

Henry Makow

Grove's Treatment of Sex: Platonic Love in *The Yoke of Life*

The influence of Plato in the work of Frederick Philip Grove has not been recognized. The influence is most apparent in Grove's depiction of the role of sex. Desmond Pacey remarks that "there is not a single satisfying sexual relationship in all of his work." Grove, Pacey says, "tends to leave us with the impression that he would prefer that [sex] did not exist."¹ Pacey and other critics have attributed Grove's attitude to almost every source but a philosophical one. Bruce Nesbitt believes that the heroine of the unfinished "The Seasons" abstains because she is a Roman Catholic.² Ronald Sutherland says that, in *Settlers of the Marsh*, Neils Lindstedt's response to sex is that of a "Puritan".³ Louis Dudek argues that Abe Spalding's son Charlie, in *Fruits of the Earth*, is a homosexual.⁴ Incest, Desmond Pacey believes, is the key to the relationship between Phil and his sister Alice in *Two Generations*.⁵ Finally, Frank Birbalsingh provides a comprehensive solution by his suggestion that Grove suffers from an acute case of sexual frustration.⁶

Grove's depiction of sex is an important manifestation of his tragic vision which, in turn, is inspired by Plato's dualistic conception of the universe. Grove believes that all men are motivated by a desire for a spiritual ideal such as harmony, truth or beauty. They inevitably fail to achieve the ideal because of the limitations inherent in the material condition. The limitations, which include mortality and ignorance, are epitomized for Grove by carnal desire or lust. Grove's tragic heroes generally fail to achieve their spiritual ideal because of the interference of carnal desire.⁷ Despite their failure, they achieve a "tragic grandeur" in Grove's view because they continue to strive for perfection undaunted.

The best example in print of the Platonic underpinnings of Grove's tragic vision is *The Yoke of Life* (1930). W.J. Alexander, a distinguished University of Toronto professor, recommended the novel to the publisher. He said *The Yoke of Life* is a "powerful work" that has "a basis of sincerity and seriousness which set it apart from the great mass of novels." He cautioned, however, that readers may be repelled by the

fact that "the hero in the latter part puts himself outside the range of their sympathies."⁸ Alexander's apprehensions are confirmed by the reaction of most critics to the novel. Although the writing is on a par with Grove's best, they find the book bizarre and eccentric and have given it low priority for republication. They cannot understand why an apparently naturalistic work about a pioneer lad's efforts to win an education and a woman ends in a ritual suicide, with strong mystical overtones, on a windswept northern lake. Desmond Pacey complains that the pioneer boy, Len Sterner, is "suddenly transformed into a wild Shelleyan or Byronic hero; from the real and tangible world of a pioneer district we are whisked to a strange unearthly lake which might have graced the pages of a novel by Mrs. Radcliffe or Monk Lewis. The transition is too complete, too abrupt; the realism and the romance do not mix."⁹ Carleton Stanley, who considers *The Yoke of Life* "a great book", defends the end by arguing that Len is in fact deranged, and that in this state, his whole purpose is to die.¹⁰ D.O. Spettigue cannot see the relevance of Len's fate. "For all his intellectual potential, Len's tragedy is private," Spettigue says. "His circumstances have not encouraged breadth of application."¹¹

Len is not deranged; his tragedy is not private; his suicide on the lake is not a radical departure. From beginning to end, *The Yoke of Life* is a deliberate expression of Grove's tragic vision. In Grove's mind, metaphysics is not divorced from everyday reality. The author defined himself in terms of his tragic vision and sought illustrations of it in the pioneer district where he lived. Len Sterner is inspired by a boy Grove taught in the bush country of Manitoba in 1917-18. Grove refers to him in an unpublished lecture as having "the gifts of a genius." "That boy, instead of following the career of a scholar, had to do the hardest of manual work; broken by it, he sank to an early and inglorious grave."¹² In actual fact, the boy ended his life prematurely in front of a train in Winnipeg.¹³ Grove says that in Czarist Russia or Imperial Germany means would have been found to make him what he was destined to be, "namely one of the luminaries of his country and mankind." Grove incorporates many of the details of the lad's struggle for an education in *The Yoke of Life*, and they give the novel an authentic tone. However, the social and economic factors which hindered the boy's progress are overshadowed in the novel by metaphysical considerations. Len Sterner falls in love with a neighbourhood farm girl, Lydia Hausman, and cannot distinguish between his passion for her and his passion for learning. He identifies the girl with his spiritual ideals and with his quest for a higher, other-worldly existence. At the same time, he lusts for her and

desires the pleasure and fulfilment that earthly existence offers. The novel basically describes Len's vacillations as he struggles unconsciously with his spiritual and carnal imperatives. Ultimately he overcomes the obstacles implicit in his physical state by committing suicide with Lydia. Their act is intended to symbolize a renunciation of the human condition and an affirmation of a higher, perfect state of being. The assertion of man's spiritual aspirations is Grove's primary purpose in *The Yoke of Life*. The pioneer conditions which prevent Len from pursuing his spiritual ideals are secondary. In an unpublished novel entitled "The Canyon", written during the same period, the poet-hero encounters exactly the same metaphysical obstacles as Len, although he already has the benefit of an advanced education.¹⁴

The metaphysical assumptions underlying Grove's tragic vision are Platonic. The novelist studied Plato's *Symposium* as a student of classical philology at Friedrich Wilhelms University in Bonn between 1898 and 1900.¹⁵ In letters and poems, Grove reveals that he has a broad knowledge of Plato's work and considers Plato to be the world's most profound thinker.¹⁶ In a poem entitled "Questions Reasked", Grove writes:

What are we? Whence? and whither are we bound?
O questions answerless which still we pose
As Plato posed them who could more deeply sound
Such problems than whoever went or goes.¹⁷

There are three "Everyman" editions of Plato's works in Grove's personal library in Simcoe, Ont. Most pertinent to his writing is one entitled, *Five Dialogues of Plato bearing on Poetic Inspiration*, first published in 1910 and reprinted in 1924. Grove underscores many passages from the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus* and in particular, the *Phaedo*, and there is marginalia in Grove's hand.

As Grove understood Plato, the philosopher believes that all matter is animated by a divine spirit called Reason which tries to mould matter in the image of the Idea. The Idea is a *model of perfection* which exists, eternal and immutable, in a purely spiritual dimension known as "being". Since matter by nature is intractable, the material world is necessarily a flawed reflection of the world of "being". In man, the divine spirit is found in the soul and is manifested by "love" for Ideas such as truth, beauty and goodness. Love, in Plato's view, is a desire to "possess" the Idea and attain happiness and immortality through *creative acts* modelled on it. In essence, love expresses the soul's craving

for a return to the state of pure "being", the world of Idea. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato says that each soul has a glimpse of the world of Idea before entering the human form. The soul which has seen "more than others of essential variety . . . pass[es] into the germ of a man who is to become a lover of wisdom, or a lover of beauty, or some votary of the Muses and Love."¹⁸ He is the "philosopher" and he expresses his love for the Idea through great works of art or intellect. The philosopher's love for the Idea is constant because his goal cannot be attained in the material world. Nevertheless, by endlessly striving to imitate the inimitable, the philosopher identifies with the eternal, and may indeed achieve immortality through his work.

A lower but still acceptable manifestation of love is that of ordinary folk. They express their desire for happiness and immortality by giving birth to children.¹⁹ Sex for its own sake, however, is the lowest and most misguided form of love. Although unconsciously inspired by desire for perfection, sex focuses the lover's attention on the earthly reflection of beauty rather than on the Idea itself. The love object is part of the mutable world which is constantly "becoming"—passing into existence, decaying and disappearing. Sexual interest, also, waxes and wanes because the goal is attainable. Sexual desire is linked to the natural cycle of hunger and satiety, growth and decay, birth and death which characterizes the material world. The philosopher withdraws from the ephemeral sensory world in order to pursue his spiritual ideal. In a passage from the *Phaedo*, which Grove underlines, Plato says, "surely the soul then reasons best when none of these things disturb it, neither hearing, nor sight, nor pain, nor pleasure of any kind, but it retires as much as possible within itself, taking leave of the body, and, as far as it can, not communicating or being in contact with it, it aims at the discovery of that which is."²⁰

Since no man, not even the philosopher, can overcome the impediments represented by his body, the world of Idea—"that which is"—remains elusive during a lifetime. At death, however, the soul is separated from the body and allowed to exist independently. Grove underlines Plato's assertion that we shall then obtain "that which we desire, and which we profess ourselves to be lovers of, wisdom, when we are dead, but not while we are alive."²¹ Grove also underscores Plato's conclusion: "those who pursue philosophy rightly study to die."²²

Len Sterner is a philosopher in Plato's sense of the word. *The Yoke of Life* follows Len's development from the ages of 14 to 21, "that septennium of his unfolding life in which we establish our whole spiritual outlook. . . ."²³ Grove's portrayal of Len is almost explicitly Platonic.

Len's "dream" is to "master all human knowledge in all its branches" (33); "all the beauty of the world he was going to grasp with his soul!" (61). Len is encouraged to become a great writer or scholar by his school master, John Crawford, who is partly modelled on Grove himself. Crawford tells Len that he became a teacher because he "hungered and thirsted after a *higher and truer idea of life*. That hunger and thirst itself is happiness, Len. We shall never still it. We shall never find truth. But we must strive after it without standing still" (45; emphasis mine). Len feels as if "in the presence of revelation" (46).

Len's hunger for perfection is symbolized by a desire for a spiritual union with a soul mate:

A longing was in him, unrecognized as such; a first adumbration that a human being is, in mind and soul, imperfect by itself; that somewhere in this world it must find its complement. A half is seeking the other half which will complete it into a self-contained whole.(67)

Len seeks the state of pure "being". Grove's identification of this state with the "self contained whole" arises from a myth related by Aristophanes in the *Symposium*.²⁴ Aristophanes says that people were once much stronger and happier than they are today. They were vaguely spherical in shape, having four legs, four arms and two sets of sex organs. They were divided into three sexes: one all male, the children of the sun; one all female, the children of the earth; and one androgynous, half male and half female, the children of the moon. People, proud of their power, threatened the supremacy of the gods. Zeus cut them in half in order to make them more subservient. The reaction of the two halves was to cling to each other in a desperate longing to be reunited. Their desire for their earlier wholeness was so intense that they could think of nothing else and began to die of hunger. In pity, Zeus moved their sexual organs to the front so that, by sexual intercourse, the race would be preserved and people might have momentary respite from their intense spiritual longing. Zeus' action had the effect of making people express their longing for their former "wholeness" by sexual intercourse. Aristophanes clearly states that in sexual intercourse, physical desire is secondary to the spiritual longing for completion:

Nor would anyone believe that such a union is only sexual, or that two people who share a mutual love have such a great passion for sex. But clearly there is something else that the soul of each desires, which it is unable to articulate, but it does divine and feel a hint of what it wants.²⁴

Aristophanes says that the lovers wish to be merged into one: "The reason for this is that our original nature was to be whole. And to this longing for wholeness the name 'love' has been attached. In the old days . . . we were one; but now on account of our crime, we have been split up by god"25

Grove exploits the obvious similarities between Aristophanes' myth and the Hebraic Eden myth to formulate, for his own symbolic purposes, the Platonic equivalent of the fall from grace. The androgynous man lives in a mythical hermaphroditic state symbolic of innocence or of a purely spiritual state. The androgyne challenges divine supremacy and is punished. He is divided into male and female, a division which represents for Grove man's "fallen" material state. In the "fallen" world, the tragic bondage of spirit to matter is manifested in the relationship of male and female. In the unpublished "The Canyon," the heroine says that "between spirit and flesh there is war everlasting. And so there is between man and woman, male and female."²⁶

Grove depicts man's spiritual aspirations in the fallen world as a compulsion to regain the former wholeness by desire for a sexless state. In *The Yoke of Life*, Grove deliberately identifies Len's longing for completion with a unicorn which is symbolic of a sexless condition. As Len's soul awakens and craves its "other half", the boy sees a deer which he imagines to be a unicorn:

It was a fabulous creature: the body that of a large deer; the head almost that of a small but nobly-shaped horse . . . and from its forehead there sprang a single horn, spirally wound or twisted, but perfectly straight, and ending in a fine point three feet above the head. (68)

The unicorn is a symbol of, among other things, chastity. The horn, according to Jung, is an androgynous symbol.²⁸ Jung explains that, from one point of view, the horn is shaped like a penetrating object and is, therefore, masculine in significance. From another point of view, he says, the horn is shaped like a receptacle which suggests the feminine. The higher state of "being" of "wholeness" for which Len yearns is symbolized by the unicorn.

Len's desire for the higher state is manifested in the fallen world by a desire for a spiritual union with a woman. Len's mind therefore turns naturally from the unicorn to Lydia Hausman, a school mate to whom he is mysteriously attracted. Len is too young to know that his attraction to the girl is tainted by carnal desire. He naively mistakes his persistent vision of Lydia's "girlish bosom" (70) for a "symbol of her virginity" (161). Len falls victim to a tragic paradox. His highest spiritual aspira-

tions are expressed in a union which, in the fallen world, also arouses his basest carnal instincts. Expression of a prelapsarian "wholeness" is impossible because wholeness requires a mate who inevitably inspires passions which are antithetical to the spirit.

Len is unaware that this attraction to Lydia is ambivalent in nature. On the one hand, his need is portrayed as symptomatic of the fall of man. As Len approaches the Hausman homestead, something in him whispers the words of the serpent to Eve: "Ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil"(71). Len almost turns back "half aware that he [has] obeyed a shameful impulse." He feels as if he is "bent on a furtive errand." Yet, paradoxically, Lydia also represents Len's ideal of spiritual union symbolized by the unicorn he had seen that afternoon: "Some obscure instinct told him that she could interpret for him what he had felt that afternoon. . . ." (72). His perception of her was something "spiritual, almost mystical: like the vision of the unicorn in the enchanted leafless forest." (139). She was "an ideal, apart from cares and desires."

The lovers are separated when Len is forced to work as a kitchen hand in a logging camp. His reading of great literature in his spare time fills him with "a vague wonder and a dumb longing for an incomprehensible mastery in spiritual realms" (112). The influence of camp life, however, is less exalting. For the first time, Len gains knowledge of the "nether realms of life" (129) where drinking, gambling and whoring are common. His companion, Joseph, lonely for his wife, succumbs to the debauchery and confesses to Len that he is "a beast" (124). The camp is seen as a microcosm of the world, one dominated by man's brutishness and sensuality. The vision is crystallized one night when Len discovers Joseph in a brothel with a prostitute on his lap. Joseph's face is "flushed with unholy excitement," his "eyes glazed with drink" (130). In Len's mind the camp is "an identification of man with Joseph and with all the iniquities which he half divined in the constitution of things male" (140).

Len would like to believe that women do not see the world as epitomized by the logging camp. When Lydia, who has been seduced during Len's absence, hints that women do, Len refuses to listen: "I don't believe it. I can't. If they did, they would curse the beast in man. Somewhere is paradise; but all about is hell. . . . I have looked into that hell. But to me, where you are, is Eden" (158). Len soon discovers that Lydia is also part of the fallen world and that he is not immune to its attractions. He is overwhelmed by Lydia's kisses: "A minute ago, his whole being had been mind; now it was all sense" (161). He feels that the real "he" is being submerged in "the fiery sea of his blood". After-

ward, he is "conscious of a feeling of shame and guilt"(162). There is a "shade of superiority and knowledge" in Lydia's smile. Len is "dimly aware that she who stood before him was Eve indeed, but after the fall." Lydia threatens him with "a revelation of the fact that in him the same man lurked as in Joseph and others"(165). However, when Lydia makes a concerted attempt to seduce him, the vision of the prostitute on Joseph's lap enables Len to resist(168). Feeling rejected, Lydia runs away to the city with a travelling salesman.

Len's dilemma now is to maintain his original idealization of Lydia as his soul mate in the face of her sexual appeal and obvious promiscuity. Len can preserve the fiction of her purity only by killing her. Had he seen Lydia's expression after they kissed, "he might have killed her in order to save her for himself"(163). Rather than that, Len determines to ignore Lydia's sex appeal and promiscuity and cling doggedly to his ideal of her as his 'other half':

He had seen in her what might make him a beast; for that he substituted what might make him a god. As in him, there was something god-like in her, different though it might be. And he subordinated himself, not to her, but as a part is subordinated to the whole, the whole consisting of the two of them united. They were equinascent, of equal rights and equal worth; and, whether she saw it or not, they fitted together: they formed the possible whole. (165)

Len persists in his idealization of Lydia in order to give his beleaguered spirit a symbolic goal. Lydia "must be enshrined so that she might save him; him, the flesh had begun to trouble"(178). By directing his desire to spiritual ends, Len is making the choice of Plato's philosophers. Len's stepfather reflects that Len remained a virgin "not from ignorance but from deliberate choice; and that gave the boy a moral superiority over the older man"(206).

For a short time, Len succeeds in detaching the image of Lydia from his visualization of the ideal. He makes great progress in his studies and imagines that he will yet become a university professor. "He lived at last"(245). One day, however, light-headed with fever, he allows Joseph to take him to a brothel where he meets a prostitute who resembles Lydia. She sits on his lap and presses his head to her naked bosom. His senses reeling, Len staggers to the door; but afterward he can no longer purge from his mind his sexual desire for Lydia:

By this time, his preoccupation with Lydia was complete and, so he felt, fatal. He must find her; and, having found her, he must redeem himself of what he now called the curse of sex. His former dreams he smiled at.

Education? Education must come at an earlier or later stage. Adolescence had interfered with its elementary phases: it had been wrecked on the turbid waters of the awakened instincts of sex.(275)

Cursing "the world and all the facts of sex"(281), Len finds Lydia and collapses in a fever at her feet. Indeed a prostitute, Lydia is repentant and assumes the task of nursing him. They live as "brother and sister"(293) while Lydia pays the doctor's bills by continuing to solicit. When Len discovers her activities, he locks her indoors. After his recovery, Len can no longer reconcile Lydia's impurity and his lust for her, with his ideal of her as a soul-mate. He resolves that he will realize his spiritual aspirations in death if he cannot in life. By renouncing the flesh, he and Lydia will fuse their souls in a spiritual union reminiscent of the androgyne. They will achieve the sexless condition symbolic of a higher, purely spiritual reality.

Len takes Lydia on a camping trip to a remote part of a great northern lake. Alone together in the wilds, the couple feels strange at first. "Undisguised by clothes or flesh, their souls faced each other and feared the contact. For between them stood something which was enormous as the night"(304). They hear the splash of a fish, reminder that matter still stands between them: "they were still in the flesh, not yet disembodied." They see the moon, symbol of the androgyne, rise over the lake. "They looked and looked; and as it rose—"it", for it was sexless now—it contracted till it hung above the lake. . . ."(305).

As the days pass, Len notices that his sexual desire for Lydia has grown weaker. He reflects that they share a common soul which supersedes their sex: "She was a woman. But that meant, not so much something different from himself, as something essentially rather the same. Sex was an important factor of character; but it was subordinated to greater facts"(314). Len also notices that Lydia had dropped her feminine affectations:

The mincing step, considered so feminine by those who lived in towns or cities, had disappeared. She stepped along in big, frank strides. Her movements were no longer calculated to fascinate or allure; they were sincere. She had dropped all the pretences of sex.(315)

This is a new Lydia, "unlike her who [has] stirred impure blood; unlike also the deified, ethereal being of his fancy years ago. She was earthy, flesh and blood; yet purified" by love. Len wonders if they might not yet live and form the "perfect whole"(324). However, the sight in the distance of the "Ridge" on which Mr. Crawford's cottage is located

reminds Len that unlike material goals his spiritual ideals cannot be fulfilled in this world. "No. Life was not for him. . . . His road lay clear ahead and led into death. But this side of death, this side of the mysterious portal, there lay fulfilment"(325).

Len wrings from Lydia an account of her past promiscuity including an admission that she had behaved like the prostitutes who had sat in his and Joseph's laps. He tells her that she could have "doubled and trebled" his "manhood" had she been what he thought she could be (336). When he taunts her with the fact that she continued to solicit during his illness, Lydia is indignant at his failure to understand that she did it to pay his medical bills. As if to atone for his obtuseness, Len wrestles her to the ground and they succumb to an extended bout of lovemaking. They pass four days in languorous sensuality, "man and wife" rather than "brother and sister"(342).

After they extricate themselves from "the intoxication of contact and sense"(345), Len's spiritual aspirations reassert themselves. He reflects that while the life of ordinary men and women is full of beauty, it is "no more than a mere existence. . . . God's life in its lowest terms." Men like himself, thinkers, cannot enjoy the fruits of this life. "We thinkers are rebels all," he says, "off-spring of Satan. . . ." (346). Nevertheless, Lydia pleads with him to build a cabin on the beach. "Life is sweet," she says. Len replies that one night she would remind him of the prostitute in Joseph's lap and he would kill her. "You would go alone. Our present union before God would be sullied"(348).

Since she cannot live with Len, Lydia agrees to a suicide pact. When Len repulses her from his embrace, Lydia knows that the "spectre" of her past promiscuity "has arisen and given the signal"(348). A smile "as of another world" hovers on Lydia's lips: "From her, too, sense had fallen like an embroidered cloak. Her spirit, awakened, stood by his side"(348). The pair travel to the mouth of a rocky gorge in their boat and lie down on the floor facing each other. Len lashes their bodies together with a rope: "Their lips met; his hands clasped her head; hers his. Their eyes were closed. They drifted for hours. . . . The never ceasing motion had hypnotised them into an ecstasy beyond that of a mere human union"(353). While they are in this state of superhuman ecstasy, the boat drifts into the gorge where it is shattered and the couple drown.

In the death embrace, Len and Lydia simulate the androgynes in Aristophanes' myth. Through a fusion of their souls, they appear to achieve the sexless "wholeness" of the mythical creatures. Their state is symbolic of prelapsarian innocence, the realm of pure spirit known as "being". Grove thus affirms Plato's dictum that the ideal is achieved

after death, and those who love wisdom "rightly study to die." Grove portrays Len's action as a heroic affirmation of the human spirit in its quest for perfection. In 1943, Grove wrote Desmond Pacey that "the meaning of that ending is, of course, that Len wants something so much that all else falls away (education, etc.): that he will pay any price to get it. There is no intention of pessimism there."²⁹

Len's efforts to attain the state of pure "being" are symbolized by a desire to overcome the division of the sexes. Throughout the Grove canon, the denial of sexual distinctions is indicative of strong spiritual drives. Innocence in sexual matters, for example, indicates a desire to be innocent in the metaphysical sense as well. In his autobiography, Grove says that Niels Lindstedt, the hero of *Settlers of the Marsh*, is based on a young Swedish pioneer who confided that until his recent marriage he had not known the "essential difference between male and female."³⁰ Jane Atkinson, the heroine of the unpublished *Jane Atkinson*, is not a pioneer but a brilliant university graduate. Yet she also admits that "she was still pretty much in the dark with regard to the essential difference between male and female."³¹

Grove protagonists who have strong spiritual drives or significance are often described as sexless or as having the neutralizing traits of the opposite sex. Lydia Hausman loses her "feminine" traits as she nears spiritual union with Len. In *The Master of the Mill*, Lady Charlebois describes Edmund's sister Ruth as "without sex."³² Ellen Amundsen, the symbol of Niels' ideal in *Settlers of the Marsh*, is described as "almost sexless" or in masculine terms. When Ellen greets Niels and Sigurdson who have come to help with the haying, "her manner is that of a man to two friends."³³ Working together, Niels praises Ellen: "You are as good as a man"(77). "You are big and strong," her mother says urging her not to marry. "You are as good as a boy"(109). Alice Patterson, in *Two Generations*, is described in similar terms: "Her figure was that of a boy. Her movements masculine."³⁴ Alice is dedicated to her brother Phil's aspirations for knowledge, and she vows never to marry because no man could match him(70). In a letter to W.J. Alexander, Grove says their relationship contains a "feeling transcending that of a mere brotherly sisterly love; as if some creative power had deliberately chosen to split a single personality in two. . . ."³⁵ Despite Grove's denials of any impropriety, Pacey cites this statement to support his contention that their relationship is incestuous.³⁶ In fact, as Grove's words to Alexander suggest, their relationship has many qualities of the spiritual union for which Len strives in *The Yoke of Life*.

In the early drafts of *Fruits of the Earth*, Abe Spalding has a Platonic love affair with Dr. Vanbruik's sister, Ada. Ada has a small sprite-like figure and "an almost sexless smile."³⁷ In riding clothes, she exhibits "male assurance" (draft II, p. 56) and reminds Abe of his deceased son Charlie (II, p.130). Like Ada, Charlie is another of Grove's fey spiritual people. His effeminate traits do not indicate homosexuality as Louis Dudek suggests.³⁸ He is rather a boy with strong spiritual motivation like Len Sterner. He throbs with vitality and evinces an interest in the exotic and in the mystery of life. His effeminate qualities—his joy on seeing newly hatched birds, his "sing song" voice, and his innocent notion of having a baby (before Abe explains the facts of life to him)—are all typical of Grove's descriptions of people who have the androgynous quality of the spirit.

Desmond Pacey's impression that Grove would prefer that sex did not exist is justified. Influenced by the dualism of Plato, Grove believes that man's tragic condition is manifested in the bondage of spirit to flesh which is epitomized by sexual desire. Grove's description of *Settlers of the Marsh* is applicable to *The Yoke of Life*. It is a novel which vibrates with "horror at the abuse of a natural instinct which convert(s) desire into lust."³⁹ Len Sterner's "natural instinct" is a love for truth, beauty and a higher spiritual existence. The higher reality is symbolized by the "sexless" condition of the mythical androgyne. Man's "fallen" material state is symbolized by the division of the androgynous soul into male and female forms. Len wishes to regain the innocence of the "self contained whole", but he is thwarted by his material condition. He discovers that he is a fallen creature, beast as well as god. His desire is converted into lust. His ideal is a prostitute, not perfection. Len renounces his beasthood in favor of his godhead. He sacrifices the fleeting pleasures of the world to an overpowering intuition of the sublime. Man, Grove believes, achieves "tragic grandeur" by his endless struggle for a higher reality. Len Sterner is a Promethean in this struggle.

NOTES

1. Desmond Pacey, *Frederick Philip Grove* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1945), pp. 126, 128.
2. Bruce Nesbitt, "The Seasons, Grove's Unfinished Novel," *Canadian Literature* No. 18 (Autumn, 1963), p. 48.
3. Ronald Sutherland, *Frederick Philip Grove* (Toronto: NCL, 1969), p. 47.
4. Louis Dudek, "The Literary Significance of Grove's Search," *Inscape* XI, No. 1 (Spring, 1974), p. 98.
5. Desmond Pacey, ed., *The Letters of Frederick Philip Grove* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 505.

6. Frank Birbalsingh, "Grove and Existentialism," *Canadian Literature*. No. 43 (Winter, 1970), p. 75.
7. I am referring to Harold Tracy ("The Canyon," unpublished), Niels Lindstedt (*Settlers of the Marsh*), and Len Sterner (*The Yoke of Life*). The exception is John Elliot (*Our Daily Bread*) who, like Shakespeare's King Lear, is a victim of generational misunderstanding.
8. Reader's Report by W.J. Alexander; Courtesy of A.L. Grove.
9. Pacey, *Frederick Philip Grove*. pp. 62 - 63.
10. Carleton Stanley, "Frederick Philip Grove," *Dalhousie Review* XXV (Jan., 1946), p. 435.
11. D.O. Spettigue, *Frederick Philip Grove* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969), p. 107. See also Margaret Stobie, *Frederick Philip Grove* (New York: Twayne's World Author Series, 1973), pp. 84 - 88, and *op. cit.* Ronald Sutherland pp. 52 - 55.
12. F.P. Grove, Address to the Rotary Club on "some aspects of education," Dec. 5, 1932; Courtesy of A.L. Grove.
13. An interview with former students of Grove, Amaranth, Man. May, 1975.
14. Henry Makow, "Grove's Unpublished Novel, *The Canyon*." accepted by *Canadian Literature* for publication in 1978.
15. D.O. Spettigue, *FPG: The European Years* (Ottawa: Oberon, 1973), pp. 45, 49, 50.
16. See Pacey, ed., *The Letters of Frederick Philip Grove*. pp. 57, 308.
17. Unpublished Poems, The Grove Collection, Elizabeth Dafoe Library, University of Manitoba.
18. A.D. Lindsay, ed., *Five Dialogues of Plato bearing on Poetic Inspirations* (1910, rpt. London: J.M. Dent, 1924) p. 234, (section 248).
19. *Ibid.*, *Symposium* pp. 57 - 58, (section 209).
20. *Ibid.*, p. 133, (section 65).
21. *Ibid.*, p. 135, (section 67).
22. *Ibid.*, p. 136, (section 67).
23. F.P. Grove, *The Yoke of Life* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1930) p. 164.
24. Groden, Suzy, trans., *The Symposium of Plato* (Boston: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 189e - 194.
25. *Ibid.*, 192c.
26. *Ibid.*, 193a.
27. "The Canyon," Unpublished Novel, Grove Collection, University of Manitoba, p. 234.
28. J.E. Cirlot, *Dictionary of Symbols* (New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1962), pp. 351, 151.
29. Pacey ed., *Letters of Frederick Philip Grove*. p. 433.
30. F.P. Grove, *In Search of Myself* (1946; rpt. Toronto: NCL, 1974) p. 372.
31. "Jane Atkinson," Unpublished Novel, Grove Collection, University of Manitoba, p. 23.
32. F.P. Grove, *The Master of the Mill* (1944; rpt. Toronto: NCL, 1967), p. 204.
33. F.P. Grove, *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925; rpt. Toronto: NCL, 1966), p. 76.
34. F.P. Grove, *Two Generations* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1939), p. 103.
35. Pacey, ed., *Letters of Frederick Philip Grove*. p. 335.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 505.
37. F.P. Grove, Drafts, *Fruits of the Earth*, Grove Collection, University of Manitoba, draft IV, p. 4.
38. See note 4.
39. *In Search of Myself* p. 381.