Intent for a Nation

Len Findlay
University of Saskatchewan

> But a nation does not remain a nation only because it has roots in the past. Memory is never enough to guarantee that a nation can articulate itself in the present. There must be a thrust of intention into the future.
>
> ***George Grant,* Lament for a Nation, *1965***

> Oh God! Like the Thunderbird of old I shall rise again out of the sea; I shall grab the instruments of the white man's success—his education, his skills, and with these new tools I shall build my race into the proudest segment of your society.
>
> ***Chief Dan George,* Lament for Confederation, *1967***

The intent behind my "Always Indigenize" essay was to create more space for making meaning and taking action within the terrain of the humanities and the university. I was aiming for robust critique of Euro-humanism, its formal settings and disciplines. I wished also to affirm the legitimacy and necessity of critical collaboration between and among Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, and sought to avoid eliding or minimizing Canada's "Indigenous difference" well summed up by Patrick Macklem as "four complex social facts": "Aboriginal cultural difference, Aboriginal prior occupancy, Aboriginal prior sovereignty, and Aboriginal participation in a treaty process" (4). The fact that others will be taking up (or putting down) in *ESC* the exhortation to "Always Indigenize!" is deeply gratifying to me, and I look forward to further critique of such validity as my argument may still have. What I wish to do here is simply say a little more about the future of Indigenizing by means of a brief detour through its past, invoking a deliberately double origin in George Grant's *Lament for a Nation* (1965; see Sugars xvi) and Chief Dan George's *Lament for Confederation* (1967). However, in shifting my own emphasis via lamentation to intention, I do not mean to suggest that there is noth-

ESC 30.2 (June 2004): 39–48

Len Findlay co-directs with Marie Battiste the Humanities Research Unit at the University of Saskatchewan. He is currently working on Indigenous and underclass resistance, historically and currently, in Canada. His edition of *The Communist Manifesto* will appear shortly from Broadview Press.

ing lamentable in the current conjuncture, not least the federal Liberal hegemony which seems to reconfirm the claim of Aimé Césaire that "the *nation* is a bourgeois phenomenon" (Césaire 335). But there are also signs of the Canadian nation practising forms of sovereignty and commitment which may yet more effectively support political and economic agency as well as constitutional legitimacy for the co-architects (not orally ancillary "authors") of treaty federalism and bearers of aboriginal and treaty rights.[1] And the radical humanities and their Indigenous counterparts have an important role to play in this process.

My focus here is Anglo-Indigenous for several reasons, all of them tactical. If you feel French Canada—or a less foundational Canadian ethnicity—only as a painful absence or ghostly travesty here, then that may help you empathize with how so many Indigenous people say they feel much of the time. If you feel my focus is needlessly exclusionary, then I refer you to Andrew Cohen's much discussed recent book on Canada's place in the world. For Cohen, Québec has functioned recently as a troublesome presence, a regrettable, parochial distraction from Canada's traditionally strong internationalism, a view he shares with other much discussed authors of the moment like Margaret MacMillan and Michael Ignatieff (Geddes 2003: 24). In *While Canada Slept,* Cohen's *only* reference to Canada's Indigenous difference is a passing allusion to Louis Riel, a situation that suggests First Nations, Inuit, and Métis are not important enough to constitute even a distraction, far less a source of national pride and international leadership in the recognition of Aboriginal and treaty rights. To understand how habitual this post-Indigenous amnesia is, how a resurgent white enlightenment (Findlay "When I hear" 2004) is once again claiming to define Canada's future, and how we can combat these

1 In recurring here to doubleness of origin, identity, entitlement, and outcome, I seek consistency with my claim that "there is no singularity without suppression; there is no doubleness without dialectic" (Findlay, "Otherwise Engaged" 398). In a chapter in Stoicheff and Taylor, I complicate this basically marxist proposition via Adorno's notion of the incompletable but necessary work of restoring "torn halves of an integral freedom" *and* articulate this productive but Eurocentric pessimism with the Indigenous holism of Battiste and Henderson. In light of these efforts, my retention of the distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and traditions may seem strange at best. However, I need it here to fortify the notion of Indigenous difference, and to use that difference to expose and counter infantilizing versions upon which colonial regimes of expropriation and oppression were erected in the nineteenth century (Findlay "Memory's Hegelian Estate"). The challenge of Indigenizing marxist dialectic is the principal focus of my teaching, research, and work for institutional change and enhanced public understanding of treaty federalism.

twin tendencies, I want to turn first to Grant and his directive version of the Indigene.

Grant's work has great resonance and aptness still, in part because of the persistence of declinism and defeatism (see Findlay 1997: 679ff.), in part because of lamenters like John Manley (in Cohen 2–3), or Michael Ignatieff (most operatically in Saunders), or via the allusive economies of Stephen Slemon's trenchant and suggestive *ESC* essay on the prospects for comparative literature, "Lament for a Notion."[2] Grant's work is especially instructive for the ways in which it appeals to indigenousness as authenticity and resistance (76, 87, 104), the invaluable if doomed basis on which to withstand for as long as possible the cultural solvents and penetrative practices of American corporate and military power. Grant's views of the Defence Crisis of 1963 are highly pertinent to missile shield discussions today, as are his invocation (after Diefenbaker) of the Annexationist Manifesto of 1849 (50), his insistence on the importance of "the French fact" (38) in Canada's past and future, or his coupling of "Corporation capitalism and liberalism" (98). However, his claim that Mexico was handicapped in its entry into the "common western pattern" of nationhood by the "conflict between the Spanish and the Indian" (60) is disappointing. Looking at the postwar options of what he calls "Castroism" and "Gaullism," Grant fails to recognize that Cardenas's bold program of nationalization in Mexico in the 1930s could be seen as precisely the convergence of "Indian" and labour interests that could lead, not to deficient or dysfunctional modernity, but to a form of co-operative statehood far more appropriate than Anglo-American imperial models are to former colonies like Mexico and Canada where Indigenous difference should and can be primarily located in Aboriginal rather than invader-settler diversities.

Alas, Grant cannot imagine such a development in Canada. He identifies "deeply rooted culture" (48) with francophone Québec rather than with Canada's First Peoples. For Grant, the cultural assault on French Canada is led not by Soviet-style military annexation but by the "more subtl[e]" and efficacious corrosives working on behalf of American capitalism (76). The desire for "democratic protection" of Aboriginal and minority cultures (96) expressed in the 1964 *Cité Libre* manifesto, "An Appeal for Reason in Politics," is for Grant fundamentally flawed because its allegiance

2 See also the very different uses made of Grant's mnemonic and allusive power in Rinaldo Walcott, "Lament for a Nation: the Racial Geography of 'The OH! Canada Project.'" *Fuse Magazine* 19.4 (1996): 15–23; and Jeffrey Simpson, "Once Again, Lament for a Nation (Shed a tear for poor Canada)." *Globe and Mail,* May 21, 2003.

to political liberalism and the logic of the market will prove fatal to the very groups its modernizing "universalism" professes to liberate. But he himself has nothing to offer Canada's First Nations except the authenticity of obsolescence. Liberal internationalism is countered by a pessimistic conservative nationalism obsessed with its own Eurocentric values and particulars. And so Grant concludes the *Lament* with calls to Straussian political philosophy and to that "tradition" wherein religious longing and political aspiration can be conveyed only "in the original" high-cultural Latinity of Virgil: "*Tendebantque manus ripae ulterioris amore*" (106: *Aeneid* 6.314: "They were holding their arms outstretched in love towards the further shore"). When neither tradition nor innovation can console, the Christian appropriation of a pagan poet can dissipate some of the pain of living, and of "look[ing] unflinchingly into the face of Moloch" (12), with love having the last word.

Amid its tragic and transcendent presences, Grant's *Lament* inscribes an Indigenous absence Chief Dan George (Teswahno) refuses to accept. George's presentation at the Empire Stadium in 1967, during Vancouver's celebration of Canada's centennial, is first and foremost Indigenous orature amplified by a late but stunningly successful career in theatre and film. George addresses first Canada and then "God in Heaven," while inserting sadness and an alternative history and nationhood into the smug narrative of this nation's first century. He concludes with a declaration of intent, the resolve to achieve restitution, legitimacy, and leadership, appropriating white commemorative practices for a vision of the next, assertively Indigenous, Canadian century. The fact that what was also known as a "prayer," "speech," and "soliloquy" (Mortimer 27–9) became definitively and textually known as a lament, expresses a distinctively Canadian dialectic of assimilation and resistance. George's brief but powerful address, reprinted as a poem in *My Heart Soars* (1971) and subsequently in anthologies like Armstrong and Grauer's (2001), can be read intertextually as a standard concession to the trope of the vanishing Indigene (Goldie 48, 179) whose passing is lamented by himself and others. Or it can be seen as intentional talking back to the dominant in a form made highly topical by Grant, though stretching in Grant's understanding back to Dunbar's mediaeval Scots "Lament for the Makaris" and thence to the Office of the Dead's *Timor mortis conturbat me* (Christian 242–3). Grant favours a Eurocentric, coercively singular term "nation" (after starting with the term "country" [Christian 242]), while George's published text employs the more composite and consensual term "confederation," which he both

extends and unsettles by the presence—inside and outside that entity—of his own (Salish) and other First Nations.

There is much still to be said about the production and reception of these two laments. However, here I wish to urge mainly that we think of them as indissolubly linked in the multiply mediated intertextuality, interculturalism, intentionality, and Indigenizing that help comprise Canada. Grant was drawn to Dunbar as the icon of an earlier doomed distinctiveness, the poet as prescient elegist for a cultural and political sovereignty whose final death knell would be heard at the Battle of Culloden (Christian 242, 422). Yet for his final touchstone Grant opted not for politicized Dunbar but rather for a piece of existential Virgil, his description of the tombless dead imploring Charon to take them to their final resting place across the Styx, though they must appeal in vain until one hundred years have passed (*Centum errant annos* 6.329). But why did Grant not connect such a century of longing to the plight of Canada's First Peoples on the eve of Confederation's first centenary? I do not know. Perhaps the pull of his argument against "English-speaking unity" as inimical to "Canadian independence" (75) was too strong for him to countenance Aboriginal "distraction" from duelling versions of the dominant. Or maybe his conviction that "at the heart of modern liberal education lies the desire to homogenize the world" (91) turned his attention away from the presumably unmodern and uneducated First Peoples of Canada. Whatever the reasons for this omission, his most influential work must be both critically admired in its own terms (see Szeman 166–76) *and* articulated with Dan George's dialogism-in-a-different-register, dialogism that refuses *terra nullius* and the mix of legal solemnity and white self-centredness that phrase evinces, even in the mouths of many of those whose mission is to continue to debunk it as colonialism's most enabling fiction. Grant deserves to be reread carefully as well as referred to evocatively; at the same time he must be Indigenized in ways different than the white loyalist version he favours in his *Lament.*

Grant functions as a critical-conservative humanist, a philosopher stubbornly invested in nationalist particularism and able to touch a national nerve, thereby mobilizing the very forces in Canada he considered spent or suborned. However, his refusal of the *Cité Libre* group's proposed "elaboration of humanism" as "the formulation of the international structures of tomorrow" (95), coexists awkwardly with a Eurocentric universalizing of his own which ignores native critique and capacity such as that exemplified by Dan George three years later. George rehearses concisely the political, cognitive, and cultural disfigurement and displace-

Grant functions as a critical-conservative humanist, a philosopher stubbornly invested in nationalist particularism and able to touch a national nerve, thereby mobilizing the very forces in Canada he considered spent or suborned.

ment of the Indigene, singling out "history textbooks … plays and motion pictures" as especially effective instruments of ongoing colonialism. But he also shows the power of what our decolonizing group at the University of Saskatchewan are calling the Indigenous Humanities (see, e.g., Isobel Findlay). George uses the competencies of the dominant—including the English language, the ability to stage episodes of state-sponsored public memory, the skills of the accomplished screen and theatre actor. Moreover, and unlike any like-minded non-Indigenous collaborator then or now, he was already empowered to exercise these competencies within Indigenous (specifically Salish) traditions. This double origin allows him to use humanities knowledge and skills against themselves to help create understanding and respect for other temporalities, other histories, other versions of place and prosperity, other languages (he uses the Salish term *seelanum* for lunar months), other ways of being in the world. Admittedly, this double gesture of critical imitation and refusal is not without its dangers and difficulties. George was criticized at the time and afterwards for being too fatalistic about the loss of Indigenous traditions, too ready to gratify white appetite for heroic depictions of the vanishing Indian, too willing to leave the hatchet buried and avoid events like Wounded Knee in 1973 (Mortimer 92–3). But, importantly, he saw his principled compromise and non-violence as distinctively Canadian. Neither his example nor Grant's is flawless, yet both can inspire critical agency, Grant for his admonitions about American inevitabilities, and George for his tying of Indigenous knowledge and resolve to what he foresaw as Canada's Indigenous century. The "thrust of intention into the future"(31) which Grant saw as especially necessary yet lacking in Canada can be readily seen in Dan George and a host of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis actors, artists, scholars, activists. If protracted oppression can be seen as producing unrivalled intellectual capacity in Jewish people, for example, (as George Steiner claims: see Knight 326–30), then why cannot something similar be argued on behalf of Canada's First Nations, Inuit, and Métis? It can indeed be done, but it requires the transformation of an endlessly resistant and tokenist Canadian academy via strategic, Indigenous-led, collaborative endeavours (see Battiste, Bell, and Findlay).

So the shift from lament to intent for a nation can best be effected with substantial Indigenous intellectual and political leadership and the Indigenizing it continues so very patiently to nourish. In the current annexationist and assimilationist climate, Canadian sovereignty needs to be assured by more than the refusal to participate in the "coalition of the willing." Yet this is the very moment when the militarized and co-opted

humanities have come to the fore, most notably in the shape of Michael Ignatieff's "military humanism" (Bartholomew and Breakspear 126). In refusing to continue as a fig-leaf for United States foreign policy, Canada has, according to Ignatieff, revealed its own nakedness as a freeloader and a hypocrite (see MacNeill). On a personal level, Ignatieff's rediscovery and critique of Canada may help extract him from his present predicament as the most (in)credible North American apologist for the Iraq War. But his self-heroicizing mix of squirming and pontification is much less important than what it reveals about policy dependency in high places in Canada (Geddes, "POGGS" 20), about the energizing of the military and the market sublime by the embedded humanities (Findlay "When I hear"), and about the promotion of deep integration with the United States by those with the deepest pockets in Canada (Schwanen and Lee).

That our Prime Minister, on his first visit to Washington in that role and speaking on foreign policy at the Woodrow Wilson Centre, should be recycling Ignatieff's remarks from a lecture delivered in Toronto shortly before is a scandalous amalgam of political opportunism and the cultural cringe. (Ralph Klein's intellectual dependencies pale by comparison.) Ignatieff's recourse in his lecture (and in major media exposure thereafter) to peace, order, and good government serves multiple purposes. It is, for instance, a version of Canada's political distinctiveness that any Prime Minister might be expected to cite when talking in Washington. However, when Ignatieff is this slogan's most immediate source, an encapsulation of Canadian autonomy is heard as emanating from a position identified strongly with US foreign policy, spiking our intellectual guns in a way that would not have surprised George Grant. The maple-fig leaf is back, big time, offering discreet reassurance to the White House while playing back home as the proud assertion of Canadian difference and sovereignty. Ignatieff's conflicted arguments and Harvard status function so as to dignify lamentable trimming in the name of the nation, while Ignatieff himself becomes a kind of minister without portfolio and without intellectual peer, Canada's super-ambassador with something of his father's diplomatic status but with charisma and latitude no public servant could hope for. When it comes to Ottawa talk of our history, values, and international role, homebound historians, novelists, filmmakers, intellectuals need not apply, and all the Canadians who gave Ignatieff a drubbing in public meetings in Western Canada last May (Geddes "Smart Guy") have their multi-faceted critique of his arguments for just war set at naught. Despite Minister Bill Graham's more recent cross-Canada policy checkup, *vox populi* is ignored in favour of *vox dei* residing in the Kennedy School of Government.

The maple-fig leaf is back, big time, offering discreet reassurance to the White House while playing back home as the proud assertion of Canadian difference and sovereignty.

The interest of Canadian elites in the market sublime is tying them slowly but surely back to the military sublime of shock and awe, and thus to the intensifying obscenity of American exceptionalism. This process may be, as George Grant claimed, unstoppable. But it can be effectively embarrassed and at least delayed by a multilateral sublime related but not reducible to the Pearsonian version of Canada as honest broker. Within a linguistic nation which must include and affirm Aboriginal as well as official and heritage languages, knowledge, and aspirations, we have the opportunity to mobilize literary studies within the Indigenous Humanities where internationalism expresses Indigenous difference at home as well as across the world; where forms of narrow and multilateral sovereignty must answer to ecological sovereignty, legitimacy to Indigenous jurisprudences (currently being (re)formulated at the Native law Centre of Canada by Sakej Henderson), individual rights to deromanticized collective rights. The next stage of Indigenizing ought not to produce a "politics of achievement" in Paul Martin's sense, nor a politics of bereavement in Grant's, but a politics of interdependency in Dan George's and John Borrows' sense, in part through new forms of coalition within the co-operative rather than the competitive university. And perhaps my compacted, allusive, underdeveloped intervention here can provoke others in their own ways to help define and fulfill just such an intent for a nation.

Works Cited

Annexation Society. *The Annexation Manifesto of 1849, Reprinted from the Original Pamphlet with the Names of the Signers.* Montreal: D. English & Co, 1881.

Bartholomew, Amy, and Jennifer Breakspear. "Human Rights as Swords of Empire." *The New Imperial Challenge.* Eds. Leo Panitch and Colin Leys. *Socialist Register 2004.* 125–45.

Battiste, Marie, Lynne Bell and L. M. Findlay. "Decolonizing Education in Canadian Universities: An Interdisciplinary, International, Indigenous Research Project." *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 26 (2002): 82–95.

Battiste, Marie, and James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson. *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge.* Saskatoon: Purich Publishing, 2000.

Borrows, John. "'Landed' Citizenship: An Aboriginal Declaration of Interdependence." *Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Aboriginal Law.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2002. 138–58.

Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism.* 1955. *Postcolonialism: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies.* Ed. Diana Brydon. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. 1. 31–39.

Cohen, Andrew. *While Canada Slept: How We Lost Our Place In The World.* Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2003.

Christian, William. *George Grant: A Biography.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1993.

Findlay, Isobel. "Working for Postcolonial Legal Studies: Working with the Indigenous Humanities." *Law, Social Justice and Global Development* 1 (2003). <http://elj.warwick.ac.uk/global/issue/2003-1/findlay.htm>. See also Wes Pue's introduction to this special issue.

Findlay, L. M. "Otherwise Engaged: Postmodernism and the Resistance to History." *English Studies in Canada* 14 (1988): 383–99.

———. "Runes of Marx and *The University in Ruins.*" *University of Toronto Quarterly* 66 (1997): 677–90.

———. "Memory's Hegelian Estate: Class, 'Race,' Treaty, and the Canadas of Alexander Morris (1826–89)." *Essays on Canadian Writing* 80 (2003): 217–42.

———. "When I hear the word 'culture': State Syntax, Cultural Vocabularies, and Violence." *Culture and the State.* Eds. James Gifford and Gabrielle Zezulka-Mailloux. Edmonton: U of Alberta P, forthcoming, 2004.

———. "The Future of the Page and Print Culture." *The Future of the Page.* Eds. Peter Stoicheff and Andrew Taylor. Toronto: U of Toronto P, forthcoming, 2004.

Geddes, John. "Smart Guy, Eh?" *Maclean's* June 23, 2003. 20–24.

———. "POGG's The Word In Washington." *Maclean's* May 10, 2004. 20.

George, Chief Dan. "A Lament for Confederation." *Native Poetry in Canada: A Contemporary Anthology.* Eds. Jeannete C. Armstrong and Lally Grauer. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2001. 2–3.

Goldie, Terry. *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures.* Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1989.

Grant, George. *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism.* 1963. Foreword by Peter Emberley. Ottawa: Carleton UP, 1995.

Knight, Christopher J. *Uncommon Readers: Denis Donoghue, Frank Kermode, George Steiner, and the Tradition of the Common Reader.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2003.

Macklem, Patrick. *Indigenous Difference and the Constitution of Canada.* Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2001.

MacNeill, Carole. "Interview with Michael Ignatieff." CBC Newsworld Sunday, 16 May 2004.

Mortimer, Hilda with Chief Dan George. *You Call Me Chief: Impressions of the Life of Chief Dan George.* Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1981.

Saunders, Doug. "Everything I've said and believed since I was 18 is on the line." *Globe and Mail* May 8, 2004. F3.

Schwanen, Daniel and Marc Lee. "Cures for a flagging relationship." *Globe and Mail* April 23, 2004. A15.

Slemon, Stephen. "Lament for a Notion." *English Studies in Canada* 29: 1-2 (2003): 207–18.

Sugars, Cynthia . "Introduction: UnHomely States." *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism.* Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2004. xiii-xxv.

Szeman, Imre. *Zones of Instability: Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Nation.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003.

Virgil. *Publii Virgili Maronis Opera.* Ed. C. Heyne. London: William Pickering, 1830.