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James Grant. *The Critical Imagination*. Oxford University Press, 2013. 208 pp. \$55.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780199661794).

James Grant's work, as the title shows, is a study in meta-criticism. Therefore, the study object is the mere work of art criticism. Unlike other contemporary approaches to the same topic, Grant's approach seems to belong to a mature age of the discipline. By this I don't mean to take away the value of some important studies in this domain, such as Beardsley's or Noel Carroll's works. My statement comes rather in light of Kuhn's theory about normal science. In this regard, most of the previous studies follow a more experimental and pioneering stage, and that's because of the normative character of their assertions. There, the scientific observation is usually, at the same time, a molding of the grasped phenomenon, i.e., the literary criticism. The theoretical reflection tends to have a prolonging effect (or an end) which is always asserted as an imperative. This kind of passing from how the object is to how the object should be, in order to match the theory, certainly belongs to a pioneering stage of scientific paradigm.

The Critical Imagination surpasses that stage because it restores the object's force in front of the theory. A large part of Grant's work is polemical; he crosses through the history of the discipline but maintains a certain distance from all other points of view. In order to do this, he uses two main polemical strategies which can be set apart by using the correspondence and coherence theories of truth. For instance, Grant uses the correspondence truth method when he confronts Beardsley's or Carroll's thesis with the reality of criticism. The author identifies in each case, some texts that should match with the theory, but do not due to the theory being narrow. On the other hand, there is the second method, that of the coherence truth, which is used when Grant splits the concepts of a specific theory, calculating the final consequences and usually proving some internal contradiction of that theory. It is a form of deconstruction, only it is done with the tools provided by the analytical philosophy. The detailed design of the needed concepts as well as the propriety and precision of his terms are new hints for the scientific maturity of the present work.

The main thesis of the book is clearly outlined, although it is not quite evident from the very beginning. The author asserts that art criticism has a double aim: a constitutive one (to aid better appreciation) and a non-constitutive one, not shared by all critics. The use of imagination in criticism will help to accomplish both of these aims. It is important to mention that for Grant imagination is a social phenomenon, since he defines it as *an unobvious way* to do something "which it is plausible to believe is reasonably likely to be an achievement" (81). The chief tool for this is metaphor which, without being indispensable, is definitely efficient in transmitting some information and aiding appreciation.

In regards to the style, Grant's argumentation is formalized at the highest level. It is almost a mathematical proof, with partial conclusions lately recollected as moving to the final conclusion. Even in this respect, he stays apart from most of the previous studies, which poses a more essayistic style. He seems to be closer to Peirce's semiotic and implicit to Umberto Eco's semiotics of reading, although he never mentions anything about this tradition. Roman Jakobson might have been another source, considering the fact that communication plays a key role in Grant's theory of criticism. When it comes to his sources, Grant prefers Anglo-American philosophy and limits his continental references to the classical names of modernity (Kant, Baudelaire). However, this is not necessarily a

limitation of his work, as it is obvious that he deeply assumes this preferred cultural pattern, at both the theoretical and methodological levels.

In order to facilitate the grasping of his argumentation, I have begun my presentation in the reverse order of the argument. I've started with the final conclusion which retrospectively sheds some light on each and every segment of the proof. In the following lines I will describe the steps to that final conclusion.

Grant begins by presenting five influential authors who wrote about the goals of art criticism. There are four major goals which have been attributed to criticism through the ages: "helping readers' choice" (Beardsley), helping perception (Isenberg), evaluation (Noel Carroll) and explanation (Arthur Danto and Sibley). Each author believed that the goal he had established was the main one, having a key role in literary criticism, while the rest of the goals are of secondary importance. In each case Grant supplies some contra argumentation (in the correspondence-truth style), showing that there are always some exceptions. There are some texts which are obviously art criticism without achieving the goals of choice, perception, or even without evaluating or explicating anything about art. A fifth possible goal is Grant's own proposal, namely "aiding appreciation". An interesting aspect of this chapter, and also of the book in general, is that the author applies the same polemical strategy to his own ideas. Therefore even this fifth option is not necessarily the right one. However, it will be the basis for the formalization (generalization) which is to be found in the next chapter.

Here, in the second chapter (*Criticism and Appreciation*) we can find the dichotomy of the two aims of criticism: the constitutive aim - available for all criticism – and the non-constitutive aim which might be any of the goals mentioned above. When he formulates the constitutive aim, Grant uses a disjunction, probably to make sure it is going to be general enough: "One criticizes an artwork only if one aims to communicate: (a) what parts, features, or represented elements appreciation can involve responding to; or (b) what responses appreciation of it can involve; or (c) what appropriate reasons for these responses there are" (38). The critic should have some specific features to succeed in achieving this aim: articulacy, knowledgeableness, perceptiveness. Moreover, he states it requires "good judgment regarding what the readership needs to be told to be able to appreciate the work better" and "good judgment regarding how to communicate so as to enable the readership to appreciate the work better" (49). These last two are the "communication skills" by which his theory differs from Hume's approach. These two specific points are essential in the following part of the study when Grant explains how, with the help of imagination and metaphor, the critic is able to realize both the constitutive and non-constitutive aims.

The next chapter is devoted to analyzing and restoring the concept of imagination. Grant begins again by recounting the most salient previous opinions about the role of imagination in criticism (Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, Roger Scruton), only that this time he doesn't reject them, but tries to consolidate them by a detailed conceptual analysis. Hence his proposal is to differentiate between imaginative, non-imaginative and unimaginative. For a work to be imaginative there is no need for it to be completely original, not even to be non-derivative. It needs only to be non-obvious and directed towards a goal that seems to deserve the effort and also seems to be a realizable one. Of course literary criticism completes this task (of imaginativeness) by using metaphors. In order to explain how this comes about, in the next two chapters (*Metaphor and Likeness* and *The Dispensability of Metaphor*) Grant provides a study of metaphor in general.

In the fourth chapter, he defends a likeness thesis concerning metaphor against all those who have rejected it, namely most contemporary philosophers. This time he really seems to enjoy his trip through the history of ideas, because he joyfully gives names (titles) to all the points of view he accounts. Thus we have: the “Argument from Difficulty,” “The Non-Existence Objection,” “Figurative-Likeness Objection,” to name a few. Even his own theory has a similar title that is the “Minimal Thesis”. As I’ve mentioned before, his theory is based on the thesis about likeness, but Grant avoids all the objections by using a disjunctive formula once more. While not all the metaphors would express a likeness, some of them might express “a determinate of such a likeness, or a likeness-maker for such a likeness or a way of possessing a likeness-maker.” (93) – thereby still relating to likeness, enforcing the thesis.

Grant’s plans for the fifth chapter are to check the validity of another wide-spread theory about metaphor that is the thesis regarding the metaphor’s indispensability. He believes that the indispensability thesis is a true one, although the proofs to defend it are rather weak, leaving the thesis open to easy rejection. Indeed, the metaphor’s goal might not be to express the inexpressible (which would be a guarantee of indispensability). The metaphor’s importance lies in that it may “identify certain properties in the first place, or enable others to identify them” (148). Accordingly, in the final chapter Grant claims that the metaphor plays an important role in art criticism, in spite of the fact that some of the metaphorical likenesses are not true at all. Thus, the critic’s metaphor is not necessarily a likeness, but it can also be a likeness-maker which is “the property of being such as to provide an experience, to elicit a response, of a certain kind” (157) (the constitutive aim).

This is the end of the demonstration which, once reaching this point, seems to be whole and very carefully planned. However, Grant provides all this information only piecemeal, and the design of the whole is postponed until the end. By doing so, he is much like a stage director who manages the details and always knows more than he actually shows. Although this style is unusual in a scientific paper, it is not at all a negative of this book.

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