



Book Review of *Lament For a Nation: Then and Now*, Ron Dart, New York: American Anglican Press, 2015; 38 pp. By Wayne Northey.

The more I learn about Grant thanks to Ron Dart and David Cayley, the more I am impressed. This booklet, though brief, points to an urgency first heralded so brilliantly by George Grant 50 years ago upon the publication of his *Lament For a Nation*.

Dart states in the Preface that “There is a direct line and lineage, in short, from the principles and ideas articulated in *Political Realignment* [written by Ernest and Preston Manning] and the form of conservatism that dominates Canada and much of republicanism in the United States.” Grant’s *Lament* is committed to “an older and deeper notion of what is worth conserving”. “*Lament for a Nation* is a lament, therefore, about the way a driven and ambitious form of liberalism has banished the contemplative way and enthroned the active way...”

There are four essays: two on Red Toryism; one written ten years ago that compares and contrasts Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl and Other Poems* with Grant’s *Lament*; one on the “Afterword” written several years later by Grant’s wife, Sheila. Dart hopes that *Lament*’s perennial significance will be readily seen.

In the first essay, we learn that Grant lamented the liberal alliance of John Kennedy and Lester Pearson that saw Prime Minister John Diefenbaker defeated in the 1963 election. Gad Horowitz coined the term “Red Tory” to describe Grant in this mode, though a self-designation never fully embraced by Grant.

In short, Grant was part of a tradition that “was profoundly suspicious of the United States as an emerging empire (p. 2).” Grant refused to allow Canada to align with American empire without raising a “lament”. In post-World War II Canada, the United States emerged as Canada’s “north star” in all key areas of nationhood. That said, Grant was not uncritical of Diefenbaker in his inconsistent embrace of High Toryism.

What Grant affirmed was “a middle way between the waning of the British empire and the waxing of the American empire (p. 7).” Grant was critical of England’s turn for guidance to the USA since World War II. The notion of “commonwealth” had precedence for Grant over American utilitarianism.

Will (power), liberty, and reason were America’s creed, which triumphed over an “older notion of the political good (p. 8).” In short, “an [American] imperial ideology [had] muted an older Anglo-Canadian Toryism (p. 9).”, that Grant held out for.

Grant’s affinities with the New Left were present when nationalism was the issue, but Grant was not a socialist, and hence was suspicious of the secular New Left. He was rather a High Tory as opposed to a Red Tory.

In the next essay, Dart finds Grant’s arguments compelling in a globalization and post-9/11 reality today. He discusses why through treating some of the key ideas:

- Chapter 1 laments the loss of the older Canadian nationalist vision.
- Chapter II discusses the battle on numerous fronts fought inconsistently by Diefenbaker.
- Chapter III shows that Diefenbaker lost the 1963 election on matters of (nationalist) principle. He pursued a contrary vision to that of Liberal Lester B. Pearson and President J.F. Kennedy at every turn.
- Chapter IV deals with liberalism and the Canadian Liberal Party, at one with American nationalism.
- Chapter V goes deeper: to an analysis of the “character of the modern age (p. 17).” It concerns the passing of the tradition of the Ancients in favour of the coming to be of the Moderns. The liberal way favours liberty, equality, choice and freedom. Such principles are problematic, and lead to even greater problems.
- Chapter VI concerns the roots of the Tory tradition. For Grant, both Liberal bourgeois and Beat protest are two sides of the same individualistic and liberal coin.
- Chapter VII followed four chapters on Canadian history; then two chapters on political philosophy and history. The final chapter is more theological, and names Hegel as the central figure in support of liberalism in his notion of history. “God and liberalism are One (p. 19)”. But for Grant, “The Classical Tradition of the Good stands in a questioning and interrogating opposition to liberalism (p. 19)”. Grant fears in liberalism the eclipse of the Good.

In 1970, Grant wrote an “Introduction” in which he rejects cynicism, indifference and skepticism. He refers twice to “the Moloch of the USA”. This is the same word used by Allen Ginsberg in *Howl*. In some respects, Dart allows, Grant’s piece is the Canadian version of *Howl* – written 10 years later. But Grant recognized that “Ginsberg and clan used and furthered the very principles of liberalism in their legitimate criticisms of the liberal bourgeois culture... (p. 20)” And Grant remained ever hopeful, taking the long view of the Good.

Sheila Grant wrote an “Afterword” in 1997, that Dart discusses at greater length at the booklet’s end. She further unpacked what necessity and the Good meant. Dart sees Grant ever vigilant about “Americans when they come bringing gifts of either the imperial, liberal bourgeois or protest type (p. 21)”, for they smuggle in, Trojan horse like, American empire ways.

The next essay was written in 2005, and it compares *Howl* and *Lament*.

In short, they agree on what they want to be free from, but differ on what they want to be free for. Canadian High Tory nationalism diverges significantly from American anarchism and its Canadian devotees. Dart denotes 6 core characteristics of the (American) East Coast Bop and Beat ethos in which Ginsberg and like-minded participated, summarized on page 24. Dart comments: “Needless to say, such a position becomes its own ideology, creed and institution that

cannot be doubted and must be defended at all costs by its guardians and gatekeepers (p. 25).” This despite its anarchism in relation to creeds and institutions. And though Jack Kerouac for instance distanced himself from this “creed and institution”, he resolutely embraced the individualism at its core.

Grant dedicated *Lament* to two persons (Derek Bedson and Judith Robinson) not known to most Canadians, this reviewer included. Dart rightly wonders at their being less well known than the Beat and Bop Americans, asking “What does this tell us about our Canadian soul and how it has been colonized by the American matrix? (p. 26)”... Dart reprises this concern at the end of the this essay (p. 35).

“Molech (*sic* – Dart also uses the Moloch spelling), Molech and Molech becomes the destructive and dominant metaphor (p. 27)” for what has happened to the best minds in America, “driven mad by [a] combination of the military industrial complex, anti-communist thinking and Puritan and bourgeois ethics (p. 29).” And what is that? “It is all forms of tyranny and authority that brutalize and are callous to the best minds (pp. 27 & 28).” This all according to Ginsberg.

Dart moves to discuss five points of convergence, and more significantly, five points of divergence between Ginsberg and Grant. Neither “offer[s] much of a way out of the problem (p. 32).” As to the latter:

- Grant was Canadian and was concerned about American liberal “colonization” of Canada;
- Spirituality and religion (in their dogmatic and institutional forms) are held together by Grant;
- Grant attempted to challenge American empire through the Progressive Conservative party.
- “Grant dared to question the very philosophic principles of American liberalism, and as such, hiked a different path than Ginsberg and the Beats (p. 34).” Law, order and good government, Dart avers, “take the curious and thoughtful to different places than life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (p. 34).” The Beats simply more subtly colonize Canadians than the overt American Way.
- Grant is a more sophisticated thinker than Ginsberg.

The final essay discusses Sheila Grant’s 1997 “Afterword”.

Dart states: “There is, in short, much more to *Lament* than merely a lament, and the journey into Grant’s distinction between Hegelian ‘necessity’ and the Platonic ‘good’ is the entrée portal – Sheila Grant, in the ‘Afterword’, pointed the way – Chapter VII is now the meditative challenge before us (p. 38).”

On that note, the booklet ends.

This is a fascinating read. One could wish, however, that “the line that ends *Lament for a Nation* (p. 38).” to which Dart alludes was quoted in his booklet. (It is, translated: “They were holding their arms outstretched in love toward the further shore.”). One could also wish for further indication from Sheila Grant of exactly what is the “meditative challenge” of Chapter

VII. But Dart discusses Chapter VII earlier in the booklet. One could further wish for fleshing out of what contemporary conservatism/Harperism looks like compared to Grant's vision. And just what is "American utilitarianism" to which Dart alludes? In general, the book could have benefitted from more filling out of ideas that readers may not know well, to which Dart alludes without further detail.

Overall, it is highly recommended reading on this the 50th anniversary of the publication Grant's *Lament*.