

A Note on

George Grant

from a Canadian correspondent

The best reason for reading George Parkin Grant (1918–88) today lies in the fact that you have got to read it. One reads him. That is as much as any politico pundit has. It's as much as any one who didn't learn from the man himself has. Memory? His memory is obscure, isn't it? I know I have tried to find it, to keep it—others, no doubt, are more successful; he was well known once. Anyways, apart from sentiment what need is there of memory? Is there nothing else? Something with more pith? A culture, or a matrix, or something?

How about public reference sites, such as Wikipedia's entry for "George Grant (philosopher)"? "A Canadian philosopher, teacher, and political commentator," it states; "academically his writings express a complex meditation on the great books, and confrontation with the great thinkers, of Western Civilization." You see, I like George Grant because it is obvious when my opponents have read it or not; if they try to make his "complex meditation" into a meditation complex and take a tone I confront it. And I like it that the internet on George Grant suggests, to me at least, that his readership values balanced and fair appraisals; but more importantly, a readership itself: rare, interesting, and working on the problem.

On the other hand, if one's wish is to become a pundit, to merely characterize the various "philosophers" in a somewhat sensible chronology and to attribute to Philosophy the discoveries of one lifetime, that is, rather than coming to a better understanding of what makes a philosopher or the purpose of philosophical training (let alone philosophy itself), well, then whether George Grant is read at all does not matter much. Let's sum up the buzz on George Grant: George Grant was a Red Tory whose mother never forgave him for not becoming Prime Minister of Canada. With as little material as this conversations can be held, depending of course on how well the Dawkinsian *meme* can be adapted to situational comedy: the best *me-me*, i.e. the most fully expressed *me-me*, takes the point. Ah, the tone is something aristocratic—though I wouldn't want to guess what is really being understood. Signals, probably. But the academics concur: George Grant was/is a Platonist (which looks pretty bad for him—an all around failure). Thus arguments are formed (and the battle won and lost) with little more by way of supporting documentation.

George Grant thinks quite a bit more about what *is* thought than those who just use him to make some rhetorical points. A fate that I obviously wish to avoid. A fate most wonderfully and lovingly depicted in my favourite Canadian book (though not published in Canada): *The Leavises, "The Social" and the Left*. But I digress.

I like George Grant. Take this snippet for example. If possible, recall if it is so, that the negative take on George Grant is the most likely in our land—despite it not really being possible.

Thought is steadfast attention to the whole.

(George Grant, *English Speaking Justice*, 1974) Which it is. I mean, I snip in Shakespeare too, and steadfast attention is needed there, isn't it?—so I come at it like it is poetry and drama: my word is "boot", which isn't to say that language is the dress of thought but something more meaningful. Even those of us that have not read Shakespeare probably wrote The Five Paragraph Essay, where you have to make quotations. So,

King Claudius, moved to prayer by his enormity, observes, “words without thoughts never to heaven go” (which is bootless), just as Hamlet stalks away, having put off executing the King, his uncle, which he could have easily. No doubt what Hamlet was thinking was too enormous a thought. So this is my explanation of “boot”, as opposed to “bootless”. Hamlet’s boot turned to soliloquy. Many besides myself do, like Malcolm Gladwell’s “outliers” do: “beweep” their “outcast state”. It is not alone that “I trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries” and think on “heaven’s gate” (Sonnet 29). Uh, it takes the brain to reboot to really get it. Thought is steadfast attention to the whole. And so I ask the intelligentsia—in fact, anyone that thinks of George Grant as a dead man, a dead white male, a dead W.A.S.P.: “This is an example of what?” What does it mean when “the whole” becomes a key term? And, I think it is what we mean today when we try to find common ground, especially when we find ourselves discussing multiculturalism. So, given the divisions we are capable of, “the whole” is, I think, a boot better than multiculturalism, if we want to get anywhere with the thought. Actually, the one is a boot and the other a put-on.

God knows our arguments are too often black and white! Not literally but figuratively. You may disagree about the nature of thought but then what answer can you make? Just make light of words funny like boot, and smirk at the whole? Boot black all the sources of the continuum in one socking white light of expertise? Well, that’s like looking with the whites of your eyes and letting the meaning of the living world splash into your pupils, like so much change is thrown into a dark wishing well, absolute and valueless. Like a teacher or a stand-up comedian, who seems as though he is sitting quietly in a subway car quietly suffering, paying his fee, in a daze of bustle and advertising, waiting for his stop. Better to be steadfast.

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