George Grant, the Uncertain Nation and Diversity of Being[1]

Luce intellettüal, piena d'amore

The decade in which George Grant's impact was the most incisive was the 1960s. While he continued to deepen the implications of his thought since that time and was the subject of a symposium in his honour in 1977, it is not certain whether his stature as a public figure grew substantively since the first appearance of *Lament for a Nation*. Indeed, as the editor of the papers presented at the symposium remarks, Grant's own generation has "been tolerant of Grant's eccentric critique of modernity because it could be safely deemed irrelevant." The participants in the symposium are those of the younger generation in the 1960s for whom Grant "never seemed irrelevant," and the book they produced is designed to "acknowledge the gravity of the questions he has raised" (Schmidt ix). This is evidently homage from those who felt his impact most keenly a decade before.

Needless to say, not everyone of that generation was so touched. Frank Davey, for example, cites Grant as one of those who assume a monolithic view of the Canadian nation, and who define Canada as "a lost Tory nation seduced by the pragmatism and amoral individualism of the U.S." (13). No careful reading of Grant's work would sustain such a view at length, but one suspects that there are more than a small number of Grant readers who have taken such a position. Since this is mere speculation, I cannot elaborate upon the validity of what I have said. Nevertheless, I would like to use Davey as a position from which to begin, for his distillation of Grant's thinking of Canada is not lacking in a small glimmer of truth. But it is phrased in such a way as to make that small truth appear anachronistic, perhaps Quixotic,

and hardly relevant to anyone bent upon seeing Canada survive as a nation. One wonders, further, whether those who were moved by the "gravity" of Grant's *Lament* were moved simply because of the appeal to the lost character of the cause. The ship may have gone down, but we have survived to witness the event: such may have been part of the thinking in the affection many have for the work.

The texts that brought Grant most powerfully into public scrutiny, besides *Lament for a Nation,* were *Technology and Empire* and *Time and History.* Each gathers his thinking in the sixties, and each for somewhat different, but always public, not professional audiences. His *Lament* is for the most general audience, and one that had lived closely to the political environment of Diefenbaker's term in office in the early sixties. The essays collected in the second text contains texts published during most of the decade and collected in one volume by House of Anansi, the most important small nationalist press of the period. The final book is the text of his CBC Massey Lectures. Given the public character of his work, they cannot appropriately be read as the text of a professional philosopher, political scientist or moralist, yet all of them appear prompted by concerns that any of these might wish to address. They are marked by a profoundly personal character, which makes them problematic, even paradoxical, in their explicitly public manifestation. It prompts one to ask, then, how they should be understood.

First, however, one should consider, if only in truncated form, what Grant's preoccupations were. The subtitle of *Lament* provides an initial clue. Its theme is "The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism." The first three chapters address Diefenbaker's inability to keep Canada as a sovereign nation, and his defeat in 1963 was the death of Canada. What Diefenbaker failed to understand was that an ideology of individualism and free-enterprise is impossible in Canada. It can have no other effect than to subordinate the rights of nations to the rights of individuals. In this, Diefenbaker shows himself more liberal than conservative (Grant, *Lament* 21). Such an assertion opens the way for Grant's central argument that the dominance of liberalism in Canada has destroyed the country as a sovereign nation. This is because its thinking is in accord with American continentalism and the structures of capitalism that support it. In other words, to anticipate an argument developed in *Technology,* Canada is not necessary inasmuch as it is part of the "universal and homogeneous state" (*Lament* 53). It is, therefore, modern, that is, part of "the age of progess" whose instrument is

understood to be technology. Thus he is later able to summarize what is only symbolically a threnody for Diefenbaker's demise:

> What I said in [*Lament*] . . . was that the belief that human excellence is promoted by the homogenising and universalising power of technology is the dominant doctrine of modern liberalism, and that that doctrine must undermine all particularisms and that English-speaking Canada as a particular is wide open to that doctrine. (*Empire* 69)

This summary contains two interesting points, which have not always worked to Grant's advantage. The first is the appeal to English-Canada. As he avers, he "was brought up in a class which has almost disappeared" (Schmidt 63). As he describes it, it was the dominant class of Central Canada between the two wars. While he confesses to being influenced by its "'values'" and "prejudice," what turned him to philosophy "was the knowledge that [that class] . . . was disappearing" (Schmidt 63). This may be construed to Grant's disadvantage (Crook 283), and indeed, in such a light Grant's apologia for Canada may be seen as no other than the reification of a dying ideology. Hence, when he pithily remarks that "technique is ourselves" (*Empire* 137), it may be that his lament is but a wake for himself, reflecting upon a kind of suicide. But it is precisely this coincidence of the intimate with the historical that does not permit one to be as categorical as one might like with Grant, for he is deeply aware of his own complicitous relation with modernity, its metaphysical privileging of technology, and the consequences for which he senses to be his own responsibility. This is the situation that, in fact, frames the essays in *Technology and Empire*. The first essay begins by meditating on the role of Calvinism in the perception of North America. Its pioneer moment is now gone. What remains is "the omnipresence of that practicality which trusts in technology to create the rationalised kingdom of man" (*Empire* 25). At the book's conclusion, he remarks:

> . . . I know that my thinking about modern liberalism is touched by a certain animus arising from tortured instincts, because of the gynarchy in which I came to know that liberalism. Thought may first arise from the ambiguities of personal history but if it is to stand fairly before the enormous ambiguities of the dynamo, it must attempt to transcend the recurring distortions of personal history. (140)[2]

Grant may deny, then, that he is presenting Grant, but Grant's self-reflection cannot be separated from his reflection upon any of his recurring preoccupations.

The reception of Grant's work has not, of course, been unmixed. His *Lament* was particularly taken to task by R.K. Crook, who argues, in effect, that Grant, for "biographically determined" reasons, is blinded by "pessimism about the inevitable implications of modernization" (Crook 284). Technology, Crook argues, is not the problem; institutional frameworks are (273). Because of a lack of empirical analysis, Grant's fear of homogenization is not valid. In fact, it could be argued that technology initiates the opposite (Crook 275-76). Finally, Grant stands clearly accused of a fundamental inconsistency. While Grant would argue that the distinction of facts and values is a modern heresy, he, nevertheless, distinguishes the two to argue against modernity (Crook 278-81). In other words, Grant's argument is heavily laden with distinctions between his values and the facts of modern life in North America that makes him open to the same charges he levels upon sociologists. Thus, Grant suffers from a "metaphysical pathos [that] stems from a nostalgic longing for the past" (Crook 282). Since nostalgia is "morbid" (Crook 283), it can do no more than offer "the indulgence of entering the warm and supportive world of fantasy" (283-4).

Virulent as Crook's assessment of *Lament* may be, it is perhaps too academic to take up Grant's central argument and central appeal concerning the question of nationalism. John O'Neill, also a sociologist, while struck by Grant's "depth and eloquence" (117), argues that Grant's position on Canada as a local culture cannot prevent its being absorbed by the universal and homogeneous state because, as the political expression of a modernity Canada desires, Grant's argument contains "everything that is soporific and lethal in the Canadian fact" (O'Neill 119). What Grant has failed to understand is that technology, far from being a philosophical concept characterizing the modern, is in fact a function of multi-national corporations in their bid to seize power. The failure of Canadian political economic analysis to grasp this point leads inevitably to the inability of a national discourse to claim validity. O'Neill argues, however, from a patently Marxist position, which privileges the discourse that would advocate a redistribution of wealth and power on bases more equitable than that which capitalism is capable of doing. The querulous tone of O'Neill's position on Grant suggests a kind of frustration with the argument of *Lament*. If Grant's thought has depth, surely Grant must see that the problem is not capable of being resolved by turning to the platitudes that spring from "[t]he passing of the Loyalist and [French] Catholic traditions of conservatism" (O'Neill 119).

It is not surprising, then, that Grant's name figures frequently in Robin Mathews' study, *Canadian Literature: Surrender or Revolution.* Commenting on *Technology and Empire*, Mathews notes that "technology/technique is its own ideology and so is not changed by the moral values of those who own and control it" (146). The consequence of such a position is that it "invites the Luddite-versus-Progress argument without serious consideration of technology within political philosophy" (146). Moreover, it is an informing cultural attitude that has powerful Loyalist roots that may be seen in the work of Susanna Moodie (28), F.P. Grove (70), as well as in those writers admired by Margaret Atwood (despite Grant's being barely mentioned in *Survival*), all of whom may be perceived as "small 'c' conservative moralists" (122). Belonging to "the ruling elite, exploitative class in Canada," Grant presents " . . . a monolithic and Establishment view of Canadian experience which makes us all guilty of the sins of the Bank of Montreal, the Family Compact, the multi-national corporations and their docile, fawning servants" (121). Because he refuses "to discriminate between the forces of community and exploitation, between the people and capitalism in Canada, George Grant rests self-condemned, guilty, an alien in his own land and history" (121).

By the mid and late seventies, it is evident that Grant was a name associated with a tradition and an ideology that pre-dated him but to which he gave probably its most enduring mark. In the same period Charles Taylor began to discover Grant, certainly a more personal Grant than the Marxist Grant, and he suggests the degree to which Grant's nationalist discourse is a *prise de conscience* that is not easily grasped in Mathews' polemic (137-38). For indeed one of the fundamental differences between Mathews and Grant is the latter's refusal, perhaps prompted by what appears one of the more casual conversions in Christian history (Schmidt 62), to make of his meditation on Canada, technology, and history a discourse in which his own experience was bracketed out in the professional manner. As O'Neill correctly observes, "his experience is modern" (118), but his reading of it is personal: Grant is his own exemplar that stands *sub specie aeternitatis.* In such a light, his texts are spiritual exercises that assume that social revolutions that are not preceded and guided by a personal revolution will amount to no more than mere social engineering of a manifestly abstract character.

The risk of becoming an exemplar is high, for it means that one's personal history may not be perceived as a sublation, but merely as an explana-

tion. As such it can be moulded to fit any argument, friendly or inimical. W.J. Keith, for example, concludes his history of English-Canadian Literature by seeing him as "in no way typical of modern Canadian attitudes" (206). Keith does not use 'modern' here in Grant's sense. He means 'contemporary' and wants to emphasize Grant's position within Keith's own construction of a dominant British North American tradition in English-Canadian writing. Grant's work, therefore, testifies to "a traditional stance that can be considered authentically Canadian" (Keith 207).

Unlike Mathews, Arthur Kroker is unable to translate United Empire Loyalist into U.S. Empire Loyalist (Mathews 32), but argues rather that Grant "is the revenge of the United Empire Loyalists against the American dynamo" (26). The revenge is conducted along the lines of his analysis of technology as presented in *Time as History*. In this text Nietzsche is privileged as the master-narrator of modernity in which the following themes are elaborated:

> the mastery of human and non-human nature in experimental science and technique, the primacy of the will, man as the creator of his own values, the finality of becoming, the assertion that potentiality is higher than actuality, that motion is nobler than rest, that dynamism rather than peace is the height. (*Time* 44)

To argue that technology is a defining idea of the human and not merely an enabling instrument inhibits, needless to say, any easy equation between technology and the power of multi-national corporations. They, in fact, are as much subject to technology as we are, inasmuch as will is the "will to will" *tout court*. Will has no other basis but itself. Furthermore, will is all the human is: "Technique comes forth from and is sustained in our vision of ourselves as creative freedom, making ourselves, and conquering the chances of an indifferent world" (Grant, *Empire* 137). As Kroker trenchantly observes, this limitation and utter dependence of the human upon will "involves a radical colonization *from within* of the psychology of the modern self" (29).

The consequences of will as technology for Grant's image of Canada is the proposition of alterity that he makes in *Lament*. By refusing, as Kroker argues, technology as a mode of being and its historical realization in American imperialism, he clears a space for an alternative mode of being and realization in a culture at once regional and cosmopolitan. The *Lament* is

> at one polarity, an almost mournful appeal for the recovery of popular culture, for the activation of "memory" itself as a form of political resistance to empire, yet at the other, fully universal in embracing any moment of cultural resistance

which represents a refusal of the "uniform, world culture" of capitalist liberalism.
(Kroker 34-35)

Nevertheless, Grant's proposition is put forth in despair, perhaps because
the difference between his analysis of the problem ("technology is the ontol-
ogy of the age" [*Justice* 32]) and his solution ("our fate" should be perceived
"as enfolded in a timeless eternity" [*Time* 48]) is radical and impossible to
traverse (cf. Kroker 48-51).

If the nub of Grant's argument in the 1960s is that technology is realized
in the American will-to-power, particularly as manifest in the war in
Vietnam, then Canada, as an alternative, is, at least, a negative response to
that will. Grant's Canada would be a non will-to-power. The caricature of
this image is the complicitous posture of the Liberal Party of Canada from
the era of Mackenzie King, a party, apparently that could not wait to be of
service to its American masters. But is there not another non will-to-power
that springs from other sources, at once historical and psychological, that
Grant wishes to represent in his refusal to be colonized from within, to use
Kroker's phrase? And is it not this non will-to-power that the reception of
Grant's writing has been incapable of addressing?

Grant is either misguided (Crook and O'Neill) or of no political useful-
ness (Kroker). Opposed to such uncompromising despair, Dennis Duffy
(1969) finds hope, and R.D. MacDonald finds irony in a clever analysis of
Grant's rhetorical stance in *Lament*, in which Grant is able to cast doubt "on
all human thought . . . including Grant's own arguments" (251). Having
demonstrated the absolute vacuity of the secular world, nothing is left but
to follow Grant in the gesture of his final words that cite Vergil's perhaps
most memorable line, "*Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore.*"
Nothing is left us in our absolute deprival but to stretch forth our hands in
love for (of?) the bank beyond. For MacDonald it is a paradox that this con-
clusion should be persuasive, and indeed it is, for there is no reason why
Grant's irony, as MacDonald reads it, need not be evident even here. For
those who stand so in Vergil's underworld are unburied souls whose fate it
is to fall like leaves touched by the first frosts of autumn or, like flocking
birds to be driven across the sea and sent to sunny lands (Vergil VI. 309-12).
The simile makes it manifestly clear that as creatures of nature, those who
stretch forth their hands in prayer have no wills of their own. In a certain
sense they are akin to the Christ who, "[a]t his height . . . surrenders his
will," substituting will with love (Schmidt 108).[3] It would be otiose to cite

how frequently Grant counters will with love, and therefore it appears to me dubious that his conclusion is absolutely ironic or that "all human thought" is also so to be considered.

Nevertheless, Grant's most ardent supporters are embarrassed by his will not to will. When faced with Grant's despair in *Lament*, Charles Taylor candidly remarks:

> Logically, I should have been plunged into despair: if my country was being inexorably drawn into the American empire, then what was the point in my return [to Canada]? Yet *Lament* did not make me despondent: just the opposite, since I found it exhilarating. This paradox was difficult to explain, but it seemed that others had a similar reaction. (148)

He then cites James Laxer: "'He was saying Canada is dead, and by saying it he was creating the country'" (148). Perhaps as a variation on an old expression—*le Canada est mort, vive le Canada*—it has a way of explaining how Grant might be construed. Perhaps, then, as the lovely chiastic order of this aphorism implies, Canada is a framework for the continuity of life out of death, and the syntax of the sentence implies that we are only discussing a paradox in appearance.

How else to explain the enthusiasm with which Dennis Lee, certainly among Grant's most intense devotees, greets Grant's prophesies for Canada? As he observes in his celebrated essay, "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space," "Grant is scarcely an apostle of public joy" (160). In effect, Canadian space has been displaced by American space by means of a technology that dominates us totally as human beings. Because in Canada there is no "dissent from liberal modernity," because silence is the only possible stance, we are unable to move outside an horizon of despair that might constitute an alternative discourse. Nevertheless, while recognizing "all the bleakness for which Grant is often criticised[,]" Lee confesses to "a surge of release and exhilaration" while reading his essays in *Technology and Empire* (Lee 161). This is because no one before Grant "enabled us to say for the first time where we are" (Lee 161), as if one were to conclude, "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was Grant." This paradox, namely, that silence is the only response, but that in silence there lies a "cadence" that issues in a discourse that re-writes colonial space, is more difficult to understand than the death and rebirth of Canada. But Grant's great refusals, especially the injunction of silence, appear to fall upon deaf ears, as if they carried a subliminal message. "We are a dead letter," it says, "but you are to

understand that in the spirit is life." For what does Lee respond to but the "press of meaning" that exists beneath the surface of colonial gibberish. Grant is praised as having brought Lee to such a space that recovers the lost space.

While Lee "may be only the best example" of the effect of Grant's presence in the 1960s, he was not alone (Mandel 170). What may appear somewhat strange to a contemporary observer is that the basis of Grant's appeal is that his sense of Canada always derives from a profound awareness of loss. And the sense of loss derives from the feeling of helplessness faced with the self-regulating—one is prompted to say self-referential—character of technology as ideology and historical manifestation, right there beside us in American economic and political policy. It is beyond the scope of this essay to argue the validity of this aspect of Grant's position. That he struck a chord not only in the academy but also in business and labour circles, as contemporary reviews indicate, testifies to his intense awareness of a serious Canadian issue. Grant's work tended to inspire either defiance or acceptance, and balanced assessments, such as Ramsay Cook's discussion in *The Maple Leaf Forever* are rare. Eli Mandel's asserts that there is "a certain crankiness in Grant's style and thought that made his best work painful and uneasy reading" (Mandel 163) and his own reading evinces the pain and uneasiness. Nor does Mandel hesitate to indicate certain lapses in Grant that might be construed as bigotry, not to speak of weaknesses and limitations in his analysis of modernity. That this will always be a problem for readers of Grant, especially those who are uneasy with the implications of a tradition, which is largely Judaeo-Christian and classical, and with the weaknesses of academic attitudes, to speak only of my own profession, which are of an exclusive character. Perhaps the worst sin is the Loyalist ideology, which Cook examines fairly and with an eye to the problem that its American origin for Canada possesses (50-54). Mandel prefers to propose a "more rigorous criticism than Cook offers" (166). Mandel's objection to Grant's loyalism is based upon a tendency in his writings from 1945 to that which continues into *Technology and Empire*, which sets his sense of Loyalist morality over against Freud, Marx, and the effects of British colonial policy (167).

While it is possible to argue that the questionable aspects of Grant's Loyalism became attenuated in time, his views of Freud and Marx can be subsumed under his notion of technology. Such knowledge, however, does not take us any closer, in my view, in understanding a deeper sense of loss and the "intimations of deprival" (Grant, *Empire* 141) that are more penetrating

than his loyalism, but still affect profoundly his conception of Canada. Grant's lecture, "Revolution and Tradition," given in 1970 (when did the 1960s end?) provides a very useful framework for understanding loss and what it bids of us. Following Nietzsche, he posits "that both tradition and revolution . . . [have] ceased to illuminate" (Grant, "Revolution" 93). He then rehearses the relation between technology, mastery of nature, and will, which leads to two essential questions, and he is unable to determine whether the first (Nietzsche's) is more important than his own: "The essential question may not be: who deserve to be masters of the earth; but rather, is it good that the race ever came to consider that mastery was its chief function?" (Grant "Revolution" 93). This is one of Grant's finer questions, for not only does it draw upon God's injunction to Adam in "Genesis" that he should both "subdue [the earth]," and "have dominion . . . over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" ("Genesis" 1: 28). but also upon the statement that legitimizes Canada's geographical dominion "*a mari usque ad marem*." While the discourse of modernity may prevent the authenticity of the question, as Grant ironically suggests, it is perhaps the only question to claim our immediate attention. I do not think that Grant is here renouncing either a Canadian or Judaeo-Christian position, yet it could be argued that he has transposed their implications as master-narratives as a means of being in, but not of, modernity. His silence in the face of technology and America is an acceptance of a position akin to the Taoist "wei wu wei," which R.B. Blakney terms a paradox that "is the key to Chinese mysticism" (39). He describes it as "man's part; [for] he is to be still, quiet and passive so that the Way, ultimate Reality, the universe of being, may act through him without let or hindrance" (Blakney 39; see Watson 6). Such an expression does not immediately conjure Jerusalem and Athens, but the twin foci of Grant's thought, certainly his preference of rest to revolution, actuality and being to potentiality would suggest that this is not far from such thinking ("Revolution" 83, 88). Thus, what may appear to be mere helplessness before technology may have partaken of the spontaneous passivity that reached Gandhi, as well as the Society of Friends. If this is Grant's position on loss, at least insofar as he intimates it, then it is no surprise that he has no practical solutions in an ordinary political or economic way. But well he might lament the death of Canada, and not simply British North America, for "wei wu wei" cannot be a political response.

Nevertheless, Lee and others felt in some way released and exhilarated by

Grant's argument. Many years ago Hugh MacLennan, in a style toward which some feminists might understandably take umbrage, referred to Canada as "a good woman" in her relations with United States. "The national feminine psychology," he observes, causes Canadians to be wryly amused at American behaviour (6). Moreover, Canadians manifest "a sort of domestic defiance of the United States. Her history shows that her dominant national impulse is to retain in her own eyes the kind of personality she *feels* she has, even though she has never been able to define this personality in words" (MacLennan 6). The reason for this, MacLennan suggests, is that not only must Canada bear the brunt of lying alongside the United States, but also to sustain "within her nature contradictions so difficult to reconcile that most countries possessing them would be torn by periodic revolutions" (5).[4] As the rest of his article indicates, however, Canada's ability to compromise, which is the central mark of her character, is simplified by the fact that its founding peoples may all be seen as betrayed and defeated (MacLennan 9-14). This is a position held not only by MacLennan, but many other observers. As the protagonist of Susan Swan's carnivalesque threnody remarks to her mother, "to be from the Canadas is to feel as women feel—cut off from the base of power" (Swan 274).[5] Indeed, so persuasive is the idea that Canada is composed of losers and the powerless that it may be considered to have taken on the dimensions of a national myth (Lipset 67-68).

So it is, I would suggest, that the greater part of the power of Grant's argument in *Lament for a Nation* is derived from the resonance of its appeal to such a myth. No myths like those of the United States are made available, furthermore, for later immigrants to assist them in becoming "Canadian," and therefore they remain residents of Canada but burdened by whatever they may have left behind. As Sacvan Bercovitch argues, there is no "framework for acculturation" in Canada (26). No suggestion, therefore, is provided that Canada is preparing a future utopia, and without too much difficulty it can be perceived that Maillet's hint that Acadie is "un pays passé" is true for Canada as whole (199). But it is a country of many pasts, both indigenous and 'foreign.' Curiously, the cultivation of the past as loss transmutes such a past from an idea into a lived present, particularly in such a discourse as Grant's, an English-Canadian version of *je me souviens*, a central motif in all of French-Canadian and Québécois literature. Thus Grant speaks directly out of a shared, if varied, sense of loss that need not, as the generality of his commentators do, be attributed to the nostalgia for a lost Loyalist past.

Grant has no difficulty including French Canada in his paradigm, MacLennan adds the Scots Highlanders, and with no difficulty we can add others, especially Natives and Inuit. This would allow the sentence with which Anne Hébert made her début as a writer of prose—"Je suis un enfant dépossédé du monde"—stand *mutatis mutandis* as a viable motto for Canada (9).

Loss, then, is a primary Canadian signifier without connoting, as it does for those whose aim is to win, a lack of meaning, a failure of being. Rather, it generates fields of signification in Canada, and it is to such fields that Grant's rhetoric appeals. And it has its own heroes, an exemplar of whom is Findley's Robert Ross, who is almost destroyed by fire in World War I. His heroism in a conventional sense is contested frequently in the novel, and what marks him as a character is his decision to side with all the victims of the war, and, in doing so, to emulate such models as his friends Harris and Rodwell present, after abandoning the more typical heroes that the novel presents. We are not, as Harris intimates, human in an ordinary way, but rather seekers for the element that forms our being. For Harris, this is water (Findley 96); for Ross it is fire. The novel is structured in such a way as to lead Ross through an initiation into his element that brings him to a kind of oneness with the cosmos and allows him, despite what fire has done to him as a human, to smile, perhaps at his fate, perhaps at nothing at all (Findley 190). He has reached the condition that the expression "wei wu wei" enunciates.

One might argue that much of the literature of Canada is a celebration of such figures, who signify precisely through the character of their loss and who are in some measure more than victims in the sense that Atwood developed in *Survival*, another meditation, neverthess, on Canadian losing. They are marked, as Grant notes in a general way, by "intimations of authentic deprival," who are "precious, because they are the ways through which intimations of good, unthinkable in the public terms, may yet appear to us" (*Empire* 141). How are, to ask a question that continuously exercised Grant, such figures to be preserved and cultivated? The first answer is through an act of memory ("I lament [Canada] . . . as a celebration of memory" [*Lament* 5]). The second answer is in Jacques Ellul's notion of indigenous culture, which forms the leitmotif of *Lament for a Nation*. As both perceive it, such a culture stands in binary opposition to the rule of technology. As a consequence, an indigenous culture signifies Canada in Grant's text, but a highly determined, metaphysical Canada whose meaning transcends geographical space. Grant inaugurated his thinking in the sixties

with a preliminary consideration of this problem in an article entitled "An Ethic of Community." At that time technology had not yet become the sign of deprival as it would later become. Here the capitalist ethic is invoked as the obstacle hindering the realization of a "community which understands the dignity of every person" (Grant, "Ethic" 26). It is the condition without which the moral dimension of the human cannot be made manifest (21).

Even before the sixties, however, Grant's thinking turned toward the notion of a federation of small communities in his pamphlet *The Empire Yes or No?* There he argues that the world in 1945 faced a fundamentally disastrous situation in the confrontation of the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. The confrontation was of such a magnitude that it gravely endangered the possibility of a "new world order" (Grant, *Empire* 2), characterized by the United Nations. Grant's answer to the problem was the preservation of the British Commonwealth. As Grant's detractors have argued, the British connection is precisely what makes him parochial and limited in his attitude toward Canada. The sense of his argument is based, however, upon the fact that the two super-powers are marked by mutual fear and isolation that eventually would lead to wars of incalculable disaster. The point of the Commonwealth was that it could operate within spheres of isolationism. Its security depended upon mutual assistance and cooperation (Grant, *Empire* 5-7). For Grant, the proof of this philosophy is the Commonwealth response to Facism in Europe. Its roots lie also in Canadian history, a country formed by two different cultures, namely, "by French Canadians who wanted to maintain their own particular way of life" and "by English Canadians who feared the U.S.A." (24-25). The struggle for responsible government is part of the same desire: to possess self-government, while preserving, through the British connection, a measure of security.

Whether the British connection is still of necessity now is a question history will decide.[6] What is of significance is the emphasis upon the particular, the isolated community which retains local authority while claiming a plurality of connections (the British connection does not prevent relations with continental powers), and the overcoming of isolation with larger community 'networks.' Such a sense of the community as distinct culture signifies in *Lament* Grant's vision of Canada. Unfortunately, "[m]odern civilization makes all local cultures anachronistic" (*Lament* 54). What is "modern civilization" but the universal and homogenizing state in its modern, technological form, the U.S. being a primary example? Its instrument is

"the imperial power of [multinational] corporations [that] has destroyed indigenous cultures in every corner of the globe" (64). In the sixties French Canada was an indigenous culture whose nationalism was already taking "a last-ditch stand," but as Grant shrewdly remarks, "[n]ationalism can only be asserted successfully by an identification with technological advance; but technological advance entails the disappearance of indigenous differences that give substance to nationalism" (*Lament* 76).

Was Grant's vision of Canada, then, so ideologically reified as it has been, moving in fact toward one that he had not quite seen, but which is nevertheless adumbrated in his work? I would argue that he was moving toward what we are now able to perceive as a pluri-centred order of particulars that has realized the insuffuciency of nationalism as defined by borders of space and language difference.[7] In other words, what Grant saw for Canada was a nation conceived as commonwealth, which fosters and encourages the local, particular, and indigenous without the menace of a universalizing and homogenizing myth of national order. Without perhaps so desiring, Grant, then, anticipates contemporary thinking on Canada as a nation, that would re-envisage the place of the truly indigenous, for example, as well as the self-conception of Québéc as particular or even as a plurality of particulars.[8]

Is it surprising, then, that the theme that continually preoccupies Grant is loss? All his efforts to define—indeed to find—Canada only mark him as suffering Canada's undying immortal dilemma. As I have already suggested, the theme recurs frequently in the literatures of Canada. By choosing it as a central theme (or being chosen by it) the fictional makers of Canada appear to wish to write a Canada that has no unifying discourse, but rather a plurality of discourses that are designed to write their own centres, their own particulars. Without, however, a clear, referential centre, and therefore being constantly prompted to write one, it is difficult not to have a sense of continuous displacement. Although Frye's question "Where is here?" has become so effective as to have attained the status of cliché, it expresses, nevertheless, absolutely the sense of absence that all the Canadian discussions about place, origin, and identity raise. It is also why, finally, the literatures of Canada have joined "Canada to the world" (Smith xviii), inasmuch as the subject of the disappearing particular, the decentred order of international discourses, and multiple claims of origin is a subject without borders. Perhaps it is too late for elegy. Technology makes even laments superfluous,

inefficient, and unnecessary. This does not prevent, however, the disappearance of the local from occurring. And technology does not take its place, being placeless according to its function.

Thus those critics who accuse Grant of perhaps doing little more than lamenting his own disappearance, if only as the representative of a local culture, are right in only a limited sense, as Grant himself has argued (*Empire* 140). The larger "intimations of deprival" that he knew made Canada are, in fact, a symbol for greater planetary deprivations, and here, I think, lies the permanent significance of his work and why the appeal to loss is still persuasive. Canada, of course, did not arrive first among peoples of the world as a lost nation, but part of its curious grandeur, as Grant saw so well, is to have perceived itself as lost and made a culture of loss. In so doing, he brings to mind Hubert Aquin's analysis of the corresponding dilemma of French Canada:

> Le Canadien français est, au sens propre et figuré, un agent double. Il s'abolit dans "l'excentricité" et, fatigué, désire atteindre au *nirvana* politique par voie de dissolution. Le Canadien français refuse son centre de gravité, cherche désespérément ailleurs un centre et erre dans tous les labyrinthes qui s'offrent à lui. Ni chassé, ni persécuté, il distance pourtant sans cesse son pays dans un exotisme qui ne le comble jamais. Le mal du pays est à la fois besoin et refus d'une culture-matrice. (Aquin 96)

The end of *Lament* hypostasizes loss by citing the famous line from Virgil's Sixth *Aeneid*: "*Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore.*" What he does not state is that those who are doing this are those who are dead but not properly buried. The book, perhaps, is a burial service. I do not think many, however, will wish to follow Grant this far, for it gives a kind of divine sanction to his vision of his country of the lost, a country indeed of ghosts. But placeless they are, Virgil's unburied dead, and therefore always in a posture of eternal search for a ground. That absence of ground, which is the Canadian fate, is paradoxically the ground itself of Grant's reception, one absence appealing to another.

2 Charles Taylor discusses some of the implications of these remarks, indicating in a certain measure the degree to which Grant's inherited Presbyterianism was marked by its

promotion of "liberal technology" (135). The implications of "gynarchy" are also explored (135-36).

3 Commenting on the significance of his conversion, Grant remarked: ". . . it was the recognition that I am not my own" (Schmidt 63). This is another way of describing the surrender of the personal will.

4 The possible sexist bearing of MacLennan's remarks should be seen within a broader context than the one he provides (see Lipset 63-65). I have also elaborated on this matter in "*Toutes Proportions Gardées*: America in Canada's Text."

5 I have discussed this aspect of Swan's novel at greater length in "*Toutes Proportions Gardées*."

6 Other aspects of the pamphlet, particularly its Victorian attitude toward progress, organic order, and those who are not British, may now, of course, be looked upon with a certain superiority, despite the lack of malice with which they structure Grant's argument.

7 In advancing such an argument, I am aware that it is drawn largely from Grant's think-ing in *Lament*. It does not attempt to address the despair of the final pages, for example, of *English-Speaking Justice* that "the justice of liberty" does not belong by necessity to anyone living within "assumptions underlying contractual liberalism and underlying technology" (Grant, 1974, 91). In such a world, "what is at stake is whether anything is good" (Grant, 1974, 93).

8 In the conclusion of his *L'Écologie du réel* Nepveu argues that Québec has in the last 30 years passed beyond both its nationalist and subversion stages and has now entered upon a phase that no longer is addressed to identity and origin. Rather, it is marked by a plurality of centres, which inhibit a monolithic sense of unity (Nepveu 212-20).

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