

[26]A useful finding aid, Register of the Frederick Philip Grove Collection, to the Grove manuscripts and correspondence is offered to Grove scholars by the Dept. of Archives, Manuscripts and Rare Books, Elizabeth Dafoe Library, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Man. R3T 2N2. The original manuscript of Settlers of the Marsh which was planned as a three-book series titled "Latter-Day Pioneers" no longer exists. What is available are three sets of manuscript copy-books and five typescripts which reflect an intermediate stage of Grove's revisions dated 1917-1923. A note attached to Folder 5, Box 11 by D. O. Spettigue draws attention to the fact that the third part of the original manuscript may never have been written as the first two parts added to the five manuscript booklets of the last scene "make up the complete Settlers material."

[27]Arthur L. Phelps to F. P. Grove, Oct. 22, 1923, "Correspondence," Frederick Philip Grove Collection, Box 2, Folder 13.

[28]F. P. Grove, "The Novel--Romantic and Realistic," unpub. article, Grove Collection, Box 20, Folder 23.

[29]F. P. Grove to Raymond Knister, Nov. 15, 1929, "Correspondence," Grove Collection, Box 1, Folder 10.

[30]Grove, typescript, "Being the first book of a three-book series, Latter Day Pioneers," Grove Collection, Box 10, Folder 1, pp. 1-5. There is a remarkable correspondence between these introductory pages and an unpublished short story, "The First Day of an Immigrant" found in Box 17, Folder 30 of the Grove Collection.

[31]Frederick P. Grove, Settlers of the Marsh (1925; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1966), pp. 15, 16. This published edition of the novel will be referred to throughout Chapter III.

[32]Grove, typescript, "Being the first book of a three-book series, Latter Day Pioneers," Grove Collection, Box 10, Folder 1, pp. 57-58.

[33]Grove, typescript, "The White Range-Line House, being the second volume of a three-book series, Latter Day Pioneers," Grove Collection, Box 10, Folder 3, p. 50.

[34]Ibid., pp. 36-43.

[35]Ibid., Box 10, Folder 4, pp. 149-152.

[36]Grove, "Preface" to Latter-Day Pioneers, Grove Collection, Box 10, Folder 1.

[37]Gordon D. McLeod, "The Primeval Element in the Prairie Novels of Frederick Philip Grove," MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 1966, p. 99.

[38]Frederick Philip Grove, "Apologia Pro Vita Et Opere Sua," Canadian Forum, XI (August 1931), p. 421.

[39]Douglas Spettigue, "Frederick Philip Grove in Manitoba," Mosaic, 3, No. 3 (Spring 1970), p. 26.

[40]McLeod, "The Primeval Element in the Prairie Novels of Frederick Philip Grove," p. 114.

[41]Desmond Pacey, Frederick Philip Grove (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1945), p. 40.

[42]Keith, p. 31.

[43]David Arnason, "The Development of Prairie Realism: Robert J. C. Stead, Douglas Durkin, Martha Ostenso, and Frederick Philip Grove, PhD thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1980, p. 180.

[44]Pacey, Frederick Philip Grove (1945), p. 46.

[45]Keith, p. 33.

[46]Frederick Philip Grove, A Search for America (1927; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1971), p. 382.

[47]Dick Harrison, Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction (Edmonton: The University of

Alberta Press, 1977), p. 140.

[48]Thomas Saunders, "Introduction," Settlers of the Marsh by Frederick Philip Grove, New Canadian Library edition, p. xiii.

[49]Grove, manuscript of last scene of Settlers of the Marsh, Grove Collection, Box 11, Folder 5.

[50]Harrison, p. 140.

[51]Grove, manuscript of last scene of Settlers of the Marsh, Grove Collection, Box 11, Folder 5.

[52]Robert J. C. Stead, "The Homesteader," The Empire Builders and Other Poems (Toronto: William Briggs, 1908), p. 21, ll. 1-8, 25-32.

[53]Harrison, p. 142.

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