

# OCEAN TO OCEAN

*G. M. Grant's 'round unvarnish'd tale'*

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GEORGE MONRO GRANT'S *Ocean to Ocean* has often been described as a classic Canadian travel book, and rightly so. Few other works of its kind retain their appeal three generations after publication, when the novelty of the experiences described has long dissipated and the writer himself has long ceased to be a figure in the popular mind. Grant still speaks to us, more than a hundred years after his journey, and his book would, I think, stand comparison with such non-Canadian classics of the genre as Defoe's *Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* and Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides*. Such a comparison is not, however, my purpose here. Although Grant's *Ocean to Ocean* is, indeed, a masterful travel narrative, it is also much more than that, and just how much more does not seem to have been recognized. In the revised *Literary History of Canada* R. G. Moyles does make brief reference to Grant's "narrative stances" and proposes that we view the book as a "combination of adventure-story and mythic chronicle."<sup>1</sup> These comments are suggestive, but they do not go nearly far enough to explain either the significance of Grant's ideas or his artistry in expressing them. The word *artistry* I choose deliberately, because a literary analysis of *Ocean to Ocean* reveals that Grant has, notwithstanding his disclaimers, done more than simply forward to the printer the notes hastily taken during his transcontinental journey. A close reading of the book, with particular attention to its narrative method, its structure, and its recurring themes, shows that its author was no mere diarist but rather a prose writer of some considerable talent who has produced an important document in Canadian cultural history. *Ocean to Ocean* gives us a vision of social and political relationships akin to that afforded by the major Victorian novelists, an expression of the aspirations and ideals of an influential segment of nineteenth-century Canada. What we see in Grant's work is not so much a vision of the west as it was in 1872 but of the west as Canada of the post-Confederation period wanted it to be. It is the intensity of this vision, and the moral basis on which it rested, which give *Ocean to Ocean* a significance not

usually found in travel narratives. Close reading will reveal this, and something more. Beyond the significance that Grant intended, there is in his book a further value for the modern reader, who can learn from it how even the laudable aspirations of moral men can be corrupted by the means they choose for realizing them. The lesson is not, of course, a new one, but at a moment in history when we are once again attempting to articulate national ideals we might do worse than consider the intellectual strengths and weaknesses of one of our most patriotic ancestors.

Grant himself insisted that *Ocean to Ocean* was not a work of art: "The book, except the first chapter and the last, is simply a Diary, written as we journeyed."<sup>2</sup> This point is made several more times in the opening and closing chapters. In his introduction Grant says that the book "consists of notes" presented to the public "just as they were written" so that his readers "might see, as far as possible, a photograph of what we saw and thought from day to day":

A more readable book could have been made by omitting some things, coloring others, and grouping the whole; but, as already explained, the object was not to make a book.

Grant begins his concluding chapter by stressing once again the factual, non-literary quality of his narrative:

The preceding chapters are transcribed — almost verbally — from a Diary that was written from day to day on our journey from Ocean, Ocean-ward. The Diary was kept under many difficulties. Notes had to be taken, sometimes in the bottom of a canoe and sometimes leaning against a stump or a tree; on horseback in fine weather, under a cart when it was raining or when the sun's rays were fierce; at night, in the tent, by the light of the camp-fire in front; in a crowded wayside inn, or on the deck of a steamer in motion.

From writing done in such unfavourable circumstances what else can we expect but a "diary," or "notes," or a "photograph"? Grant assures us that his object "was not to make a book" but to deliver "a round unvarnish'd tale." In echoing Othello's words here Grant obviously intends to give us one more example of his commitment to truth and plain speech. Some readers, however, will wonder why Grant is so insistent on this point; unlike Othello, Grant is addressing an audience which has not yet accused him of anything, and, furthermore, if his audience knows Shakespeare's play Grant's allusion to it will only increase their suspicions: "I think this tale would win my daughter too," says the Duke, after hearing Othello's vivid summary of his "round unvarnish'd" account.

Grant's disclaimers, then, draw attention to themselves, and encourage us to look for other evidence that he did in fact set out "to make a book." Such evidence is not difficult to find. One of the most striking instances of Grant's "coloring" of his materials may be found in the way he creates a personality for himself as narrator of his own book, a personality based on, but differing in significant ways

from, that of the "real" George Monro Grant. The narrator of *Ocean to Ocean* presents himself as "the Secretary," an energetic, enthusiastic tourist eager for adventure, seldom perturbed by the inconveniences of travel, and noticeably fond of campfire meals. When the steamer *Frances Smith* makes its slow progress from Collingwood to Thunder Bay the Secretary notes that its "needlessly long delays" nevertheless provide his party with an opportunity for a daily swim.<sup>3</sup> When rapids must be shot on the Maligne River the Secretary finds in the experience not danger or inconvenience but rather pleasure, "a fascination . . . , as of music or poetry." When dinner is delayed one evening in the mountains the Secretary finds that the cook's "under-done bread" will serve very well for making toast to take the edge off his hunger. He then does full justice to the supper which follows, a meal composed of "excellent" trout and grilled beaver:

In due time everything was ready, and the five who had never tasted beaver, prepared themselves to sit in judgment. The verdict was favourable throughout; the meat tender, though dry; the liver a delicious morsel, and the tail superior to the famous moose-muffle.

Many other meals are described with similar enthusiasm. The party's first supper of fresh buffalo meat is termed "an event in our journey"; the merits of pemmican are extolled on more than one occasion; and Doctor Moren's "plum-pudding," concocted of berry pemmican, flour and water, baking soda, sugar and salt, is presented as one of the culinary triumphs of the expedition. An attentive reader of *Ocean to Ocean* will notice that there is almost as much direct and detailed description of meals as there is of the landscape through which Grant's party passes.

What emerges from passages like these is the picture of an open, uncomplicated, cheerful man, fond of the simple pleasures of life. The Secretary is, in other words, not a man to be taken too seriously, and this impression is reinforced by his presentation of himself as something of a comic figure.<sup>4</sup> He is absent-minded at times, leaving the expedition's thermometer hanging on a tree on one occasion. On horseback he can be ludicrously impetuous, risking his neck as the expedition makes its way through the mountains:

. . . though a great improvement on the breakneck hills we had been going up and down all day, the clumps of willow and alder stubs and roots kept the horses from venturing on much beyond a walk, — except the Secretary's, a mad brute called "the fool" which dashed on after the "bell" at such a rate that the rest of the party in following more slowly looked round to pick up the remains.

Even the Secretary's sermons turn out to be the material for comedy; throughout the book a running joke is made out of their length and their reception by other members of the party. Despite their length, however, the sermons are straightforward and non-sectarian, in keeping with the easy-going personality of the Secretary. His political views find similar expression; the British connection is

defended, the menaces of the United States are emphasized, and a spirit of national pride is everywhere evident, but we are not conscious of any partisan leanings on the narrator's part. On the one occasion when the names of Canadian politicians are mentioned, the Secretary avoids their party connections and stresses instead his theme of national pride:

we saw the photograph of an old friend, John Holmes, of Pictou, Nova Scotia, who has been well called "the oldest and youngest Senator of the Dominion;" and at Prairie Portage, those of the Governor General, the Premier, Sir Francis Hincks, Alexander McKenzie, and others of our public men, adorning the walls, so that we were reminded that, although in a new land, we were still in our own Country. Everywhere, in conversation with the people, we found the rising of that national sentiment, that pride in their Country and interest in their Statesmen, which is both a result and a safe-guard of national dignity and independence, as distinguished from a petty provincialism.

In politics, as in religion, the Secretary seems to profess a commitment to the virtues of tolerance and co-operation.

The virtues were also professed by George Monro Grant, and put into practice, too, as the record of his life clearly indicates.<sup>5</sup> Like the Secretary he was, as well, a man of great eagerness and energy. "Eagerness," say his biographers, "is the word which perhaps comes most readily to mind when one recalls his aspect. . . . Energy, boundless and absorbing, ran with the eagerness."<sup>6</sup> Something of Grant does, then, shape the personality of his narrator, but there are other traits which the two do not share.<sup>7</sup> The Secretary's fondness for meals must be set against the testimony of Grant's son that his father felt "little regard . . . for what he ate and drank."<sup>8</sup> The Secretary's unfailing good humour was not always evident in Grant himself, whose generally "cheery and resolute spirit" was occasionally offset by "nasty irritability" and "warmth of temper,"<sup>9</sup> and whose sense of humour was combined with "a capacity for sarcasm."<sup>10</sup> The Secretary's ecumenical tendencies can be discovered in Grant himself,<sup>11</sup> but Grant's own vigorous Presbyterianism, and his impressive influence as pastor and preacher, are not qualities assigned to the Secretary. Ordained in 1860, Grant threw himself into his work with his usual energy, and, in 1863, when not yet twenty-eight, he was called to the charge of St. Matthew's, Halifax, "the largest and most influential Presbyterian Church in the province."<sup>12</sup> His sermons, unlike those of the Secretary, were no joking matter:

Quick comments, made vivid by their pungency, came from him when he was suddenly aroused. A few may still remember the vibrant notes of a voice that must have shaken quite a few out of their self-complacency and self-righteousness, at some of the morning and evening services in old St. Matthew's.<sup>13</sup>

In politics, as in religious matters, Grant was rather different from the self-effacing Secretary:

he counted no work, political, educational or philanthropic, unfit for the hand of the servant of the Lord. In accordance with this conviction, he from the first took the deepest interest in those great political principles and movements with which the welfare of the country and of the world is so largely bound up.<sup>14</sup>

In 1865-1870 Grant had shown himself willing to engage in partisan politics in order to ensure Nova Scotia's entry into Confederation, demonstrating a flair for the platform and a skill in debate equal to that of his former political mentor, Joseph Howe. This activity did not sit well with several members of his congregation ("Why the devil don't you stick to your damned preaching and leave the politics to us," said one prominent merchant),<sup>15</sup> but it established Grant as a political figure of importance in Nova Scotia, and reveals that he had developed firmly-held views on national issues several years before taking his transcontinental journey:

Nova Scotia is too weak to be able to exist by herself, and too valuable to be allowed an independent existence. If a nationality distinct from that of the northern states cannot be formed, Canada must fall into the hands of the United States, and we sink or swim with Canada.<sup>16</sup>

These remarks are from a speech Grant delivered in 1865, and they make clear his commitment to unification as the means of preserving a Canadian identity. Something more than national pride inspired this commitment, however. Grant had done missionary work in the slums of Glasgow while attending university, and he had returned to Nova Scotia convinced that British North America could afford a refuge to the victims of industrial squalor.<sup>17</sup> This conviction added strength to his political views, and encouraged him to participate in the creation of a united Canada.

**G**EORGE MONRO GRANT WAS, UNQUESTIONABLY, a man of acknowledged ability and importance, far more impressive than the note-taking Secretary who narrates *Ocean to Ocean*. This latter figure is Grant's own creation, designed for the purpose of disarming the reader. As his son noted, another of Grant's distinguishing characteristics was his "consummate cleverness," his ability to sway others through a "sensitive adaptation of address to the man before him."<sup>18</sup> The narrative method of *Ocean to Ocean* is just such a "sensitive adaptation of address," enabling Grant to present, unobtrusively, a carefully-considered political position.

The structure of *Ocean to Ocean*, evident in the way Grant chooses to emphasize certain recurring themes, provides the clearest indication that Grant intended not merely to "make a book" but to make a book which would serve specific political purposes. In almost every chapter, except for those dealing with the

expedition's passage through the Rocky Mountains, he stresses the opportunities for settlement afforded by northwestern Ontario and the prairies. Neither the Indians nor the climatic conditions present obstacles to settlement; all that is required — and Grant reiterates this point — is a railroad. But the railroad is central to Grant's argument in yet another way. Not only will it solve the problem of how to settle the west, it will also ensure Canada's survival. If the west is settled then Canada will become a unified transcontinental nation, able to resist the threat posed by its democratic and expansionist neighbour and to preserve the morally superior political institutions which derive from the British tradition. This two-part thesis is clearly present in *Ocean to Ocean*, and Grant has carefully arranged his materials to make them support his argument. Once again, we have evidence that the book consists of something more than mere "notes" taken by the Secretary.

From the time the expedition leaves Thunder Bay until it reaches Fort Edmonton Grant repeatedly directs our attention to the agricultural potential of the territory through which they pass. The land near Shebandowan is "good country for emigrants of the farmer class," "acknowledged to be splendid farming country." "The time will come," he says, "when every acre of these banks of Rainy river will be waving with grain, or producing rich heavy grass, for countless herds of cattle." Manitoba lacks nothing but "good industrious settlers";<sup>19</sup> "Those great breadths of unoccupied land are calling 'come, plough, sow, and reap us'." The land near the Touchwood Hills is even "better adapted for farming purposes" than the open prairie, "being well wooded, well watered, and with excellent and natural drainage." The country near Fort Carlton "could easily be converted into an earthly paradise"; "Its only fault is that it is rather too rich." Near Fort Edmonton the Hudson's Bay Company is reported to have run a large and productive farm on the same land "for thirty years without any manure worth speaking of being put on it."

Not only can the intending settler expect a land of unbounded fertility, he can also look forward to a life lived in a healthful and invigorating climate and to the complete absence of any difficulties with the native population. The winter is said to be "pleasanter than in Ontario, Quebec, or the Maritime Provinces. There is no severe weather till the beginning of December." The weather conditions experienced by Grant's party are so "delightful" and "exhilarating" that, as the narrator says, "We ceased to wonder that we had not heard of a case of sickness in one of the settlers' families." "The air is pure, dry and bracing all the year round; giving promise of health and strength of body and length of days." The Indians are said to be no more threatening than the weather:

This is a matter of the utmost importance to the intending settler. When we returned from our expedition, the Chief was interviewed at Ottawa by a deputation of the Russian sect of Mennonites, who are looking for the best place in America for their constituents to settle in, and one of their first questions referred

to this. He answered it by pulling a boy's knife out of his pocket, small blade at one end, corkscrew at the other, and told them that this was the only weapon he had carried while travelling from Ocean to Ocean; adding that he had used only one end of even so insignificant a weapon, and that end not so often as he would have liked. [This is part of a long passage not in the diary.]

Grant does, of course, recognize the presence of the Indians in the Northwest, and devotes some space to a discussion of how they should be treated. He is impressed by their qualities of "patience, endurance, dignity and self-control" and notes with approval their loyalty to the Queen. If, he suggests, the Canadian government adopts a "paternal" policy, makes treaties with the Indians and provides them with reserves "that no one can invade," and encourages them to become Christians and turn to farming, then the Indian population will not suffer unduly when immigrants take up the prairie land for agricultural purposes. "At all events," Grant concludes, "there are no Indian difficulties in our North-west."<sup>20</sup> Of the Métis little is said. The events at Red River only a few years before are termed "Riel's . . . little rebellion," and the Métis way of life is seen as incompatible with the new uses to which the prairie will be put: "A man cannot be both a hunter and a farmer; and, therefore, as the buffalo go west, so will the half-breeds."

Soil, climate, and a tractable native population all combine to make the Northwest "a great field for colonization." But to bring the settlers a railroad must be built, and it is this crucial point to which Grant subordinates the other aspects of his argument. Even before the party leaves southern Ontario Grant has begun to suggest the advantages of railway construction. "Collingwood," he notes, "is an instance of what a railway terminus does for a place. . . . Around the town the country is being opened up, and the forest is giving way to pasture and corn-fields." Manitoba, which has even better land, will be similarly opened up once a railroad has been built:

The ancient maxim had been, 'settle up the country and the people will build railways if they want them.' The new and better maxim is, 'build railways and the country will soon be settled.'

If only Canada would adopt a vigorous railway policy, "the ever-increasing current of emigration from the old world must flow into Manitoba, and up the Assiniboine, and Saskatchewan rivers." The future, indeed, of the Northwest depends on the construction of a railroad, and this point is clearly stated in one of the key passages of *Ocean to Ocean*:

in the elevated part of the country in which we were, extending north-west from Fort Ellice, light frosts are not unusual in July or August. They are not so heavy as seriously to injure grain crops; but still they must be regarded as an unpleasant feature in this section of the country. The general destruction of the trees by fires makes a recurrence of these frosts only too likely, till some action is taken to stop the real fountain of all the evils. If there were forests, there would be a greater

rainfall, less heavy dews, and probably no frosts. But it will be little use for the government to issue proclamations in reference to the extinguishing of camp-fires, until there are settlers here and there, who will see to their observance for their own interest. Settlers will plant trees, or give a chance of growing to those that sow themselves, cut the grass, and prevent the spread of fires. But settlers will not come, till there is a railroad to bring them in.

The railroad is obviously central to the first part of Grant's argument, the solution to the immediate and practical problem of how the west is to be opened up for agricultural settlement.

The second part of Grant's argument is similarly focused, although the problem addressed has moral as well as practical implications. The railroad here becomes the key to national unity and national survival:

Let [the west] be opened up to the world by rail and steamboat, and in an incredibly short time the present gap between Manitoba and British Columbia will be filled up, and a continuous line of loyal Provinces extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Canada thus unified will retain its British connection, "bound up with the Empire by ever-multiplying and tightening links"; "Her traditions, her forms, her moral elevation, her historic grandeur shall be ours forever." This, claims Grant, is the true destiny of the British provinces of North America, to remain British and "Not to ripen and drop, one by one, into the arms of the Republic." The Canadian Pacific Railway, viewed in this way as the means by which Canada is to be saved, is transformed from a mere railroad into a moral agent, "one of the most gigantic public works ever undertaken in any country by any people," a contribution to "the cause of human liberty and true progress."

In this moral drama of which the CPR becomes the hero, the villain's part is played by the United States. Grant draws attention, throughout *Ocean to Ocean*, to the clear and present danger which American aspirations represent, and he loses no opportunity of contrasting American values (or the lack of them) with the merits of British traditions and institutions. Grant does admire the "characteristic energy" which led the Americans to build railroads and open their western territories, but this is more than outweighed by his emphasis on less admirable qualities.

At Sault Ste. Marie, for example, Grant notes that there is no canal "on the British side of the river," and he then stresses the advantage this has given the Americans:

The most ordinary self-respect forbids that the entrance to our Northwest should be wholly in the hands of another Power, a Power that, during the Riel disturbances at Red River, shut the entrance against even our merchant ships. In travelling from Ocean to Ocean through the Dominion, more than four thousand miles were



all our own. Across this one mile, half-way on the great journey, every Canadian must pass on sufferance.

To make the point inescapable Grant returns to it at the end of his chapter: "The eastern key to two-thirds of the Dominion . . . is in the hands of another Power. . . ." <sup>21</sup> The following chapter is similarly constructed. At the "North-west Angle" of the Lake of the Woods attention is drawn to the irregularity of the boundary line, another instance of "the superior knowledge and unscrupulousness of our neighbours." Later we are told that difficulties in arranging a treaty with the Indians near Fort Francis can be attributed "in great measure to the fact that Indians from the United States had been instigated by parties interested in the Northern Pacific Railway to come across and inflame their countrymen on our side to make preposterous demands." This issue of Canadian-American relations is returned to once again, for emphasis, at the end of the chapter.

In Manitoba Grant reports that unfavourable comments about the area's prospects are all American-inspired, and that "a knot of touters and indefatigable sympathizers with American institutions . . . had been at the bottom of the half-breed insurrection." Later in the chapter he contrasts American policy towards the Indians unfavourably with that exercised north of the border, and states that American corruption in this matter is of a kind "that seems to be inseparable from the management of public affairs in the Republic." American policy in this matter is criticized again as the party journeys westward from Winnipeg, and the activities of "Yankee free-traders from Belly River" who enter the country to sell rum to the Indians are twice noted as grounds for the immediate introduction of Canadian law and order into the area. In British Columbia Grant finds further evidence to support his claims for the superiority of British institutions, contrasting the violence to be found in mining camps below the border with the order and justice prevalent to the north.

In Grant's conclusion to *Ocean to Ocean* this superiority is forcefully asserted, as Canadians are urged to protect themselves against American influences by remaining British:

A nation grows, and its Constitution must grow with it. The nation cannot be pulled up by the roots, — cannot be dissociated from its past, without danger to its highest interests. Loyalty is essential to its fulfilment of a distinctive mission, — essential to its true glory. Only one course therefore is possible for us, consistent with the self-respect that alone gains the respect of others; to seek, in the consolidation of the Empire, a common Imperial citizenship, with common responsibilities, and a common inheritance.

As Carl Berger has argued, "Canadian imperialism was one variety of Canadian nationalism — a type of awareness of nationality which rested upon a certain understanding of history, the national character, and the national mission." <sup>22</sup>

*Ocean to Ocean* is one of the earliest and most significant statements of that imperialist philosophy which would become more prominent after 1880.

Grant's book has, as well, political significance when viewed in the context of the 1870's. In its emphasis on the railroad and on the settlement of the west, and in the way in which these are argued for, *Ocean to Ocean* can be seen as an early attempt to define what would be termed the "National Policy." John A. Macdonald had "appropriated" this phrase in February of 1872,<sup>23</sup> and, although the idea of a national policy "had not fully crystallized and did not rise to dominate the campaign" of 1872, it was, as W. L. Morton has said, "present in all its parts":

the work of political union had to be completed by a railway to prevent local dissatisfaction and American competition, renewed in the form of the Northern Pacific. It was necessary also to complete the work of political union by making the Dominion a national economy, complete with prairie wheat lands, Pacific ports, and industries in both east and west. In the last session Hincks had already made the first move in this direction by raising the tariff once more to a general level of 15 per cent. It was the first formulation of that "national policy" of which Canada First was speaking in confused terms, and which Macdonald was to make an economic policy.<sup>24</sup>

Grant was, despite his narrative stance, no neutral in politics. He had worked, and was working, for the cause of Confederation, and, according to his son, "speaking broadly, he was a Conservative from Confederation till 1893";<sup>25</sup> his friend George Parkin described Grant as Macdonald's "ardent supporter in the great lines of policy by which Canada was consolidated."<sup>26</sup> *Ocean to Ocean* shows that Grant not only supported the policies, but helped to articulate them and make them popular; the "notes" taken on his western journey are given shape and purpose by the political vision which he, and others like him, possessed.

A FULLER AWARENESS OF ITS INTENDED POLITICAL significance helps to explain some odd details in the publishing history of *Ocean to Ocean*. Grant had claimed that his intention was "not to make a book," and that his "diary was not written for publication, or, if printed at all, was to have been for private circulation only." His readers are, therefore, asked to excuse the "little personal details" which have been included and the "many literary mistakes" evident in the book. Grant was urged, however, by "those who had a right to speak in the matter," to publish his notes because they "contained information that would be of interest to the general public, and of value to intending immigrants." The names of "those who had a right to speak in the matter" are not given, but we may safely include among them that of Sandford Fleming, "the Chief" of the expedition. Fleming was not merely Engineer-in-Chief of the Cana-

dian Pacific Railway; he had been, since 1858 when he published *A Railway to the Pacific through British Territory*, closely identified with those who argued for the economic and political necessity of a transcontinental railroad. The effect which Grant's "notes" could have, in strengthening popular support for the railroad, would not have been lost on Fleming. Indeed, the expectation that Grant could make a publishable book may have inspired Fleming's original decision to make him one of the party. Grant himself gives a rather off-handed explanation of his presence on the expedition at the beginning of his second chapter: "1st July, 1872. — Today, three friends [Fleming, Grant, Moren] met in Halifax, and agreed to travel together through the Dominion from the Atlantic to the Pacific."<sup>27</sup> Fleming and Grant were friends, and Fleming was one of Grant's parishioners at St. Matthews. He certainly knew Grant well enough to know what kind of notes he would take, and we are entitled to suspect at least a touch of disingenuousness in Grant's introductory explanation of why the book was published.<sup>28</sup>

This matter of publication is raised again in the concluding chapter, but here a different point is made. The notes, Grant says, "were written out in the first few weeks after our return, as it was desirable, — if published at all — that they should be in the printer's hands at once." Grant returned to Halifax in November 1872, and *Ocean to Ocean* was published "early in the next year,"<sup>29</sup> leaving us with the strange case of a book — one which was not to have been published at all — being rushed through the press with great speed, so quickly in fact that the author was given "no sufficient opportunities to correct the proofs." The explanation for this haste may be found in the circumstances of late 1872, and it affords one more example of the book's intended political significance. In the fall of 1872 and early in 1873 Macdonald was still wrestling with the problem of how to form an acceptable company to build the CPR; Grant's book, if quickly published, could appear in time to do the government some good:

the whole history of the railway had been one long, unbroken misfortune. The new board [of which Fleming was a member], with its elaborately graduated scale of provincial representation, and its almost complete lack of capital, was a pompous fraud. Everything depended on Allan's success in London; and Allan, as Macdonald knew only too well, was a selfish, unskilful, unreliable man. The railway and the government were far from being out of the woods. Macdonald might yet have to admit the failure of his railway policy; and in Montreal a rumour persistently circulated that the overthrow of the government at the next session was a certainty.<sup>30</sup>

Grant's concluding chapter, in particular, with its insistence on the importance of the railway to Canada's survival, takes on a deeper meaning when read in the context of the political events which surrounded its publication.

That the book was, in part, written for a specific set of circumstances becomes clearer when the first edition of *Ocean to Ocean* is compared with the second, a

"revised and enlarged" version published, perhaps coincidentally, in 1879, soon after the Conservatives had returned to power. A revised edition ought to have given Grant the opportunity to correct those "many literary mistakes" for which he apologized in his preface to the first edition. Not all of them are corrected, however,<sup>31</sup> suggesting that this mattered less to Grant than he had earlier claimed. Furthermore, although the second edition is "enlarged" by the addition of new information, it has also been shortened at two crucial points, both having to do with the reasons for publishing the book. The claims that the diary "was not written for publication, or if printed at all, was to have been for private circulation only," and that "those who had a right to speak in the matter" urged him to publish because his notes "contained information that would be of interest to the general public, and of value to intending immigrants," are both dropped from introductory chapter of the second edition. Also omitted, from the concluding chapter, is the remark concerning hasty publication ("... it was desirable, — if published at all — that they should be in the printer's hands at once"). These comments are not instances of "literary mistakes"; rather, they are examples of a rhetorical strategy no longer justified by immediate political circumstances.

Grant was to say, many years after the publication of *Ocean to Ocean*, that his western journey had confirmed his belief in Canada's destiny:

This journey resolved the uneasy doubt in my mind as to whether or not Canada had a future; for from the day we left Collingwood till we reached Victoria, the great possibilities of our great North-West impressed us.<sup>32</sup>

This remark is often quoted,<sup>33</sup> and made the basis for a claim that Grant's trip across Canada was "the turning point in his life," creating his vision of Canada's future.<sup>34</sup> There is some truth in this view, but, as his life and his book make clear, Grant's vision of our national destiny was as much confirmed as created by his experiences in the summer of 1872. As was the case with another ardent imperialist, in slightly different circumstances, the country Grant saw "fell into the lines of his imagination,"<sup>35</sup> and nearly everything he discovered on the prairies appeared to conform to the shape of that national policy formulated in eastern Canada. The creative energy which marked Grant's personality is apparent in this imaginative transformation, but equally apparent to a modern reader are the ways in which Grant's imagination encourages him to assume, too easily, that the west will be simply an extension of eastern Canada and that the means used to achieve this will harmonize with the lofty moral purpose of preserving British values in North America.

It is not in his view of the native inhabitants of the west that Grant's intellectual difficulties are most obvious. No more than any intelligent man of his time could he have foreseen the enormous problems which even a humanely paternal policy would not solve. Nor is his failure to understand the problems of the Métis sur-

prising; here, too, he was not alone.<sup>36</sup> The issue is much larger than this, and arises from what can only be termed a failure of imagination, a failure to imagine that the aspirations of western Canadians might differ from those of the east. Grant wanted to believe that the prairie west would become "the very backbone of the Dominion," the area "most strongly imbued with patriotic sentiments"; but he also believed that this sentiment would not be *different* from what was found in the east, merely stronger. That the rigours of the western climate, the sacrifices required of those who would endure it, and the essentially colonial relationship in which they would stand to the rest of Canada, might all combine to produce a different sentiment, Grant could not imagine. A summer traveller, not a settler, and conditioned by his Maritime and Scottish experience, he could not see the regional nature of his own national policy, nor could he see how it denied the possibility of other regional interests.

The west he sees becomes too often the west he wishes to see, and his commitment to British values leads him to imagine a British landscape:

Lakelets and pools, fringed with willows, glistened out at almost every turn of the road — though many of them were saline. Only the manor-houses and some gently-flowing streams were wanting, to make out a resemblance to the most beautiful parts of England.

....  
a country of unequalled beauty and fertility; of swelling uplands enclosing in their hollows lakelets, the homes of snipe, plover and duck, fringed with tall reeds, and surrounded with a belt of soft woods; long reaches of rich lowlands, with hillsides spreading gently away from them, on which we were always imagining the houses of the owners; avenues of whispering trees through which we rode on, without ever coming to lodge or gate.

The English country estate will be recreated in western Canada, rich in tradition and charged with all the associations that make it an emblem of British culture. But the prairie is not quite an English landscape, nor is it the landscape of southern Ontario, as Grant does recognize in other comments which he makes:

There is no limit to the amount [of land farmers may break up] except the limit imposed by the lack of capital or their own moderation. This prairie land is the place for steam ploughs, reaping, mowing, and threshing machines. With such machinery one family can do the work of a dozen men.

The vastness of the land, and the urgency of the American threat, justify the use of technology in the opening of the west.

Later writers were to show us, however, that technology was not a means to an end but a value system of its own. In *Fruits of the Earth* we meet another man from eastern Canada, one who came west with a similar vision, "of a mansion such as he had seen in Ontario, in the remnants of a colonial estate — a mansion dominating an extensive holding of land. . . ." <sup>37</sup> Grove's Abe Spalding would also

use machinery to conquer the land, and would lose his family, and his values, in the process. Grant, of course, distinguished "true progress" — the advancement of British civilization — from mere material progress. But in Canada one was to corrupt the other. Railroads, and steam ploughs, were to impose values far different from those Grant so passionately defended in *Ocean to Ocean*.

Grant's description of Collingwood provides one clear example of his inability to assess the effects of material progress:

Collingwood is an instance of what a railway terminus does for a place. Nineteen years ago, before the Northern Railway was built, an unbroken forest occupied its site, and the red deer came down through the woods to drink at the shore. Now, there is a thriving town of two or three thousand people, with steam saw-mills, and huge rafts from the North that almost fill up its little harbor, with a grain elevator which lifts out of steam barges the corn from Chicago, weighs it, and pours it into railway freight-waggons to be hurried down to Toronto, and there turned into bread or whiskey, without a hand touching it in all its transportations or transformation.

Mechanization displaces not only the wildlife, it removes the human element from the scene as well. The ominous qualities of the passage linger in our minds, and return in full force when Grant reaches the Rocky Mountains and proceeds to transform them into a symbol of Canadian spiritual values:<sup>38</sup> "mountains elevate the mind, and give an inspiration of courage and dignity to the hardy races who own them, and who breathe their atmosphere." The claim is still moving, but we can no longer believe it, and we are likely to answer with the words of G. M. Grant's grandson:

That conquering relation to place has left its mark within us. When we go into the Rockies we may have the sense that gods are there. But if so, they cannot manifest themselves to us as ours. They are the gods of another race, and we cannot know them because of what we are, and what we did.<sup>39</sup>

Technology was the means by which eastern Canada was to preserve its great tradition, but the costs involved are ones we have not, until recently, chosen to assess. In future, one suspects, our national aspirations will need to be shaped by a moral imagination as fervent, but rather more humanly reasonable, than that which we find in *Ocean to Ocean*.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Literary History of Canada*, Carl F. Klinck, gen. ed., 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 361.

<sup>2</sup> *Ocean to Ocean* (1873; facsimile rpt. Toronto: Coles, 1970). A line by line comparison of the first edition with the surviving notebooks in which Grant kept his diary shows that the notes were not always published "just as they were written." (The diary was kept in three notebooks; the first and third of these are in the Public Archives of Canada: G. M. Grant Papers, vol. 8.) There are, not surprisingly, several stylistic changes from the original; there are also, of more impor-

tance, several passages in the published text that do not appear in the diary. In these passages Grant stresses various aspects of his argument by summing up his evidence and drawing conclusions on such matters as the railroad, the Indians, the future of the Canadian west, and the dangers of American influence. In this essay I have indicated significant additions or revisions when I quote from the published text.

- <sup>3</sup> Although there is some criticism of the steamer's dilatory captain in the published text (see pp. 15-16), this is a softened version of what appears in the diary, where Grant makes reference to the captain's "repeated humbugging." In a letter of July 18 to his wife Grant criticizes the captain even more strongly: "He wasted so much time the last two days that several of us formed ourselves into a deputation, & waited on him to remonstrate. As he made but a weak-kneed defence we pitched into him unmercifully; & he has been better since. He is a good looking, counter-jumping sort of a young fellow" (Grant Papers, vol. 34). In the published text Grant does not mention the deputation or his part in it; to do so would be at odds with the rôle he is creating for himself.
- <sup>4</sup> In the diary Grant begins by writing in the first person, but he quickly shifts to third-person neutrality or to the first-person plural. This enables him to present himself more effectively as "the Secretary." For publication he eliminated these early instances of the first person to make the narrator's viewpoint consistent.
- <sup>5</sup> See William Lawson Grant and Frederick Hamilton, *Principal Grant* (Toronto: Morang, 1904). See also George MacLean Rose, ed., *A Cyclopaedia of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: Rose, 1888), pp. 388-91.
- <sup>6</sup> *Principal Grant*, p. 500.
- <sup>7</sup> Missing completely from the published text, but evident in his letters to his wife (Grant Papers, vol. 34), is the real loneliness Grant felt, particularly in the early part of the journey. Deeply in love with his wife, and made more aware of his love by separation from her, Grant was "half inclined" by the time he reached Fort Garry to turn back, "but as you exhort me to go on, I pick up courage" (letter of August 1). Without Jessie Lawson Grant, it seems, we would not have had *Ocean to Ocean*.
- <sup>8</sup> *Principal Grant*, p. 474.
- <sup>9</sup> *Principal Grant*, pp. 472, 473.
- <sup>10</sup> Obituary notice in *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 2nd series, vol. 8 (May 1902), p. vii.
- <sup>11</sup> See *Principal Grant*, ch. 25, "Religious Life and Teaching."
- <sup>12</sup> *Principal Grant*, p. 58.
- <sup>13</sup> C. Prescott McLennan, "Church Memories of Halifax," *Dalhousie Review*, 22 (1942-43), 172.
- <sup>14</sup> *Principal Grant*, p. 89.
- <sup>15</sup> *Principal Grant*, pp. 97-98.
- <sup>16</sup> *Principal Grant*, p. 94.
- <sup>17</sup> James Angrave, "William Dawson, George Grant and the Legacy of Scottish Higher Education," *Queen's Quarterly*, 82 (1972), 88.
- <sup>18</sup> *Principal Grant*, p. 502.
- <sup>19</sup> In the diary Manitoba is said to lack nothing but "a few lowland Scotchmen to show the people how to farm." The revised version stresses the need for settlement

of the west, and it also removes (as some other revisions do) what Grant seems to have recognized as his own bias in favour of Scottish settlers. Sufficient evidence of this bias does, however, remain in the published text.

- <sup>20</sup> These observations come from a section Grant added to his diary when preparing it for publication.
- <sup>21</sup> This passage is not in the diary, and it represents another occasion on which Grant departs from his stated purpose of presenting his notes "just as they were written."
- <sup>22</sup> *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 9. Berger analyses Grant's views, but concentrates on his activities after 1880. Although *Ocean to Ocean* is briefly mentioned, it is treated as a travel book, "which exulted in the discovery of the west and the huge resources of the new Dominion" (p. 25), and not as an expression of Grant's political thought.
- <sup>23</sup> Donald Creighton, *John A. Macdonald: The Old Chieftain* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955), p. 120.
- <sup>24</sup> W. L. Morton, *The Critical Years* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1964), pp. 269-70.
- <sup>25</sup> *Principal Grant*, p. 348.
- <sup>26</sup> George R. Parkin, *Sir John A. Macdonald* (Toronto: Morang, 1909), p. 329.
- <sup>27</sup> The explanation given by Grant does not fit the facts. Moren did not accept Fleming's invitation to join the expedition until July 4, and this acceptance took Fleming by surprise, as is shown by his telegram to Moren of July 5: "See Rev. Mr. Grant who intends going as far as Manitobah [*sic*] scarcely thinking you would decide favorably I have since leaving partly committed myself to another gentleman whom I must consult again will telegraph tomorrow night" (PAC: Sandford Fleming Papers, vol. 77). These difficulties seem to have been sorted out, but they suggest that the expedition was not organized in the way Grant says it was (and Fleming's telegram reinforces the suggestion — see note 7, above — that Grant had not firmly committed himself at the outset to a transcontinental trip). In addition, we may question whether Grant and Moren were "friends" at the beginning of the journey. In a letter to his wife dated July 15 Grant says: "I dined at the hotel today with the party. I like them all but Dr. Moren: he is very obliging but I don't like him" (Grant Papers, vol. 34). This attitude seems to have changed in the course of the expedition; see, for example, *Ocean to Ocean*, p. 216. Grant's view of Colonel Robertson Ross, on the other hand, seems to have changed for the worse. In his letter of July 15 Grant told his wife that the Adjutant General was "going to be a pleasant companion." Writing to his wife from Fort Carlton on August 16 he reported: "The Adjutant General & his son we dropped at Red River, as they couldn't keep up with us, & we are not at all sorry for sundry reasons — that I'll tell you of again" (Grant Papers, vol. 34). The important point is that "the Secretary" who narrates *Ocean to Ocean* does not necessarily display Grant's personal opinions of his companions.
- <sup>28</sup> In a letter to Fleming of May 12, 1873, Grant acknowledges the extent of Fleming's involvement with the book: "What an amount of trouble you have had. Any balance that may accrue from the sale of the book belongs by right to you — not to me; for yours was the expedition, the idea of a book on the subject, the risk and expense of printing, the trouble of superintending & bargaining & making maps or stealing them" (Fleming Papers, vol. 18). Fleming's letterbook and his diary for 1873 show that in December of 1872 and January of 1873 he was taking an active part in the book's production (Fleming Papers, vols. 63 and 81).



- <sup>29</sup> William L. Grant, "Introduction" to *Ocean to Ocean* (Toronto: Radisson Society, 1925), p. xiv.
- <sup>30</sup> Creighton, p. 152. It is worth noting that Macdonald was in Ottawa, considering the railway problem, when Fleming and Grant arrived there in late October on their homeward journey.
- <sup>31</sup> The second edition has been reprinted (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1967), with an introduction by Lewis H. Thomas. As an example of an obviously-needed correction which Grant did not make see the original edition (p. 358) where Britain is masculine in one sentence ("The Fatherland") and feminine in the next ("Her traditions, her forms . . .").
- <sup>32</sup> "Thanksgiving and Retrospect" (1902). Quoted in *Principal Grant*, p. 131.
- <sup>33</sup> See, for example, Mary Quayle Innis, *Travellers West* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1956), pp. 222-23, and Pierre Berton, *The Great Railway* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970), p. 43.
- <sup>34</sup> Wilfrid Eggleston, "The Dream of 'Geordie' Grant," *Queen's Quarterly*, 60 (1953), 568.
- <sup>35</sup> The allusion is to Lorne Murchison, the central figure of Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist* (1904; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971), p. 112.
- <sup>36</sup> It must be added that Grant was more sympathetic to Riel than many English-speaking eastern Canadians. He wrote to Fleming, on July 29, 1886: "Yes — the N-west Insurrection was a blessing in disguise [in showing the value of the railroad], & I don't see the necessity for hanging that poor crank Riel. Banishment or imprisonment would be punishment sufficient, in my opinion. He was the spokesman of the Métis; & if they were to blame so was our Govt; & on this occasion, Riel murdered no one" (Fleming Papers, vol. 18).
- <sup>37</sup> Frederick Philip Grove, *Fruits of the Earth* (1933; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965), p. 23.
- <sup>38</sup> Grant's treatment of the mountains is another example of his arrangement of his materials. The party spends an entire day approaching the Rockies, but Grant says almost nothing about the mountains in this section at the end of chapter VII. He delays his commentary until the beginning of chapter VIII, so as to lead up, most effectively, to the passage quoted.
- <sup>39</sup> George Grant, *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969), p. 17.