Poets and the Canadian Jewish Community: Three Portraits

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The central idea of this study is an examination of the transformation of the image of the poet in different generations. My thesis problem is that the poet is dynamic, reflecting both the self-image and reception of society at different times. I collected data from many different sources- the primary sources were memoirs, poetry, short stories, novels and original documents from the Canadian Jewish Congress Archives and by speaking with historians about A.M. Klein, Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen. The secondary sources used were scholarly books about the poets, articles from the Canadian Jewish press and documentaries. I used literary analysis for the poetry and I took a social-historical approach in the examination of the poets' relationship to the community and biography. The social historical approach and the literary approach were both used in this study to analyze the succession of Canadian Jewish poets. As an original contribution to the field, this study categorizes the three poets in a succession: Klein is the Jewish poet, Layton is the Canadian Jewish poet and Cohen is the spiritual guru, all reflecting the changing situation for Canadian Jews.

I examine the first generation poet in this succession of gifted Canadian Jewish poets, A.M. Klein, the second generation, Irving Layton and the third generation poet, Leonard Cohen. Specifically, I argue that the roles and the reception to these poets have changed in the Jewish press as a result of changing times. As the years progress and the situation for worldwide Jewry becomes more stable with greater tolerance in a multicultural society, the poet moves away from the identification as a Jewish poet. In Klein's generation he is labeled as a Jewish poet. Layton fights the label of a Jewish poet and through controversy and celebrity he is recognized as a Canadian Jewish poet. Leonard Cohen re-defines the category of a Canadian Jewish poet in favor of a spiritual guru.

This study provides an overview of the times and the issues that each poet faced in their generation. The first part of each chapter is devoted to a brief biography and an exploration of the way the Jewish community responded to the poets in terms of roles that they wanted them to undertake and the own reception to the poets in the local Jewish press. It is interesting that each poet served a different function in different generations as a response to the needs of the community. The second section of each chapter is an examination of the poets' self-image as depicted in their writing. All of the poets viewed themselves in the same manner, as spokesmen, controversial figures and as modern poets similar to ancient biblical figures. This section includes the ways the
poets viewed their relationship with the community and their relationship to Judaism as a way of shaping their self-perception.
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ABBREVIATIONS

CJN...........................................Canadian Jewish News
CIV/n...........................................Civilization Literary Magazine
CJC............................................Canadian Jewish Congress
CJA............................................Canadian Jewish Anthology
The Chronicle..................................The Canadian Jewish Chronicle
I chose to write about poetry because it is something that I hold dear to my heart. If there is one thing that I could do in my life, it is to publish my own poetry. A poem is like a gift to the world. It is a reflection of life, an observation. It is meaning. It makes the ordinary extraordinary and it has the power to create, to destroy, to enlighten, to cause controversy, to evoke emotion and to unify. For me, a poem is an expression of emotion, too powerful to be contained within the mind. Poetry is my first love and it has always been my outlet for expression. Those are the reasons why I wanted to write about poetry.

This thesis topic was based on this love of poetry and the plight of the poet. A.M. Klein, the patriarch of Canadian Jewish literature, the second generation’s controversial Irving Layton and the third generation’s mysterious poet Leonard Cohen. These three gifted poets are in a succession of Canadian Jewish literary talent that have been received differently and have taken on different roles in the Jewish community. As the roles and reception to the poets have been transformed so has the Jewish community. This is a study of the transformation in the image of the poet in different generations.

I chose to write about A.M. Klein because I wanted to find out more about this incredible poet who wrote multi-layered poetry that did not conform to one popular style or form. I wanted to write about Irving Layton because he was the second generation after Klein in the succession of poets, but also because I was curious about the man behind the words. I wanted to find out more about his persona, his inspiration and his life. I was compelled to write about the third generation poet, Leonard Cohen, because I have been moved to the point of tears upon reading his work. Not only is he one of the poets that I most admire, but he is also a chameleon. By this I mean that his identity is constantly changing and that has been a source of fascination for me.
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Abraham Moses Klein, Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen are pivotal figures in the development of Canadian literature and integral to the Canadian Jewish literary voice. Scholars unite the three poets in a succession of gifted Canadian Jewish poets. Klein is the first Jewish poet, then Layton and finally Klein: three generations and three unique roles and receptions by the community. It must be clarified that the reference to generations refers to the generations of Jewish poets writing in English. Each generation of poets is affected by the times in which they live, which impacts their roles and their reception by the community. The reception of the poets can be defined as "welcome or greeting of a specified kind, demonstration of feeling towards person or project."¹ This study examines the transformation in the roles and reception to the poets in different generations. There was a transformation from a Jewish poet in Klein’s generation, to a Canadian Jewish poet in Layton’s generation and to a spiritual guru in Cohen’s generation. This process of changing identity was a result of changing times and the impact of historical events on each poet spanning from the height of Klein’s career during the late 30’s to the late 50’s, Layton’s career from the 40’s to the present time and Cohen’s career from the 50’s to the 60’s, before he became a folk icon.

The image of the poet has transformed in different generations, just as Jewish identity is dynamic. For the purpose of this study it is necessary to define Jewish identity. Encyclopedia Judaica defines Jewish identity as being determined “by two forces: the consensus of thinking or feeling within the existing Jewish community in each age and the force of outside, often anti-Jewish, pressure, which continued to define and to treat as Jewish even such groups which had in their own consciousness and that of the Jews already severed all ties with Jewry.”² In contemporary times, Jewish identity can be understood as an ethnic unit or a nationality into which one is born into even if he does not practice the Jewish traditions, or if he is not involved in Jewish culture. Jewish identity is bound up with Jewish law in the Halakhah or it may be defined as a Jewish consciousness. In this study, Jewish identity will be understood in a broad definition, one in which it is simultaneously bound up with Halakhah, nationhood and a Jewish consciousness without necessarily the practice of a "tradition."

This six-credit thesis takes a social historical approach to examining the transformation in the role and the reception to Canadian Jewish poets in different generations and a literary analysis approach to each poet’s self-image in their writing. It is an original contribution to the field because of the intertwining of the social historical

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approach to each poet's reception and the literary analysis approach to the autobiographical poetry. In addition, previous studies have labeled Klein as a Jewish poet, but there have been no studies that have labeled Layton as a Canadian Jewish poet and Cohen as a spiritual guru as a reflection of the changing situation for Canadian Jewry.

It is necessary to examine how other scholars have dealt with the three poets: A.M. Klein, Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen in order to demonstrate that this study is a major contribution to the field. The major studies that will be examined are Michael Greenstein's *Third Solitudes: Tradition and Discontinuity in Jewish- Canadian Literature*, Usher Caplan's *Like One That Dreamed*, Zailig Pollock's *A.M. Klein: The Story of the Poet*, Elspeth Cameron's *Irving Layton: A Portrait*, and Ira Nadel's *Various Positions: A Life of Leonard Cohen*. These studies have taken different approaches to the examination of the lives of the poets and their writing.

Michael Greenstein's *Third Solitudes: Tradition and Discontinuity in Jewish- Canadian Literature* approaches Canadian Jewish literature with both a social-historical approach and a literary analysis approach. In the chapter "Canadian Poetry After Auschwitz: Layton, Cohen and Mandel," Greenstein makes a point similar to what has been argued in this thesis. Greenstein says that Klein's *The Hitleriad* was not well received because it did not have the historical distance to cope with the Holocaust. Klein's rhyming couplets and satiric style did not capture the enormity of the Holocaust. The author argues that by the time Layton and Cohen wrote about the Holocaust, their audiences were capable of handling the subject.

In this thesis, it has been mentioned that Klein was attached to the traditional themes and styles. In a similar manner, Greenstein examines Klein's attachment to modern writers such as Joyce and his attachment to traditional Yiddish writers and themes. Greenstein does not depict Klein's conflict between modernism and traditionalism, as Pollock does, but he points out the different forces that influenced Klein. In addition, Greenstein states, "for even while remaining skeptical, secular Jewish Canadian writers are drawn to a spiritual and mythical past...in the spirit and letter- not of the law but of Cabbala and fabled aggadah- their imaginations celebrate." Greenstein's connection of the poets and spirituality is also evident in this thesis, especially in the chapter on Cohen.

Various topics in this thesis were treated differently than in Greenstein's study. Greenstein is concerned with what the poets were trying to do and say, instead of how
they were received by the Jewish community and how they viewed their reception in their poetry. Greenstein also treats the relationship between Klein and Cohen in a different way from this thesis. Unlike the thesis that shows the influence of Klein on Cohen as a mentor, Greenstein depicts Cohen as actually borrowing themes and symbols from Klein in his work.

This work also differs from Usher Caplan’s biography of A.M. Klein entitled *Like One That Dreamed*. This work is one of the major studies on Klein. The biography takes a social-historical approach and Klein’s poems are featured with photographs of images from the times. The photographs include images of the Jewish section of Montreal in St. Urbain, a picture of the city of Montreal from a distance, a pathway on top of Mount Royal and a picture of Kalman Klein, all corresponding to poetry that is featured beneath the images. There are a few interpretations of poetry that refer to events in Klein’s life, but they are not overly analyzed. It is clear that the emphasis of this book is not on literary analysis of the poetry, but it is on the biography of Klein’s life and the historical events that shaped his life.

A weakness of *Like One that Dreamed* is that it does not go into depth about Klein’s relationship with the Jewish community and it does not indicate it as a major factor in his breakdown. However, Caplan does suggest that Klein’s relationship with Sam Bronfman was a way for him to act out all of the power, wealth and prestige that he did not have in his life. Another weakness is that Caplan does not analyze reactions to the poet in the Jewish press. The strengths of the book are that Caplan provides a detailed description of the events in Klein’s life, historical events that shaped him and molded his image as a Jewish spokesman. Another strength of the book is the way Caplan shows that after Klein’s death, scholars take more of an interest in uncovering the motivations for his silence. The approach by scholars is different from that of Caplan who focuses his analysis on the examination of the man behind the image of the poet and his motivations for his career choices.

Zailig Pollock is one of the most important scholars on A.M. Klein in fact he is the chairman of the A.M. Klein Research and Publication Committee. Pollock wrote *A.M. Klein: The Story of the Poet*, which traces the image of the poet in key poems such as “Out of the Pulver and Polished Lens,” and “Portrait of the Poet as Landscape.” The key poems mark transitions in the story of the poet and in different points in Klein’s career. This study looks at the relationship between the poet and his community through the portrait of the poet in Klein’s key poems. Pollock’s study is the most closely linked to this
study on the three poets because he incorporates literary analysis and a social-historical approach to Klein's poems. However, the distinction lies in the way Pollock has traced this one story of the poet through different points in Klein's career, whereas this thesis examines three portraits to depict the changing image of the Canadian Jewish poet and the relationship to the community in a social historical context and the autobiographical images in the poetry.

One of the strengths of *A.M. Klein: The Story of the Poet* is the analysis of the story of the poet as a reflection of what has been labeled Spinoza's skepticism of faith in his theory of the one in the many, in which G-d and nature are one and Klein's skepticism of faith. In Klein's poetry and in Spinoza's life, they both were outcasts in their community. One of the weaknesses of this study is that Pollock does not examine the relationship of the community to the poet to the same extent that he analyzes Klein's relationship to the community through his autobiographical poetry.

Elspeth Cameron is Irving Layton's unauthorized biographer. Irving Layton has ridiculed her book *Irving Layton: A Portrait*, in the public forum, due to what he calls "bloopers," such as her references to Layton's father lighting the Sabbath candles and Layton having to go into the mikvah, the Jewish ritual purification bath. The book takes a social-historical approach and a biographical approach to examining Layton's life in the context of the times. Cameron begins by taking almost a narrative approach when she re-creates the setting and takes on the different voices of Layton's family members. Cameron's approach to taking on the voice of different characters is affective; it is a strength of the book, in that it makes it more interesting for the reader, however, it must be noted that it is difficult for Cameron to accurately re-create historical events and the pressures facing each individual. Also, it is impossible for Cameron to fully grasp the nature of the family members from before Layton's generations, when the author re-creates the setting of family life in Romania.

One of the strengths of the book is that Cameron is not afraid to portray Layton in a negative manner. Cameron's study does not make any attempts to please Layton by providing a flowery depiction of the poet. The author speaks her mind and tries to be unbiased. This is demonstrated when she says that Layton was distraught that he was not the pivotal figure in bringing forth the Jewish voice in English, instead he was Klein's successor. Cameron is not afraid to add in negative elements in her portrait of Layton, such as the implication that he was a womanizer. Another strength is Cameron's attention to detail. For example, in other scholarship on the poet, Layton is described as
returning to the Jewish people following a visit to the public library but there is not a lot of
detail given as to individual people who attracted him to the library. Cameron suggests
that at the library Layton met Rochel Eisen who was a librarian there. Rochel Eisen
became his friend and inspired him to read Yiddish poetry. One of the weaknesses of
the book is that Cameron does not combine the biographical information with analysis of
the poetry. Cameron does not go into detail about Layton's relationship with his
community. There are no references to articles from the local Jewish press and there is
no focus on the poet's relationship with his community.

Ira Nadel is the authorized biographer of Leonard Cohen. He has written a
biography of Cohen, entitled *Various Positions: A Life of Leonard Cohen*. Nadel uses a
social-historical and a biographical approach and he does not include any literary
analysis of poetry. Nadel traces Cohen's literary career and events that affected his life
and his themes in his writing. His book shows Cohen's motivations for writing poetry
and how he tried to be a visionary figure. The book mentions Cohen's "indictment of the
Montreal Jewish community," when he gave a lecture in 1963 at the Jewish Public
Library and condemned the community for their consumerism. The relationship of the
poet to the community is mentioned briefly but there is no emphasis placed on it. The
strengths of *Various Positions* are the attention to detail with the stories that Nadel
recounts from Cohen that shaped his life. The weaknesses of the book are that Nadel
has not included a way to see how Cohen has defined himself in his poetry in terms of
his self-image and his relationship to the Jewish community.

Now that the major scholars of the three poets have been identified and their
work has been briefly examined, it is necessary to define this study. Klein, Layton and
Cohen have all been grouped together from one generation to the next because of their
similar backgrounds. Klein, Layton and Cohen were all from Ashkenazi Orthodox
families. All of the poets took inspiration from the Orthodox traditions but hardly
subscribed to the traditions in their lives. Other Jewish themes in the poets work include
the immigrant experience, the Holocaust, Zionism and the experience of the modern
Jew. All three poets have embraced the Jewish influences that inspired their creative
works but they have not necessarily embraced the Jewish Orthodox traditions.

These poets have also tried to take on the same roles in the community but each
poet was responded to in different ways. Klein, Layton and Cohen's poetry all contain
the same self-image of the way they saw their roles in the community. They all tried to
be spokesman on behalf of Jewish causes, controversial figures that would make both
the Jewish and non-Jewish readers think differently or else shock the readers with language. They also viewed themselves as modern biblical figures.

A.M. Klein worked in the Jewish community of Montreal serving the people as a lawyer, speechwriter for Samuel Bronfman, guest lecturer at McGill, editor of The Chronicle and poet. He was a spokesman for Jewish causes, he wrote satirical verse about Hitler in The Hitleriad (1944) as well as a representative of Canadian Jews traveling to Israel, which resulted in his only novel The Second Scroll (1951). Despite his active role in the community, he believed that he had never received the recognition or appreciation that he should have received by the community. In turn, he ended up silent at the height of his career, when he stopped all public appearances and refused to reprint old work or to publish new work.

A.M. Klein took on the role of spokesman within the Jewish community. The Jewish press emphasized his role as a spokesman and there was not as much emphasis placed on Klein as a poet. The Jewish press embraced Klein but it did not glorify him. He was a member of the Jewish community of Montreal, part of the people and not elevated to a level of celebrity that was reached by Layton or Cohen.

Irving Layton took on the role as a controversial outspoken figure; on many occasions he spoke on behalf of the Jewish community and Jewish interests after the Holocaust. He spoke out about how he viewed Christianity as the cause of antagonism towards Jews throughout history, and how Jesus should not be revered as a G-d but as a holy prophet in his collection of poetry, For My Brother Jesus (1976). The Jewish community embraced him when he spoke on their behalf, but also condemned him when he used the public arena to voice controversial political and religious opinions that inevitably made the community look bad. The Jewish press showed their support for Layton by avoiding publicizing his controversies in the local Jewish newspapers, which was contrary to the actions of the local and national Canadian papers. The local Montreal secular papers and the national Canadian papers reported on all of the scandals in Layton’s personal life, his contentious collection of poetry For My Brother Jesus and the arrogant, womanizing persona of the fame-seeking poet. Layton was also viewed as a controversial figure due to his overtly sexual and grotesque imagery and his political opinions in his writing. The shocking imagery helped Layton to gain notoriety and it also helped him to re-negotiate his relationship to the Jewish community on his own terms.
The third generation poet, Leonard Cohen took on the role of spiritual guru. He was able to undertake this image because he lived in a time of increasing freedom of expression. Cohen’s work was published in a time of greater tolerance for Jews. Cohen started out writing poetry and novels and then he ventured into singing while continuing to publish books of poetry. During this time and Cohen became an internationally renowned spiritual voice. Cohen was one of the pivotal figures in Canadian poetry that helped to shape modernist poetic verse with Canadian Jewish themes and secular spiritual ideals.

In the Jewish community Cohen was received in different ways depending on the stages of his career. When he wrote poetry about Jewish traditions as in his first two books of poetry, he received a positive response, but when he delved into dark themes that included tragic events in Jewish history with a satirical tone the Jewish press did not respond well to him. In later years Cohen returned to make Montreal more of a home base and in his work he wrote poetry that was closer in theme to his earlier, more positive work in the Book of Mercy (1984). With this new work and his effort to return to his roots, there was a change of attitude towards the poet and the community embraced him. In addition, he was depicted as never having rejected Judaism but as defining his own relationship to the religion.

It is necessary to detail the issues facing Canadian and European Jews that are discussed in Klein, Layton’s and Cohen’s writing. These issues had an effect on each of these poets’ roles in the Jewish community. During the period from 1891-1919 there were massive waves of immigration to Canada from the Pale of Settlement. A large proportion of the immigrants settled in Montreal. With this influx of immigrants into Montreal many new groups formed that represented a wide variety of ideals, such as “Socialist groups, Anarchist, Communist, Zionist, Trade Unionist, Liberal party supporters, Bundists, Montreal was noted by many as the city with the richest quality of Jewish life on the continent.” This influx of immigrants meant that the “older more acculturated Jewish community was simply overwhelmed demographically and culturally by the new immigrants, members of the more established community indeed attempted and in some respects succeeded in asserting their communal leadership.” The arrival of immigrants into Montreal had a profound impact on Klein, whose parents also were immigrants. Klein was born in Canada yet he lived in the immigrant neighborhood. His poetry included themes that explored many facets of immigrant life in Canada and included the various movements in Montreal and his devotion to Zionism.
In the 1930's, most of the Jews of Quebec lived in Montreal, where 96.5% of them lived in urban neighborhoods. There was a "narrow strip of land wedged between the predominantly English speaking west end known as the immigrant corridor, from north from Sherbrooke Street to St. Jean Talon Street." Both Klein and Layton described their childhoods in their poetry, growing up in the 1930's and living in the immigrant core neighborhoods. In 1931 "only 44.7 percent of the Quebec Jews had been born in Canada, and another 33.1 percent naturalized leaving almost one fifth of the community with the somewhat uneasy status of aliens" those born elsewhere were from Romania, Hungary, Russia and Poland. Most Jews who lived in the urban core of Montreal worked in factories and many of those were garment factories. In these factories the immigrants had to endure poor working conditions and low pay. Jews lived in other areas, but the fact that the Jewish quarter divided the French and English areas shows that the Jews were marginal to both of the other two groups.

During the 1930's anti-Semitism in Canada was overt. The Canadian Jewish Congress rallied on behalf of the Jews. In Ste. Agathe, a popular resort area in Quebec, signs were posted at a local swimming area- "no Jews, or colored or dogs allowed." During this time many Jews who were born in Canada began to apply to educational institutions such as McGill University and many moved in to occupations held by the French and the English. In this period "of economic slowdown, this Jewish social mobility, however restricted, produced an ethnocentric reaction in French nationalist circles that often took the guise of anti-Semitism" and "Anglo-Canadians in Montreal also opposed the influx of Jewish professionals and white collar workers in sectors." Universities in Montreal had quotas for the number of Jews they could admit as well, there were set grade averages for admittance that were placed at a higher level for Jews. This was done in order to limit the Jewish professionals that would graduate and move into the public sphere and occupy positions dominated by the French and the English. In these turbulent times for Jews, Klein was involved in the Jewish community, responding to the turbulent times for Jews both within Canada and in Europe.

The anti-Semitism in Canada was also a worldwide phenomenon. The late 1930's marked the onslaught of the annihilation of six million Jews in the Holocaust. As part of an international campaign, political parties in France and Germany included the hatred of Jews in their ideology and electoral platforms. In the United States, Henry Ford's daily newspaper the "Dearborn Independent" was filled with denouncements against the international Jew. A pamphlet of the same title was circulated nationally in
the millions" throughout Europe. Picking up the pieces of Jewish life marked the period from 1943 to 1952 after the Holocaust. The Canadian Zionist movements were politically active and also tried to raise funds for war victims.

In 1945 there was a change in the attitudes towards Jews in Montreal. A number of positive steps were taking place to ensure a greater understanding and acceptance between the Jews and the French Canadians. Gerald Tulchinsky, marked this change in attitudes towards Jews in his book *Branching Out*, when he said that the University of Montreal did not have any more quotas for Jewish students in medicine, Rabbi Chaim Denburg was appointed a lecturer in medieval studies at that university, and when, "Laurent Barre the provincial minister of agriculture, made some anti-Semitic comments in the Legislative Assembly, he was publicly condemned by Mgr. Henri Jeannotte, a member of a special committee put together by Montreal's archbishop, Joseph Charbonneau." In *Le Devoir*, despite its staunch opposition to mass migration that persisted well into the 1950's, "Jews were not mentioned once in the editorials as potential enemies of French Canada."

In the 1950's to the 1960's the government reexamined the legislation regarding human rights. The "federal and provincial authorities began to consolidate an expanding patchwork of remedial legislation into comprehensive human rights codes which in turn have been further expanded" and "this process has recently been capped by the far reaching Charter of Rights and Freedoms enshrined in the new Canadian Constitution." Throughout the 1960's there was a shift to moving to cities besides Montreal, in Canada as well as a blending with the English community. In the Montreal Jewish community federations, Jewish youth groups, the elderly Jewish old age homes, YMHA and YWHA's were formed. For Jews living in the suburbs English was the preferred language for the children of immigrants, parents' preferred Yiddish newspapers and grandparents' preferred Yiddish reading material. Without the anti-Semitism there would have been more rapid assimilation into the Anglophone culture.

During the 1950's and 1960's, Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen published modern poetry that centered on free verse and free expression. Their themes of sexuality, women, religion and the Holocaust could be expressed freely in a time of greater acceptance towards Jews and an overall freedom of expression. The Beatnik poets of America, including Allen Ginsburg helped to create this greater awareness and demand for books of poetry. It was a time when poetry was a large part of the popular culture of the times. The domain of popular poetry did not solely belong to the English
poets, the American poets had their voice, and Layton became an integral part of the Canadian literary milieu that developed a distinct Canadian voice.

All three poets were greatly affected by the times in which they were living. Further, there was a transformation in the role and reception by the Jewish community to the poet in different generations. In Klein’s generation where vast waves of immigrants came to Canada and tried to set down roots, Klein struggled to be recognized as a Canadian Jewish poet but he was only regarded firstly as a Jewish spokesman and secondly as a Jewish poet. The events that effected his generation had to do with the depression, fear of modernism, World War II and the turbulent times for Jews in Europe and the growing anti-Semitism in Canada. Klein’s generation was one that lived through turbulent times where it was important to have categories of identity. These categories of identity helped the immigrants adjust to the New World of North America without completely breaking free of traditions from the Old World. The Jewish press recognized Klein as a Jewish spokesman and they did not place an emphasis on his poetry. When the press acknowledged Klein as a poet, they focused on him as a Jewish poet, not as a Canadian Jewish poet that would reach both Jewish and general audiences because of the turbulent relationships between Jews, English and French. His first book of poetry Hath Not a Jew (1940) set the mood for his reception as a Jewish poet. He tried to show universal themes in his poetry on the vibrant French community in The Rocking Chair (1948) but he was still regarded solely as a Jewish poet. Klein interpreted the label as a Jewish poet as limiting because it meant that he could not reach his intended audience, which included non-Jews and it meant that he would not be recognized in the broad scope of a Canadian poet.

The Canadian Jewish press as well as the general media recognized Layton as a Canadian Jewish poet. He refused to be limited to the label of a Jewish poet instead he struggled to be recognized by the Jewish press and the general media as a Canadian poet. The general media gave Layton more exposure as a controversial figure, which helped to create this image of a Canadian Jewish poet. He took on the same struggle that Klein took on, to be known as a Canadian Jewish poet and he succeeded. Layton lived in a time in which he could be both a Jewish poet and a strong Canadian voice. He could only have merged being a Canadian and a Jew because of the increasing tolerance in Canada due to multiculturalism and the idea of Canada as a mosaic in which each different culture and religion made up the whole of Canada and did not blend in with one another so that they were lost. Layton successfully merged being a
Canadian and a Jewish poet thereby completing what Klein had started, therefore he should also be recognized as a patriarch of the formation of a Canadian Jewish literary tradition.

The community recognized Leonard Cohen as a modern guru. A guru can be defined as an "influential teacher; revered mentor."\(^{13}\) Cohen was a modern guru because he tried to teach lessons through his writing and in his life in his rejection of materialism. He lived in a time of greater acceptance towards Jews in which Canada had truly become a cultural mosaic. Instead of being defined as a Canadian Jewish poet- he became a spiritual poetic guru who happened to be Jewish. Cohen contributed to this image in the press as a modern guru because his work focused on his self-image as a modern visionary.

These three Canadian Jewish poets' paved the way for the Jewish Canadian literary voice to be heard. Klein introduced the Jewish voice, Layton said what other Jews did not say for fear of controversy and Cohen returned to a focus on spirituality instead of organized religion. Through poetry and prose these poets' reached beyond the Jewish community of Montreal, to affecting readers worldwide. Klein, Layton, and Cohen had many similar qualities, which led to the idea that were in a succession of Canadian Jewish poets, from one generation to the next, the Jewish community received them and they portrayed themselves in unique ways as reflections of the times in which they lived.

The transformation in the role and the reception to Canadian Jewish poets from different generations in the Jewish community was a result of the changing times and the greater acceptance of Jews in multicultural Canada. The integration of Canadian Jews and their changing situation was reflected in the transition of the poets in each generation. The poets served different functions for their audiences depending on their generation and the times in which they lived. Along with assimilation and the greater tolerance in a multicultural society, the image of the poet in this succession changed to a spiritual figure in which he re-negotiated his relationship to the Jewish and Canadian identities.

The first section of each chapter examines the biography for important events that shaped each poet's literary career and explores the receptions by the local Jewish press. The second part explores the self-image of the poets by analyzing the roles and images that they undertook in their poetry and in specific novels. Each of the poets saw themselves in the same way: as spokesman, controversial figures and as connected to
the biblical figures. The press however, concentrated on only one of these images for
the poets in each generation.
A.M. Klein: The Jewish Poet

A.M. Klein (1909-1972) was a crucial figure in Canadian Jewish literature that published *Hath Not a Jew* (1940), *The Hitleriad* (1944), *Poems* (1944), *The Rocking Chair* (1948) and *The Second Scroll* (1951) as well as many short stories and poems in journals. Klein wrote as a Jew living in the cultural mosaic of Canada - the nation of immigrants. Canadian literature came from many patterns and according to Tom Marshall, "Klein has come close to creating the archetypal Canadian pattern - a dense organic fusion of traditional idiom, ancient myth and cult, the contrapuntal dialectic of our French English relationship, the sophisticated technical reach of man alive in this age and in whom all ages are alive."\(^1\) Klein wrote with a sense of pride in his identity as evident in his Jewish themes and this pride carried over into his depiction of the Canadian landscape. Klein's pride in his identity was transferred to his literature and added to the collective mosaic that was the essence of Canada.

Klein was the first major Canadian Jewish poet to use English rather than Yiddish to express his work. His first collection of poetry, *Hath Not a Jew* used traditional Yiddish themes in English. Klein was the only Jew who “contributed a new note of expression, of creative enlargement of the poetry of the English tongue.”\(^2\) He was also a commentator on Jewish tradition, historical events, identity, philosophy and spirituality. Klein was able to act as a spokesman on behalf of Jewish causes to serve the needs of the community at that time. His poetry addressed certain issues facing Jews in his generation. Klein served the people as a Jewish poet who maintained close ties to tradition from the past to lead the Jewish people towards a brighter future.

The use of the English language in his writing on traditional Jewish themes united the Canadian Jewish voice to the Yiddish world of Klein's ancestors. His short stories were in tune with the traditional stories of the great Jewish storytellers and his themes included the Jewish holidays as well as common motifs that could be found in Yiddish literature. Many of Klein's short stories that followed the framework of Yiddish narratives were set in a Canadian context. The setting "for many of these stories is the Canadian Urban scene and the situations that develop grow out of the Canadian Jewish context" not the European ghetto.\(^3\) He wrote about Yiddish culture in a Canadian setting because they were both passions that he held dear to his heart. By doing so he further united the Jewish immigrant experience with Canadian Jewish life, creating modern Canadian Jewish myths.
This study examines the roles and reception to this patriarch of Canadian Jewish literature by the Jewish community and what it means to be a labeled as a Jewish poet. The first section of this study includes the biography of the poet and it provides a background to his life and traces important events in his career. It also marks his responses to historical events, as described in his poetry. This first section also includes the community's response to the poet in the Canadian Jewish press with the focus on the image of spokesman that served the needs of the community at a specific time.

The second section explores Klein’s self-image and how he viewed his role and reception by the community. Klein tried to be a controversial figure, spokesman and one who was deeply connected to the prophets and biblical character Abraham. He did not feel appreciated by his community since the Jewish press did not report on his image as a visionary and as a controversial figure; they emphasized his role as a spokesman. With this emphasis on Klein as a spokesman, his role as a poet was diminished in the media.

I

Abraham Moses Klein was born in 1909 in Montreal, Quebec where he spent most of his life. Klein's parents Kalman and Yetta were from Orthodox Jewish families from Ratno, Ukraine and maintained their Orthodoxy when they moved to Canada. Klein attended Baron Byng High School and during this time he was active in Jewish movements in Montreal. He was a strong supporter of Young Judea where he served as the educational director and the editor of The Judean from 1928-1932. The Young Judeans encouraged Canadian Jewish youths to read books on Jewish subjects, to meet other Jewish youths and celebrate the Jewish culture. This group, in the work of Gerald Tulchinsky strived to "become spiritual chalutzim in Canada and create an appropriate environment for nurturing a race consciousness to be born out of a nation's will to live."

Klein attended McGill University and earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree. In 1933, he received a law degree from the University of Montreal. In 1934 he established a law firm with Max Garmaise. While practicing law he maintained his ties to Jewish organizations by becoming the educational director of the Canadian Zionist Organization and the editor of the Canadian Zionist Magazine and acting as the president of Young Judea. In 1937 he moved to Rouyn, Quebec, for one year to practice law and later returned to Montreal.
Klein's occupations as a lawyer and poet seemed to be self-contradictory. Law was logical, straightforward and integral to the business world, whereas poetry was not limited by logic and it did not have to be straightforward, it thrived in the realm of imagination. It was evident that Klein became a lawyer for practical reasons but it was his writing that helped him survive in times in which there was not a lot of money to be made in his law practice.

From 1938-1955 he edited *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle* in Montreal. Before the publication of his first book, most of his poetry and short stories were published in *The Chronicle* and other local Jewish magazines. *The Chronicle* covered "anti-Semitism in the United States, Europe, and Canada, where insults, allegations that foreigners were taking over, no dogs or Jews allowed signboards, exclusion and misinterpretation of Jewish religious and social practices were common fare."5 Klein wrote numerous articles and included poems in his columns that emphasized a new freedom of expression in a Canadian Jewish paper. According to Canadian Jewish Congress' David Rome "never in Canadian journalism was English poetry invoked so freely and so naturally in comment on current political issues...Klein spoke personally for a nation, thereby revealing the complete range of his own emotions."6 In 1939 Klein started working for Samuel Bronfman as a speechwriter and publicist for Seagram's.

In 1940 his first collection of poetry was published entitled *Hath Not a Jew*. This work focused mainly on Jewish themes. This concentration on Jewish themes was a reflection of Klein's desire to unify of the Canadian Jewish community and express the richness of the Jewish culture for general Canadian audiences. It was a turbulent time for the Jews of Europe and their situation was increasingly fragile. In a statement made by M.W. Steinberg about Klein's concerns for the times, he argued that fascism was spreading "through Europe and becoming and more manifest in Canadian life. His great concern was the strengthening of the Jewish community in Montreal and in Canada generally and he also was very much concerned with the development of the Jewish community in Palestine. Then with the rise of Hitler and coming war, I think he was totally absorbed in crying the Jewish outcry and in making the Jewish case."7

From the period of 1942-47 Klein was associated with *First Statement*, a journal of modern poetry. In this journal the modernist poetry was a rejection of poetic forms in favor of free verse and new expression. The modernist movement which began in Europe included such writers as "Kafka, Rilke, Pound and Eliot, the Hebrew poet Bialik, and above all, Joyce, in Canada however the situation was different, reaching Canada at
time of emerging nationalism the modernist movement, which devoted its energy to rejection of the old and assertion of the new, found relatively little to reject, there were few decaying structures to topple.²⁸ Before being associated with this journal, Klein was published in the competing journal Preview, that many modern poets felt was a journal for poets of Klein’s generation. As a result of Klein’s association with First Statement, Layton stated: “Abe began to write a different kind of poetry. His vocabulary had been somewhat archaic, the vocabulary changed considerably, the style took on richness and he began to experiment with new forms and new modes. In short we really swept him into modern poetry.”⁹

In contrast, John Sutherland argued that Klein was modern by his association with First Statement only and that he never fully became a modern poet. According to John Sutherland, co-founder of First Statement, Klein was “able to give an impression of modernity because of the continued deference of the modern school to the eighteenth century, and because his urban and didactic poetry, is in fact, a minor descendent of the satire of Pope and Dryden, but that Klein can be modern in appearance only and that his relationship to the eighteenth century is on the imitative rather than the creative level.”¹⁰ In order for Klein to be considered to be a modern poet he would have had to shed his poetic formulas based on the model of English poets, in favor of free verse and he would have had to loosen his ties to traditional themes in favor of modern subjects. This was relevant to Klein’s self-image and to his reception by his audience. The presumption that he was superficially a modern poet and that he maintained ties to traditional poetry in terms of themes and styles revealed that Klein did not adjust well to modernity. The greater meaning that this had was that since Klein did not want to shed his traditional motifs and styles it meant that he had an affinity for the traditional ways. Thus, he could not truly be labeled as a modern poet. Similarly Klein could not be identified as a Canadian Jewish poet since he maintained his traditional themes, styles, imagery and limited audience.

In 1944 The Hitleriad was published. The book was not well received, which may have been due to its use of satire to depict Hitler. The Hitleriad “received whatever praise it did. Among readers and reviewers who took note of it, the poem seemed to touch a sensitive nerve. Many did not know what to make of it as literature.”¹¹ Klein even tried to have it re-printed in Reader’s Digest but they refused to print it, since only a few critics understood his use of satire in his depiction of Hitler.
In 1948 Klein published *The Rocking Chair* and received the Governor General's Award for it. The book was a collection of observations about French life that the French people of Klein’s generation could identify with. The book depicted a reverence for Montreal, its language and its culture that helped to form the poet. The book was truly a collection of portraits of French people in Montreal as an observer. In the poem "Montreal," from *The Rocking Chair*, it described his gratitude to the city "You are a part of me, O all your quartiers-/ And of dire pauvrete and of richesse-/ To finished time my homage loyal claim;/ You are locale of infancy, milieu/ Vital of institutes that formed my fate." In "Librairie Delorme" Klein depicted the dedication of Monsieur Delorme to Quebec, which served as a metaphor for the dedication of all French Canadians to Quebec. Klein described arcades, vaudeville halls and poolrooms, and in the midst of all of this is the “Canadianna: Librarie Delorme”..."Monsieur Delorme...Stoopèd and with doctoral beard/ he is all anecdote and courtesy/ one who loves bindings and the old regime/ that in his mind is gobelin’d fleur de lys." The *Second Scroll* was published in 1951. The book was based on a collection of Klein’s diary entries and observations while journeying to Israel on a mission sponsored by the Canadian Jewish Congress. *The Second Scroll* traced the journey of a Canadian Jew who searched for his uncle, from Montreal to Europe, Morocco and then to Israel. The narrator was a witness to the pogroms, the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel. The novel contained five glosses at the back of it that were poetic commentaries. The text was abounding with symbols and multi-layers of meaning that represented Klein’s attempt to follow Joyce’s approach. This multi-layered text was based on the search for Uncle Melech, which could be interpreted as the search for the Messiah. Melech meant “king” in Hebrew, which could be understood as another word for the Messiah. The figure of Melech in the book was always hidden, even the photograph that was taken of him was blurred and despite the narrator’s search, Melech constantly eluded him. The search for Uncle Melech could be interpreted as Klein’s search for a muse of inspiration. Although the search ended in Israel, the idea came across that what was more important than the end of the journey was the process itself, which was the true muse. Just as in Klein’s life, he was inspired to write *The Second Scroll*, not for what he found when he got to Israel but the process of the journey, which served as his muse of inspiration.

Scholars labeled the text to be both a novel and a memoir of Klein’s travels, but they did not emphasize the prophetic qualities of the text. These prophetic elements
were reflections of the way Klein envisioned his ideal role in the Jewish community, which was not recognized by them. The book showed this prophetic role that Klein wanted to take on in many ways. Firstly the act of writing a second scroll implied a continuation of the Torah, which many Jews believed to have been divinely inspired or else divinely written. The Second Scroll was a reflection of Klein's Zionist ideals which was a continuation of the theme in the Book of Exodus, for the Jewish people to reside in the holy land, "the national theme is most clearly interwoven with the religious theme, for the search for Zion is inseparable from the search for G-d and an understanding of his ways; its attainment is seen as a miraculous manifestation of his will."¹⁴

The book received a positive response in the local press but it never became popular outside of the Jewish community. When The Second Scroll appeared, The Nation called it "the most profoundly creative summation of the Jewish experience by a Jewish man of letters since the European catastrophe."¹⁵ The Second Scroll was praised but according to David Kaufman it "never became popular outside the Jewish community and some North American literary circles. Probably the very quality that made it memorable, the unique perspective of a resident of the Canadian Diaspora, made it inscrutable to people elsewhere."¹⁶

The analysis of Klein's relationship to his community is explored by examining his references to the treatment of the poet in the Jewish media. Klein took on many roles of spokesman, controversial figure and prophet but the Jewish press highlighted his role as a spokesman and neglected his role as a poet. When he was mentioned as a poet, the Jewish press gave him the label as a Jewish poet in order to blend the role of spokesman with the role of poet to further Jewish causes. In this regard Klein believed that the label of a Jewish poet limited him. Usher Caplan and M.W. Steinberg in their text A.M. Klein Literary Essays and Reviews, outlined how Klein viewed the Jewish artist, they argued "to be a poet of the people was to suffer a kind of anonymity and a frequent suppression of the private lyrical accent in favor of the public rhetorical voice. The Jewish writer is the everyman of his people, a spokesman of the entire folk."¹⁷

Further, by ignoring the other roles that Klein had assigned for himself, his frustration increased. In the portrait of Klein's self-image, he viewed his reception by the community as unappreciative of his efforts. In fact, the Jewish community did not do anything malicious to Klein. Their only crime was not giving him the attention that he craved. They did not feed him with adoration by showing him that he was making a difference in their lives and adding to the greater schema of Canadian Jewish literature.
Due to the community's lack of enthusiasm, adoration, financial support and with a limited role imposed on him, he felt ignored and unappreciated by those whom he unselfishly dedicated his life to serving.

Klein's work in the Jewish community included working as a speechwriter for Bronfman, lawyer, writer for Young Judea, editor of the Chronicle and poet. His active involvement in the Jewish community made it harder for him to receive the recognition he deserved. This statement does not imply that it is impossible for a poet involved in the Jewish community to achieve wide acclaim. However, it is more likely that Klein would have achieved a better response from the Jewish community if he received more acclaim from the non-Jewish media. If the general media would have celebrated Klein, it may have encouraged his own community to appreciate Klein as a great contributor to Canadian literature rather than a public servant.

Klein worked among the Jewish community therefore members of the community knew him and could not revere him as an icon or as a legend. He was not a mysterious figure, whose ties to the community were ambiguous. He was one of them therefore it was impossible to revere him in the way that Layton and Cohen were revered. These two poets distanced themselves from the community and received wider acclaim by the general audiences and from the Jewish community. The more distance between the poet and the community, the more there was a sense of mystery which was followed by appreciation and the attempt of the community to win the poet back in to the fold of the community through adoration.

There were limitations placed on Klein by the community, but there were also limitations that Klein placed on himself in order to maintain the integrity of his work. Klein craved the adoration of the community but he also needed to stay true to the essence of his writing. Klein would rather be remembered by those few willing to look beyond the glitz to a man behind the words instead of a celebrity image created by the media. According to scholar, M.W. Steinberg in the introduction to A.M. Klein Short Stories, the poet was under "pressure to sell his talent through the media and cater to the mass taste, or turn his talent into more directly rewarding commercial channels."^{18}

Klein wanted to maintain the integrity of his writing by not over-commercializing his poetry. He had conflicting desires; on the one hand he wanted to be recognized by the Jewish community and beyond the Jewish community for his artistic endeavors but on the other hand he did not want to commercialize his writing or his image. Basically, he wanted to show his readers that what you see is what you get and his first loyalty was
to his community not to the persona that he would have had to create to reach a wider audience.

Klein paved the way for the Jewish poetic voice to be heard in Canada at a time when there was blatant anti-Semitism. He was able to take on this role of spokesman because the community was in need of a dedicated, intelligent and well-versed spokesman to make Jews aware of those suffering, to support Zionist ideals and to unite Canadian Jewry. Klein was able to do well at this role because he had many venues to voice his ideas particularly in *The Chronicle*. Klein’s job editing *The Chronicle* included his “responsibility for weekly editorials and comments on the news, his role as spokesman for his people to the general public, championing their causes, compelled him to immerse himself deeply and constantly in contemporary affairs...he had continually to respond to the evil evident in the world around him-fascism and its attendant anti-Semitism, increasing violence and treachery by individual leaders and governments, the plight of refugees driven out by dictators and turned away by democracies and the horror of the Holocaust.”

Klein was actively involved with the Jewish community as a spokesman for Jewish causes for most of his life until the silence, in 1955, at the end of his career when he distanced himself from the community. This silence meant that he did not publish new work, he did not respond to those who tried to re-publish his work, he did not write any articles, he stepped out of the public sphere as a spokesman for Jewish causes and he did not socialize with friends. It has already been deduced that Klein felt unappreciated by his community. This may account for his silence, but there are also many other factors in his demise. These other reasons may have been mental illness, commercialization, failing to win Jewish voters in an election and trying too hard to create a multi-layered text with *The Second Scroll*.

In the local Jewish media there was a concentration on the reasons for the poet’s silence at the end of his career instead of the focus on his poetry while he was still writing and publishing work. One reason for his silence was mental illness. The first signs of this silence, according to Ira Nadel occurred after he assisted “Layton with the revision of some of his poems for the *Black Huntsmen*” he “was already showing signs of the psychological stress that would lead to two suicide attempts in 1954, after which he became a recluse.” When Cohen met Klein he told Layton that, “the fires had been banked but that Klein was still witty and eager to talk about poetry.” Despite this move
away from the public sphere, Klein retained order by maintaining close ties to family members.

Many historians connected Klein's silence during the 1950's as a result of his relationship with Sam Bronfman and his failed political career. Klein first met Bronfman in the 1920's when he was a tour guide and one of the stops was Seagram's. American tourists flocked to Seagram's due to the prohibition of alcohol in the United States. It was on one of these tours of Seagram's that Klein met Bronfman, who many scholars believe played an integral part in Klein's demise. The two met again in 1939, when Bronfman noticed Klein's writing from the Canadian Jewish Congress and decided to hire him as his personal speechwriter. The full load of Klein's work for Bronfman included being a "speech-writer, secretary, public-relations consultant and advisor on Jewish affairs...annual reports, birthday and anniversary greetings for Sam sent to friends and family members and even in all likelihood some highly personal correspondence, such as a long letter to his son Charles on the occasion of his bar mitzvah" and Bronfman's coat of arms. Klein may have become silent because he did not achieve the recognition from his community that he deserved. Instead, his words were used for Bronfman's insincere bar mitzvah speeches, grace after meal napkins and personal letters. The relationship between the "mercurial, rough-hewn industrialist and the troubled, gentle poet was certainly problematic, and Sam could, at times, be brutally unaware of the damaging effects it had on Klein."

Klein's relationship with Bronfman may have contributed to his desire to maintain the integrity of his poetry by avoiding commercialization and the false use of his poetry. When he worked for Bronfman he felt like he became the proxy of the community. Klein felt as if he was a proxy because Bronfman used the poet's speeches as his own, as well as concocted personal letters. It disturbed Klein that his words that could be used for something sacred such as writing poetry, short stories or novels, were used not only for an activity such as writing letters and speeches, but they were written in an acceptable form of falseness, speech writing. Klein wanted to maintain the integrity of his writing for himself and for his audience. By being Bronfman's speechwriter he felt as if he was betraying his audience and the sacred gift of being able to write well on another's behalf.

In contrast, an article by Ben Rose, from the CJN reflected a different view; that Klein's silence should have been blamed on the contradictions between his public and private voices instead of the relationship with Bronfman or politics. In a CJN article it
was suggested that Klein's inner conflicts were the cause of his silence, in addition, "Klein like Bronfman was ambitious and craved recognition and power, his relationship with Bronfman both fed and aggravated this feeling and may have contributed to his sense that his was a buried voice... on the one hand his close association with the industrialists power and even a kind of vulgar fame, but his too close identification with Bronfman may have exaggerated his increasing sense of personal failure, when he would come to realize that he was, after all not Bronfman." In a different view, Usher Caplan suggested that Klein's friendship with Bronfman might have given him the opportunity to act out roles that he could not achieve in his own career.

In other articles in the CJN and internal memos at the Canadian Jewish Congress, there was an attempt to try to mend Bronfman's image in the community by changing the image of his relationship to Klein and by describing the image of the relationship as "distorted." David Rome of the Canadian Jewish Congress sent a letter to Mr. M. Batshaw on June 29, 1982, saying that he was upset about the "distortion of the Sam Bronfman figure created rather consistently by a number of academic people who have distorted, rather crudely the Bronfman-Klein relationship." Rome may have wanted to change the "distorted" image of the Bronfman-Klein relationship because he knew both Klein and Bronfman and he might have truly believed that the image of the relationship has been misconstrued. There was another possibility as well, that Rome wanted to remain in Bronfman's favor due to the fact that Bronfman was a powerful man in the Jewish community and a generous philanthropist. By remaining in his favor and fighting on behalf of Bronfman, Rome could have benefited from Bronfman's power in the community. Just as the Jewish press tried to do damage control over Layton's image, so did Rome over Bronfman's public image.

What drew together Klein and Bronfman may have been their love of Judaism and the desire to preserve Yiddish culture in a turbulent time for European Jews. Klein was the "ideal man to provide an intellectual base for Bronfman's quest to unify the Canadian Jewish community to answer the threat." It can be deduced from the articles and scholarship by historians that the poet and the businessman were drawn together by their mutual respect for one another; Bronfman respected Klein's intellectual and creative prowess and Klein respected Bronfman's power in the community. Bronfman represented to Klein what he could be if he had money, power and respect in the community. Klein achieved a level of respect by his active participation in the community and by his role of spokesman, whereas Bronfman was respected for his
power that extended beyond the Jewish community. Bronfman was a symbol of what Klein could have been but he also represented everything that Klein was not. He was attracted to Bronfman because he made him feel powerful in his own right; he acknowledged the importance of Klein's writing skills for practical purposes in a time when the Jewish press did not emphasize Klein's literary career. Klein's attraction to Bronfman's power within the Jewish community was one factor in his demise because it led him to all of the disappointments that he saw in himself and the limitations he believed that the community imposed on him as a Jewish poet.

Another factor in Klein's demise was that he felt unappreciated by the Jewish community when he tried to move into politics with the encouragement of David Lewis who thought that he had a good chance of getting Jewish voters. The first time that Klein was a candidate, he ended up withdrawing from the race. The second time Klein ran was as a candidate for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation. The flier that went out from the campaign headquarters in Dollard read:

"Electors of the Cartier Division! For some time now the Jewish community in general and the Cartier constituency in particular, has been singularly unfortunate in their representation in the Canadian House of Commons. Then to put an end to the state of affairs the C.C.F. has persuaded A.M. Klein to contest Cartier. A.M. Klein needs not introduction to the community. Devoted to the objectives of social justice, he has been active with the C.C. F. from its earliest inception. A well-known Zionist, he has served the movement since 1929 in top executive and honorary capacities. As a Zionist orator and writer he is known to Jewry in every city and hamlet in the Dominion. There is not a Jewish cultural activity in the city of Montreal to which he has not made a singular and memorable contribution. In the last two decades he has won an enviable position in Jewish life." [27]

In 1949, Klein was defeated and he felt abandoned by the people that he had served. This was such an "embittering experience, for Klein felt he deserved better from a constituency that was largely Jewish."[28] This may have contributed to Klein's silence.

In an article written for a newsletter for Canadian Jewish students, Shirayim, it asserted that the local Jewish community did not treat Klein well during his lifetime. The author of the article argued "were it not for American publishers, he might have had to finance his own publication or seek contributions from friends like other Montreal Jewish writers of international reputation. He struggled for a less than comfortable living; he did not practice law for profit and he was not sufficiently supported to make his writing profitable...for over fifteen years, he was almost ignored except for a small band of colleagues, disciples and personal friends and relatives. His death received much less
notice in the Montreal and Toronto papers than in the New York Times." In this article, the author tried to encourage the community to acknowledge their treatment of the poet. The community was blamed for not mourning Klein's death in the city of his origin; even the city of New York was more devoted to him than Montreal. The article indicted the community not only for ignoring the poet but also for contributing to his isolation. This article that appeared following Klein's death was testimony to the fact that the community acknowledged its treatment of Klein after his death instead of during his lifetime.

The final reason given for Klein's silence was mentioned in Colman Klein's interview in A.M. Klein: The Poet as Landscape (1987) produced by Ergo Media Inc, directed by David Kaufman. Colman Klein stressed that one of the main factors in the demise of his father was that he tried too hard to create a multi-layered text. His work on The Second Scroll marked his breaking point when he followed Joyce's method of using many layers of meaning in his text. This arduous task that he set for himself resulted in a novel that did not receive the acclaim that it deserved, which took its toll on the poet.

The scholarship on Klein indicated that the community did not give anything back to Klein until after his death. During the time that the poet was silent, so was the community towards the poet. Following Klein's death, a memorial publication honoring his memory was printed, a collection of his poetry was published, honorary evenings were held and a film was produced. Irving Layton described the situation for Klein during his period of silence. Layton said "my grievance is that the powers in the Jewish community, who must have been aware that this very gifted individual was slowly sinking into poverty did nothing at all... they benefited so well from his services but could not find it in their hearts to see that this individual had three or four thousand dollars without any worry or anxiety."30

A.M. Klein: The Poet as Landscape (1984) was a way for the next generation to honor Klein by creating a memorial film following his death when the community did not give back to him when he was alive. This film was a way to remember Klein's contribution to paving the way for the Jewish voice to be heard in English, in Canadian literature. The film honored Klein's memory and paid tribute to Klein's ties to both Judaism and to the Canadian landscape and placed Klein's poetry in social, cultural and political contexts. The appreciation that Klein did not receive by his generation or Layton's generation was fulfilled in Cohen's generation in the form of a visual tribute. The film was sponsored mainly by Jewish organizations in Montreal such as: Ontario
Arts Council, Bronfman family foundation, Zionist Archives, Bibliotech Nationale de Quebec, Canada War Museum, Jewish Publish Library of Montreal, House of Seagram's and YIVO. It was interesting that the Bronfman Family Foundation and the House of Seagram's were sponsors, when the film depicted Bronfman as being a primary figure in Klein's attitudes towards commercialization and the community.

The film emphasized two themes as integral influences in Klein's writing: his Jewish identity and the Canadian landscape. The fragmented segments of the film were held together by the poetry and the images of nature and religion. The depictions of Klein's poems about Israel with images of Canada functioned to change Klein's intentions, by implying that he was embracing Quebec as his holy land instead of Israel. The images were edited in such a way as to suggest that Klein found a new Zion in Quebec. Further, Kaufman united the Jewish people and the French Canadians in terms of their cultural symbols and ancestral memories. Kaufman did this by depicting images of French culture while the narrator read poems about the Jewish people. This tribute to Klein was a way of unifying French people and Jews by blending cultural symbols with the Canadian landscape. Instead of the image of the isolated poet that blended into the landscape so that he was lost in the poem "Portrait of a Poet as Landscape," this film suggested that the landscape facilitated the creativity of the poet and helped to define him. Ultimately, the film acknowledged A.M. Klein as a poet.

In addition to viewing himself as a spokesman on behalf of Jewish causes and as a poet, A.M. Klein viewed himself as controversial and connected to the biblical figures of prophet and Abraham. Klein was a poet serving the people yet he also intended to speak for the people; to fight injustices committed against Jews and to create controversy intended to make people think in new ways within the Jewish community. As a controversial figure he tried to challenge the existing order, to upset the sensibilities of his generation, to shock readers and to go against the norm. Klein was controversial in his rejection of the community; which was something that he was only able to do in his writing because of his obligations to his community. Klein limited his self-doubt and anger against the community to his poetry while continuing to serve the community. Klein was not happy to be regarded solely as a lawyer, but he wanted to be recognized and celebrated by the Jewish community as a prophetic poet. In his poetry, Klein's prophetic poetry expresses his need to be close to G-d, to be on the level of the biblical prophets in order to succeed in life. In addition Klein depicts the biblical setting in which
Abraham lives and uses his own voice; therefore he plays upon the fact that his name is Abraham, just as the biblical figure shares the same name.

The first central image that is found in Klein's autobiographical poetry is his controversial voice. It was important for Klein to introduce new ideas to the community through poetry. Klein wanted to be a spokesman, to be a protector of Jewish interests and to shock readers from his community with the power of language. He was against any limitations placed on the artist and advocated the need for the artist to speak freely. According to Steinberg, Klein "protested against the opinion voiced by communists that literature must serve the party purpose, the class revolution, or support the communist state, an attitude that perverts art into propaganda and squeezes life, which in its fullness is the province of the artist whose work belongs to all ages and people." His need to express himself without any political limitations helped to form this role of shocking the reader through free expression.

One of the best examples of this use the controversial voice is found in The Hitleriad (1944) where the reader must adjust to the nontraditional use of satire to depict Hitler. The Hitleriad reads:

"Heil Heavenly muse, since also thou must be/ Like my song's theme, a siegheil'd deity, / Be with me now, but as once, for song:/ Not odes do I indite, indicting Wrong! / Be with me, for I fall from grace to sin, / Spurning this day thy proffered hippocrene/ To taste the poison'd lager of Berlin!...Where was he born? In Braunau at the Inn-/ And Austria paid for that original sin! / Born to a father, old and over-wined/ Who had he slept one night, had saved mankind!/ At first hight Shicklgruber- what a name/ To herald through the mighty trump of fame-/ Heil Shicklgruber! Shicklgruber heil/...His teachers have since died; and fortunate they/ Who else had died ten deaths to see the day/ The dunce of the corner corner better men."

In this poem Klein tries to make a mockery of Hitler's birth and turn disgust into ridiculing humor. In the verse that says if his teachers who have since died were alive to see how the "dunce of the corner, corner better men," Klein mocks Hitler's rise out of obscurity by being the ultimate evil. Klein's controversial voice in The Hitleriad is designed to shock readers in the community by its blatant depiction of Hitler, especially one in which he is depicted as a human being instead of a monster. This shows that Klein has rationalized Hitler, instead of viewing him as a powerful evil force, he views him as a human being that committed horrific crimes.

The Hitleriad also shows that Klein is not quick to condemn the universe as immoral unlike poets of Layton's generation. Klein finds satirical humor in the power that the German people gave to Hitler. In a sense, Klein is taking back the power of the
persecuted by ridiculing Hitler. Klein does not take the easy way out that Layton takes in his decision that the universe is immoral. Klein takes a more intellectual approach when he separates good from evil and provides a satirical glimpse of Hitler. The fact that Klein uses humor in his poem suggests that all is not lost, whereas in Layton’s poetry there is a sense of pessimism; a sense that he has given up on the morality of the universe. Poetry from Layton’s generation would have depicted Hitler in inhuman terms and the universe ending in a violent apocalypse whereas Klein’s poem suggests that although Hitler committed crimes against humanity, the ones who have been persecuted are the ones left laughing at Hitler.

The Jewish community would have regarded this poem as controversial because of the diction that the poet uses, such as “heil heavenly muse.” Klein uses the word “heil,” similar to the Nazis “sieg-heil’d” salute to Hitler, to call upon a muse of poetry. As well, Klein calls upon a heavenly muse to write about Hitler, which would be deemed as offensive. The act of calling upon a heavenly muse evokes images of peace, tranquility and positive elements of the universe. The idea of calling upon the heavenly muse to depict Hitler’s hopes and dreams as a youth and his rise to power is a contradiction of the images evoked in the declaration. This statement does not show respect for the victims who suffered and the depiction seems to turn the seriousness of the Holocaust into a mockery.

The second image that Klein identifies with in his writing is the image of spokesman on behalf of Jewish causes. Klein reacts to the situation for European Jewry in his poetry as a spokesman that shows his own fears, insecurities and guilt. “Meditation Upon Survival,” Poems (1947) reads:

“At times, sensing that the go|gotha’d dead/ run plasma through my veins, and that I must live/ their unexpired six million circuits, giving/ to each of their nightmares my body for a bed/- dispirited/- those times that I feel their death wish bubbling the/ channels of my blood/- I grow bitter at my false felicity/ the spared one and would almost add my wish/ for the centigrade furnace of the cyanide flood.”

In this poem Klein expresses a sense of guilt about the Holocaust. This sense of guilt may be a reaction that many Canadian Jews had due to the fact that they could not save European Jewry from annihilation. Hitler’s intentions were to annihilate all Jews, not only European Jews. In this poem Klein expresses guilt in survival but also a sense that his body is a vessel for the victims’ traumas. It is as if Klein is experiencing their pain and his life is lived on behalf of those who perished.
In Klein’s poems about Abraham there is a play on words because his name is also Abraham, therefore the poems could be about him. There is no evidence to suggest that Klein writes about the biblical figure of Abraham because the poetry describes the biblical context not specific events that can be backed up by rabbinic texts or the Bible. Klein’s work shows a re-surfacing of ancient biblical narratives that depict this ancient world in modern terms with modern issues facing the dispersed Jewish people. The reference to Abraham can be clearly defined in the Encyclopedia Judaica, that indicates that, “the patriarchs are the founding fathers of the people Israel, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” In the context of the poems about Abraham, Klein takes on the patriarch’s voice as a way of identifying with the original forefather. Klein is also a patriarch, not of Judaism but of bringing forth the Jewish literary voice in English, in Canada. The reader would presume that the poems are about the biblical figure but the fact that Klein uses his name and his ancient context proves that he sees himself as connected to the ancient biblical figure. The poem entitled “A Psalm of Abraham which he Made Because of Fear in the Night” from the “Psalter of Avraham Haktani” Poems (1944) is a poignant example of the play on words it reads: “Thou settest them about my bed, / The four good angels of the night, / Invisible wings on left and right, / An holy watch at foot and head:/ Gabriel, Uriel, Raphael/ And Michael, of the angelic host/ Who guard my sleep-entrusted ghost/ Until day break, and break the spell.” The title of the poem “Psalter of Avraham Haktani” reflects this play on words; “haktani” in Hebrew means small just as “Klein” in German means small. The poem is set in a biblical context but it describes almost an otherworldly encounter where Klein is surrounded by G-d’s heavenly hosts.

Klein identifies with the image of a modern prophetic figure. Prophecy is founded on the “basic premise that G-d makes his will known to chosen individuals in successive generations. A prophet is a charismatic individual endowed with the divine gift of both receiving and imparting the message of revelation...The prophet is overwhelmed by revelation and becomes word possessed but he does not lose his identity.” The prophet must translate revelation to the common people and must bear the burden of being chosen. In many of Klein’s poems, psalms and in his novel he takes on the image of a modern prophetic figure, which means that he depicts himself as having an elevated role of an intermediary figure between G-d and man, it also means that he praises the deity and laments. Unlike the definition of a prophet in the encyclopedia, Klein does not reveal divine revelation in his poetry. In the works of Layton and Cohen the role of
prophetic visionary is more clearly defined than in Klein's work. However, the first traces of this prophetic role that the Canadian Jewish poets undertake, is evident in the works of Klein. As a modern prophetic figure, Klein writes psalms, a second scroll reflecting the same structure as the Bible and poetry that reflects his closeness to the deity that is one step above the rest of humankind. It seems as if Klein borrows elements of traditional biblical literature in his own work in order to update the Bible and its psalms to be relevant to modern times and also to continue the pattern of documenting Jewish history. As a poet, whose verse mirrors that of biblical literature, Klein has taken on a complex role. Klein has maintained his ties to traditional Jewish themes while approaching modern styles of poetry and he has approached traditional Jewish themes while maintaining his ties to biblical styles and themes.

Klein defines his role of prophet as an important figure in the Jewish community that is a part of their social unit but also one step beyond to an intermediary figure with G-d and the people and one who has been chosen. In the poem "Epitaph" (1930) it reads: "And you, O traveler, may laugh/ Seeing what is the end of me;/ You may revile my threnody/ And you may scorn my epitaph. / But I beneath this fertile sod/ Will surely find a peaceful lapse, / Yea, I may lay my head, perhaps, / Upon the very knees of G-d." When he says that he rests his head on the knees of G-d, it implies a deeper connection to the divine than that of a regular person. In "Psalm XXII, A Prayer for Abraham Against Madness" (1944), The poem reads: "Lord, for the days allotted me, / Preserve me whole, preserve me hale! / Spare me the scourge of surgery. / Let not my blood nor members fail. / But if thy will is otherwise, / And I am chosen such an one/ For maiming and for maladies/ So be it; and Thy will be done." Klein speaks about being chosen for maiming instead of being chosen for receiving a divine message. He suggests that he is chosen for maiming because as a poet he is not respected or appreciated by his audience. By this statement he makes himself into a martyr figure, he is chosen by G-d to be maimed on behalf of the Jewish people. It suggests that he has sacrificed his recognition by following G-d's will. The following verse demonstrates an intimate relationship between the poet and G-d. The poet speaks of days allotted to him as if acknowledging that his life is pre-determined by G-d. He begs for G-d's mercy on behalf of himself, just as biblical prophets prayed for G-d's mercy on behalf of the Jewish people.

The scholarly view of Klein's relationship to his community mirrors that of Klein's own perception of this relationship. Zailig Pollock provides a detailed analysis of Klein's
reception by his audience in *The Story of the Poet*. It is a story that Klein re-tells at different points in his career that changes as he re-defines his role in the community. Pollock aligns this story of the poet to Spinoza’s concept of the one in the many. Klein is the one in the many, who is concurrently a part of the landscape in which he finds the divine presence. As the one in the many, the poet is also the lone voice in the community. In Klein’s life, he could not approach the community on his own terms unlike Layton and he could not express his self-doubt and feelings of abandonment by the community in the public sphere but this is expressed in his poetry and it is reflected in the story of the poet. There is a sense in both the story of the poet and in Klein’s life that he has so much to offer the community that rejects him. The poet is engaged “in an unending search for a unifying pattern underlying the bewildering multiplicity of the world, for and effective, valid real unity which makes the world one.” In Pollock’s *Story of the Poet*, Klein describes the world as fragmented and the only way to unify it is to remember the body of the one. In Klein’s poetry and Pollock’s *Story of the Poet*, he expresses both a love and a disdain for his people.

In “Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens” *Hath Not a Jew* (1940) Klein questions the Jewish community from different periods in history. Klein mentions Benedict or his Hebrew name, Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) who was a Dutch philosopher born in Amsterdam. According to *Encyclopedia Judaica*, “in early 1656, Spinoza, a Spanish doctor, Juan de Prado and a schoolteacher, Daniel de Ribera began to attract attention for their heretical opinions, questioning, among other matters, whether Moses wrote the Pentateuch, whether Adam was the first man, and whether the Mosaic law took precedence over natural law.” Spinoza also held the view, as documented by a report to the Spanish inquisition that described him as denying the immortality of the soul and suggesting that G-d only exists philosophically. Spinoza suggested that G-d and nature were of the same substance from which everything was created. For these views, Spinoza was excommunicated, cursed by the Jewish community and his life was even threatened for his concept of G-d.

Klein’s poem “Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens” reads: “paunchy sons of Abraham/ Spit on the maculate streets of Abraham/ Showing Spinoza, Baruch alias Benedict/ He and his G-d are under interdict.” By saying “he and his G-d are under edict” it is as if to say that Benedict and G-d have been divided by the community and they are both marginalized. In verse five, “Reducing providence to theorems, the horrible atheist compiled/ such lore that proved, like proving two and two make four, that
in/ the crown of G-d we are all gems. From glass and dust of glass he/ brought to light, out of the pulver and the polished lens, the prism/ and the flying mote; and hence the infinitesimal and infinite."\(^{42}\) In verse eight "For thou art the world, and I am part thereof; thou art the blossom/ and I its fluttering petal...Thou art everywhere; a pillar to thy sanctuary is every blade of / grass./ Wherefore I said to the wicked, Go to the ant, thou sluggard, seek thou and audience with G-d./ On the swift wings of a star, even on the numb legs of a snail, thou/ dost move, O Lord...The flowers of the field, they are kith and kin to me; the lily my/ sister, the rose is my blood and flesh/...For thou art the world, and I am part thereof.” In this poem Klein emphasizes how the one and the many are part of each other or in other words the poet is part of nature and part of G-d.

"Out of the Pulver and Polished Lens" continues with verse nine, “Think of Spinoza, then, not as you think/ Of Shabbatai Zvi who for a time of life/ Took to himself the Torah for a wife,/ And underneath the silken canopy...Spinoza, gathering flowers for the One, / The ever-unwedded lover of the Lord.”\(^{43}\) In the verses of Klein’s poem, it suggests that Klein is in accordance with Spinoza’s theory that we are all a part of G-d and that G-d is a part of nature. Essentially, we are all one, and we are all connected. He asks G-d to not look upon Spinoza as he would look upon Shabbatai Zvi, the false Messiah, but he pleads for G-d to look upon Spinoza as one who is a servant of the Lord. Klein distinguishes between Shabbatai Zvi and Spinoza.

The reference to Shabbatai Zvi is explored in the Encyclopedia Judaica. Shabbatai Zvi (1626-1676) was "born in Smyrna on the Ninth of Av, 1626, unless the date was manipulated to conform with the tradition that the Messiah would be born on the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple...he was destined by his family to become a hakham, a member of the rabbinic elite."\(^{44}\) From 1642-1648 he suffered from manic depression and he was compelled to say the name of G-d in public, to perform strange rituals in ecstatic states and he proclaimed himself to be the Messiah. He got into trouble with his community when he celebrated a ceremonial nuptial service with the Torah and he was expelled from Salonika by the rabbis in 1658.

For Klein Shabbatai Zvi represented a figure to be looked upon negatively because of his pretentiousness in his presumption that he was the Messiah and thus he represented a falsity for his own benefit of recognition. In contrast, Spinoza was a figure that Klein identified with because he tried to present the truth and his community scorned him, just as Klein felt abandoned. Both of these figures did not sacrifice their own ideas and values on behalf of the community and they had to suffer for it. By this
It can be argued that Spinoza did not follow a traditional route in his religious views and he paid the price for his disobedience of rabbinic order. Klein was a skeptic of religion similarly to Spinoza and he may have felt alienated for the same skepticism and feeling of not fitting in despite the fact that he was a pivotal figure in the Jewish community. There are reflections of the way Klein viewed his relationship to the community and his relationship to G-d. Klein is the poet symbolically excommunicated by his community, condemned to suffer the fates of Spinoza and Uriel da Costa who defied the community by challenging the norm. Klein identifies with Spinoza as one who not only challenges the community but also one who is a servant of the Lord.

Similarly to Spinoza, Klein was a skeptic of religion, particularly demonstrated in *Hath Not a Jew* (1940). In "Guide to the Perplexed," (1940) there is the depiction of a questioning of faith. "Guide to the Perplexed," reads "the paleface mutters: Lord G-d is a myth; do you your genuflexions to the Rose/ Be merry, eat and drink, the large paunch crows/ the worms adore a man of gust and pith." An article from the *Chelsea Journal* in 1975 suggested that "in a few radical poems of social concern that he published between 1932 and 1938 he turns to a Marxist, reformist approach and religion and its institutions are present only as part of the establishment weighing down the workers." Klein questioned faith in G-d in various poems yet he remained connected to the Jewish culture and loyal to serving the Jewish community.

In "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" in *The Rocking Chair* (1948), Klein describes the way he perceives his reception by the Jewish community and consequently how he defines himself based on this relationship. The poem reads: "Not an editorial writer, bereaved with Bartlett,/ mourns him, the shelved Lycidas. / No actress squeezes a glycerine tear for him. / The radio broadcast lets his passing pass. / And with the police, no record. Nobody, it appears, either under his real name or his alias,/ missed him enough to report." There is no recognition for the poet even the police are not notified. It continues, "It is possible that he is dead, and not discovered. / It is possible that he can be found some place/ in a narrow closet, like the corpse in a detective story,/ standing, his eyes staring, and ready to fall on his face. / It is also possible that he is alive/ and amnesiac, or mad, or in retired disgrace,/ or beyond recognition lost in love./ We are sure only that from our real society/ he has disappeared; he simply does not count/ except in the pullulation of vital statistics-/ somebody’s vote, perhaps, an anonymous taunt/ of the Gallup poll,/ a dot in a government table." Klein writes about how nobody cares about the poet who has disappeared. The poem reads
“O, he who unrolled our culture from his scroll-/ the prince’s quote, the rostrum rounding
roar-/ who under one name made articulate/ heaven, and under another the seven-
circled air,/ is, if he is at all, a number, an x,/ a Mr. Smith in a hotel register-/ incognito,
lost, lacunal.” Despite the fact that he has “unrolled our culture from its scroll,” by
writing a second scroll and by contributing to Jewish Canadian literature, he is not
recognized as doing anything important or being one who should be missed. He writes,
“he who under one name made articulate heaven,” as if to say he took on a prophetic
role by having an intimate connection with the heavenly realm, but he is still not
recognized as an important figure.

Klein defines himself as a poet that has been ignored by his community. He
describes how he blends in to the Canadian landscape in a negative context. He is not
recognized to the extent that he blends in and disappears within the landscape. The
landscape and Judaism are his two muses of inspiration, but in this poem they both
function to make him oblivious to the community. Part II of this poem, reads “The truth is
he’s not dead, but ignored-/ like the mirroring lenses forgotten on a brow/ that shine with
the guilt of their unnoticed world. / The truth is he lives among neighbors, who, though
they will allow/ him a passable fellow, think him eccentric, not solid,/…Himself he has
moods, just like a poet/ Sometimes, depressed to nadir, he will think all lost.”

In the following passages of “Portrait of a Poet as Landscape,” Klein’s passion for
writing is so intense that it is likened to a sexual love affair with words that acts as his
comfort while he feels ignored by his community. The poem reads “Then he will
remember his travels over that body-/ the torso verb, the beautiful face of the noun, / and
all those shaped and warm auxiliaries! / A first love it was, the recognition of his own./
Dear limbs adverbial, complexion of adjective, / dimple and dip of conjugation.” In the
midst of his self-pity, he remembers his first love, which helps him carry on and keep
writing. Part iv of the poem refers to the commercialization of his poetry. It reads, “So
he guesses at the impertinent silhouette/ that talks to his phone-piece and slits open his
mail./ Is it the local tycoon who for a hobby/ plays poet.” This verse may refer to Klein’s
relationship with Bronfman the reference to the local tycoon who plays poet is fitting for
Bronfman who used Klein’s speeches and poetic statements to create his public image.
There is an angry tone to this verse, which may reflect the poet’s discomfort with the
exploitation of his writing for commercial gain. In paragraph vi, “he/ makes of his status
as zero a rich garland/ a halo of anonymity/ and lives alone, and in his secret shines/ like
phosphorous. At the bottom of the sea.” The jewel shining at the bottom of the sea is
the essence of Klein's self-image, he is a jewel that is lost and cannot reach the surface of the sea, or the pinnacle of the community's adoration.

Another one of Klein's central themes, besides the plight of the poet and the reception by his audience was the Jewish culture and heritage. Klein grew up in an Orthodox family where he studied in Hebrew school and even pondered becoming a rabbi in his youth. Klein's biographer Usher Caplan describes his relationship to Judaism, "as a young boy in a religious home, Klein was taught to observe all of the customs and rituals of Orthodox Judaism; life followed the rhythm of the Jewish calendar. Every Friday evening and Saturday morning all starched up, as he later recalled- he would accompany his father to the synagogue." In the beginning of Klein's literary career he took inspiration from the Jewish culture, traditions and heritage that shaped his poetic themes. In his writing "more than any other modern Jewish writer, Klein summoned up a Judaic world which he regarded as precious and desirable, but admitted ruefully that the clarity and security it once exuded are no longer felt." His connection to the Jewish culture, folklore and mythology shaped his poetry, but it must be noted that he was not a religious man.

This connection that Klein felt towards his religion is evident in his poetry.

"Heirloom," *Hath Not a Jew* (1940) reads: "My father bequeathed me no wide estates;/ No keys and ledgers were my heritage;/ Only some holy books with yahrzeit dates/ Writ mournfully upon a blank front page-/ Books of the Baal Shem Tov, and of his wonders;/ Pamphlets upon the devil and his crew;/ Prayers against road demons, witches, thunders;/ And sundry other tomes for a good Jew.

This poem shows the connection Klein felt towards his Jewish ancestry. Klein's father did not leave him vast estates but something more important, he bequeathed him the book of the *Torah* that contains a code of law that is a guideline for the way Klein should ideally live his life. "Autobiographical" *Hath Not a Jew* (1942) shows Klein's connection towards Jewish traditions and folklore, it reads:

"Out of the ghetto streets where a Jewboy/ Dreamed pavement into pleasant Bible-land,/ Out of the Yiddish slums where childhood met/ The friendly beard, the loutish Sabbath-goy/ Or followed, proud, the Torah-escorting band,/ Out of the jargoning city I regret,/ Rise memories, like sparrows rising from/ The gutter-scattered oats, / Like sadness sweet of synagogal hum, / Like Hebrew violins.

In this poem Klein demonstrates his connection to the biblical tales and how he turns the immigrant ghetto into distant and remote biblical lands that are alive through narrative and imagination.
A.M. Klein was truly the patriarch of Canadian Jewish literature. He was actively involved in the Jewish community his entire life. The community provided Klein with a sense of belonging, yet that may have driven Klein to silence. Klein did not just want to belong to the community he wanted to be recognized as someone different. He wanted to be revered for his efforts as a poet and as the patriarch of the Canadian Jewish voice. He played the role of spokesman in the Jewish community in order to fulfill the needs of the community during turbulent times for Jews in Canada and in Europe. The community recognized him as a spokesman who served the needs of the community when there was overt anti-Semitism in Canada. However, the community failed to place an emphasis on Klein's role as a poet and when his poetry was highlighted it was to serve his role as a Jewish poet, thereby blending poetry with his role as a Jewish spokesman. Klein also tried to cause controversy in his writing, to write with a prophetic voice and to express a connection to Abraham as well as to create a modern Bible that documented modern tragedies and triumphs in *The Second Scroll*, all of which the community did not respond to favorably. Klein did not receive the recognition that he craved for his poetic efforts and for the many ideals he tried to evoke in his writing.

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51 A.M. Klein, 157-158.
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Irving Layton: The Canadian Jewish Poet

Irving Layton has been venerated as Canada's most controversial yet celebrated poet. Layton has contributed fifty volumes of poetry and has been an international representative of Canada's literary elite. This study examines Layton's self-image, which includes the roles that he undertook and his perception of the way he was received by his community. It also examines the way the Jewish community viewed the poet. Layton's private and public controversies have come to the forefront in the media, which capitalized on Layton's contentious opinions. The Jewish press has also celebrated the controversial poet who has tried to be both a spokesman on behalf of Jewish causes and a Messianic figure in his writings. Layton is the second-generation poet who took on the same struggle as A.M. Klein to not be limited to the category of a Jewish poet but to be thought of as a Canadian Jewish poet with universal themes. Layton fought to have a broader definition by the press and he achieved his goal, therefore, through the merit of his own achievement, he should be regarded as one of the pivotal figures in Canadian Jewish literature.

Layton came on to the literary scene at a time when it was in the initial stages of development in Canada. He argued that before he arrived on the literary scene, Canada was a cultural wasteland where mainly American or English poets work made their way into the school systems. The "possibility or likelihood of a Canadian poet living in our midst was scarcely to be entertained or only as an oddity and publishing firms mainly located in Toronto, for the most part printed textbooks or acted as clearance houses for the British and American counterparts." Layton said that since the end of the war no country produced such vast amounts of creative works as Canada.

This portrait of Irving Layton examines the times in which he lived and the events that shaped his generation. It also concentrates on the changing image of the poet in different generations. The first section examines Layton's biography and his reception by the local Jewish community, which was constantly in transition as he changed his public image. The second section examines Layton's self-image; similar to the other two poets, he tried to be a spokesman, a controversial figure and a biblical figure in modern times.

I

Israel Lazarovitch was born in the village of Tirgul Neamt in Romania in 1912 to Clara and Moshe Lazarovitch. In the Old Country, Moshe worked as a bookkeeper while maintaining his commitment to Orthodox Jewish life. The Lazarovitch family immigrated
to Montreal when Irving was one year old. Layton was shaped by his immigrant family's Old World ideals and the enticing freedoms of modernity that he found in Canada. Layton became a peddler and when he decided to enroll at Baron Byng High School, he encountered opposition from his family. Their Old World ideals led to their discouragement of higher education in favor of a traditional Jewish occupation. Layton stayed in school despite his family's urgings for him to follow a career as a peddler.

Layton went through his schoolboy years tormenting teachers and one month before Layton was supposed to graduate from Baron Byng he was expelled. Layton was able to attend university with the help of David Lewis and A.M. Klein who influenced his decision to write the entrance exam at McGill University and with the help of Klein's tutoring in Latin, Layton succeeded. In fact, A.M. Klein gave him money for his tuition when he could not afford to pay for it. Layton attended MacDonald College and he received a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture and a Masters degree in Political Science and Economics.

Layton met Klein through David Lewis who was the leader of the Young People Socialist League Club. In Layton's youth "everybody flocked to see if Lewis and Klein were debating against anyone, and they put on a tremendous show," and what they gave him was a "model, some kind of an image of what a Jew can achieve." Klein was a role model and a teacher for the budding poet, Irving Layton. Layton recounted Klein's mentorship role: "I brought Klein one of my short stories and even though it was not a particularly good one, he went over it very carefully. It was this genial kindness that struck me, his willingness to spend time with someone several years his junior, and to talk about poetry, writing and politics." The relationship between Irving Layton and A.M. Klein was initially based on mentorship and then it became a close friendship. Klein would often meet Layton for coffee to discuss politics, poetry and the status of the Jewish people. In addition, Klein acted as a critic of Layton's work. Layton remembered how he "brought him his earliest poems and stories and he would scan them and offer some criticism here and there but it was mainly that he was there on the scene, that here was a Jew who was a poet and somehow or other he was surviving." Klein was a mentor for Layton, providing him with a model of Jewish poet in Canada. Klein's "presence as a Jew and a poet who had achieved a distinction made it clear that writing was an avenue open to him as he put it much later, Klein's very existence persuaded me that the poet need not be completely a leper, an outcast." Klein came on to the literary scene at a time when poetry was not
as widespread as it was in the 1960’s when it was popularized by the move of poetry to
a younger audience who could afford paperback instead of hard cover editions and the
Beat poetry movement in America. Layton commented on the times that effected Klein
when he wrote poetry, in an interview he said the following: “in 1942, when as well as a
beard you had to have talent to prove you were a poet- I used to go to see him. Today
you can’t walk anywhere without tripping over a poet, but in those days poetry was a
secret vice." It was due to this fact that poetry was a secret vice at the time, that Layton
was enticed by it and both Layton and Cohen respected Klein even more for being the
first Jewish poet to write in English.

To Layton, Klein was the ultimate poet, in that he was a unique human being or
“a different kind of animal.” Layton “has fond memories of Klein who would spend the
final years of his life as a recluse, I liked his wit, his ready humor and eloquence, he was
that marvelous unique creature, a poet." Klein represented the essence of the Montreal
literary milieu that Layton further developed. Klein paved the way for other Jewish
Canadian poets to have a voice. Layton acknowledged the importance of poets from
Klein’s generation. In the early “forties, it was Montreal where Canada’s first sounds of
poetry were heard. There a cluster of gifted poets seemed to be fashioning new images
and rhythms, new techniques to capture the staccato vibrations of world shaking itself
free from Victorian reprehensiveness and conspiracy.

Klein and Layton were able to connect based on their close ties to the immigrant
experience. Although Klein was born in Canada, his parents were immigrants and he
lived in the immigrant neighborhood during his youth. Layton was born in Europe and he
also lived in the immigrant neighborhood in Montreal and therefore the two poets could
identify with one another based on this shared experience. In a letter that Layton wrote
to Klein on August 10th, 1948, he expressed his deep connection to Klein’s imagery of
the immigrant experience. The images in Klein’s poetry related to the imagination of a
child and the life of an immigrant youth, Layton wrote “reading your poems give me the
uncanny feeling that someone else besides myself was in my skin living my boyhood
days.” Klein and Layton chose poetry to express their longing, loss and adjustment to
the New World.

In the mid-fifties Layton changed his attitude towards Klein. Instead of regarding
Klein as the role model, mentor and poetic voice for Canadian Jews, one of Layton’s
letters noted that he thought of Klein as lacking imagination and whatever ingenuity he
had was mistaken for wit, as well, he claimed that Klein feared modernism. In a letter
written to Desmond Pacey, in November 13, of 1956, Mansbridge’s collection noted that Layton claimed that Klein was “best when he was remembering the past or contemplating failure” and “read The Second Scroll, where the hero returned to the Orthodox faith of his fathers and this in modern Israel which has today a higher percentage of atheists and unbelievers than any other place in the world.” Layton may have said this because he believed that Klein was not a modern poet in the fullest sense of the term. Although Klein was classified as a modern poet, he still used many traditional forms and traditional themes. As well, Klein displayed a deep connection to images of Orthodox Judaism in his writing, which Layton rejected. Layton argued that he embraced modernism whereas Klein feared it. In a letter written in November 1956 to Desmond Pacey, Layton wrote “the truth of the matter is that Klein, disliking the modern world and fearing it, withdrew from it to proud and bitter isolation, I know this view runs counter to what you and other critics have written about him.” This change of attitude towards Klein was progressive. In one of Layton’s letters, he acknowledged that Klein was his first mentor and in later letters there was a dramatic change in his opinion of Klein.

There were many factors that led to Layton’s change of opinion about Klein from a mentor to a pitiful fallen poet. The first reason had to do with his view of Klein’s tragic story when he did not receive the recognition that he deserved. Layton felt sorry for the poet he once admired. In Layton’s opinion Klein went from being an admired servant of his audience to a victim of his audience. The second reason had to do with Klein’s stubborn need to maintain intolerant views towards “the homosexual, the failure, and the man who had turned his back on family obligations, for them he had scant sympathy, here the repressed bourgeois was clearly revealed.” Layton maintained liberal views about such issues whereas Klein maintained traditional views. Therefore, they could not relate to each other in the way that they had in the past. Thirdly, Layton believed that Klein’s “mental development had far outstripped his emotional one; and of all the poets I have ever met, no one had less insight or even interest in human beings than he did.” Finally, in regards to Klein’s Jewish poems Layton found that G-d was not an abstraction for the Jew, but the “old man with the flowing beard” and “only I used to feel that Klein often took liberties with that beard, permitting himself since his motives were so impeccable, a jovial tug to make the old man bend down to listen to his lisping pronouncements.” This implied that Klein’s undertaking of the prophetic voice in his poetry was deemed to be offensive to Layton. It seemed that Layton found Klein’s
descriptions of G-d to be offensive and his role as a poet to be presumably greater than it actually should have been. If Klein took liberties with the image of G-d in his poetry, Layton took liberties in the images of humankind in his poetry.

Their relationship changed as a result of Layton's growing celebrity as he increased his publications in *First Statement*. When Layton started to be recognized by the media and the general public, he felt as if he no longer wanted Klein as a mentor. In fact, Layton made a distinction between himself as a modern poet and Klein who was part of the "old school" poets of Canada, despite the fact that Klein published in *New Provinces*, the competing journal to *First Statement*. *New Provinces* "had been edited by A.J.M. Smith and F.R. Scott in 1936" and "both poets thought of themselves as decidedly modern, international and daring, their idea of modern poetry was manifest in their selection, poems by A.M. Klein, Leo Kennedy, Robert Finch, E.J. Pratt and of course themselves."¹⁵ Scholars such as Elspeth Cameron argued that this contempt had to do with the fact that Layton was not the pivotal figure in Canadian Jewish poetry but he was Klein's successor.

Upon Klein's death it seemed that Layton reconciled his anger towards Klein but not his anger towards the Jewish community. In August 30th of 1972, Layton wrote a letter to his lover Musia Schwartz from Greece. In that letter he told Musia that he received a letter from Seymour Mayne informing him of Klein's death. Layton described the news of Klein's death as "evil news," and he lost an "older brother." Layton's letter addressed his anger towards the Jewish community: "I have many grudges against the Jewish community of Montreal but the tragic waste of his life especially the silent two decades at the end, is the one I shall keep in mind the longest," and "the best the Jewish millionaires in and out of congress could do was to send him on a fund raising mission that broke his spirit and finally silenced him."¹⁶ Layton described the events that happened to Klein in his poem "Letter to No One in Particular," where he called the Jewish community "the stinking world of stinking ostentatious vulgarians, the accursed bastards forever in conspiracy against the children of light and the crapulous bleary eyed bitches."¹⁷ In this poem, Layton expressed his anger towards the Jewish community in their maltreatment of Klein. Layton's use of derogatory language to describe the Jewish community indicated that he blamed the community for not honoring Klein despite the fact that he has stated on many occasions that after 1939 he felt compelled to be involved in the Jewish community.
Irving Layton was not only influenced by A.M. Klein but he was also affected by the times in which he lived. Growing up in the years of the depression "spawned endless talk of revolution, oppression and exploitation, Marxist rhetoric provided Layton with ammunition in his assault on Anglophone Canada." Layton took inspiration from these turbulent times and wrote deeper poetry from them. Layton’s memoir *Waiting for the Messiah* (1985) depicted the environment in which Layton spent his childhood as one of segregated groups of Jews, French and English. Layton discussed the different worlds in which the French Canadians and the Jews lived in and how the Jews could not expect equal treatment. Layton described the helplessness of the Jews: “the French Canadians were there to harry street walkers or to see that my mother kept her small grocery store closed on Sundays” and “we could do nothing but stand our ground and suffer.” In his memoir, he described a time that he wanted to call the police but he decided not to because they were French Canadians that were considered to be the “others” whom Layton believed added to the hostility towards Jews.

Layton encountered harsh anti-Semitism in his life, which greatly affected his attitudes towards non-Jews later in life. In Layton’s youth he became aware that “Jews were different, Layton had to put up with anti-Semitic taunts and heavily armed gangs that descended upon their street on Easter, you could lose an eye, have a leg broken or get your face badly cut up, if you were unlucky you might get killed.” Layton described himself as an outsider in both the Anglophone and the Francophone environments. In an interview in the 1970’s Layton commented, that it “was the beginning of my suspicion that all was not well in wasp land and that there was some kind of difference between myself and wasps.” Layton’s choice of words to describe the Anglophones was derogatory, when he labeled them as “wasp s.” Layton maintained a prejudice against English and French people that began in his childhood and continued in adulthood.

The turbulent times and divisions had an affect on Layton and affected themes in his work and attitudes in his life. According to Layton “things that were troubling Klein, Scott, Smith and Pratt were not troubling us, these earlier poets writing in the magazine *Preview*, were still trying to decide whether this was a moral universe or not; the poets of the forties decided it was not.” The poets of Klein’s generation were still struggling with figuring out if this was a moral universe or not because they had not come to terms with the Holocaust, whereas Layton’s generation had come to terms with the Holocaust and they concluded that it was a result of the fact that it was not a moral universe. This was also evident in their poetry, where Klein’s poetry exhibited a sense of naïveté and in
contrast, Layton’s poetry overwhelmingly expressed a cynical tone. Layton’s view doubted the morality of the universe, which was expressed in violent and grotesque imagery in his poetry whereas Klein’s poetry maintained an innocence that suggested that he was not quick to condemn the universe as immoral.

In his early adulthood in the 1940’s Layton’s literary career took off when he left his first wife Faye for his second wife, Betty Sutherland. Betty’s brother John Sutherland was an aspiring writer and together with Louis Dudek and Layton, founded First Statement. The intent of this magazine was to “broaden the range of Canadian poetry, both in its emotions and in its subject matter- objecting to the English models often used by the Preview poets, they moved Canadian poetry to a greater realization of its North American context.” Layton published his own work in the magazine and gained wide exposure. After the success of the magazine, Layton’s partner, John Sutherland started a press company and published Layton’s first chapbook entitled Here and Now (1945).

The initial stages of Layton’s literary career were his publications in modernist journals such as A.J. M. Smith’s New Provinces. Modern poetry was a new way of poetic expression that reflected the times and ensuing events. According to Layton “the newer poets of the decade, Dudek, Souster, Miriam Waddington, myself and others had been formed by the depression of the thirties and the Second World War- years of misery and tumult.” Modern poetry was not limited to rhyme schemes but it consisted of free verse poems. As well, modern poetry did not follow traditional patterns that many English poets used in their work. Modernism came about in the cities and it expressed new social realities.

In 1956 Layton achieved wider recognition among both the Jewish community and Canadian literary circles. In 1957 and in 1959, Layton received Canada council grants, which proved that he was gaining recognition as a major Canadian voice. In 1969, Layton was offered a tenure position as a professor at York University where he worked until retirement. In 1971 Layton received an honorary doctorate from Bishop’s and he spent a few months in Australia in 1976, which facilitated his involvement in the international literary milieu.

From the 1960’s to 1980’s the creative expression of Irving Layton as well as numerous other Jewish writers flourished. There were a number of historians such as the Canadian Jewish Congress’ David Rome who wrote updated histories of the Jewish people in Canada in the 1970’s. Layton followed Klein by writing about the Holocaust. Miriam Waddington’s poetry reflected Yiddishkeit, “Adele Wiseman’s Sacrifice, Mordecai
Richler’s *Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* and the poetry of Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen shone as major literary achievements of that era. In the 1970’s these Jewish literary figures and particularly Layton followed Klein by writing about immigrant life in Montreal and the Holocaust.

In 1987 in an article in the CJN about Layton’s birthday gala, the message was evoked that the community was not doing all that they could to help poets. The article described the party in honor of Layton’s seventy-fifth birthday where three hundred and fifty people showed up to honor Layton. The evening “was a tribute to Layton’s life and work, it was also a benefit to help defray some of Layton’s current medical costs, doctors have recommended that he have twenty-four Hour care.” Roma Gelblum Bross, the event’s organizer, said that Layton was a symbol for many artists in Canada “one of the reasons I became involved in this event is because our society does not have enough resources for its creative people... look what happens, Irving Layton, the greatest poet in this country, a man who devoted all his life to the culture of this country is in need in his old age.” The article described how the community pulled together to support one of Canada’s premier poets in a time when the Canadian government bestowed on Layton what they would to any other citizen.

Before the analysis of Layton’s relationship to the Jewish community it is necessary to examine his relationship to Judaism. Layton rejected the Jewish traditions and laws of Orthodoxy after his father’s death. In an interview with scholar Mervin Butovsky, Layton was questioned how he reconciled himself to the Orthodoxy of his parents. Layton responded that “the revolt came after the death of my father, I had doubts when I was about eight or nine, very pragmatic doubts, because going to the synagogue interfered with more interesting things like playing baseball.” These doubts were evident in Layton’s youth when he refused to say Kaddish, the prayer for the dead after his father’s passing, he reasoned “with my young brain that my saying the Kaddish was not going to help my father at all.” In addition, Layton refused to have a bar mitzvah, “by the time I was 13 or 14, I was well on the way to agnosticism, if not actual atheism, and I had begun to question the pieties of my parents and forefathers.” Even into adulthood Layton brought his rejection of Orthodoxy into his work as a teacher at a Jewish day school Herziliah where he was fired for trying to influence young students against Orthodox Judaism. When interviewed at the age of seventy-five, after the publication of *Fortunate Exile* (1987) and many other collections of poetry, he maintained the same skepticism for the Jewish laws.
"I don't like to see Orthodoxy equated with Judaism. It is devitalizing because being a Jew transcends the Orthodoxy of the rabbinate... the amazing thing about the Jewish heritage is that is combines faith and skepticism. A real Jew is one with vision, not dogma." ²⁹

This was similar to Klein's depiction of Spinoza who was rejected by the Jewish community and deemed to be a heretic for his view that G-d and nature were one. Spinoza deviated from the norm; he did not follow traditional Jewish views perpetuated by rabbinical authorities and therefore he was persecuted. Layton seemed to be suggesting that there needed to be a new type of Judaism, one in which there were no set traditions but one in which individual vision took precedence. Just as Spinoza deviated from traditional Judaism, Layton suggested that Jews do the same. In a contrasting view, Klein's Spinoza was condemned for only being skeptical and lacking faith, which was dissimilar to Layton's view that Judaism combined both faith and skepticism. Layton shared with Klein a willingness to identify with skeptics such as Spinoza and to see them as a legitimate part of Judaism because he was also a skeptic of organized religion. Layton's new Jewish consciousness was in favor of a general spirituality that consisted of visions instead of set prayers.

Irving Layton's relationship to the Jewish community changed at different times in his life. During the time that Layton was the president of the Young People Socialist League in high school he abandoned his communal ties. When questioned about his relationship to the Jewish community during this time in an interview with Butovsky, he replied-

"I had abandoned the Jewish community in the sense that I was a Socialist and I, like so many of my generation, foolishly believed that Socialism was the answer to anti-Semitism. I swallowed the troubles that the Jew had endured for many, many centuries. A naive faith, which as I say was shared by so many Jews of my generation whether it was Trotsky or Zinoviev or a Rosa Luxemburg; whether in Germany or in France or in Russia or here in Canada or the United States. It must be remembered that this was the great attraction, which the Soviet Union exerted on the minds of many young Jews, so I was one who was a little more critical than the others because of my love for literature, but nevertheless accepting the myths in their main outlines, as a result I looked upon the Jewish festivals and holidays and practices with a considerable degree of disdain." ³⁰

One of the reasons Layton abandoned the Jewish community during this time was a rejection of the "materialism of Jewish social life." When Layton married Faye Lynch he found himself back in the Jewish community, of Halifax instead of Montreal. Layton recounted his attitudes towards the Jewish community of Halifax: the "main thing the
Jews of Halifax had on their minds were money-making and bar mitzvahs and the rabbi's orotund platitudes that asked to be taken for profundities. Sam Jacobsen said to him you know you are disgracing the Jewish community here, I've a report that you're a member of the Communist party and we can't tolerate this. We're a good Jewish community and we've never been in trouble with the law. We want to keep our good name.  

Layton's return to his people came following his disenchantment with Socialism in 1937-38 where he "began to have strong doubts as to whether Socialism was going to cure this radical sin that we call anti-Semitism and then when I began to teach the first newcomers at the Jewish Public Library and I heard their stories, because many of them were survivors from the death camps, my turnabout was complete." Although Layton claimed that he mentally moved away from the Jewish community during his early adulthood, he remained a physical part of the Jewish community. Layton taught classes at the Jewish Public library, Jewish Immigrant Aid Society, the Jewish Public Library, Herziliah High School and the Jewish Teachers Seminary. He worked at these Jewish institutions for many years, so no matter how much he may have separated himself from Jewish life, he was an important educational guide for members of the Jewish community.

According to Butovsky's interview with Layton when asked if Layton's role as a teacher in Jewish institutions was an intrusion into Jewish society and an almost undercover spokesman for altering the "crudities" of Jewish social life- Layton said "much as I might disagree with them, I felt that I was on the same wave length with them that I was sharing a common destiny and a common history of misunderstanding and persecution and then a great development of pride in the achievements of my people, a consciousness of their unique place in the world so that far from rejecting them I began to pity anyone who was not a Jew." Layton clearly depicts his devotion to the Jewish people as a whole despite the conflicts that he has with the local Jewish community.

Articles on Irving Layton stressed the importance of Judaism to him despite the fact that he was not a religious Jew. In 1987 in a CJN article entitled "Layton's Turbulent Early Years," Sheldon Kirshner reported on events in Layton's life and his religious upbringing. The CJN naturally highlighted Layton's Jewish roots and emphasized how he regarded his childhood with nostalgia. In one article there was a reflection of Layton's Jewish upbringing that included an observation of the Jewish holidays, it read: "every year just before Passover, the family would rip the wallpaper from the walls,
exposing the swarms of vermin." Although this did not sound as if Layton was
recounting his memories with nostalgia, after having read his memoir, *Waiting for the
Messiah* (1985), it was evident that this was remembered fondly. His memoir reinforced
how he felt as strong as a biblical hero when he stomped on the exposed vermin.

The *CJN* attributed the roles of Jewish prophet and spokesman for Jewish
causes to Irving Layton as well as controversial figure. The poet was not only a figure
reciting verses that made the soul rejoice. The poet was a figure that dared to say what
others chose not to reveal. The poet rejoiced and like a prophet lamented the loss,
suffering and aversion of the right path by his people. Irving Layton evoked all of the
loss, longing, happiness but he did something else that was revolutionary to any poet
who came before him. He took on a role that he tried to project in his poetry and in his
public image as a spokesman for Jewish suffering. According to the *CJN*, in an article
by Joel Yanofsky in 1987, "Layton became what he has always fancied himself, a cross
between a warrior poet and an *Old Testament* prophet- a single voice raging in the
wilderness." This meant that the article from the *CJN* understood Layton as a mixture
of a warrior poet, who fought against the existing order through controversy and an *Old
Testament* prophet who lamented on behalf of his people and begged for G-d’s mercy.

The Jewish press reinforced this view of Layton as a prophetic voice in modern
times. In a review of Layton’s book *Fortunate Exile*, that was published in 1987, Joel
Yanofsky likened Layton to biblical prophets “like the Jewish prophets and visionaries he
admires most- from King David to Sigmund Freud Layton’s isn’t in the habit of pulling
punches or avoiding controversy.” Layton argued that he began to see that “no human
life is worth living if it does not have human dignity, creativeness, freedom and love” and
“as you know I always maintained that poets are prophets and the descendants of
prophets, this is prophecy, this is vision.”

This role of spokesman was not just a role that the Montreal Jews gave to Layton
without his desire for it, it was one, which he sought after and readily accepted. He
admitted that there were times in his life when he rejected the Jewish culture and
traditions and he did not want to take on the role of spokesman but the life altering
experience for Layton was a visit in 1939 to the Jewish Public Library, when he stated:
“up to then, I was well on my way to a complete assimilation, a most a kind of scorn for
my own wonderful heritage.” The visit to the library was an experience that moved
Layton; he was surrounded by literature by Jewish writers; some books that documented
Jewish history, others that were fictional narratives. Layton was overwhelmed by the
vast amount of Jewish literature and it could only be presumed that he embraced his Jewish roots when he was faced with the fruit of the Jewish people’s contribution to literature and the need to keep the community united to stay strong. This was an example for Montreal Jewry of how a lost Jew found his way to becoming one of the strongest, leaders of Montreal Jewry and Canadian Jewry as a whole. After this visit, Kirshner reported that Layton said, “a deposit was left in my soul that influenced the rest of my life and because of that influence I found myself working in almost every Jewish institution in the city.”

In a speech at an auditorium at the 70th anniversary for the annual meeting of the Jewish Public Library, Layton conveyed how “the Jews are a people with a mission, it is their mission to spread the Jewish principles of righteousness, mercy, justice and truth throughout the world” and it was highlighted in bold letters “the Diaspora Jew is here to stay, Jews have always been a dispersed people and therefore we must come to terms with the fact and not lament the Diaspora as if it were some gross misfortune.” This statement was aimed at alleviating guilt that Jews living in the Diaspora felt by not living in the Jewish homeland. In addition, one could presume that by affirming the importance of the Diaspora he suggested that Israel as a Jewish homeland was not as significant, however this was not the case. Layton suggested that Jews were meant to be a dispersed people and living in the Diaspora should not be regarded as negative. Layton argued that it was just as important for Jews to live in the Diaspora as it was for Jews to live in Israel. Layton was a spokesman to encourage Jews to not focus on the Holocaust as the core of Jewish identity, but to look beyond, when he said: “to fix our attention wholly on the Holocaust is to overlook the tremendous accomplishments of Jews during the Renaissance, during the great Jewish period of the ninth to the fifteenth century and of the Jews of Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, France, England United States and Canada today.” Although Layton emphasized the importance of the Diaspora, he also stressed the importance of Israel in his poem entitled “For My Two Sons, Max and David” (The Shattered Plinths, 1968). The poem read: “The Jew everyone seeks to destroy, having instilled self-division/ in the heathen. / Be none of these, my sons/ My sons, be none of these/ Be gunners in the Israeli Air Force.” In this poem, Layton said that he wanted his sons to not identify with the image of a Jewish victim, but as a strong Israeli soldier.

Layton was a spokesman who also tried to change the misconceptions about poetry. He believed that high school students did not understand that there was more to
poetry than sentimental themes. He suggested that no “real Canadian poetry” found its way into Canadian textbooks. This real poetry included poems about politics, erotic/sexual imagery and social injustices. According to Layton, Canadian youths did not know that poetry should disturb them and make them think about social issues. As a poet, “he has asserted his views on many issues and questions of the day- fascism in the 1930’s, the future of the post-war world in the 1940’s, communism as a world force in the 1950’s, the war in Vietnam and the fate of Germany in the 1960’s, Canadian identity, the War Measures Act.”

An article from the CJN in 1975 seemed to have a different view of Layton as a spokesman whose words may have caused greater divisions between cultures rather than unifying relations. Layton took part in a debate that was billed as a “verbal slinging match” that functioned to divide rather than to unify Jews and Palestinians. “The Great Debate,” that was aired on Global Television, featured Layton and Sami Hadawi- a Palestinian Christian addressing whether or not Zionism was a form of racism. Layton “avoided the topic instead attacked Arab countries for oppressing ethnic and religious minorities in their midst” and “the audience, a fair number of whom appeared to be Canadians were easily swayed by Hadawis and they voted 69 to 45 in factor of the resolution condemning Zionism as a type of racism.” The heated debate included the Palestinian speaker claiming that his hatred of Zionism was comparable to Layton’s hatred of Nazism. In protection of the Zionist ideals of Herzl, Layton contrasted the “Arab’s maltreatment of minorities with Israel’s attitude towards her 400,000 Arab citizens and said that Israeli Arabs have the highest standard of living in the Middle East.” The Jewish press did not support Layton as a spokesman when he used the public forum to support his own controversial ideas that ended up backfiring on the Jewish community. In the article from the CJN that reported on the debate, the author clearly did not celebrate Layton as a spokesman, the article read: it was “at two points in the debate, Layton seemingly discredited himself with the audience by characterizing African nations that voted for the UN anti-Zionist resolution as backward and by confusing a legendary remark by Chaim Weizmann that he sought to create a Jewish state as Jewish as England was English.” In some instances such as this debate, when Layton’s controversial statements or publications caused divisions instead of unity between Jews, French and English, the press did not support Layton. In other instances when he used the public forum for his own contentious opinions, the Jewish press tried to do damage control on Layton’s image.
Layton was controversial in his writing and in his public image. In his writing he tried to challenge the decency of the Jewish community in order to negotiate his relationship with them. Layton wanted to have a relationship to the community on his own terms and therefore made his distaste for the community public knowledge, unlike Klein who revealed his frustrations only in his poetry. He had a lot to offer the community but at times they did not accept him and at times he rejected them. The types of controversy that Layton tried to create were different from those of Klein or Cohen. Layton used explicit sexual and religious imagery in his writing and in his public image he took on a persona of an egotistical womanizer.

Layton achieved celebrity through controversy by his persona of an egotistical, womanizer who brought passion into Canadian society through poetry. Layton created this persona of the poet when he realized that “to get Canadians to read his work he would have to do something sensational or disagreeable, thus contributing to his image” and “deep down he had hoped people would see that he is really a very shy, modest, decent fellow, but I don’t think that has happened yet.” Layton created this persona due to the wide interest in Canadian poetry and due to his notion that Canada was “emotionally asleep.” According to Layton “since there are no great issues and no great passions, I’ve had to make them or rather fake them.” Although the truth as to whether Layton has created a persona or not cannot truly be revealed, this study acknowledges Layton’s creation of his persona, despite the indications that it is the poet’s way of covering up some of his contentious actions. It would have been easier to place blame on his persona and applaud Layton for the creation of the self if his poetry did not display the same types of controversial opinions and imagery that he exhibited in his public image. The fact that his poetry exhibited the same egotism, sexual and grotesque imagery that did not show a respect for the female body, as his public image of an egotistical womanizer, suggests that the creation of a persona was an easy way to gain recognition and notoriety.

This persona was uncovered in the Jewish media-when Layton was 74, after three nominations for the Nobel Prize and winner of the Governor General award “he confessed that his greatest literary creation was the outrageous, womanizing lecher, known to the public as Irving Layton... I’ll go further than that, the fictional personality called Irving Layton is my most successful masterpiece equal to any character in Dickens or Thackeray.” The comparison of Layton’s persona to a character in Dickens or Thackeray suggested that Layton creation was comparable to the great authors.
narrative inventions. The author of the article wrote that Layton "had assumed that
Byronic pose as a promotional device to induce Canadians to read the fifty books of
passionate verse that he has turned out since 1945, when he first burst out onto the
literary scene, calling himself our national aphrodisiac." The CJN article reinforced
this view of Layton as an innocent bystander, with the hideous Faye bombarding the
helpless poet. It read that "by now he was married to a physically disfigured woman he
had wed out of pity and weakness, not being able to bear the idea, he left her." It was
unfortunate that the author of that article in the CJN chose to depict Faye as "physically
disfigured," when she was overweight. In his memoir, he was openly cruel in his
descriptions of his ex-wife Faye, however the Jewish press supported him. The author
of the article was trying to make excuses for Layton's actions, to evoke sympathy by his
audience, to sensationalize and to increase the awareness of Irving Layton.

Those people, whom Layton held dear to his heart, were venerated, as important
figures that influenced his life and shaped his poetry those, however, whom Layton
disfavored were shown no mercy. Elspeth Cameron, the unauthorized biographer of
Irving Layton: a Portrait made several mistakes. Layton argued that Cameron's book
was filled with fictitious information that "malign him as a sexual predator and anti-
Semitic innuendos which make it a modern Dreyfus affair...the mask was so successful
that it had been accepted as the real person." The article in the CJN recounted the
lecture at the Jewish Book Fair, where "Layton had the crowd howling with laughter as
he exposed one blooper after another that the so-called scholar had perpetrated about
Jewish customs." It was debatable if this treatment of Elspeth Cameron was a result of
his persona or a reflection of his own identity.

Some of these inconsistencies included that "his pious Orthodox father used to
drag him to the women's mikvah ritual bath used by them after menstruation; that
his father rather than his mother lit the Sabbath candles and that a marriage
arranged by a shadchan was known in Yiddish as a shotgun wedding...as for her
claim that Layton as a teacher had preyed sexually on his female students, the
poet said with amusement that the only one he'd ever slept with after classes
was the woman who became one of his five wives."
In a *CJN* article, Frank Rasky reinforced the idea that Layton's persona was alien to his real identity in an interview with Layton's current wife Anna. She lightly challenged the perceived "misconceptions" of the real poet's identity by refuting arguments about Layton held by many Canadians. In a response to a question about Layton's faults Anna said "the only flaw I've detected is that he puts too much chili pepper in his spaghetti, as for being vain, he's the most modest man I've ever met." The *CJN* viewed Layton's ego, which was an essential element to this persona, as a reflection of the fact that he was conscious of his talent. The article quoted Layton as saying that he was not a vain person, yet when asked about how he ranked himself in terms of talent he said "I'm up there with some of the good ones, like Yeats, Eliot and Robert Frost" and in terms of the function of the poet "I regard myself as a prophet and seer as in days of yore, that's because of my Jewish heritage."

*CJN* reporter, Frank Rasky, painted a touching portrait of the "misunderstood" poet by quoting Anna Pottier and his view of their marriage. Rasky described how he felt about observing Layton and his wife, he wrote that "this reporter found it rather touching to observe the affection shared by the 74 year old bard and his fifth wife, 27 year old Anna Pottier." Layton said the following about Anna: "she's extremely intelligent, emotionally honest, and with a little guidance from me, is developing into a fine poet and short story writer" Anna replied "he's my idea of a perfect husband." Then the *CJN* reporter emphasized in bold print Anna Pottier's acquired love of the Jewish culture. Anna had "since acquired a love for his Jewish culture, and obviously adores him." The fact that Layton married a "buxom, jolly faced Acadian from a village near Yarmouth, NS" may emphasized a peace between the Jewish culture and the non-Jewish world. In this case, the *CJN* tried to create a positive image of Layton by portraying him as a family man. There was also the sense that Rasky feared Layton's verbal wrath both against the community and against himself, that he depicted Layton in such a positive manner and changed the negative controversies into justifiable actions. Rasky may have feared Layton as any writer would after the poet used the public platform to verbally abuse his unauthorized biographer Elspeth Cameron for her mistakes in her text *Irving Layton: A Portrait*.

The Canadian Jewish press tried to fix the damage to Layton's image by his controversial actions that he claimed were a result of his persona. In the initial stages of his literary career he was recognized for the merit of his poetry. To keep the momentum
going the controversies and triumphs were sensationalized by the general media and Jewish press tried to do damage control. There were a few articles in the Canadian Jewish press that focused on the controversial poet when he used the public forum to voice his own political and social opinions that backfired on the Jewish community. In times that he served the Jewish community well, many articles on Layton took the negative sensational issues in his life and turned them around as being positive. In the article that featured his views on Elspeth Cameron's text, it clearly supported Layton's backlash against the scholar. In the report on his persona, it depicted Layton as fondly reminiscing about the invention of his public image, instead of regretting the deceitful nature in portraying a false image to his loyal audience. In the articles that depicted his young wife, he was shown as a devoted husband in contrast to Cameron's depiction of him as a womanizer and the CJN article depicted his relationship with his wife as a way of promoting good relationships between Jews and non-Jews.

As a celebrated poet, the Jewish and general Canadian media emphasized different elements of Irving Layton. The general Canadian media focused on the controversies surrounding Irving Layton- his philandering, the controversial ideas in For My Brother Jesus and his triumphs as a symbol of the best of the Canadian literary milieu. According to scholar Seymour Mayne, Layton's writings elicited distaste in the English Canadian sensibility found in the fifties, sixties and early seventies. In the publication of "the foreword to Now is the Place in 1948, it was obvious that the poet was addressing himself to the gentility of an English Canadian poetic tradition, to its academicism, and at the same time to public, social and political issues" and this "clash of sensibilities was not so much one of class, but of culture and ethnic background. Layton wrote from roots and experience, which were urban and Jewish in their moral, metaphysical and psychological concerns. His irony and satirical stances underlined an urgency of voice which critics found strident and distasteful." Mayne argued that Layton's predecessor A.M. Klein did not pave the way for the upheaval that Layton caused. In this sense Layton used his controversial opinions to achieve notoriety but also to challenge sensibilities of his audience. Klein's approach was to win audiences with the integrity of his writing in a passive manner due to the fact that the majority of his work did not contain shocking themes or imagery that would have given him more publicity, whereas Layton's approach was to actively shock readers and win them over with his words that challenged existing order. Klein truly did not pave the way for the
havoc that Layton caused, but through this he was able to re-negotiate his relationship to the community.

*For My Brother Jesus* was published in 1976. The thesis of the book was that Jesus should be reclaimed for the Jews as a great prophet and that the Holocaust and other calamities that befell the Jews throughout history should be blamed on Christianity. Layton argued in the preface of his book that, "it is an historical mischance, largely the work of Saint Paul, that Jesus has been wrenched from the succession of prophets and turned into a deity that intelligent gentiles are able to worship only with increasing embarrassment." He claimed that "it was Christianity that carefully prepared and seeded the ground on which Europe's gas chambers and crematoria flourished," and "it was at the Council of Nicea that Jews were officially labeled the murderers of Lord Jesus" and "it was a Pope who invented the Roman ghetto; it was not Hitler but another pope who with Christian charity and tenderness dreamed up the distinguishing yellow Badge of Shame." Layton wanted to emphasize that Christians were responsible for the Holocaust and they should be blamed for antagonism towards Jews throughout history. This argument is even more controversial than the argument that Jesus should be reclaimed for the Jews.

Layton's *For My Brother Jesus* was greeted with mixed reviews in the general media. The *CJN* did not report that favorably of Layton's venture when it initially came out because of fears of what intolerance to Jews may arise due to its publication. In an article in the *Canadian Zionist*, Gavriel Strasman wrote that the book will "undoubtedly cause some controversy, Christians who take his words at face value may find themselves on the defensive, Jews may raise their eyebrows at Layton's concept of Jesus." When questioned about how he united religion and politics and how the Jews should expect something in the future as a result of historical brainwashing and Christian animosity Layton said that his aim was not to divide people but to unite them around the prophetic figure of Jesus. By this statement, Layton was referring to uniting Jews and Christians around the figure of Jesus instead of the traditional divisions that have been caused.

The reaction to *For My Brother Jesus* in the Jewish press was mixed. On the one hand the writers projected the image that Layton's work was controversial and sought to divide rather than unify Jews and Christians but yet on the other hand the writers projected the image that Layton dared to reveal what had been hidden. In this book, Layton dared to say what many Jews believed but would dare not convey to the
general public. Sharon Drache from the CJN reported in “Fans Find a New Layton,” in March 21, 1981 that Layton’s For My Brother Jesus was a reflection of Layton once again “drawing nasty truths like water from the depths of Christian love.” The article reported on Layton as a spokesman reeking controversy, almost forfeiting his adoration in the Anglophone and Francophone realms on behalf of the Jewish community. Drache reported in the CJN that, “our own outspoken bard is at his favorite occupation, tongue lashing injustice, stupidity and narrow-mindedness with his unique Jewish vision.”

The article did not take a negative stance towards For My Brother Jesus but it also did not take a positive stance, it seemed to take a middle ground approach in order to not offend Jewish and non-Jewish sensibilities.

II

In an examination of Layton’s self-image in his poetry, it is clear that he views himself as a controversial figure, as a spokesman for Jewish causes and as an individual who is deeply connected to the ancient Jewish messianic figure. There are also many other roles that Layton has taken on that will not be examined in this study, but these three roles are examined because they have been undertaken by all three poets; A.M. Klein, Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen.

The first way that Layton sees himself that will be examined is his image of a controversial figure that uses language to shock and disturb. His poem “Whom I Write For,” Balls for a One-Armed Juggler (1963) emphasizes this need of the poet to shock the reader with language, it reads:

“When reading me I want you to feel/ as if I had ripped your skin off/ or gouged out your eyes with my fingers/ or scalped you, and afterwards burnt your hair/ in the staring sockets; having first filled them/ with fluid from your son’s lighter/...for I do not write to improve your soul/ or to make you feel better, or more humane/ nor do I write to give you any new emotions/ or to make you proud to be able to experience them/ or to recognize them in others/ I leave that to the fraternity of lying poets/ no prophets, but toadies and trained seals!/ ...I write for the young man, demented/ who dropped the bomb on Hiroshima/ I write for Nasser and Ben Gurion/ for Krushchev and President Kennedy/ for the Defense Secretary/ voted forty-six billions for the extirpation of humans everywhere./ I write for the Polish officers machine-gunned/ in the Katyn forest/ I write for the gassed, burnt, tortured/ and humiliated everywhere/ I write for Castro and Tse-Tsung, the only poets/ I ever learned anything from.”

In this poem, Layton lists his intended audience who are most likely nothing like his real audience. His real audiences are mainly North American and international scholars as well as general people interested in his poetry. It is doubtful that his audience consists
of “the young man demented,” or those “gassed, burned and tortured.” Layton is writing for those who have been persecuted and for those who have power but who do not address important issues that the poet addresses. Layton not only writes for them but he symbolically writes about them. The images in the poem are an intermingling of powerful and powerless people. Layton takes inspiration from everything around him, especially parallels between those who have power and those who are powerless in life. This poem is an attempt for Layton to create controversy, firstly by uniting the powerful and the powerless in the same poem, and secondly, by using the names of political figures and stating historical events.

Layton has been deemed to be a controversial poet because his poetry is not only overtly sexual but some poems are shocking to the reader. The overt sexual tone that has shocked readers is exemplified in the poem, “The Pit” The Whole Bloody Bird (1969), it reads “I tell it like it is,/ man/ however excellent you are;/ as sage as Solomon,/ brave as Charlemagne/ and possessing many talents/ in the end/ you will be gulled/ by a woman’s insatiable/ vulva.”68 In “Sourwine Sparkle” from The Whole Bloody Bird (1969), Layton uses sexual language that can be regarded as grotesque. The poem reads: “what I saw on the faces of the people who crowded up to the diseased phalli and hairy, black-pit vaginas was the skin of a wine that had gone sour, a sourwine sparkle.”69 This overt sexual imagery could be found in Cohen but it is not found in Klein’s work. This suggests that Cohen was comfortable expressing this type of imagery whereas Klein did not want to challenge his relationship to the community or to upset the sensibilities of his generation.

Further examples of Layton’s use of the grotesque that upset the sense of decency in many people of his generation, is found in the poem “Jasmine, anyone?” The Whole Bloody Bird (1969) that reads “leprosy had eaten away/ four fingers and half a palm/ like a neckband studded/ with wet, fragrant pearls/ was the gajra/ he held out to me/ his rotted thumb.”70 In “A Sort of After Dinner Speech,” The Shattered Plinths (1968) there are grotesque descriptions that are controversial, an excerpt from the poem reads “blood rains down from the skies/ for the sun is a boar/ whose head has been sliced off/ a general’s brains is being auctioned/ in the Place de la Concorde.”71 Layton uses the grotesque imagery to depict his controversial self-image. It seems as if he dares to say what many people may think but for social concerns they do not dare say. The use of the grotesque fits in to Layton’s self-image because he is comfortable saying
what others dare not say in the public sphere, through his poetry. In this sense his poetry becomes an open forum for all that society tries to hide in name of decency.

The second way that he sees himself is as a spokesman on behalf of Jewish causes. Layton uses the public forum to not only speak on behalf of Jewish causes but also to voice his own controversial opinions. Through his public voice as a spokesman he identifies a new kind of Jewish consciousness, one that is aware of the atrocities of the Holocaust but does not focus Jewish identity on the image of victim and one that responds to atrocities with cynicism instead of compassion. Layton identifies with this new kind of Jewish consciousness, which is evident in his poem, "One Last Try at a Final Solution," The Shattered Plinths (1968) reads:

"So the Russian soldiers/ tore their blouses and wept/ fine, passionate fellows/ that they are/ when they saw Auschwitz/ on a carefully controlled tour of inspection/ and even the cautious Czech wailed/ and the Polish communist leaders/ let out a terrible howl of sadness/ that made the ovens quivers...as arm in comradely arm/ whimpering and blubbering and dabbing handkerchiefs/ to their red tearing eyes/ they gave the Syrians and Egyptians/ bullets, land mines, hand grenades, machine guns/ poison gas/ to finish the job."

This poem seems to be a reaction to the 1967 war. In this poem Layton is implying that the sorrow the soldiers feel is not only transitory but it is not real. Layton expresses a sense of cynicism in regards to the sincerity of the Czechs and Poles. He implies that their insincere sadness was fleeting and they ended up providing the Syrians and Egyptians with the tools to complete what the Germans had started. Layton is indicting the Czechs and the Poles and he is saying that they not only knew what was happening but they also wanted the Jews to be annihilated, however they did not want to be murderers but secret accomplices. The greater statement that Layton is making in this poem is that the Jews stand-alone and they must protect themselves as a people without mistaking a transitory sympathy for an alliance.

The final image that is examined in this study and emphasized in Layton's memoir is the way he alludes to a connection with biblical figures. In his poem "A Vision" from A Red Carpet for the Sun (1959) there is similar imagery to biblical prophets ascents to heaven. The poem reads: "from a wingless chariot, I see/ immortally bleeding vines, guards, a hired soldiery, crowds of foredoomed Thebans; I see the evil skulls of men, child bearing women and one/ who from this witless human freight/ breaks suddenly upon my eyes/ to run on rodent feet." This poem clearly does not describe
an ascent to heaven but possibly a descent to an apocalyptic earth or a descent to hell. Layton describes himself as being on a wingless chariot.

This idea of the chariot is found in Ezekiel, who ascends to heaven and views the celestial chariot. The Encyclopedia Judaica provides a portrait of the book of Ezekiel's prophecy. The encyclopedia states "the division of the book into pre-fall doom prophecies and post-fall consolations must be at once qualified by recognition of the intermediate status of the oracles against foreign nations. The prophet is accosted and overwhelmed by a cloud and fire apparition of the divine vehicle, a wheeled platform, born by four hybrid creatures- on which was enthroned the fiery majesty of the Lord." Layton seems to blend what Ezekiel divides; Layton blends the doom prophecies and the consolation prophecy. The doom prophecy in Layton's poem is explicit but the consolation prophecy lies in the fact that Layton is alive to view the apocalypse, thus all is not lost. As the encyclopedia suggests, Ezekiel's chariot is ornate whereas in the poem, Layton's chariot is simple and without wings. Due to the fact that in the poem it is a wingless chariot, it implies that there is something wrong with the vision. In the poem, the chariot is without wings to move, just as the poet is a helpless observer, both the chariot and the poet are described as lacking the ability to act. By having a vision, Layton is chosen to ascend to this place, as a prophet who observes destruction and annihilation.

In the vision, Layton sees crowds of Thebans who were inhabitants of Thebes in ancient Egypt. Amidst the destruction, Layton views the doomed Thebans who would not survive in modern times. The reference to the Thebans provides a greater context to the vision, one in which Layton is envisioning the ancient world from almost an immortal standpoint. It is as if he places himself in the context of the annihilation but he is immortal, he has survived whereas the Thebans have perished. This poem is fitting with Layton's statement in which he argued that the universe was immoral, unlike poets of Klein's generation who were still trying to decide if the universe was moral or not. In "A Vision," it suggests that Layton has decided that the world is evil and that is why his vision is of annihilation instead of prosperity and creation. This poem reflects Layton's negative outlook on the nature of humankind and the propensity for evil in the outlook of a prophet.

In his memoir, Waiting for the Messiah, Layton says that he is a messianic figure. The Encyclopedia Judaica, describes the Messiah as "the anointed king; a charismatically endowed descendent of David who the Jews of the Roman period
believed would be raised up by G-d to break the yoke of the heathen and to reign over a restored kingdom of Israel to which all the Jews of the exile would return." Layton uses this interpretation but he re-interprets the necessary prerequisites for the Messiah by suggesting that he is the Messiah because he was born circumcised. The text reads, "the intelligence that had been favored with the messianic sign stayed in my mind and sometimes, suddenly, in the midst of the roughest and most boisterous game, I would find myself standing quite apart." He makes speculative statements about Moses—such as that he was the only Jew born before him that was born circumcised, however there is no indication of this in the Bible. Layton writes, "because Yahweh had some mission for Moses, and because under the rite of circumstances it was impossible to perform the rite of circumcision, it was by divine will that the child was born without a foreskin." Due to this identification with Moses, Layton believed that he would follow in his footsteps. Moses was a leader, prophet who was "commissioned to take the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses led them from his 80th year to his death at 120 during their wanderings in the wilderness until their arrival at the Plains of Moab." Moses fashioned slaves into a nation and he is treasured among the biblical figures. In his youth, Layton was drawn to the biblical figure of Moses and he wanted to be like him in terms of the fact that he was revered as a great leader of the Jewish people, he performed miracles and he defeated the Egyptians with the help of G-d.

The fact that Layton identifies himself as the Messiah demonstrates that he believes that he is not only destined for greatness but the very fact of his existence has been predetermined by G-d to impact the future of the universe as we know it. Layton's self-image as the Messiah suggests further evidence that he tries to create a controversial persona both in his writing and in his public image. The fact that he calls himself the Messiah in his work is another way for Layton to upset the sensibilities of the Jewish community by turning a sacred figure of the Messiah into a figure to be ridiculed. However, it seems as if Layton's intentions are not to use cynical humor by suggesting that he is the Messiah; in his youth he really believes that it is his true calling to be the Jewish savior.

There are many circumstances in Layton's life that shape his view of a messianic calling. Some of the events that reinforce this take place during Layton's childhood and are recounted to him by his family. The first circumstance that leads to Layton's messianic sign is when his mother is pregnant with him, she is terminally ill. His grandmother wishes her daughter's illness upon herself and the prophecy actualized.
The second event is when Layton is saved from setting his body aflame. The fact that he is saved reinforces his calling to greatness after intense suffering. The third example where there is a return to the image of Irving Layton the Messiah when in September of 1926 Layton enters Mr. Saunders class. The influence of this teacher is likened to the preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

In Layton's depiction of his early adulthood there is a change in his messianic role that dominates his childhood fantasies. Instead of describing himself as the long awaited messianic savior, he makes a distinction between himself and the Messiah. The text reads “when the Messiah comes how will he increase the pleasure I get from holding the cat to my chest or from feeling the warmth that comes from my mother’s body.” In later poetry, Layton writes about the conditions for the coming of the Messiah. The poem “Coming of the Messiah,” reads, “the Messiah will come/ only after every inch of earth has been stained with human blood/ only after every lake, river and sea has been polluted/ with the corpses of butchered men and women/ only when the air is made thick with the moans of victims/ expiring with indignity and extreme pain/ only when all nations have tumuli of slaughtered humans/ on which he can step as he makes his way to his seat/ on the highest mountain.” In the previous section on Layton's reception and his relationship to the community he discussed how his generation of poets have a negative outlook on the universe. This poem expresses Layton's idea that the universe is immoral in that it ends in a violent apocalypse. In addition, this poem depicts the condition for the Messiah's arrival. Clearly, at the time Layton wrote this poem humanity did not reach the level of destruction that would be necessary for the coming of the Messiah. This poem marks a distance between Layton and the messianic figure that was missing in the section of his memoir on his childhood dream of being the messianic figure. In addition, this poem describes Layton's pessimism about human perfection. It suggests that the Messiah will come after human beings have destroyed themselves. The poem implies that it is inevitable that human beings will not reach a level of perfection so that the Messiah will come based on their good deeds. The Messiah will only come after a violent apocalypse.

In his writing Layton describes himself as the messianic savior, a role that Klein would never dare undertake. In his daily life, Klein was conscious of not upsetting the sensibilities of the Jewish community whereas Layton consciously tried to challenge the decency of his audience. Klein would not dare undertake this role because of the times in which he was living where it would have been a scandal that would have led the
community regarding him as an outcast, whereas in Layton’s generation he could make this assumption and still not be marginalized because of the liberal times.

Layton writes about the way he views his relationship with his audience. In a poem entitled “Two Poets in Toronto” from A Red Carpet for the Sun (1959) there is a reflection of Klein’s feelings of abandonment. The poem reads:

“Two poets in Toronto entering the city/ at a quarter of eight/ they brought up the rear of a Christmas parade/ and thought the hosannas/ the plaudits of the crowd/ were intended for them/ the poets bowed./ but the acclaiming thunders/ were all for a clown/ who clambered like fly/ or a rented van/ and tugged at his loose comedian collar at so many paid for tugs to the dollar/ the poets acknowledged/ the welcoming noise/ and wiped the tears from their Sensitive eyes.”

This poem suggests that Layton sees either himself or many poets as not being appreciated by their community. The acclaim is not for the poets who have real talent but it is for the clowns who do not possess talent. The poets are left empty and humiliated by their audience. In the poem “Lines On Myself,” there is the same feeling of anonymity evident in Klein’s “Poet as Landscape, it reads: “here rots Irving Layton/ claimed by no kith or kin/ friends I had none, for who / could love an ironic Jew?”

Similarly to Klein’s poem, this poem suggests that the poet rots in anonymity. This poem suggests that Layton is aware that he upsets the sensibilities of some of his audience but he also suggests that he is aware of the reasons why he is unloved, it is due to his ironic identity.

This same feeling of not being appreciated could also be found in “The Cold Green Element,” A Red Carpet for the Sun (1959). The poem reads:

“A great squall in the Pacific blew a dead poet/ out of the water/ who now hangs from the city gates...and hanging from ancient twigs/ my murdered sleeves/ sparked the air like the muted collisions/ of fruit...I am again/ a breathless swimmer in that cold green element.”

“The Cold Green Element” provides insight as to Layton’s relationship with his community or his audience. Layton describes that the Pacific Ocean draws a dead poet out of the water, suggests that he drowns and he is washed up by the Pacific Ocean; his death may signify that he is emotionally empty. The poet is left to hang from the city gates, which implies that he is viewed by his audience as a traitor and therefore his corpse must be held up on the city gates to show the other members of the city what happens to traitors or possibly he hangs from the gates to suggest that the members of the city, or the audience wanted his corpse to be displayed for all to see and ridicule. The reference to him hanging from his sleeves may be linked to a crucifixion similar to
that of Jesus. If this suggests a crucifixion then it implies that he dies the death of a martyr on behalf of the dignity of poetry.

Just as the way Layton views his relationship to his audience in his poetry is compelling, it is also interesting to examine the poet’s view of his relationship to Judaism. In his memoir, Waiting for the Messiah, Layton describes his early childhood in an Orthodox Jewish home, thereby depicting the influence of Jewish traditions in his formative years. One of his first memories was of his mother lighting the Sabbath candles, Cheder classes, and his father studying the holy books. His memoir describes his deep connection to the Jewish culture, which is evident in the magnitude of the Jewish symbols that re-appear in his poetry and in his memoir.

In his poem, “Jewish Main Street” from A Red Carpet for the Sun (1959), Layton makes a creative commentary on Jewish life. The poem reads:

“Jewish main street old Jews with memories of pogroms/shuffle across menacing doorways/they go fearfully, quietly/ they do not disturb/ the knapsack of their sorrows/ here each anonymous Jew/ clutches his ration book/ for the minimum items of survival which honored today who knows/ tomorrow some angry potentate/ shall declare null and void.”

The verse “Jewish main street old Jews with memories of pogroms” suggests that on the street that is the central location for Jewish life and it is unclear if the context of the poem is set in Europe or in Montreal. It is possible that the poem is discussing the Jews from earlier generations who are burdened with memories of the pogroms in Eastern Europe. They move in fear in order to not disturb, suggests that they are afraid that if they upset the English or the French then they would be fearful of anti-Semitic acts re-occurring. The old Jews shuffle along the streets holding on to their sorrows, their ration book as anonymous Jews until someone in power renders them void. This suggests that the old Jews still believe that they are at the mercy of the authorities and they have kept the burden of the past with them despite the fact that they live in modern times. This poem is Layton’s way of depicting the burden of the past and the role of victims that Jews have carried with them for years; when Layton describes the burden of memories that the old Jew carries with him, it does not describe the majority of modern Jews, born in Canada who do not share the collective memories of persecution. In addition it seems as though Layton is implying that the old Jew is the smart one, not the modern Jews who forget easily the persecution of Jews throughout history. The old Jew does not forget the destruction of the pogroms and therefore he is prepared if the Jews will be persecuted again.
Although he projects himself as deriving inspiration from Judaism he also depicts how he re-defines his connection to Judaism. For Layton his connection to Judaism is personal and therefore he reinterprets traditional notions of G-d to coincide with his own spirituality. Layton finds another way of perceiving the divine force and it is a reflection of the way he sees the world and his role in it. For Layton, G-d represented imagination and creativity when in his memoir he writes the following: "G-d was neither love nor goodness. Nor was he justice or truth, he was creativity, and we had all been made in G-d's image, the divine and the creative were one."85

III

In conclusion, Irving Layton is already recognized as one of the premier poets in Canadian Jewish literature and he should be regarded as a central figure in fighting for the recognition as a Canadian Jewish poet. He is a pivotal figure that has made incredible contributions to Canadian literature. As his self-portrait demonstrates, historical events and the pressures of his generation have had an effect on him. Layton sees himself as a controversial figure, a spokesman on behalf of Jewish causes, as a prophetic figure and as a messianic figure. In recent times, Layton's community has recognized him but it has been a struggle for him to come to the point in which he is celebrated.

Layton is the most controversial of all three poets, despite the fact that they all try to be controversial and to shock readers with language in order to establish new sensibilities and to reach a new type of Jewish consciousness in his generation. This new type of consciousness includes the decision that the universe is not a moral place, so the new Jews of this generation have developed a cynicism that is evident in Layton's poetry. Although there is a negative outlook on the morality of humankind and the naïveté in Klein's work is absent from that of Layton's there is still the idea that poets of Layton's generation have not given up on the hope that they have claimed to discard. The fact that the poets of Layton's generation are contributing to Canadian Jewish literature proves that they are trying to build a moral universe, even if they have to bring to the forefront that which is hidden as in the case of Layton's controversial ideals.

2 Canadian Jewish Anthology. 69. CJC Archives, Montreal.
3 Canadian Jewish Anthology. 160. CJC Archives, Montreal.
5 Elspeth Cameron, Irving Layton: A Portrait (Toronto: Stoddart, 1985) 68.
10 Ibid, 71.
11 Ibid, 72.
12 Ibid, 74.
13 Ibid, 74.
14 Ibid, 74.
15 Elspeth Cameron, 121.
16 Francis Mansbridge, 280.
17 Francis Mansbridge, 280.
21 Mervin Butovsky, Canadian Jewish Anthology, 65. CJC Montreal.
22 Howard Aster, 48.
24 Howard Aster, 48.
27 Ibid
28 Mervin Butovsky, CJA, 62.
30 Mervin Butovsky, CJA, 70.
31 Irving Layton, Waiting for the Messiah, 209.
32 Mervin Butovsky, CJA, 70.
33 Mervin Butovsky, CJA, 71.
36 Ibid
37 Mervin Butovsky, CJA, 73.
39 Ibid
40 Ibid
41 Ibid
43 Howard Aster, 5.
46 Ibid
47 A.J. Arnold, CJC Archives, Montreal.
48 Francis Mansbridge, 176.
50 Ibid
51 Irving Layton, Waiting For the Messiah, 198.
53 Frank Rasky, CJN, CJC Archives, Montreal.
54 Frank Rasky, CJN, 16, October, 1986. CJC Archives, Montreal.
55 Ibid
56 Frank Rasky, CJN, CJC Archives, Montreal.
57 Frank Rasky, CJN, CJC Archives, Montreal.
58 Ibid
59 Ibid
60 Ibid
63 Ibid
66 Ibid
70 Irving Layton, The Whole Bloody Bird, 125.
73 Irving Layton, A Red Carpet for the Sun, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1959) 42.
75 Encyclopedia Judaica, Volume 11, LEK- MIL, 1408.
76 Irving Layton, Memoir, 8.
77 Irving Layton, Memoir, 8.
79 Irving Layton, Memoir, 62.
80 Irving Layton, Collected Poems, 515.
81 Irving Layton, A Red Carpet for the Sun, 66.
82 Irving Layton, Collected Poems, 154.
83 Irving Layton, A Red Carpet for the Sun, 78.
84 Irving Layton, A Red Carpet for the Sun, 9.
85 Irving Layton, Memoir, 250.
The final portrait in this study is of the third generation poet, Leonard Cohen. Cohen has been cherished by poetry fans and admired by scholars. This is a study of Leonard Cohen, the poet and the author. There will not be an exploration of Cohen’s folk music career that begins in the mid 1960’s but individual poems from books of poetry that he wrote during this time will be examined. In the section on the biography and reception there will be an examination of Cohen’s literary career and the ways he has been received by the community. As Cohen re-defines his themes, tones and styles there is also a change in the way he is received. He begins by writing about Jewish traditions, he moves away from positive elements of the Jewish culture to negative themes on Jewish tragedies and controversial imagery and then he returns to embrace spirituality by writing modern psalms. The section on his self-image shows that he tried to be a spiritual figure, controversial and a spokesman in his writing, but as the reception section demonstrates, the press only favored Cohen as a spiritual figure who served his generation with spirituality, which was misinterpreted as religion.

Cohen’s generation grew up in the midst of the Holocaust and in the aftermath of the annihilation. Many themes in the work that came out of the generation in Cohen’s literary milieu during the time when he was growing up in the fifties were negative, not only due to the aftermath of the war but also due to the predominant attitudes and fears in the fifties. According to Stephen Scobie’s Leonard Cohen, in the fifties the “conventional modes of morality and authority had been breaking down for a long time, at least since 1914, in the book Bomb Culture, the English writer Jeff Nuttall claimed that this process was given a special impetus in the fifties by the general expectation of impending nuclear catastrophe.” Cohen expressed the same fears of corruption when he said, that “whatever we have been told about anything, although we remember it and sometime operate in those patterns, we have no deep abiding faith in anything we have been told.”

In Cohen’s generation there was a fear of impending disaster and the need to grapple with the Holocaust but this was also a time of greater freedoms for Jews with further integration into Canadian life. The massive waves of immigration that began in Klein’s generation began to move towards the suburbs in Cohen’s generation due to increasing prosperity and assimilation. Many Jews moved away from the Jewish areas in downtown Montreal to the suburbs “of Outremont and Westmount by nearly 60
percent each, while the city of Montreal's grew by 21.78 percent during these years from the twenties to the forties.³

Cohen was affected by the literary milieu of Montreal that was created from these turbulent times. The literary milieu that Cohen was a part of was still alive in his generation because he was born in the midst of destruction that followed a time of freedom and change for Jews. This milieu fostered his creative growth. Tom Marshall in the introduction to Critical Views on Canadian Writers- A.M. Klein wrote that writers from Cohen's generation were affected by the literary milieu in Montreal that began with writers from Klein's generation. In this passage, Marshall quoted Irving Layton as saying that this literary milieu that was created from the economic, social and cultural forces was no longer operative. The harsh anti-Semitic climate in the thirties and early forties, as well as World War II and the Holocaust all had an effect on Cohen during his youth and influenced his poetic themes later in life.

This section on Cohen's biography and reception traces events in his life and in his literary career. The tragedies and the triumphs are outlined in order to show that Cohen's poetry has transformed over the years. Cohen began with a deep connection to Jewish traditions in his first two novels, then there was a period of dark themes, many that included the calamities in Jewish history, controversial poetry and political themes, marked in Cohen's life by turning away from the community. Finally, there was a return to positive Jewish themes and upon this return the Jewish press tried to bring Cohen back into the community. Unlike the first stage in the poet's career that centered on positive themes of Jewish tradition, the final stage focused on a different connection to Judaism that expressed a devotion to the biblical prophets and Cohen's own calling as a modern prophetic figure. Throughout his literary career, it was evident that his work expressed strong ties to spirituality despite all of the transformations in themes, styles, and receptions by the press and the re-definition of his public image.

On September 21, 1934 in Montreal, Leonard Cohen, who was to become a poet, novelist, songwriter and folk music icon was born. Cohen's early years were turbulent with the death of his father when he was nine years old. Before his father passed away he revealed signs to his son that his time to die was close, which emphasized Nathan's connection to his own intuition and to the spiritual element in life. In Ira Nadel's Various Positions, there was a narrative about Nathan foretelling his death to his son. The first example of this is when Cohen was a youth, he remembered how
he mistakenly said Kaddish, the prayer for the dead, instead of the Kiddush, which was the prayer over the wine and his father wanted him to continue because he said that he would have to say it soon anyway. In another instance Nathan turned to Leonard and told him that he would never live to see his bar mitzvah. Cohen's ex-wife Suzanne remembered Cohen's mother Masha as the spiritual influence in the family. Thus, it was clear that Cohen's family were very much connected to spirituality, which may have provided Cohen with a base of spirituality. Cohen may have been influenced by his parent's awareness of their own spirituality.

In the early fifties, Cohen entered McGill University where he was active in the student literary scene. In 1953, his first few poems "An Halloween Poem to Delight My Younger Friends," and "Poem en Prose" were published in CIV/n, a literary magazine of which Layton was on the editorial board. In 1954, Cohen became reacquainted with Layton from being in the literary milieu of the CIV/n circle. Louis Dudek who was one of Cohen's professors commented that the importance of CIV/n, "was its role in stimulating a vital Montreal literary environment, the emergence of the CIV/n group also confirmed the move of new poetry from Toronto to Montreal."

In 1955 Cohen graduated from McGill and won the MacNaughton Prize for creative writing. His first book Let Us Compare Mythologies was published in the McGill Poetry Series, with the help of Louis Dudek. This collection of poetry was written from the age of fifteen to twenty. The title of this book was a way of expressing Cohen's interest in comparing mythologies and traditions as well as trying to uncover the mysteries of religion.

In the next two years Cohen attended the M.A. graduate program at Columbia University in General Studies. His attendance at Columbia was a way of following in the footsteps of his first mentor Frederico Garcia Lorca who had studied at Columbia many years prior to Cohen's attendance. When Cohen was fifteen, he discovered the Selected Poems of Lorca who would be the first among many of his mentors. He was inspired by Lorca's passionate verse that dealt with the perils of imprisonment. When Cohen explained the influence of Lorca on his life, he said the following: "Lorca taught me to understand the dignity of sorrow through flamenco music, and to be deeply touched by the dance image of a Gypsy man and woman, thanks to him Spain entered my mind at fifteen and later I became inflamed by the civil war leftist folk song movement."
Two other pivotal mentors for Cohen besides Lorca were A.M. Klein and Irving Layton. Ira Nadel, Cohen’s biographer has argued that Klein was one of the primary influences for Cohen, as well some of the ways in which Klein influenced Cohen were as a role model that showed Cohen that he did not have to be limited to only writing poetry but he could also write prose, and the “similar poetic and rhetorical tricks and the reliance on exotic words, worlds, and biblical diction in their poetry.” Another way that Klein influenced Cohen was that he dared to step outside of the protective community and to write from a different voice. Instead of writing in Yiddish, Klein wrote in English as Cohen stated:

“His fate was very important to me, what happened to and what would happen to a Jewish writer in Montreal who was writing in English, who was not totally writing from a Jewish position...Klein came out of the Jewish community of Montreal, but had a perspective on it and on the country and on the province.”

In addition, Cohen was influenced by Klein’s use of Judaism as a poetic theme. Klein “established not only a tone but also a subject for Cohen- traditional Judaism- and showed him how it could work poetically.” In fact, Klein found a way of honoring the Jewish voice in his poetry while reflecting on what it meant to be a Canadian.

In a lecture given at the Jewish Public Library of Montreal in December of 1963, Cohen interpreted his mentor’s silence at the height of his career as a result of his exile from the community. Cohen said the following: “Klein chose to be a priest though it was as a prophet that we needed him, as a prophet he needed us and needed himself.” A priest can be defined as “principal functionaries in divine services, their special task being to engage in cultic ceremonies which they conducted mainly in the Temple. In general the priest’s post is authorized by hereditary right and they constituted a distinct class separate from the rest of the people.” Cohen’s interpretation of Klein as a priest was different from the definition outlined in that Cohen did not suggest that Klein was a priest who performed special services in a Temple, but Klein served the community just like a priest. Cohen’s statement suggested that Klein chose to be a priest who served his community instead of being a prophet who did not necessarily serve his community, but served a higher muse such as G-d. The fact that Klein served his community without feeling appreciated by them, may have led to his breakdown. As a priest, Klein followed set patterns of order in society, whereas if he was a visionary he would have challenged established traditions. In another interpretation, Klein chose to see himself both in the community and in his writing as a disciple of the prophets, but Cohen argued that his generation needed him to be a visionary figure. This implied that Cohen was the
visionary in his generation and he fulfilled what Klein was unable to accomplish. Klein was unable to be a prophet or visionary because it would have been presumptuous in his generation to project himself as a visionary in the public sphere at a turbulent time for Jews, one in which he had to be careful about what he said due to the sharp divisions between Jews and other religious groups. In this statement Cohen also implied that Klein denied himself and the community of his true poetic gift of being a visionary, which included writing new prophetic verse that placed him in the role of intermediary between G-d and man. As a disciple of the prophets, Cohen suggested that Klein took on a role of lesser importance, which diminished his talent and was a factor in his demise.

One of Cohen's pivotal mentors, Irving Layton was reacquainted with Cohen due to their mutual involvement in CIV/n magazine but it was their attendance at a 1955 Canadian Writer's Conference at Queen's University that sparked a long lasting friendship. At this conference many writers claimed that the media did not do enough to promote them. Layton stood up to these writers and argued that poets worked for the public and he sought to battle the media instead of to embrace them. Cohen was inspired by Layton's outspoken attitude both in the private and public spheres.

Leonard Cohen was also influenced by Layton as both a friend and mentor. Cohen did poetry readings with Layton, they spent time together in Hydra and they supported one another in the media. At different times Cohen's poems were similar to those of Layton's exemplified in his use of sexual and controversial imagery, which were found in a few poems in the *Energy of Slaves* (1972) as well as in the use of satire in *Flowers for Hitler* (1964). For Cohen, Layton provided a model of passionate poetry. Cohen learned the "value of the excesses of the Dionysian style, to accept the power of prophetic visions, and to extend the poetic to include the Judaic."13 Cohen wrote a few poems in Layton's honor, one such poem is entitled "For My Old Layton," excerpts of it read:

"His pain unowned, he left/ in paragraphs of love, hidden/ like a cat leaves shit/ under stones, and he crept out in day/ clean, arrogant, swift, prepared/ to hunt or sleep or starve/ the town saluted him with garbage/ which he interpreted as praise/ for his muscular grace, orange peels/ cans discarded guts rained like ticker tape/ for a while he ruined their nights/ by throwing his shadow in moon full windows/ as he spied on the peace of gentle folk."14

This poem shed light on Cohen's view of Layton as a poet in terms of his role and reception in the community. The first verse that his pain was unowned suggested that Layton did not care what the media and the critics thought of him and the pain that he
should have felt from his negative reviews was unclaimed. Within his paragraphs of love there were secret meanings. Cohen described Layton as a cat that crept out in the day and was prepared to hunt or to starve, thereby suggesting that he was a predator coming upon the town or the community as if it were his prey. The line that stated that the town saluted him with garbage, which he interpreted as praise, was interpreted that the community did not appreciate him and he turned their negativity into praise. Layton “spied on the peace of the gentle folk,” can be deciphered to mean that he disrupted the order of society with his writing.

In contrast to the view that Layton was Cohen’s mentor, Cohen argued that “Irving Layton never took an avuncular or paternal position towards me,” Cohen insisted trying to shake free of the common view that Layton was his mentor, “it would be just as true to say that Cohen was Layton’s mentor, for Layton quickly absorbed and sometimes mimicked the younger poet’s sayings and lifestyle.” Despite Cohen’s insistence, scholars such as Ira Nadel, Cohen’s biographer, have argued that Layton was indeed one of Cohen’s first mentors. Layton “forced a new vitality into moribund poetic forms and linked the prophetic with the sexual. In Layton’s work, Cohen discovered a Judaic voice of opposition, energy and passion... Layton brought the full force of Jewish identity to bear on his work, he also brought politics to poetry.”

Layton’s relationship to Cohen was one of friendship but it can also be argued that he wanted Cohen to achieve fame and notoriety even at his own expense because he was attached to Cohen as he would have been attached to his son. Layton seemed to be overprotective of Cohen as a father would be protective of a son, when Cohen did not receive recognition by the community for his work. When in 1961, Northrop Frye, the well-known literary critic and Roy Daniells as well as Alfred Bailey gave Finch a second Governor General’s Award instead of giving it to Cohen for *The Spice Box of Earth*, Layton fought back in a protective way on behalf of the younger poet. In a letter written to his wife, Aviva Layton, called Cohen his “fascinating, vocal, madcap son.” Cohen also showed support for Irving Layton, but as a friend not as a paternal figure or as a mentor. After the release of “A Tall Man Executes a Jig,” Cohen wrote to him from Greece and called it a masterpiece saying that there was no point in congratulating Layton because genius like that was handed down.

During the early sixties Irving Layton was no longer at the core of modern poetry. He had to make room for a new generation of poets but according to Elspeth Cameron’s *Irving Layton: A Portrait*, he was angry at the loss of his stature both among the literary
milieu and the public. He lost his position at the core of the literary milieu at the time because he was not actively involved in literary magazines; he kept submitting poems but he was not involved with the creation of the magazines. Audiences started focusing their attention on a new generation of poets. Layton expressed the idea that Cohen was one of the only poets worthy of praise. Other poets of Cohen’s generation wrote about “dreary souped up hysteria full of bomb consciousness and the note of joy most conspicuously lacking, haven’t you heard Jack? The younger generation doesn’t believe in joy, and all their lovemaking is done over coffee tables where beard tickling can act as an aphrodisiac when everything else has failed.” In contrast, Cohen’s work consisted of both the negativity of his generation as well as the love and passion for living that Layton believed to have been absent from the work of Cohen’s contemporaries.

In 1960 Cohen won a Canada Council Arts Scholarship and temporarily moved from Montreal to Hydra, a Greek Island in the Aegean. Unlike the majority of Montreal poets who stayed in the literary milieu, Cohen ventured overseas which allowed him to gain a greater perspective on his experiences when writing about Montreal. The island of Hydra enticed Cohen because it was an exotic locale where international artists lived in colonies. Following Cohen’s return to Montreal, he began to write plays with Layton and he also won a four thousand dollar award for the best English language work in the annual Quebec competition.

In 1961 Cohen won a Canada Council Arts Scholarship and published his second book of poetry entitled The Spice Box of Earth. This book of poetry was the most widely acclaimed of any single volume of his poetry. Cohen decided to publish the book as a soft cover to reach a wider audience with a reduced cost. Nadel outlined how the publishers intended the book to be a hard cover as part of the McClelland and Stewart Indian Fife, which was a collection of poetry geared towards an elite audience that could afford to buy books of poetry with the extra expense of the hard cover and for those who bought poetry as part of a collection. Cohen’s main concern was to have an audience for his poetry and therefore he did not want his book to look traditional. This new form was a success and the book sold out in three months due to the soft cover and Romantic themes.

In 1963 Cohen published The Favorite Game in England and in the United States after having difficulty finding a Canadian publisher. The life of the main character Breavman mirrored that of Cohen, as both were children of wealthy, powerful Jewish
families, they both attended McGill and went to New York. Art imitated life, in the novel, when Breavman’s father passed away when he was young, just as Cohen’s father died when he was nine years old. Cohen undertook the role of father figure in the family similar to Breavman. In a 1963 review of Cohen’s semi-autobiographical book, Barbara Goldberg, from the local Jewish press, gave a negative assessment of the book. In Goldberg’s review, she said that “it has become fashionable for Canadian writers to abuse their origins, to look upon their country from afar with scorn, to ridicule an ill disguised nostalgia, Leonard Cohen who feels he has to keep coming back to Montreal to renew his neurotic affiliation is closer in spirit to Irving Layton.” In this statement Goldberg expressed her negative view of Cohen’s depiction of his community. Goldberg took a defensive approach to protecting her community from Cohen.

In 1964, Cohen published Flowers for Hitler. In the 1972 edition of the text after the seventh printing there was a note about the title. It stated that a while ago the book would have been named “Sunshine for Napoleon,” or “Walls for Genghis Khan.” This addendum may have been included because of the controversial title of the book. The title suggested honoring Hitler with flowers, as anyone would honor the dead. In the Jewish tradition, the dead were honored with stones placed at the graves, whereas in the non-Jewish tradition the deceased were honored with flowers. In the first edition of the printed text of Flowers for Hitler that never made it out of the printing press, Cohen dedicated the book to “The Dachau Generation.” The dedication that would have been “deemed to be offensive to readers, read with scorn, love, nausea, and above all a paralyzing sense of community, this book is dedicated to the teachers, doctors, leaders of my parent’s time: The Dachau Generation.” It was clear that the original dedication was a way for Cohen to break free from the public image as a Romantic poet, in favor of a harsher, more controversial image. In this first dedication Cohen wanted to shock the reader with his unusual choice of language to describe the people in his community as the Dachau generation. Cohen’s category of the Dachau generation was a way of grouping the community from his parents generation together and labeling them as the generation of concentration camps, thereby implying that their generation was not only known as the generation of suffering but also suggesting that their lives were caught up in the Holocaust. It was a way for Cohen to show his thankfulness for the teachings of his parent’s generation but also a way for Cohen to show the ties of suffering in the community.
With the publication of this book there was a transition in Cohen's themes, imagery, style and tone that coincided with his changing public image. Following the publications of his first two books that established Cohen as the "golden boy" of Canadian literature, Cohen sought to change his image, cause controversy in both the Jewish and general communities and to shock readers with language. He no longer wanted to be recognized as a Romantic poet and he was acutely aware that this book would cause controversy and change his public image. According to Cohen, "this book moves me from the world of golden boy poet into the dung pile of the front line writer...Flowers for Hitler won't get the same hospitality form the papers, my sounds are too new, therefore people will say this is derivative, this is slight, his power has failed, well I say that there has never been a book like this prose or poetry, written in Canada, all I ask is that you put it in the hands of my generation and it will be recognized." This book was an attempt to shock readers, by the use of negative themes and imagery, similar to Layton. In Layton's case his audience was familiar with his negative themes whereas Cohen's audiences were used to the image of the Romantic poet and the use of negative themes was unexpected. Cohen believed that the book would be recognized in his generation because they were ready to deal with the Holocaust. Not only could they cope with the subject matter but his generation could also cope with satirical verse used to portray Hitler. Klein tried to do the same thing with The Hitleriad, which was not well received due to the times in which he lived. Klein's generation was not ready to deal with the topic of the Holocaust, especially not the depiction of Hitler in a satirical manner whereas Cohen's generation could cope with the magnitude of the calamities in a better way than previous generations.

Following the publication of Flowers for Hitler, a review from the Congress Bulletin entitled "Leonard Cohen- Disturbing Contrasts," (1965) reflected one perspective of this transition. The author of the article, A.J. Arnold acknowledged Cohen's talent as a writer but he also noted that this collection of poetry was more open to criticism. Arnold depicted how Cohen no longer wrote about the beauties of the ancient traditions that he wrote about in his previous volume of poetry Spice Box of Earth. The previous volume published in 1961 exemplified "Cohen's use of the spice box, one of the symbols of the Havdallah service marking the Sabbath's end, is in keeping with a demonstrated appreciation of the beauty and aesthetics of Jewish tradition." The author of the article did not believe that Flowers for Hitler would have been well received by the audience particularly because it had different themes from his earlier work and took a harsher,
more satirical tone to Hitler's evil. As well, the title of the article suggested that there were disturbing contrasts in Leonard Cohen's personality. In the article, the author was disturbed by contrasts in themes and styles from his earlier work to the recent publication.

In 1963, the change in Cohen's public image was marked by his controversial lectures in the Jewish community. When he gave a speech at the Jewish Public library, he announced, "this Sunday I address the Jewish Public Library and I shall have become a Rabbi at last." In *The Chronicle* the event was described under the headline, "Poet Novelist says Judaism Betrayed." When Cohen spoke at a symposium on December 20th of 1963, he gave a lecture on the future of Judaism in Canada called "Loneliness and History," where he "startled the audience with an indictment of the community's neglect and indifference to its artists, the emphasis on the corporate survival of Jewish institutions he said was wrong, Jewish must survive in their loneliness as witnesses for if they forego that role, they abandon their purpose, Jews are witnesses to monotheism." In this article, the author described Cohen's speech as an "indictment" of the community for neglecting their creative talent. The author was depicting Cohen in a negative way by showing him as an adversary of the collective Jewish voice, instead of depicting Cohen as a representative of one strain of attitudes among the Jewish community.

At this meeting Cohen argued the attention given to businessmen replaced the vanished prophet. Cohen contradicted himself when he said this because on the one hand he was condemning the community for neglecting the artists, which presumably included a financial neglect, and on the other hand he was arguing against the Jewish people's reliance on corporate survival. Cohen seemed to be suggesting that the Jewish people should have a sense of collective responsibility in supporting their artists. According to Nadel, the "indictment of the Montreal Jewish community confirmed their worst suspicions that Cohen had turned against them in the Favorite Game and in person." There was a strong reaction against Cohen and there was a suggestion to reconvene the following day. At the second meeting Cohen was not there and "the community took his absence as an insult, but in a later interview Cohen said no one had confirmed to him the date of the second meeting. In his absence several speakers lashed out at him, launching personal attacks. They quoted from his novel and identified Cohen with anything that was critical or vulgar in the book. A few of the younger members of the audience attempted to defend Cohen, although with little success."
was meaningful that a few of the younger members of the audience tried to defend Cohen. Their defending Cohen meant that they may have shared his views or else they sympathized with his opinions that spoke on behalf of his generation. Members of the community from Cohen's generation may have been supportive of Cohen because they shared common experiences in their generation.

In another article Cohen was described as arrogant when he tried to take on the role of spokesman. It was evident that during this time Cohen's image changed to a spokesman who was controversial at times. In 1964 when he was asked to be on a panel discussion group, he condemned Canadians for enjoying material objects that were owned by America. Cohen also criticized Jews and Canadians for their "fetishes of identity," Cohen expressed that "if Canadians are in a bad state, Jews are even more hopelessly involved in the search for identity game...we, the Jews, create this insane Talmud of identity, that must end in psychiatry or Zionism...perhaps we can live with the destruction of European Jewry because in some unassailable quarter of our psyche we know that the exile has become meaningless." By this statement Cohen said that both Jews and Canadians were wrapped up in materialism and their identity was enmeshed in the material culture of the United States. Cohen spoke out against Canadians and Jews as materialistic and lacking an identity in a time when Cohen was searching for his own identity and spurning materialism in favor of Buddhist minimalism.

Cohen commented that we created an insane Talmud of identity, which could be interpreted as Jews creating commentaries from different viewpoints as to the Jewish identity or else different sects of Jewry, described as insane. The statement that it all ends in psychiatry or Zionism equated psychiatry with Zionism. He suggested that the search for identity either ended in confusion or in the Zionist ideals for a homeland for all of the Jews searching for their identities. In another interpretation, he implied that Jews were continuously searching to uncover layers of meaning in the Bible through Jewish books of interpretation when at the same time adding layers to the meaning of being a Jew with Zionist ideals. Cohen said that Jews could cope with the annihilation of six million Jews in Europe because they knew that the exile from Israel had become meaningless, for Jews were satisfied with their materialistic lives and banal identities. In an interpretation of the speech, Cohen meant that somewhere in the unconsciousness, Jews really knew that all of the doctrine in the Jewish texts that called for a return to Israel was without meaning because the majority of Jews were content to live in the Diaspora.
In 1966 Beautiful Losers and Parasites of Heaven were published. In 1972 The Energy of Slaves was published and in 1977 Death of a Lady's Man was published. Both The Energy of Slaves and Death of a Lady's Man did not receive good reviews, possibly because of what critics called their dark themes. The themes were reflections of the turbulent times in Cohen's personal life with the passing on of his mother, a brief silence from the spotlight and a change of home base. Cohen's use of dark themes has been argued to be an opposite way of portraying a Romantic poet. According to Stephen Scobie's Leonard Cohen, the traditional Romantic period poet was obsessed with the self. When the self was isolated it became perverse and essentially Black Romantic, which Scobie viewed Cohen to be. In different books of poetry Cohen either hid or showed his Black Romantic themes and imagery. For example, in the Spice Box of Earth, the Black Romantic themes were downplayed whereas in Flowers for Hitler, the Black Romantic themes were evident.

The Black Romantic focused on the irrational elements of consciousness such as visions and the darkness of the human psyche. Leonard Cohen's themes during the early seventies were different from his earlier work and contained elements of the Black Romantic poetry that concentrated on dark themes and the self. For Scobie, "Layton demonstrated the romantic exultation of his own poetic and sexual prowess, Klein's influence was evident in the attempt made by both poets to write out of an obsession with Hitler, preoccupation with silence and madness which in his life were real." According to Scobie, poets that grew up in the fifties had Black Romantic qualities such as the concentration on the broken self and the vacuum of existence. Scobie deduced that "if the lack of social or political commitment in the fifties threw the artist back onto the naked self, then his exploration of that self might lead to annihilation." The only way to penetrate through Cohen's Black Romanticism was through his love poetry, where the sense of love was combined with loss.

Cohen wrote about such negative themes not because he was a Black Romantic poet, which was an elaborate term for the mysterious, sexually charged, spiritual persona that he projected both in his poetry and in his public image. Cohen was preoccupied with tragedies and he focused on Jewish calamities because they were closer to his family history. His poetry contained negative themes but they functioned in two ways; firstly he wrote about the themes because they were familiar as a Jew, secondly, he wrote about the negative themes because his generation was capable of dealing with calamities such as the Holocaust unlike previous generations. With time,
Cohen’s generation had a greater understanding and perspective that was not only based on raw emotions. Cohen could use different styles in his dark themes because his generation was ready to interpret them. In addition, Cohen’s work concentrated on the self, similar to the Black Romantic poets, but most poets focus on the self since poetry is in most cases personal observations.

There was a change in attitude towards Cohen within the Jewish community. For many years Cohen had distanced himself from the community both in his life and in his poetry. In the past, Cohen was regarded as the most distant poet of the three poets from the Jewish community of Montreal. Unlike Klein and Layton, Cohen did not work for Jewish organizations or in Jewish education. Cohen successfully worked on his poetry and his music and he did not have to work in a traditional occupation whereas Klein supported himself as a lawyer, speechwriter for Bronfman and as an editor of The Chronicle and Layton was a teacher in a Jewish school.

Cohen decided to make Montreal more of a home base, which many members of the Jewish community believed would bring him closer to them. Just as Cohen moved away from Judaism and the Jewish community and returned, he also moved away from Montreal and returned. An article in the CJN in 1978, described Cohen as expressing the need to return to Montreal after traveling all over the world. The author of the article tried to show that Cohen needed not only to return to the city of Montreal but he also needed to return to the Jewish community which he had abandoned years earlier. The article seemed to be a reconciliation between Cohen and his community when it emphasized Cohen’s need to strengthen his roots in Montreal, Cohen said “after living the life of a traveling troubadour for many years, Cohen hints at strengthening his roots here: ‘I am looking for a place to put up stakes and Montreal appears to be it.’” Cohen’s move away from Montreal to other locales was interpreted as a rejection of the community. The author of the article showed that Cohen needed to return to his Montreal roots and it also showed the importance of family for Cohen. He discussed Cohen’s affection towards his family and how he dedicated his books to his parents. He then commented on Cohen’s Jewish ancestry thereby linking his success in literature and devotion to family with the poet’s Jewish ancestry. The author quoted Cohen’s nostalgic memories of his grandfather, when he said: “my grandfather, Solomon Klinitsky, wrote a thesaurus of Talmudic interpretations, as well as a lexicon of Hebrew homonyms;’ offers Cohen with obvious respect.” The author tried to bring Cohen back in to the Jewish community upon his return to Montreal.
Cohen’s interest in Buddhism amplified when he met Joshu Sasaki Roshi a Zen Buddhist master who also became a close friend. Cohen became involved with Zen Buddhism and in later years he became a monk. For Cohen, “Judaism initiated his spiritual quest but with Buddhism he had direction. This process of ‘liberation through suffering has led me to wherever I am,’ the importance of self-understanding in Zen was a great attraction for him.”

In an article written by A.J. Arnold for the Canadian Jewish Press in 1965, Cohen’s involvement with Buddhism was downplayed whereas his devotion to Judaism was emphasized. Arnold acknowledged that Cohen was influenced by what he called “Buddhist ethics,” but he also said that Cohen honored his Jewish heritage and derived inspiration from it. Despite this focus on Cohen’s connection to Judaism, Arnold also acknowledged Cohen’s conflicting feelings towards Judaism. He quoted Cohen’s statement that “no matter how distorted or grotesque the interpretation of Judaism, something of its authentic power and nourishment comes through, so long as a person has been taught to honor this tradition.” Arnold portrayed Cohen as being against the misinterpretations of religion and the distortions of faith. Arnold did not imply that Cohen suggested that the misinterpretations of Judaism had to do with rabbinic Orthodoxy, which the poet chose not to follow.

In the article, Cohen was portrayed as trying to honor the religion of his ancestors, the religion that he strayed from and that he embraced however he attempted to honor it in his own way by acknowledging the beauty and power of its essence. This depiction of Cohen was indeed an attempt to bring him back into the Jewish community by portraying his devotion to Judaism and by showing that he did not stray from Judaism but he maintained a deep connection to spirituality and an awareness of the Jewish traditions that reappeared in his work. It was almost as if Arnold wrote the article to convince the community that they should accept Cohen as a member of the community who was their ally because of the common Jewish ancestry. In addition, by his emphasis on Cohen’s connection to Jewish culture, the author attempted to keep Cohen as an integral part of the Jewish community of Montreal, by doing so it reflected positively on the community as contributing to Canada as a whole and also to Jewish communities worldwide.

In Arnold’s article, Cohen was depicted as advocating the spiritual instead of the material. Cohen was quoted as saying that there was too much of a focus on the material side, but “what he advocates is a return to the spiritual, a form of neo-Judaism that will refuse the title Jew to any man who is not obsessed by G-d, how he intended to
do this is with 'drugs or whips or blasphemy or fasting, let us declare a moratorium on all 
religious services until someone reports a vision." Arnold perceived Cohen as 
advocating the spiritual element instead of the Jewish traditions. The author argued that 
Cohen maintained a general respect for the power of Jewish traditions but he thought 
that they were meaningless without spirituality.

In an interpretation of Cohen’s guru teachings, the idea of visions was closely 
linked to the biblical prophets who had visions, thereby symbolizing a return to ancient 
forms of connecting to the deity and the shift of power from the rabbinic intermediary to 
the individual with a direct connection to G-d. In this suggestion, Cohen was presuming 
not only that it was possible to have such visions in modern times but also it was 
common enough to stop religious ceremonies until someone reported a vision. In a 
critique of this argument, Cohen’s emphasis on the spiritual instead of the religious was 
lacking; there needed to be a balance for the organized religion to function. However, 
Cohen said that modern Judaism only gave validity to the rabbinic traditions instead of to 
the spiritual element within Judaism, within other religions and within every human 
being. It can be deduced that Cohen contradicted himself because he seemed to be 
arguing for a move away from the traditions towards spirituality but by doing so he would 
be doing exactly what he was preaching against; there would be a concentration on the 
spiritual but yet the traditions would be lacking.

Layton was aware of Cohen’s connection to Buddhism and his search in many 
different religions for a greater understanding of spirituality instead of a religious 
consciousness. In a letter written to Jack McClelland on May 27 of 1967, Layton wrote 
about a meeting with Wynne and Jack, he wrote in response to Cohen as a religious 
writer, it read: "I was particularly delighted to find you disputing her claim that Cohen was 
a religious writer, she mistakes the shadow for the substance, straining and swaying and 
genuflections for genuine movement, for me these are merely the outward shows, not 
the real thing at all, what betrays him is precisely the agonized countenance he turns 
toward the heaven of his adoration, he does his devotions in an airless bathroom." Layton suggested that Cohen’s poetry was misinterpreted because it employed religious 
themes and imagery that could have been misconstrued as religious monotheistic 
poetry. Religious poetry was bound to an order of faith and tradition in terms of literary 
themes, whereas Cohen’s poetry was spiritual, which suggested that his work contained 
elements of the religious poetry but it did not ascribe to a doctrine of faith. Spiritual 
poetry was concerned with the sacred without the direct connection to one religious
doctrine. Cohen’s poetry may have reflected biblical themes and images but it was one step away from being religious poetry, which may have been due in part to the fact that Cohen was not a religious man. Cohen rejected organized religion in his search for more individual forms of identity that were self-defined. In his life, he was on a spiritual quest to take elements from many different religions and incorporate them into his spiritual consciousness.

Critics viewed Cohen as a religious poet due to his spiritual themes. However, Cohen was a spiritual guru in that he tried to inspire the masses towards leading more spiritual lives, but he was not a religious poet who imposed a doctrine of faith. Spiritual poetry made references to spiritual concepts such as G-d, heaven and so forth whereas religious poetry ascribed to a particular faith and made specific references to human or spiritual figures. As a spiritual guru, Cohen wanted to encourage people to look beyond the mundane realm and to seek answers to unknown questions in life and the divine power that is greater than humankind. Cohen wanted to encourage people to look beyond the material world with a spiritual consciousness. He also wanted to guide people to discover their own spiritual power within instead of following the doctrine of organized religion he believed limited individual power.

With the publication of the *Book of Mercy* (1984) there was a transition in Cohen’s themes and imagery in fact the tone of the book was uplifting in comparison to his earlier work that focused on Black Romantic themes. The *Book of Mercy* was a collection of poems that resembled biblical psalms, such as King David’s *Song of Songs*, due to their similar themes and common styles. The poems in Cohen’s book resembled the biblical psalms in terms of their themes of praising G-d, lamenting to the deity and asking for his divine mercy. The book was the most spiritual of all of Cohen’s single volumes of poetry with fifty poems that corresponded to the age he was when the book was published. A common opinion held by critics was that the book was that it was a collection of prayers.

*Book of Mercy* reflected the poet’s return to embracing Jewish themes in a new way. Instead of a focus on the negativity of the Holocaust poetry, there was a celebration of faith. The poems in this collection symbolized a period of renewal with lighter, more positive themes in comparison to his earlier work that were closer in mood and tone to the *Spice Box of Earth*. This book was also a reflection of Cohen’s life at the time, mirroring his involvement with Zen Buddhism and Judaism as well as his interest in mysticism.
Cohen was not the Jewish poet that was found in Klein, or the Canadian Jewish poet that Irving Layton fought to be recognized as. Cohen was a spiritual guru deeply connected to the power of faith at the root of religion. When Irving Layton was questioned as to how Jewish Canadian poets, after Klein and after Layton’s generation expressed aspects of their heritage he replied that in Cohen his poetry was a rejection of Judaism. Layton wrote that in Cohen one found “the Jew who is a Jew by negation...he rejects the burden of Jewish morality while he takes from his past as heritage its pageantry, the word glory occurs at least forty times in Spice Box of Earth, and words like king, G-d, prophet, psalm, Solomon, Isaiah, but the true hallmark of his writing is in his Let Us Compare Mythologies- a diminution and a rejection of Judaism.”

II

As the biography and reception section indicate, Leonard Cohen tried to be a spiritual icon, a controversial figure and a spokesman. The Jewish press spoke highly of Cohen as a spiritual icon during times when he wrote about Jewish traditions in The Spice Box of Earth (1961) and in his later work, Book of Mercy (1984) that concentrated on modern psalms. The Jewish press regarded Cohen in a positive way because his spirituality was occasionally confused with religiosity and the community may have believed that as a Jewish, religious poet he could better serve their interests. In terms of Cohen’s self-image it will be demonstrated that he regarded himself as spiritual, controversial and outspoken with his blend of politics and poetry. Cohen’s view of himself was not static; the reflection of this change in his self-image is reflected in his books of poetry.

Leonard Cohen draws on traditional notions of prophecy and traditional biblical imagery to a large extent in his poetry, particularly in Book of Mercy in which he depicts himself as a holy seer. His poetic voice is similar to biblical prophets in that he describes his vocation or calling, he talks about judgment, divine revelation, repentance and humanity, which has turned away from the deity. He also acts as an intermediary between humankind and G-d in his work. In this manner he resembles a biblical prophetic figure in modern times. As well, he also writes about traditional biblical narratives and provides the reader with his own view of the stories. In many of the poems about traditional biblical images, Cohen takes his own spin on them by putting himself in the position of the biblical characters, thereby placing the ancient narratives in the mindset of a modern poet. Cohen intends to be a prophet instead of the role he believes that Klein undertakes as a priest. As a prophet, Cohen is a visionary in his
writing and he does not follow traditional ways of expressing love for G-d, he expresses a direct connection to G-d and serves the deity rather than the community.

There is evidence that Cohen has adopted biblical imagery and uses it to portray that in his poetry he views himself as a prophetic figure deeply connected to biblical myths. This is evident in the poem “Isaiah” from the *The Spice Box of Earth* (1961). This poem from Cohen’s early work contains positive images and themes of Jewish traditions, which is different from Cohen’s later period in his work when he writes on darker themes in *Flowers for Hitler* (1964). The poem “Isaiah,” reads:

“Between the mountains of spices/ the cities thrust up pearl domes and filigree spires. / Never before was Jerusalem so beautiful/...why then this fool Isaiah, / smelling vaguely of wilderness himself, / why did he shout, / your country is desolate? / Now will I sing to my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching her hair/ which is pure metal black/ no rebel prince can change to dross, / of my beloved touching her body/ no false swearer can corrupt, / of my beloved touching her mind/ no faithless counselor can inflame, / of my beloved touching the mountains of spices/ making them beauty instead of burning. / Now plunged in unutterable love/ Isaiah wanders, chosen stumbling.”

Cohen begins by setting the mood and tone of this poem by describing the beautiful landscape and scenery of the mountains of spices and pearl domes. This also functions to provide the reader with a context for the biblical times in which the myth of Isaiah is based. He then questions why Isaiah laments that Jerusalem is desolate and he even insults Isaiah by calling him a fool. He then adds in his own praise of Israel by using a similar style that has been used in biblical passages where Israel is described as a beloved woman, in some cases there is the metaphor for the relationship between G-d and Israel as a relationship between a husband and wife. Cohen uses this same biblical image of Israel as a woman to discount Isaiah’s lamentation with his own praise of the Israelites.

In Cohen’s poem “The Dove” from *Death of a Lady’s Man* (1978) there is imagery of a divine vision. The poem reads, “I saw the dove come down, the dove with the green twig, the/ childish dove out of the storm and flood. It came toward me in the/ style of the Holy Spirit descending. I had been sitting in a café for/ twenty five years waiting for this vision.” The image of the dove with the green twig of the olive branch coming down to Cohen is a vision of holiness and peace descending upon his life. Cohen had been sitting in a café for twenty-five years waiting for the vision, which is in contrast to traditional places where biblical prophets received revelation. Cohen receives his vision at a café, whereas many biblical prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Micah, Nahum,
Hosea, Jonah, Amos, Obadiah, Joel, Habakkuk and Zechariah do not specify their location upon divine revelation. However, Ezekiel clearly outlines where he was when he received the divine calling, he was in the community of exiles by the Chebar Canal. The fact that Cohen specifies his location upon receiving his vision indicates that he documents his surroundings upon receiving the vision whereas the majority of the prophets did not include this detail in their writing therefore he is one step above the other prophets to the detailed writings of Ezekiel. The fact that Cohen writes about receiving revelation in a café in the material realm as opposed to an open field, a place that is close to nature, or closer to the spiritual realm is compelling. This image of the café suggests that Cohen is a contemporary prophet, receiving divine prophecy in a modern location. Cohen is not actively seeking the vision but he is sitting in one spot, waiting for the vision to come to him at the proper time. The interpretation of the dove carrying the green twig is a reference to the biblical story of Noah when the dove returned to the ark when there was land to start life anew. In the story it was a time of new beginnings. In Cohen’s poem, the revelation of the dove comes to him for the same purpose, to start again.

The Book of Mercy (1984) consists of many poems that mirror biblical psalms in theme and style. The work consists of free verse poetry that contains similar key words such as “glory” and “blessed” as well as similar themes such as divine calling, repentance, judgment, and the elevated role of the poet. Cohen’s voice in the book is concurrently both of a human being expressing the need to be closer to the deity, and of a prophetic poet who is the intermediary figure between man and G-d. “I Stopped To Listen:"

“I stopped to listen, but he did not come. I began again with a/ sense of loss. As this sense deepened I heard him again. I stopped/ stopping and I stopped starting, and I allowed myself to be/ crushed by my ignorance. This was a strategy, and I didn’t work at all. / Much time, years were wasted in such a minor mode. I bargain/ now. I offer buttons for his love. I beg for mercy. Slowly he yields. / Haltingly he moves toward his throne. Reluctantly the angels/ grant to one another permission to sing. In a transition so delicate/ it cannot be marked the court is established on beams of golden/ symmetry, and once again I am a singer in the lower choir, born/ fifty years to raise my voice this high and no higher.”

The first verse “I stopped to listen,” means that Cohen is receptive to the divine being calling him. He begins again with a sense of loss, therefore, he keeps writing even though he does not have a divine calling, or it can be interpreted that he keeps doing what he is doing even though it is wrong. Then he hears the voice again which is a
divine calling and he allows it to overtake him with wisdom, allowing it to crush his ignorance. Cohen describes this as a strategy that does not work. He begins to bargain for G-d's love begging for his mercy therefore he tries to reach G-d through prayer and by outward expression of faith. After Cohen expresses his devotion, G-d yields. In addition, Cohen suggests that he has insight as to the establishment of the court in heaven. In the poem, the heavenly angels who sing in a choir surround G-d. Cohen’s role is to be a singer in the lower choirs, born fifty years to raise his voice to a certain level but no higher, suggests that everything is pre-determined, that his mission in life is to be a poet and it suggests that his impact on humankind is already established before birth.

The poem also has a tone of judgment day, when G-d yields to the poet’s requests for mercy and for his love by establishing the court where Cohen’s role is to be a singer in the lower choirs. In this judgment day Cohen is holy enough to be included among other heavenly hosts as a singer in the lower choirs. In a different interpretation, being a singer in the lower choirs suggests a prophetic tone where Cohen is a singer or prophetic poet on earth whereas the upper choirs would be in heaven. The ascent to heaven is not a full ascent because of the fact that Cohen depicts himself as a singer in the lower choirs of the earthly realm moreover, it can be argued that if it was a full ascent Cohen would mention the process of ascent and describe the heavenly realm in greater detail. Instead it can be argued that there are two separate images one of the earthly realm where Cohen is searching for divine mercy and one in which the heavenly realm is depicted as a divine court, the poet is not in the court nor in the vision, because he does not sing amidst the upper choir of the angels.

In the poem “I heard my Soul Singing” from the Book of Mercy (1984) there is the image of Cohen trying to fight his poetic vocation that has come upon him which may have been a reflection of the myth of the biblical prophet Jonah, who upon receiving the divine calling to go to Nineveh fled on a ship to Tarshish. In the poem, Cohen depicts himself as trying to sabotage the divine voice that he hears. An excerpt from the poem reads: “I heard my soul singing behind a leaf, plucked the leaf, but/ then I heard it singing behind a veil. I tore the veil, but then I/ heard it singing behind a wall. I broke the wall and I heard my/ soul singing against me. I built up the wall, mended the curtain, / but I could not put back the leaf. I held it in my hand/ and I heard my soul singing mightily against me.” The poet hears his soul singing, which implies that he and his soul are separate entities and the action of singing can be interpreted as divine calling.
His soul is singing because he is infused with the muse of inspiration and revelation. He can tear the curtain, mend the wall but he cannot put the leaf back together, which is made by G-d. This implies that he is conscious of G-d's power and the beauty of his creations. The leaf is something that he feels is insignificant, but when it comes to mending it, he does not have the power to put back together something that has a life force. Therefore, in this interpretation, Cohen receives a divine calling but he is conscious of his limitations.

In "You Have Sweetened Your Word" from the Book of Mercy (1984) Cohen describes song as a divine gift. The poem reads, "you have sweetened your word on my lips...you placed me in this mystery and you let me sing, though only from/ this curious corner. You bound me to my fingerprints as you bind/ every man except the one who need no binding." Cohen is acknowledging that G-d blessed him with a divine song, which means a divine gift but G-d also limits him, when he says that he lets him sing from a curious corner. The curious corner implies that Cohen is given a gift of being able to write poetry but he is limited by writing from a corner, which may imply from his heritage, or else from the limitations of one perspective. The verse about G-d sweetening his word on Cohen's lips could be a reference to G-d purifying the prophets by touching their lips. In some cases this is demonstrated in the Bible when a hot coal touches the lips of certain prophets, or in Ezekiel's case he has to eat a scroll that contains lamentations. Cohen is bound to his fingerprints, which implies that he is bound to his identity and to his own mortality.

In "Sit Down, Master," from Book of Mercy (1984) Cohen praises the lord, which is similar to the biblical prophets dirges and King David's psalms. The poem reads, "Sit down, master on this rude chair of praises, and rule my/ nervous heart with your great decrees of freedom. Out of time you/ have taken me to do my daily tasks...in utter defeat I came to you and you received/ me with a sweetness I had not dared to remember. Tonight I come/ to you again, soiled by strategies and trapped in the loneliness of/ my tiny domain. Establish your law in this walled place. Let nine/ men come to lift me into their prayer so that I may whisper with/ them: blessed be the name of the glory of the kingdom forever/ and forever." The "decrees of freedom," is self-contradictory when he says, "establish your law in this walled place," and further key words reinforce this contradiction, "loneliness" and the...
"walled place." Cohen goes to G-d in defeat, which is another reference to the poet acknowledging his own limitations. The reference to Cohen coming to G-d again implies the elevated status of the poet as having a close relationship to the deity, one where he can choose to go to the deity instead of being chosen. The reference to the nine men coming to lift up the poet and to take him in to prayer is a way for him to re-connect to the deity. The ten men together form a minyan and offer praise to G-d.

It is evident that Cohen tries to take on the voice of biblical prophetic figures in many of his poems, especially those from the Book of Mercy. His poetic voice mirrors the biblical prophets who repented, lamented, praised the deity, acknowledged poetic vocation, received divine wisdom and served as intermediary figures between G-d and the Jewish people in their writings. However, it must also be acknowledged that in many instances he describes his own limitations as a human being seeking spirituality.

In a similar manner to Klein and Layton, Cohen also tries to shock the reader with language by writing about controversial themes. Cohen is trying to set up controversies between the reader and the poet. He tries to shock the readers' sensibilities and to challenge their sense of decency but still entice them to keep reading. Cohen is also setting up controversies between himself and his critics who up until the release of Flowers for Hitler viewed him as a Romantic poet that was a supporter of the Jewish community through the concentration on Jewish themes in his earlier work. In addition, Cohen is also trying to create controversies among the Christian audiences and the poet as well as Holocaust survivors and the poet due to his blending of the sacred and the profane as well as his depiction of Jesus as a human being and Hitler as a human being when the Christian audience would want Jesus depicted as a deity and the Jewish audience would want Hitler depicted as an inhuman villain.

There is shocking imagery in a poem from Flowers for Hitler entitled "Police Gazette," (1964) that reads, "Jesus is dying of heat. / There he lies on the wall of the sordid courtroom/ trying to get air into his armpits...Hitler is alive. He is fourteen years old. / He does not shave. / He wants to be an architect." In the Encyclopedia Judaica Jesus is described as one "whom Christianity sees as its founder and object of faith, who was a Jew who lived toward the end of the Second Commonwealth period...the story of Jesus' birth from the virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit without an earthly father exists...throughout the New Testament there are indications that Jesus had seen himself as a prophet." The description of Jesus in the encyclopedia does not demean the
figure of Jesus, as Cohen does in his poem. In the poem, the image of Jesus is depicted in a negative, demeaning manner when the statue of the crucifixion is portrayed as Jesus getting “air into his armpits.” Jesus is not depicted as dying a martyr’s death but dying of heat in a modern courtroom. Cohen describes Hitler as a young boy with hopes and dreams of his own. This is disturbing for the reader because it paints the portrait of Hitler as an innocent youth. As well, it is unclear if Cohen is uniting the figure of Jesus with Hitler thereby implying that the Christians were responsible for the Holocaust, as Layton has conveyed in *For My Brother Jesus*.

Cohen’s depiction of Jesus in this manner is a discontinuity from Layton’s depiction of Jesus. In “Police Gazette,” Jesus is described in demeaning terms whereas in Layton’s *For My Brother Jesus* (1976), he is described as a Jewish holy figure. In Layton’s “For Jesus Christ” *For My Brother Jesus* he writes about how Jesus came to be worshipped as a deity and the negative result for Jewry. The poem reads:

> “Having mutilated under your mild forgiving eyes/ your idol-hating brothers and sisters, / both peasant and duke knew the joys of penitence, / the ecstatic remorse in sinning flesh. / Your stoutest, most selfless partisans in Europe/ labored nearly two thousand years/ to twist your Cross into the Swastika/ that tore into our flesh like a fish hook.”

In this poem Layton is depicting Jesus as a misunderstood holy figure. In this context, Jesus’ teachings of love were misinterpreted and used for power, hate and mutilation, which would all be forgiven as signifying true faith. The image of twisting the cross into the swastika is powerful, but even more compelling is that Layton describes it as a fish hook that caught the helpless Jews in a sea of intolerance all in the name of Christ. Layton does not describe Jesus in the same way that Cohen does, where the tone does not show anger against Jesus but against those who twisted his human image into a G-d. In Layton’s “Jesus and Saint Paul,” *For My Brother Jesus* (1976) the crucifixion is depicted as a result of Jesus stirring up controversy in the name of freedom. The poem reads: “my name was Jeshua, not Jesus; not G-d’s son but a Hebrew revolutionary/ I stirred up rebellion till the Romans crucified me... I who preached G-d’s love and justice/ who brought the glad tidings to make Jew and Roman free.” In this poem, Layton takes on the voice of Jesus who says that his name is Jeshua, which is a Hebrew name and that he is a revolutionary not a son of G-d. He curses those who have distorted his image and have made him into an idol when he is a fighter on behalf of freedom.

Although there are discontinuities between Cohen and Klein’s depiction of Jesus, they both write controversial verses designed to shock readers. Layton’s depiction of Jesus
is more closely linked to the *Encyclopedia Judaica* interpretation, in which it recognizes that Jesus thought of himself as a prophet, similarly to Layton's depiction of Jesus. In addition, both the encyclopedia and Layton's poetry about Jesus do not depict him in derogatory terms.

In his poem "I Wore a Medal of the Virgin," from his 1972 book *The Energy of Slaves* (1972) there is shocking imagery. The excerpt from the poem reads, "I wore a medal of the Virgin/ round my throat/ I was always a slave/ play with me forever/ mistress of the world/ keep me hard/ keep me in the kitchen/ keep me out of politics." Instead of respecting the image of the virgin Mary as the mother of Jesus, Cohen tries to shock the reader by writing about her in sexual terms. The use of religious figures portrayed in demeaning ways is Cohen's attempt to juggle with sacred and profane imagery. Cohen may be trying to show that the religious figures that are viewed as sacred are really just human beings part of the mundane world but revered as holy.

There is more shocking imagery in another poem from *The Energy of Slaves* (1972), that is similar to Layton's controversial poetry in that it challenges social norms. In "The 15 Year Old Girls," it reads "the 15 year old girls/ I wanted when I was 15/ I have them now/ it is very pleasant/ it is never too late/ I advise you all/ to become rich and famous." Controversial poems such as these seem to be more in the style of Irving Layton instead of Cohen who initially achieved notoriety for his Romantic poetry.

The final image that Cohen tried to portray in his poetry is as a spokesman on behalf of Jewish tragedies and an outspoken leader against war and materialism. When it came to speaking out about the Holocaust, Cohen was inspired to condemn and to satirize Hitler's ideals. One of the main messages in Cohen's Holocaust poetry in *Flowers for Hitler* is that Hitler was human and just as a he could commit such horrific crimes against humanity, so could any other human being when infused with intolerance and hate. In "All There is to Know about Adolph Eichmann" (1964) there is a chilling example of this concept that Hitler was a human being not a monster. This altered conception of Hitler is a way of making human beings more accountable for their actions. The poem reads "eyes...medium, hair...medium, weight...medium, distinguishing features...none, number of fingers...ten, number of toes...ten, intelligence...medium, what did you expect? Talons? Oversize incisors? Green Saliva? Madness." The poem "Hitler The Brain Mole" in 1964 reflects Cohen's awareness of his own potential for evil. It reads, "Hitler the brain mole looks out of my eyes/ Goering boils ingots of gold in my bowels/ my Adam's Apple bulges with the whole head of Goebbels." Hitler looks
out of Cohen's eyes suggests that Hitler is in hiding in Cohen's body, referring to the evil that is within every human being. The reference to Goering boiling gold in the poet's bowels suggests that the site of the majority of the atrocities, the concentration camps are within Cohen's body, therefore the Holocaust is alive in Cohen's body as a symbolic vessel just as the world was the vessel for the annihilation. His "Adam's Apple bulges with Goebbels's head," suggests that the villains of the Holocaust are alive within the poet as every human being has the potential for evil. In another suggestion, the Nazis are alive inside his body to torture him. Michael Greenstein, in his text Third Solitudes: Tradition and Discontinuity in Jewish Canadian Literature commented on this poem. Greenstein said that the process of entering another person's body takes on a new form and there is a "witches brew of human anatomy in which Nazis torture the poet and become part of his body."§3

Cohen takes his treatment of Hitler as a human being capable of committing horrific acts one step further by arguing that even he is guilty of lying, torturing and conspiring against love and he wants the world to confess their sins. In "What I'm Doing Here," Flowers for Hitler (1964) the poem reads, "I do not know if the world has lied/ I have lied/ I do not know if the world has conspired against love/ I have conspired against love/ the atmosphere of torture is no comfort/ I have tortured... I wait for each one of you to confess."§4

There is continuity in Cohen's treatment of Hitler in Flowers for Hitler (1964) to Klein's treatment of Hitler in The Hitleriad. Both Cohen and Klein use satire to depict Hitler and both of the poets depict him as a man instead of a monster. Klein uses satire in the poem when he describes Hitler and says "and that mustache, the symbol of the clown/ made emperor, and playing imperial pranks-/ is this the mustache that brought Europe down,/ and rolled it flat beneath a thousand tanks?"§5 As well, Klein describes Hitler as a human being when the poem reads, "meanwhile he dreamed, and dreaming saw himself/ rich and esteemed on many a library shelf/ in many paintings hanging from a wall."§6 Although there is continuity from the different poets in the depiction of Hitler, Cohen takes his own spin on it, in his explicit portrayal of Hitler as a human being instead of a monster. In addition, he emphasizes that any human being is possible of committing such atrocities.

Cohen also spoke out through his poetry about his anti-war views. In one poem entitled "War is No Longer Needed, " The Energy of Slaves (1972) reads "war is no longer needed/ to teach you/ about torture and pain/ therefore don't congratulate
yourself/ when the boys come home/ your party did not win/ it's the old arrangement/ the old party/ the one that deals in slavery." In this poem Cohen is implying that the world is corrupt. He suggests that there is a system at work in society where there is the belief that the government leaders seem to care about the soldiers who fight for their countries or for their citizens but it is really just a lie, soldiers are just slaves to authority.

Cohen's poetry reveals his self-image but it also reveals the way he views both his relationship to his community and to Judaism. In the following analysis of specific poems it is evident that Cohen derives inspiration from his Jewish heritage and from the lack of poetry about his community, it can be deduced that he does not have a close connection to the Montreal Jewish community, however in his semi-autobiographical novel that is discussed earlier, Cohen does indeed show that he derives inspiration from his community.

Cohen's poetry reveals his view of his relationship to his community, in the poem entitled "Hallelujah" Various Positions (1984). Although it does not specifically make any references to the poet's relationship to his community, the symbols and imagery could lead the reader to interpret the poem in that manner. Cohen makes an interesting point about the role and the reception to poetry in general by suggesting that he is separate from what can be interpreted as his muse of inspiration, which is female. By implying that he is separate from his muse it suggests that he is a helpless victim of his muse's will. In this case, poetry comes upon the helpless poet and it has an audience, thus, the three subjects of the poem, Cohen, the muse and the audience. The poem reads: "I've heard there was a secret chord/ that David played to please the Lord/ but you don't really care for music, do you?... your faith was strong but you needed proof./ you saw her bathing on the roof./ her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you/ she tied you to a kitchen chair/ she broke your throne, she cut your hair,/ and from your lips she drew the Hallelujah."

The first interpretation that has to do with Cohen's relationship with his community is that the subject of the poem could be the Jewish people as there is mention of King David and in the biblical context he was the great leader of the Israelites. The part about her tying the subject to the kitchen chair is an implication of the relationship between Cohen's poetic muse and the Jewish people. However, in this case Cohen suggests that the poetic muse is female, thereby having a life force. In this reading of the poem, for the line "you saw her bathing on the roof," the Jewish people saw the poetic muse before them in all her grandeur, "her beauty and the moonlight..."
overthrew you," implies that the poetic muse or the beauty of the poetic muses words are too powerful for the Jewish people. The lines stating that "she tied you to a kitchen chair, she broke your throne, she cut your hair and from your lips she drew the Hallelujah," implies that Cohen's poetic muse may have demeaned the Jewish people with words, but the muse helped them to return to their faith. In other verses he states, "I remember when I moved in you/ and the holy dove was moving too/ and every breath we drew was Hallelujah." This implies that he remembers when he was a part of the Jewish community. The reference to the holy dove is a symbol of peace and new beginnings and together the Jewish people, the dove and the poet repeat a dirge of faith.

The second interpretation of these multi-layered meaningful verses has to do with a reflection on the biblical myths and it may not have anything to do with the relationship between the poet and his community. The first verse of the secret chord that David played to please the Lord can be interpreted as the psalms that King David and Cohen write for the deity. There are two interpretations of the following verses. The first is that in the second line that reads "but you don't really care for music, do you're your faith was strong you needed proof you saw her bathing on the roof," implies that the subject of the poem, "you," switches from talking about David to addressing David. The woman bathing on the roof is Bathsheba. In this interpretation Bathsheba breaks his throne, ties him to a kitchen chair and cuts his hair, which symbolizes a disobedience to G-d due to David's forbidden relationship with the married Bathsheba. The reference to cutting the hair may trace back to the story of Samson and Delilah. Samson loses his strength when Delilah betrays him by cutting his hair, which Samson's mother promises G-d would never be cut. In the greater context of the poem this suggests that situations have occurred in biblical times that have threatened the Jewish people being in G-d's favor and also specific events have tested faith but after the chaos ceases there is the need to praise the divine name.

Leonard Cohen takes inspiration from his Jewish heritage. His poem "Claim Me, Blood, if You Have a Story to Tell," Parasites of Heaven (1966) reads "claim me, blood, if you have a story/ to tell with my Jewish face/ you are strong and holy still, only/ speak, like the Zohar of a carved out place/ into which I must pour myself like wine, / an emptiness of history which I must seize/ and occupy, calm and full in this confine, / becoming clear like good wine on its lees." In this poem he is saying that his very essence, his blood which is his life force is Jewish. His blood has a story to tell of the generations of Jews who came before him and suffered for his existence.
Cohen takes inspiration from historical events that affected Jews such as the pogroms and the Holocaust. In his poem "Lovers" Let Us Compare Mythologies (1956), instead of making a statement about the calamities as the focus of the poem, the tragedies are in the background and provide a context for the poem.

The poem reads: "During the first pogrom they/ met behind the ruins of their homes/ sweet merchants trading: her love/ for a history full of poems. / and at the hot ovens they/ cunningly managed a brief/ kiss before the soldier came/ to knock out her golden teeth./ and in the furnace itself/ as the flames flamed higher,/ he tried to kiss her burning breasts/ as she burned in the fire./ Later he often wondered:/ was their barter completed/?/ while men around him plundered/ and knew he had been cheated."61

This touching poem sets up opposing images of love and hate in a narrative framework. The poem depicts that although hate can destroy the physical body, it cannot murder the spirit. Even after the lovers die in the ovens at a concentration camp the male lover is still alive spiritually to know he has been cheated of expressing his love physically just as he has been cheated in the loss of his life. Cohen may also be trying to convey to the reader that real human beings, who had desires of their own, were murdered.

III

In conclusion, Leonard Cohen is a renowned spiritual icon whose work has affected readers worldwide. The Canadian Jewish press was more receptive to him when he focused on positive themes concerning Jewish traditions and biblical narratives in Let Us Compare Mythologies (1956) and the Spice Box of Earth (1961), however in his later work when he employed Black Romanticism, Flowers for Hitler (1964), The Energy of Slaves (1972) and Death of a Lady’s Man (1978) he was not as well received. When Cohen’s Book of Mercy (1984) and even more recently Stranger Music (1993) were published there was a change of attitude towards the poet as depicted in the local Jewish press. This change of attitude was a result of the changing themes and positive tone that more closely resembled his earlier work. The Jewish press emphasized Cohen’s connection to Judaism and tried to bring him closer to the community.

The poet’s self-image in his poetry revealed a similar pattern to the one found in both Layton and Klein’s self-image. All three poets tried to be controversial, spokesman and to depict their connection to ancient biblical figures. Leonard Cohen succeeded only in being recognized as a spiritual guru, thereby serving his audience with poetry instead of organized prayer. The first generation poet A.M. Klein introduced the Jewish voice in Canadian literature and the second-generation poet fought for unison between the
Jewish identity and the Canadian identity and was recognized as a Canadian Jewish poet. Finally, the third generation in this succession of gifted Canadian Jewish poets, Leonard Cohen, changed the definition of the poet from a Canadian Jewish poet to a spiritual poetic guru in times of further freedoms and greater tolerance.

2 Stephen Scobie, 2.
5 Ira Nadel, Various Positions, 8.
6 Ira Nadel, Various Positions, 39.
7 Ira Nadel, Various Positions, 23.
9 Ira Nadel, Various Positions, 67.
10 Ira Nadel, Leonard Cohen: A Life In Art, 43.
11 Ira Nadel, Various Positions, 67.
13 Ira Nadel, Various Positions, 41.
15 Ira Nadel, Various Positions, 4.
16 Ira Nadel, Various Positions, 41.
18 Elspeth Cameron, 366.
20 Ira Nadel, Various Positions, 69.
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Conclusion

In conclusion, the poets A.M. Klein, Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen are grouped together as three of Canada's premier poets. These poets influenced the Jewish communities of Montreal as well as Canadian literary circles. These poets are known internationally as pivotal figures in Canadian literature. A.M. Klein paved the way for Layton and Cohen in regards to bringing forth the Jewish voice in Canadian literature by being the first Jewish poet to write in English instead of Yiddish, in Canada. Irving Layton fought for the recognition as a Canadian Jewish poet which was possible due to the changing times and greater acceptance of Jews. Finally, Leonard Cohen was regarded as a spiritual guru by the local Jewish media. This study provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between the three poets, the roles that they took on in the community and the way that they viewed themselves in their poetry and specific novels. This study has provided three portraits of Canadian Jewish poets in three different generations, marking the changing times with the changing images of the poets.

Through the different generations many changes occurred in regards to the social situation for Canadian Jewry, European Jewry and Israeli Jewry. There was a gradual transformation in the image of Jews beginning with emancipation where Jews went from being regarded as "the other," to being accepted as citizens. As time progressed, with increasing multiculturalism and tolerance, Jews were more accepted and they further integrated into Canadian society. In later generations, with the waves of immigration, Jews had further freedoms to choose the extent of their connection to Judaism. What was once accepted tradition and an expected way of life for Jews became an option. New Jewish movements began to form, such as the German based Reform movement that was not popular in Europe but it took shape in North America. In Canada in the late 1930's there was overt anti-Semitism. During this time the situation for the Jews of Europe during the Holocaust was increasingly fragile and eventually led to the annihilation of six million Jews. After the Holocaust in mid-1940 there was a change in attitude towards the Jews with more acceptance and integration.

The events that affected Jews in certain parts of the world had an impact on Jewish people worldwide. With the establishment of the State of Israel there was inevitably a further push towards tolerance of Jews on an international level. Israel was a military force that would not be docile while Jews were being persecuted. It was clear that Israel was a military power that could defend not only itself but also Jews worldwide.
With the open immigration policy persecuted Jews or else Jews wanting to establish roots in Israel could move there. Further, the image of Jews changed with the establishment of Israel, from the image of persecuted victims at the mercy of the motherland to members of a strong and united country.

The transformation of the poet is a reflection of the transformation of Canadian society. As society becomes more tolerant to minorities in multicultural Canada, there is a change in the roles and the receptions to poets. Since the image of the Canadian Jewish poet changes according to the social situation for Jews, as there is further acceptance of Jews in the different generations of poets there is a re-negotiation of traditional identity. This reflects the general trend of North American Jewry who has moved away from traditional Judaism in favor of more liberal movements such as the Reform and Conservative Jewish groups, which allow Jews to re-define the traditions just as Layton and Cohen have re-defined the images of the poet.

With these changes affecting Jews internationally, there were also changes in the roles and receptions to the poets, which were previously examined. The transformation in the recognition of the poet was a result of changing times: from a Jewish poet in Klein’s generation, to a Canadian Jewish poet in Layton’s generation to a spiritual guru/poet in Cohen’s generation. Klein may have been labeled as a Jewish poet because he started out publishing poems and short stories in mainly Jewish publications and more importantly, many of his themes were Jewish. He was preoccupied with the situation of European Jewry and Canadian Jewry. This interest is reflected in his first book of poetry *Hath Not a Jew*. When Layton discussed Klein as a Jewish poet he believed that he was labeled as such because Klein “has a Jewish background no other writer in Canada can possibly pretend to, this made him a poet of the minorities, first he wrote about the Jew, a large enough minority, then about the French Canadian, a slightly smaller one, then about the Indian, a yet smaller minority, finally he was left with the smallest of all minorities, the persecuted poet.”

The label of a Jewish poet was a label that Klein believed to have limited him because he intended to be a universal poet. He wanted to bring forth the Jewish voice to a wide audience at a time when there was no Jewish poetry in English. As well, he wanted the poetry about Montreal and the French people in *The Rocking Chair* to be well received and taken seriously. Klein wanted to unite the English, Jewish and French through poetry and by labeling him as a Jewish poet meant that he was confined to a category that did not allow him to fully reach beyond the Jewish audiences to the English
and French audiences. Klein objected "to being labeled a Jewish poet, and he resented the slighting criticism and neglect of his first volume of poetry Hath Not a Jew, on the grounds that his subject matter was limited and parochial"... but he wanted to create literature that linked the "Jews and English and he believed that he succeeded, but his view for much of his literary life, was not widely shared."\(^2\) In Klein's generation, a poet who wrote about Jewish themes, supported Jewish causes in his poetry and one who had strong ties to the Jewish community was labeled as a Jewish poet. Due to this fact, Klein felt that he did not receive the recognition that he deserved or the adoration that was bestowed upon Layton and Cohen.

Klein served as a spokesman on behalf of Jewish causes, which reinforced his image as a Jewish poet. As a speaker on behalf of the community in a time of social instability for Jews, he was a community representative, spokesman and leader. Klein became a spokesman because he wanted to help Canadian Jewry at a time when he was virtually powerless to help Jews suffering in Europe. By helping the Jews of Canada, he felt as if he was an active figure in the fight for tolerance. He served the needs of the community when they were facing overt anti-Semitism in Canada. Klein's generation faced the aftermath of both World War I and World War II. His generation was the first to witness the extent of mass destruction from competing political powers and the innocent victims caught in the middle of this struggle. The Jewish press emphasized his role as a spokesman more than his contributions as a poet. When his role as a poet was focused on, it was in terms of his image as a Jewish poet that had implications for his role as a Jewish spokesman.

Klein's generation of poets spoke on behalf of Jewish people but served a different role from religious figures. There was a strong boundary line; a poet served his function in the community just as a rabbi served his function as a leader of the community. In modern times, as Layton has argued, the voice of the poet has been elevated to the role of religious authority. In fact, this role substituted the role of rabbi or priest, just as poetry has been substituted for religion. According to Layton "poets have replaced the discredited rabbi, priests and ministers and that is for them to dish out the uplift and the sermonizing that the educated middle class audiences can no longer endure. So, they come to poetry readings or to poetry conferences and are dished out the same kind of uplift, the same kind of adulation."\(^3\) Layton speaks about the new role of poets in a positive light where they have taken over the role of the "discredited rabbis." This role of the poets taking over for the discredited rabbis suggests that the rabbinical
authorities misled people but now they are enlightened. Instead of this being positive, it could also be viewed as a negative reflection of the state of Judaism in modern times where religion has become unnecessary. However, people still strive to be enlightened, therefore, the poet can serve that function in the community.

Layton took on Klein’s battle to be recognized as a Canadian Jewish poet. He fought against the narrow definition of a Jewish poet that entailed having an audience of mainly Jews and writing about Jewish themes. This title of a Jewish poet was limiting because it meant that the poet could not be widely recognized and the poet would remain a part of Jewish culture and a contributor to Jewish literature without impacting general audiences. Layton succeeded in being recognized as a Canadian Jewish poet and broadened the definition of a Jewish poet by being recognized as a controversial figure, which inevitably led to his celebrity.

As a controversial figure Layton chose to write about subjects that were shocking to Canadian readers at the time. Layton’s controversial themes included his use of overt sexual imagery, grotesque imagery and their combination as well as political themes and social issues. In addition to the controversies in his writing, there were controversies in his personal life that came to the forefront such as his philandering, his interfaith marriage at a time when English-Jewish-French relations were fractured, his outspoken controversial opinions spoken in public forums and the acknowledgement that he created a public persona. Layton was the outspoken controversial voice that fought against injustices and for his own ideals that served the needs of his generation coping with the aftermath of World War II and the need for change. During the time of change from traditionalism towards modernity Layton’s outspoken political ideals were needed to cause further change, to break boundaries of racial and ethnic divisions and to cause people to change.

The Jewish press emphasized Layton’s connection to Judaism even if at times it was less manifest than other times. Layton was regarded as a Canadian Jewish poet because he fought to have a broader definition of the Jewish poet and because he was deeply connected to his Canadian heritage. He enjoyed the freedoms that living in Canada could bring him and he did not want to settle for limitations in a land of freedom. It is clear that Layton was ready for change and he pushed the definition of a Jewish poet living in Canada, however Layton was not the only one ready for change. He was only recognized as a Canadian Jewish poet because Canadians were also ready to broaden the definition. At the time, Canadian society was becoming increasingly more
accepting of different cultures and religions. In this multicultural element, it fostered Layton’s desire to reach all possible audiences.

Leonard Cohen took on the role of prophetic seer and mystic visionary. This served the need of Cohen’s generation who were moving away from organized religion towards spirituality that encompassed many different religions and practices. In Cohen’s poetry there was indeed awareness and great knowledge of the Jewish traditions but the passion for the Jewish traditions that is evident in Klein’s poetry is absent.

Gerald Tulchinsky, a renowned scholar of Canadian Jewish history, ponders whether the third generation of poets will have the same heart in the Canadian Jewish poetry that A.M. Klein had in his work. Tulchinsky wonders if the third generation will unite the Jewish identity to the Holocaust or Israel instead of concentrating on some of the important themes to Klein “on the Jewish soul caught in the unyielding web of modernity, while looking back to the past and remembering the sweet smells and Oriental sounds of the olden days.” It is evident that Cohen’s themes on the Jewish identity include the pogroms and the Holocaust which may reflect on his Black Romantic style, but there are also many positive poems such as those found in The Spice Box of Earth and in the Book of Mercy, which unite modern Jewish identity with the ancient traditions and the beauty of faith. The three poets have been united for a variety of reasons but the most significant reason is the influence that they had on one another.

It can be deduced that there was indeed a transformation of the Canadian Jewish poet in different generations. The issues that their generation had to face affected each poet. They all expressed the issues that affected not only their generation but also each other’s generation. Thus, they were all intimately linked by themes in their work that united them and molded them as poets. This transformation was a result of increasing tolerance towards Jews, therefore the basis for the change was positive. With this transformation of the times the image of the poet was dynamic. The image of the Jewish poet changed with the changing times. In the move from a Jewish poet to a spiritual guru/poet there was no longer the direct relationship of the Jewish poet to the Jewish audience as in the case of Klein. This meant that the connection to the Jewish culture, the Jewish heritage, Jewish suffering and triumphs could not be expressed on an intimate level. However, the changing image of the poet to a spiritual guru/poet meant that all audiences who ascribed to many religions could identify with Cohen’s messages in his poetry. The changing image of a Jewish poet in Klein’s generation to a spiritual guru/poet in Cohen’s generation is a greater metaphor for the process of integration for
Jews in Canada. Just as Canadian Jews have re-defined Jewish identity, the poets have also re-negotiated their relationships with the Jewish community.

These three Canadian Jewish poets from different generations, A.M. Klein, Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen have transformed the image of the poet based on the times in which they lived. By examining their self-perception of their roles and receptions imposed on the poets by the community as demonstrated in the local Jewish press, it can be deduced that each poet served a function for the community and each poet contributed to Canadian Jewish literature. Klein was a forefather of bringing forth the Jewish voice in English instead of Yiddish. However, in their own ways, Layton and Cohen were also patriarchs. Layton took the voice of Klein one step further by creating controversy and daring to say what many Jews believed at the time but would not dare say to the English and the French people as demonstrated in the Canadian Jewish press. Layton brought controversial ideas to the forefront of multicultural Canada and concurrently made people re-examine religion, politics and spirituality. He was able to speak honestly about the downfalls of the Jewish community in his work, whereas Klein who served as a spokesman could never have spoken out against the community. In essence, Klein’s poetry sought to reconcile while Layton’s poetry sought to tear apart the existing order and to challenge it. Cohen re-invented this Jewish voice to be a general spiritual voice.

This study has given new insight as to the three generations of Canadian Jewish poets; A.M. Klein, Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen. It has provided the reader with greater knowledge of the relationships between the three poets and the influences they had on one another. These portraits have also provided a social historical context of the times in which each poet lived in and included literary analysis used to uncover their self-images in the writing. It has contributed to the field with original scholarship in that no other studies have grouped together the poets as reflecting different times and situations for Canadian Jewry, marked by the images of Jewish poet, Canadian Jewish poet and spiritual guru. The images of the poets were dynamic and reflected the changing situation for Jews in Canada. Although the three portraits provided insight, there is still a lot to be accomplished. If this had been a twelve-credit thesis or a PhD thesis, then more research would have been conducted, with wider resources including more articles from the Jewish press and extending to the general press in newspapers such as The Montreal Star and The Montreal Gazette. There would have been a comparison of the treatment of the poets in the general media and in the Jewish media. As well, in addition
to the interviews with professors from Concordia, it would have been beneficial to interview Klein's son Colman, Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, as well as scholars on the poets such as Usher Caplan, M.W. Steinberg, Ira Nadel and poets from the Montreal literary milieu such as Miriam Waddington. This project has begun the task, and there is still more to uncover in this vast topic.

All three poets tried to take on all three images as spokesman, controversial figures and deeply connected to biblical figures. Klein aspired to become a politician which resulted in failure when the Cartier riding, a mostly Jewish neighborhood did not vote for him. Klein's prophetic voice was heard in *The Second Scroll* and in his psalms yet the Jewish press did not immortalize him as a prophetic visionary. Layton tried to be recognized as a spokesman and as a prophetic visionary. Cohen wanted recognition as a spokesman and a controversial figure. The community responded most to Klein as spokesman, Layton as controversial figure and Cohen as mysterious guru, however the Jewish community needed each poet to serve a different function. As Canada became a multicultural mosaic, there was more of an acceptance of Jews and the roles of the poets changed. This tolerance towards Jews had an effect on the poet's freedom of expression in literature and the attitude towards them in the community. The functions that they served in the community reflected the images and the transformation of the image of the Canadian Jewish poet in different generations.

2 Steinberg, xii.
3 Arsen, 71.
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