A STUDY OF THE POETRY OF IRVING LAYTON

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the phases of Irving Layton's growth and development as a poet, and the patterns of his vision. These phases are eightfold: the early poetry of the thirties; the poetry of the forties and Layton's involvement with First Statement and Northern Review; the poetry of the early fifties and his association with Contact Press; the two phases of satirical and meditative poetry of the intensive middle fifties; the poetry and prefaces of the late fifties and the consolidation of his body of work; and the writings of the two phases of the early and late sixties. Each phase corresponds to a development in his poetry and his involvement with the Canadian literary community. The pattern of publication is closest to the real order of his development; the chronology reveals the nature of Layton's growth.

The poetry of the thirties and forties contained the seeds of his later development and pointed to the directions he was to take. At these early phases he achieved some degree of definition which was to grow and widen rather than transform itself radically from book to book. The process of definition and redefinition, as revealed by this close study of his poems and his books, provides for the tension in his poetic growth. The poems and books, in their arrangements as well, indicate Layton's artistic intentions. They were also means
for reshaping his own self-image as poet, and the device of the persona of the poet figure.

The search and movement of Layton's poetics revolve around the self-image and persona of the poet. The image of the poet figure reflects itself in its varied aspects both in Layton's poetry and in his other writings—short fiction, critical articles, prefaces and forewords, literary and public correspondence. The dialectic for poetic realization finds its source in the poet figure. And the making of these self-images and personas moves as if in full circle. Ultimately, as in the last phase of the late sixties, the dialectic is one of completion and haunting, poetry and poet. Thus, each phase of Layton's poetry moves out from an initial stance and vision, and then completes itself in a manner that offers a new point of departure.

All of Layton's poet figures and their attending personas are explored in the light of this poetic dialectic, as well as Layton's singular influence and contribution to the literary community of Canada, which stem from his vision of the poet.
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CHAPTER I

The Early Poetry: 1931-1940

The sources of a poet's development often lie revealed in his early poems. Images and themes present themselves for the first time. Though the poet may be employing borrowed or derivative means, these poems contain the forms of his unique response and expression. It is possible to detect characteristics and patterns that are to grow and develop, and these are made more apparent in a study of the poetry in the light of the poet's subsequent work.

In Layton's case, this is more than a truism. It is a fact of poetic growth and development, and reveals the perennial pattern in the poet's writing. For Layton's writing takes on the curious form of a rising spiral—a series of cycles that reach for completion, but somehow develop beyond each other. In each phase of his career he begins initially, moves out from a point of departure and vision, and then almost returns to the point of inception. Yet the return is not an aboutface, for that would suggest but stasis and repetition. Rather, each cycle moves on further, and Layton finds himself on a further plane.

These phases of the poet's development are eightfold, yet in each phase growth does not fit neatly into this scheme. Poetic growth is organic, living, and vital. It has its points of intense overcoming and its instances of withdrawal and regression, and no critical approach can easily approximate the creative movement. Thus, I have deemed it wisest to follow the course of the poet's career and to focus on the
poems themselves.

He manifested an intense interest in the images of his poetic growth at an early date. The self-images of the poet are the central and connecting link and motif to the body of his work. The chronology of his poetry is closest to the real order of his development, a movement in experience and self-realization which is not incidental for every poet.

The poet figure then proves to be the central and engaging persona in Layton's work. The poet figure changes and grows from phase to phase such that the persona of the sixties is accumulative and contains within itself the poet figure of the earlier poems. Thus, in order to see Layton's own achievement and development, it is necessary to give the poems the closest scrutiny. Nor has any study attempted to fully interpret Layton as he interprets himself. The only book length study treats Layton's work homogeneously, that is, a search for the thematic unities in the poems. Mandel's approach is defined in the first statements of his book, "Irving Layton's poetry exhibits the extraordinary degree to which his career has been concerned with an imaginative and intellectual pattern." Mandel, indeed, attempts to comprehend this pattern, but in the course of his examination he tends to overlook the phases and changes in Layton's work. Mandel attempts to delineate and seize the pattern, and ignores the organic evolution which is so much a part of Layton's poetic dynamic. In any case, little critical attention has been focused on the pattern of Layton's books, and his own attempts to shape and reshape the body of his work. Layton's preoccupation with the poet figure finds its counterpart in his concern
for the arrangement and collection of his own poems.

Layton's first book did not make its appearance until fourteen years after his first poem had been published. In this period his publications were not consistent, and he did not get into his own stride until the early forties. In the thirties his poems appear in college papers, and only by the early forties do they appear in such publications as *The Canadian Forum*, *First Statement* and *Saturday Night*. Some of the poems of the thirties are revised and republished in the forties, and many of the poems of the latter period are collected in Layton's first books. Layton at these two early stages reveals the scope of his themes, and the tendencies and mannerisms which were to be characteristic of his writing for years to come.

There are a number of textual complications which arise in connection with this early period. The *Failt-Ye Times*, the student paper of MacDonald College which Layton attended in the late 1930's, is not available in a full file. In addition, Layton republished many of his poems in various places. The *Failt-Ye Times* was amalgamated into the *McGill Daily* in October of 1937. It becomes easier to follow the course of Layton's publications since the file of that student newspaper is readily available. In a reconstruction of Layton's published poems it is possible to see the forces that moved him into poetry: that they were, at first, simply inspirational, but were later reinforced by a keen social and political awareness which the poet did not hesitate to let affect his verse.

With the discovery of his own muse in 1944, Layton achieved his momentum and collected his periodical verse of the thirties. Yet
his writings of the thirties reveal his hesitancy throughout these years. Layton was also to republish his poems from period of creativity to the next or subsequent period. By the early forties he was consciously building up a body of work and a poetic world. The order of publication of his poems at these stages reveals the poet's preoccupation with definition and self-definition. And this also is reflected in a concern for the figure of the poet himself, his role, the facets of his image and self-image, and the related themes of creativity and artistic order.

Layton's first poem, "Vigil," was published when he was nineteen. Living on his own then, after graduating from Baron Byng High School, he had continued to write after his first impetus to verse began under the inspiration of a high school teacher's reading of a Tennyson poem. In a biographical study relating the forces in Layton's early life which affected his poetry, George Edelstein writes:

A few social satires and lyrics, both written in the mellifluous quatrains of Tennyson, were composed in Layton's tiny room, with the walls reverberating to the raucous cries of the local poultry merchants. A typical product of the rigid school curriculum, he had never been introduced to modern poetry. The influence of the Romantic Poets is apparent in "Vigil," published in The McGilliad, in 1931. A.M. Klein, his former tutor, was the editor.

"Vigil," re-discovered over thirty years later and collected in The Laughing Rooster contains pathetic fallacies and conceits of imagery in a manner reminiscent of Imagist verse, and also resembles some of Louis Dudek's early verse published in the forties. However, in "Vigil," the imagistic effects tend to a quasi-symbolism, for the
evocations of the imagery are often linked to an order of poetic statements. Some of the effects include a pathetic fallacy which is intended to ruffle or shock an anticipated puritanism, and resembles the same effect in a later poem of this period, "Masquerade." In "Vigil" sexuality which has been repressed, almost seems to express itself in the perverse:

The shadowy swaying of trees
Like robed nuns in a forbidden dance . . .

By implication, the poem castigates misdirected sensuousness and sensuality. Though it is awkwardly expressed, this early preoccupation provides a glimpse of a central tension in many of the later poems that Layton was to write. This unease with misdirected sexual energy surfaces in the poems published in the first three books, and later in the context of human and sexual betrayal offers the strongest poems in The Laughing Rooster, in which volume "Vigil" is appropriately gathered for the first time.

In this poem, the uneasiness and vague disturbance of the evening world gives way to dawn. Some master artist is creating the day by recreating the dimensions and colours of the earth. This painter's labours will reveal "the labouring ages of earth." In the first half of this poem (it is actually a thirteen line sonnet with an initial seven line octave set off against a sestet) the earth does not figure at all--but the props of the earth do. And these props, in Layton's usage, suggest primordial rituals and sacrifices. This is all suggested and vaguely constructed, but the pattern holds nonetheless. Nothing is finally given birth to in this evening world. Everything lies as if in wait, but expectant in an almost unnatural sense. The sense of
yearning is effectively imaged in the "clouds the colour of oyster shells." This image of shells is a figure of expectant shapes waiting in the probably fertile water-colour of the evening sky. And so are the "feathery grass," "boughs," and "trees." The different forms of organic life seem to be preparing themselves "like robed nuns," like the suggested bird in the grass. The event will be sacrificial. And a birth of a kind.

In the sestet it is the day that has given birth, that has created an image of the celebration inherent in the morning. For the "suns", the proliferating lights, have transformed the anonymous cast-off streams "To moving panes of light." These energetic exuberances of the opaque are the new windows onto the creative dimensions of day where the sun figures as a guiding source of energy. The final image of release encompasses the pun in "panes" and ties in the "labouring age of earth" with the pre-natal urgings of night.

The suggestive use of time and figurative language underlines this early statement of creativity. The young poet is keeping the vigil with his new found imaginative awareness. The last two lines, which indicate the creative release of energy in the landscape of the poem, suggest the symbolic transformation of energy into imaginative and perceptual vistas. And as the poet’s first published poem, it is, if not a manifesto of sorts, at least a declaration of intentions. Its theme is large: nature as the cosmic arena of the creative, and the relation of the archetypes of moon and sun. Yet these motifs are not really developed, and lie in the matrix of the poem as if to be developed by the poet in the future. Though the limitations are at first technical and lie in the awkward command of the figurative language,
the poem reaches a memorable denouement when the pathetic fallacies give way to those final two lines:

And suns that turn the wayside streams
To moving panes of light.

It is as if the creative energy of the suns were turning artistic, and the flux of nature becoming emblems of the creative intelligence, that is, "moving panes of light." The pattern of imagery and assertion already suggests motifs that were to be central to Layton at the two peak phases of his career, the middle and late fifties and the early sixties. The theme of tragic creativity and the central symbols of the sun and water were to figure in such poems as "The Cold Green Element," "For Mao Tse-Tung: A Meditation on Flies and Kings," "My Flesh Comfortless," and "A Tall Man Executes a Jig."

For the next few years Layton continued at his sporadic work but found most of his stimulation at Horn's, a cafeteria on St. Lawrence Boulevard near Rachel St. Here he was drawn into the left-wing circles and their discussions, and was goaded into arguments and polemics, and spent most of his otherwise free hours reading omnivorously. In an interview on April 11, 1962, he underlined the effect of those days:

My thinking then was rising in political categories.
I saw the world in political and social categories.
I was very excitable and impressionable at that age and absorbing economica l, political and literary ideas.
At that time there was a connection between literature and politics so that when you went to "Horn's," you had to be prepared to talk about Lenin and Dreiser or about Upton Sinclair or Bernard Shaw.5

That "connection between literature and politics" was to inform much of what Layton was to write to the end of the thirties.
In 1933 at the age of 21 Layton entered MacDonald College on a special government subsidized program in Agriculture. To the campus he transferred the energies and concerns of his polemical and political days. He was politically active at MacDonald, but most of all he began writing and publishing. In the February 21, 1936 edition of *Failt-Ye Times* Layton published his next poem. Though "Masquerade" does not bear the signs of Layton's political interests, it cannot simply be viewed as "showing his early preoccupation with love." Limiting and clumsy as it may be, it stands beside "Vigil" and reveals the poet's early preoccupation with the sources of inspiration. The poet addresses his other self, his inspirational double, a kind of a beloved alter ego. As in "Vigil", there is an initial backdrop of opposites. The expectations, however, are varied, and the images and statements seem elliptical to each other. They are not really unified. Ellipsis is characteristic of Layton at this early stage. It is as if perceptions and images of different kinds and orders were being thrown off. The center to this pattern is the form of the poem which is conventional in this case. Later the free verse techniques permitted phrases and figures to connect themselves with an eclectic syntax and association; that is, the poet chose whatever proved organically useful to his expression.

In "Masquerade", the speaker wonders about the first words spoken "that night." These "words were mixed with wit." What the speaker or persona wonders about is why the creative impulse "brings / Such crazy lines so sprawling writ." Putting aside the obvious technical considerations that these lines are doggerel, one still notes the conjunction of the "birth" or inspirational urge with the birth of the poem.
and its attending "fever," "the mute unneeded pain." It is as if the birth itself were unnecessary, as if art itself were not worth the risk and effort. This ambivalence towards art and creativity dogs Layton throughout his career and it finds its second expression in this early poem. Rejection and acceptance are held together in the rationalizing mind and they are the two attitudes that make the poet both bless and curse his lot. And characteristically, a tongue-in-cheek conceit, a pathetic fallacy with a hint of the sexually perverse, finds itself in the answer to the speaker's musings:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{And coming from one mammoth light,} \\
\text{Were waiting for the April sun} \\
\text{To shyly lift the hem of night.}
\end{align*}
\]

The bathetic, the pathetic fallacies, and the imagery, almost parallel the sestet of "Vigil." But it is from these early sources that Layton was to draw the imagery and symbols for his later poems. The early traces in this poet, common in the early verse of many, were not to disappear entirely. The first signs continue to appear. Yet this poem beneath its own sloppy technical masquerade bears the early signs of a contradiction of tones: the ludicrous and the serious. In a way this points to what was to bother Layton and his critics—the ability to graft opposite tones into one effective whole and not to allow them to mar the overall unity of particular poems.

Sandwiched between these two early poems on creativity and the poetic process is "A Jewish Rabbi." This seemingly incidental fact is in keeping with Layton's ambivalence to his Jewish sources and roots. This early ambivalence was to grow more complex, yet this unease
was to be a singular factor in his development. At all phases of his writing he was to be concerned with Jewishness and the Hebrew ethic.

The portrait itself of the Jewish rabbi is not ambivalent. Curiously, this short poem contains a blatant redundancy in its title. But this is not by way of accident. It is the equation of Jewish with the ineffectuality of that orthodox Judaism which was blind in the face of the historical forces of pre-war Europe, of Jewish persecution and the rise of Fascism, and of the debate in Jewish intellectual circles between socialist internationalism and Zionism. If this rabbi were a visionary prophet who looked at his own people with a sharp eye and an admonishing tongue, he probably would not merit this bitter portrait. For Layton this rabbi was a parody, at the most, of the prophetic tradition whose natural links in the thirties were with the various socialist visions of justice. What Layton may be implicitly using as a measure of comment is not the rich rabbinical or mythical world which Klein was drawn to—to Layton it was to be dismissed because its contribution in alleviating man's lot and transforming the conditions of capitalist society was limited. Layton was turning against the detached Jews set in limiting orthodoxy. The rabbi is too engrossed to see the ills, the sufferings of his fellow Jews. He is aloof and lives in a small corner of the world. He is the example of the bent-over cringing Jew:

He slowly stirs his jaundiced tea
And sighs for lemon...ach. His room
Is empty and he talks with kings.

Nine years later this poem is collected in *Here and Now* with two changes. The first involves the substitution of "Israel's" for "Jacob's breed"—
an allusion to the patriarch rather than to the people. But more
significantly the poem is re-titled, "My Father."

His father, Moishe Lazarovitch, lived in a secluded
world of his own. In Roumania he had been the records
keeper for the owner of an estate. It was a position
of some importance but this status disappeared in Canada,
to which he had been drawn by the promising letters of
his eldest son, Abraham, who had been sent away to
avoid conscription.7

On arrival in Canada, the elder Lazarovitch retreated into his own
scholarly world. His ineffectualness in earning a living, and his
death in 1921 when Layton was nine, left their marks on the poet.
Yet with the years Layton's position vis-a-vis his Jewishness took
on a more complex dimension. But this intitial poem outlines his
first allegiances most clearly. It was the angry and moralist
prophetic tradition which Layton identified with in later years.
Yet only in the Foreword to A Red Carpet For the Sun was Layton able to
admit that his father's otherworldliness, though ineffectual in worldly
concerns, still provided a link to an intellectual tradition of some
value and to an even larger mystical order. Layton was not to meet
this head-on for many years. Not until The Swinging Flesh does he
indulge in the same vituperation and unabashed scorn. And in The Whole
Bloody Bird, as with Klein, he finds a final resolution to this pre-
occupation in the state of Israel, though his is not essentially a
Zionist vision, nor an idealistic vision of the Jew.

The early years at MacDonald College were not productive from
a poetical point of view. Layton was involved with the politically
oriented Social Research Club and acted as its president in 1934-35.
He also began writing politically radical articles for the Failt-Ye Times
in a column called "Current History."

It was as if "Vigil," "Masquerade," and "A Jewish Rabbi" reiterated themselves in the pattern of his development. From the former two he moved to the rejection and stance of the latter poem. He was now ready to engage his full energies in political concerns, but not yet ready to engage his poetry because he probably had not gained either assurance or the real need to extend his politics into verse. In any case, Layton did not sense that he fitted in, as yet, with his social awareness. The sense of being an outsider which had grown out of childhood experiences and his years in high school were now reinforced at MacDonald and were to give him a definite perspective to be re-created in many versions of the persona of his later verse.

There they were, all healthy looking English philistines, red cheeked, blue-eyed, with not a thought in their heads and here was myself, eager, enthusiastic, concerned about the affairs of the world, the rise of Naziism, the employment situation and in no time I got myself involved in an argument thinking that the people in front of me were characters in Horn's Cafeteria. I was met with incomprehensible stares. After a while I could see that they regarded me as some sort of queer animal who had somehow or other been let in by some grotesque mistake. 8

Though this and similar experiences left their mark on him and his shaping awareness, his main political interests and activities continued unabated. In the MacDonald College Annual of 1934-35, as President of the Social Research Club, Layton outlined his own political stance as well:

War and the suppression of civil liberties are the burning issues today. A twofold purpose motivates the activities of the MacDonald Research Club: first to consider impartially the main trends of the present economic system and the basic changes that should be
affected; second, to arouse and organize campus sentiment against the twin menace of War and Fascism. Membership is open to all students who are earnestly opposed to these evils, and who are bent upon destroying them.⁹

So it is not wonder that when the poetic impulse returned in the fall of 1937, Layton's first poems proved to be political in subject.

Between the fall of 1937 and the fall of 1938 he published twelve poems and began to feel more comfortable with poetry. Not directly concerning himself with the sources of his creativity, he began to use poetry as a vehicle for his more vociferous concerns. Since the college paper was amalgamated into the McGill Daily, Layton's assurance must have been bolstered by his increasing readership. Of these twelve poems, about half arise from political occasions, and the rest are either romantic or meditative lyrics. This pattern can be seen as the first instance of Layton's varied poetic bents. This variety that was to confuse his critics was a combination of the serious and the light, of "high" and "low" poetry. At this early stage it indicated that the poet was not intent on preserving a pre­ cocious and precious lyricism, but was intent on being open and engaging.

These first poems are satirical and topical. The two poems under the heading of "Poetic Socialism" already prefigure the kind of poem that was to proliferate in the satiric collections of the early and mid-fifties. It also points to the poet's early declaration for his poetry: a marriage of poetry and the world. "Portrait of a Pseudo-Socialist" is a lampoon directed against the living-room socialist, the one who "...shouting fury 'pon the system's flaws / ...sits attentive to his own applause." Hypocrisy, and insincerity are
human traits that irritate the poet. With the clicking and teetering rhymes of heroic couplets Layton attacks the man who uses the political viewpoint but is really caught up in the effects of his harangue, of his own "role", his own "ego" showing itself off as the non-conformist. The archaisms and the choice of meter have the effect of parody, and set the portrait up as a kind of minor caricature. In "On the Proposed Air Pact Outlawing the Bombing of Cities" Layton is jibing at the hypocrisy of the British politicians who supposedly stood up for democracy, but for fear of the Left revolutionary spirit of Spain, did a double take and ended up allowing Franco to win in Spain. But in this expose of the double-think and double-talk of the Western democracies as the Civil War tore Spain, Layton was already striking at another characteristic target for his satire: the deviousness of men (and politics) and the perversion of language (and thus truth): that is, propaganda. The early satirist was already aiming at cant and fustian. Neither of these poems read like the agitprop of New Frontiers, for they are not marred by socialist or communist jargon and they spring from a detachment and a commitment working in balance. Rather, they are marred by their adherence to a stilted and confining meter and rhyme. The diction is often poetic and archaic with little formal effect. Though as Layton developed from rhyme and closed verse of this kind, he reserved these formal means for the satire he was to write.

The long poem, "Ah Rats!!! (A Political Extravaganza)", dated April 14th, 1938, attacks the policy of appeasement of the Western democracies in regard to Hitler. As an 'extravaganza', it can give itself over, however, to the caricaturistic devices of much agitprop
written in the thirties. The setting is a political meeting amongst the rats. Different speakers are heard:

Another holds his paw aloft
And with a voice beguiling, soft,
Orates: "The rats of whom you speak
Are dominated by a clique;
We their own Fuehrer we should deal
For somehow he's our friend I feel;
Since wars today are won by cash,
Bethink you, rats, and be not rash."

The chairman speaks and all are still,
"The vote is ninety-nine to nil
That we with Fuehrer Rat shall treat.
Now legend says we are discreet;
We must a proper rodent choose
Who'll bring the others to our views....
Your squeaking tells me I am right
Its plain that only fools will fight.

"Since tis agreed the wisest plan
Is swift to place, if but we can,
An emissary in the House--
A full-sized rat and not a mouse--
'This needful to select the best,
A rat more cunning than the rest,
And for our cause no better than
This lanky rat from Birmingham."

The meeting loudly broke in cheers,
The wives and maidens were in tears,
They all danced up, they all danced down,
Short tails, long tails, black coats, brown;
For now they have in Parliament
A delegate whom they have sent;
When Brother Neville lifts his voice
Ah listen! Hear the rats rejoice?

But Layton moves on from this kind of writing. Of the other poems published in this period, the most effective are those whose themes arise from behind the backdrop of the thirties, shed the limitations of the above poems, and move into a more radical or rather reductive vision in which the visual imagination comes to the fore and the themes become larger in scope.
An early metaphysical bent manifests itself. In "Voltaire Jezebel" an almost Nietschean echo relates the death of God:

...who died of rage,
Cursing a race unsatisfied
With metaphysics as a proof
Of his divine existence--
Or the fluttering of a dead butterfly's wing
Shaken by the sun.

The Jezebel, harlot philosopher is Voltaire whose rationalism denied the existence of a deity. But Layton's early signature on this poem lies in the last image. It is a recurring one and makes itself manifest again in "Butterfly on Rock," a meditative poem that gives the title to a recent study of Canadian poetry. This curse is also transformed into a human curse—man's damnation of his condition. This tragic declaration and bravado inform other poems. This damning stance is part of the reductive vision in "Days of Wrath" in which another characteristic theme is first articulated. Men "are forever doomed / To be life's wreckage and its bitter waste". But this is tempered by the perspective of man's weakness and the perversity he lends himself to in the character of culture and civilization:

For man his lust-begotten fortune builds
Upon a pyramid of human skulls
And with its varnish all corruption gilds
And each ennobled feature slowly dulls;
Thus blindly driven, like groping ants we creep,
And with these crawling tribes a kinship keep.

Insect and reductive imagery sums up this statement of the debasing and de-humanizing forces in history and civilization. This sub-human world is the source of much of Layton's imagery. It lends itself to the vision of a Timon coupled with the beast and animal obsessions of a raving Lear. Man is the perverted beast; he who has
consciousness and culture is most deserving of the curse and the wrath of the poet. Yet it is this debasement of civilization which likens him to lower forms of life. Layton had not totally reduced his vision of man. Later he was to enlarge his statement and add to it the judgment that man's condition renders him more despicable than the beast. This statement in the above poem finds its antecedents in Shakespearean sources, but the choice is revealing. Once he discarded these sources and their outmoded poetic language he was to emerge with his own rhetoric.

Another sonnet, "De Mortuis" (later re-titled "Release" in The Laughing Rooster), reveals the poet's other literary models and forebears. It has classical Roman echoes and could have sprung from English versions of Juvenal's diatribes, the odes of Horace, or the short poems of a Catullus. This could have been picked up through Layton's readings at MacDonald College mitigated through the medium of Elizabethan verse. Wishing for the death of an enemy, the speaker finds some release from his antagonism to the inexorable. From another's death, he will find power and vision.

Then will my youth aspire beyond the flesh
And tread bold ways to a remembered peace.
And find life's spiteful fever ebb and cease
In spacious dreams where light is born afresh.
Yet shall I wonder how our sullen mirth
Provokes the ancient anger of the earth.

These "spacious dreams" suggest a transcending vision. Layton returns to this vision with maturity and power first in The Swinging Flesh and in Balls for a One-Armed Juggler. The affirmation then arises from a vision in which the poet's consciousness will always re-appear in other forms, that the imagination will re-create itself no matter whatever doom
prescribes itself. It is the immortality of the imagination that is sustained as if there were a poetic force in the cosmos which can never be obliterated. This theme finds its resolution when the Timon resolves the contradictions of the human condition, when he touches on the other ways of transcending reality. "Spacious dreams" in any case suggest that the next mode the poet may take may be the fantastical and the surreal. Edelstein, relating the above poem to Layton's growing disenchantment with left-wing dogma and the indifferent student body, sees the poet expressing his essential loneliness again, and his sense of frustration. This may be the particular emotional source of that poem and it is reinforced by Layton's own reaction to the dogma he found among the radicals he was associating with:

I could see a type of mind which, as I grow older, I find more and more abhorrent. A completely un-literary and anti-literary mind, an unimaginative mind that puts will and reason before the imagination. I could sense it then but I can see it far more clearly today.¹⁰

As if in keeping with this elegiac note, "Meditations of a Liberal" is re-titled "Requiem" in The Laughing Rooster. It is the plaint of the liberal in a time of changing values and an expression of his inability to function with a coherent viewpoint:

How shall we meet the burden of our times, Or make profession to our tongue-tied faith When all the lamps are gutted, one by one.

The theme of change is a major one in Layton's work. Though he is not a liberal, this theme provides the crux for the preface to the second edition of A Laughter in the Mind, and the last image in the above poem reverberates in the final poem of that volume. That preface is a paean to flux and change in history and carries itself forward to The Swinging
Flesh. In the early sixties when the North American ethos became conscious of its vulnerability and confusion in the face of change, Layton had already foreseen the process a few years before. Finally, in The Shattered Plinths, Layton reaches the paradoxical resolution to this theme. In any case, it can be argued that in "Meditations of a Liberal," Layton's presentiment is socialistic. The liberal is complaining about the social order he sees crumbling between the onslaughts of the Left and those of Fascism. Layton seems to be preparing his reader for the new era promised by the left ideology of the thirties. Many intellectuals and artists who subscribed to this were to be disappointed in the forties and fifties. Layton in the fifties was to see that the god had indeed failed and that the problems of technological society were to go beyond the usual analyses and criticisms of capitalism. The process of dehumanization was universal and not only limited to Western society.

The apparent urgency of "Ah Rats!!" carries over to another poem dated November 13, 1938, two days after the twentieth anniversary of the Armistice. Layton was moved again by the topical and the timely—the immediate in the world he lived in—an impulse hard to avoid in the late thirties. The backdrop in this "Medley for Our Times" shifts, and these shifts and changes of tone move the poem from an elegiac note to a satirical stance, and finally to an oracular declaration. It becomes truly a medley, then, and a collection of different notes held together in one piece. These three tones, in effect, inform different viewpoints of the contemporary world, of the late thirties. Significantly the poet holds them together in one poem. They are sustained awkwardly, but sustained nonetheless. These tones inform
the rest of the early poems and are a mixture which time and time
again will remain in Layton's poems—they are the directions of his
voice.

Three walls
Lurch upward through the mist,
While the rain decorates
With a broken string of pearls
Each faded line of brick,
And a doorway
Gapes at my window
Incredulously.

This roofless three-walled house or room represents Layton's present
of the thirties, empty within, and standing like an affront. Each
of its parts contain a "mad tale," a fragmentary piece of the puzzle
of human suffering.

What fearful, strange imaginings
Of curious insensate things.

All the objects and paraphernalia of this world are emblems of the
adversity of the times. Yet they speak out as if they were personas
of a fragmentary hallucination. Buying a poppy is a stupid ironic
act for it will add cash or commerce to a world that will return to
war and drums. The poppy interlude suggests the Christian theme of
sacrifice. But that redemption myth of the Western democracies can
do little here. Christianity and capitalism are bankrupt. There is
only the silence, then, in the face of human strife and suffering.
Retribution may come from joining in the common cause which inverts
the Christian myth and its perverted militarism:

What did he say,
Before he fell?
He told the word,
"Destroy this hell."

Christ becomes a red revolutionary preaching destruction of the status
quo.
And finally in the last stanza the initial, almost surreal image returns:

Three walls
You shall push upward through the mist,
For the night has come
And our disordered lives
Go out upon the wind
Like the frail whimper
Of a beaten idiot.

But the gods

...will send down
Some kindlier dream of life
To stir the busy minds of men,
To fill that gaping
Venomous doorway.

The poet merges this doorway and what it stands for with an apostrophe also directed against his own mouth, that other oracular opening:

O incredulous mouth
Draw back your lips!

This indeed is a poem of disorder. The disassociative technique and mood are reinforced by the poet's distance from the surreal house and from the suffering masses. He has withdrawn in the poem, and so has Layton by means of this persona. This allows Layton to appeal as if to everyone and no one at the same time. The obsessive apostrophe suggests that the speaker has been so drawn to the images that are correlatives for his states of mind or that the intense force of objects and images have almost taken him over. The tangential links between the moods in this poem, and the obsessive presence of a disembodied image of walls and a door, create the disturbing visual elements. It is as if the claustrophobia of human strife and suffering were never to break open and free of these bounds and bonds. As the first developed instance of the poet's tendencies to
order imagery and statement into vision, it is a significant poem in Layton's early work. It points to the technique and manner of the later visionary poems in which Layton was to create his own symbolic and surreal landscapes and immovable props and backdrop of his developing vision.

Layton is so engrossed in his own unfolding tableau in "Medley for Our Times" that he rarely looks back in this poem, and he sees this order of images as the order of the mundane reality he treats so caustically in his satirical pieces. It is also strange to note that this combination of the satirical and the ironic impulses, with its visionary and obsessive characteristics, sometimes hovers on the hallucinatory. The bridges and gulfs between vision and hallucination inform Layton's unease and the thematic tension in his visionary poems, and will find different and varied resolutions in such later poems as "The Tall Man Executes a Jig." This unease and tension signal the fact that the poet will not be satisfied merely with lyricism, but as an artist, will attempt to construct an imaginative world of his own. There is no other alternative for the creative intelligence that is at the point of being wracked to pieces by the contradictions of an obsessing vision of suffering and unmeaning. For the meantime this does not demand a maturity of effort. That maturity begins to show signs of its poetic energy and integration in the books of the forties, and develops through the books of the early and mid fifties, coming to an apprehension of that tension in the "Note" and poems of A Laughter in the Mind. In any case, the disassociation is only incipient in these early poems. Nevertheless though the mode is not the surreal,
it is unsettling to see separate themes and moods held together so loosely in a poem that demands a more imaginative integration. On the other hand, this may be construed as only the attempt of a beginning poet who has not found the form and the coherence to fashion consistency and effective poetic wholeness. But in its own way this poem prepared the poet for the next attempt in poetic order, the energy and nature of which was to emerge full force later when the poet would be "called" to his poems.

The most realized and complete of these poems, "Old Halifax Cemetery," combines within itself the elements of style and shifts of tone and stances of the early poems. Cemeteries would always hold a fascination for Layton. In the later cemetery poems Layton writes his various poetic statements on the theme of death. Cemeteries bring out the pathos, satire, ridicule, and the knack for seeing the absurd. This compassion, rage, and celebration, may stem from that central experience in his youth, (also evoked in "A Death in the Family" is the death of his father when he was only nine) which imprinted itself on the poet's youthful awareness. In the travel poems he was to write in the sixties, cemeteries often become the keys to understanding each culture's vision in terms of its attitudes to life and death. A cemetery is a final cultural statement--a final meeting of a culture's contradictions and stance--a kind of a collective coda. For the poet it is a source of meditation and questioning. It is at the same time the source of much human absurdity and also the wonder at the absurd itself. All dissolves there for the poet. And from it he can draw his own crystallized vision. Cemeteries also evoke a laconic and rhetorical response is one
and the same instance.

In the "Old Halifax Cemetery" the cynic and idealist meet, as it were, in the same position before the world. While one emphasizes the shame, the corruption and absurdity of human life, the other can still feel for the sufferers. But one may have to mask this sensitivity, this awareness of the pathos of it all. A satiric and an ironic stance is like a protective armour. It allows the poet to foray with irony and reductive wit without being drawn in by sentiment or bathos.

The poem moves along by means of shifts, the tension of opposites: cemetery, city; angels, excreting birds; virgins, seducers. If these opposites or contradictions resolve themselves into a vision of the good, it is only by means of the ironic universal fellowship of death.

For death was the occasion for making "These sunken, sullen stones /
Absurdly... / ...advertise a pile of bones." And,

Here lie seducers and mean knaves
Who now a friendliness achieve
Thro' huddled graves.

The opposites proliferate before this observer. The opposites are finally resolved in death and in the grave, but within the context of a classic ironic stance. Yet this death does not even provide one with singularity or individual identity.

...not the dates,
Or epitaphs with thou and thee,
But birdlime etchings on the slates
That marks Finis.

The poet's statement could have no more reductive a strophe than the excremental. And it is this continued seesaw and inversion of opposites (underlined by the reductive) which keeps the poem (and the poet) from either railing incoherently or from silence. And these final "etchings"
are almost correlatives for the lines of the artistic statement and vision. But the poem does not leave off at this point. There is a stanzaic epilogue, a sort of aside. This is a gesture Layton was to indulge in frequently, stemming from a desire to put in even one more word after the last word. The poet has almost anticipated the reader's response, for after this last image, what is there left to pay? What remains, then, is the re-application of the insights of this poem, the poetic etchings on this theme. They are to fall back into life, into the here and now:

One mournful thought is fit
Before I to my Silence pass:
These die without the benefit
Of poison gas.

The poet brings us back to pre-war Halifax. The vision of the dead fades away. The cemetery is now a fact to be reconciled with; it bears a lesson to carry home. For in the immediate future, Layton seems to be suggesting, the era of poison gas will return. More graves will sprout in Halifax as a result of explosions and munitions and the whole phenomenon of war. The implications proliferate. For it is as if the "Old Halifax Cemetery" were obsolete. In it lie the victims of natural death. The civilian deaths arose from accidents or natural causes. These were individual deaths. Soon the opposites will encompass mass death, and there will not be time to name the Isabella Ferns, the Susan and Jed MacIvers. This reading can be corroborated in the light of Layton's political awareness and statements in the articles on politics he wrote prior to this poem's composition. He was not unaware of the new conditions brought into play in the pre-war years and the military preparations being made in
Europe. A new dimension had been added by technology.

One of the articles Layton wrote for the MacDonald College Supplement of the McGill Daily is an example of his political awareness. The vigour of the prose points to the other directions Layton was to take in his later prose writings: his prefaces and their blunt statements on Canadian culture, on the nature and traits of the poet, and the creative process, and on the dilemmas of the twentieth century. The persona which later emerges from his poems was reinforced by the vigor and bluntness of his polemics and the literary controversies he engaged in. But these stem from the force of his insights and the prose which he wrote at this early stage:

Mr. Chamberlain's love letters to Mussolini would seem to indicate that the heart of the National Government has slid down into the Italian boot. However, that there are many farsighted statesmen in the British Isles who fear the Caesarian ambitions of the renegade socialist undeniable. Thus, the unpredictable and contradictory nature of Britain's foreign policy reveals a significant gap between her imperial and class interests. The resulting vacillation has had the most unfortunate consequences for the peace and security of the world. Might has triumphed over right. The unsheathed sword has once again become the final arbiter of international morality.

The figurative language in the employ of a clear and hard-fisted writer reinforces this vigour:

The democratic governments have adopted the worst possible method to fight the Fascist bullies—by encouraging them.... Nevertheless, the democracies must hasten to put more iron into their political diet. They must learn to match the dictators' monosyllables with ringing monosyllables of their own. Fortunately, it is not yet too late.... It needs only a firm will for the democratic nations to act together to preserve peace and liberty. They must learn to trust each other
and strike hard and fearlessly for a much-desired purpose. There is only one flaw in the above reasoning. Alas, there is no honour even among thieves!

Layton's socialist analysis tempered by an understanding of real-politik informs his forceful seriousness. Style and utter realism mask the writer's early singularity of mind. He analyses by means of a dialectic method, forces open the situation, sees the two alternatives as if they were black and white and apparent, and forges ahead with his own solution. Yet at the close he comes to one reservation—the Laytonic reservation, one can add—already expressed in "Medley for Our Times":

Alas,
There is no honour
Even among thieves.

This is the seizing point of view of the poet. It is blunt, crystallized and uncompromising, yet utterly realistic. And the argument fuses these into the one mould of the poem which begins in medias res and moves swiftly with argument and assertion. This brio informs these early poems and demonstrates that the early Layton had already shaped himself to the tendencies of spirit he was to make complex with the coming maturing years.

Layton had also begun to attempt to write short fiction, which also throws light on the poetry of this phase. He in fact never really stopped writing in this form from the early period to the days of First Statement and Northern Review, and lasting up to The Swinging Flesh. In effect by this early period, 1937-38, Layton had already tried his hand at all the different genres he was to work in in the coming years: poetry, articles, short fiction.
"Silhouette of a Man" was published at the end of 1937, in the midst of his first sustained period of writing poetry. The story is developed like a poem, a prose poem centered upon one episode, an anticipated rendezvous between a down-and-out unemployed man and the girl who was to aid him. Its exploration of human disappointment, non-communication and misunderstanding were to be carried over to most of Layton's subsequent short stories.

Waiting for this girl to come, the man is led into a disappointment. She never arrives as she had presumably promised, and from this disappointment the rationalization emerges:

Chiefly I thought it was human suffering that had moved her; not know that misery, if it is too common is an object of contempt.
The empty marionnette did not come. I felt an ill-defined sense of pleasure as of a man who has spent many years in a dungeon and is suddenly released. I had neither begged nor borrowed. But neither did I know where a morsel of food was coming from. I picked myself up slowly and hunching my shoulders walked unsteadily down the path.

If she "were the empty marionnette", perhaps it is also the fault of the man. In any case, the man must continue on his way. But the girl as puppet may be interpreted as being a chimera, a character in the man's fantasy and daydreams. On another level, it may be a parable of Layton's as yet unfulfilled attachment to the muse. In the midst of his politics and his identification with the abject, the muse has not yet come back to finally offer him her real presence and help. Without her, he is still the silhouette—and without this feminine principle he must remain as he is for the time being. He may be angry with her, but there is some consolation in the fact that he
has not had to beg from her. He can still make it on the terms of his present condition. Layton as poet was to remain on these terms for some years yet.

"Old Halifax Cemetery", the last poem of this period, was published in the McGill Daily in 1940. It was what the poet salvaged from a depressing sojourn in the Maritimes after he graduated from MacDonald College in May of 1939. The marriage he had entered into in 1938 was not working out and by 1940 things were dismal indeed. But this was a mixed curse for he began to turn to poetry with a renewed interest and dedication:

Some relief was gained by his registration for a Master's Degree in Political Science, at McGill University, but the writing of poetry became the main outlet for his misery and it probably saved his sanity, although he did not consider himself to be a poet and was only beginning to read Auden, Spender, C.D. Lewis and Dylan Thomas. 1940 was a terrible year for him; even his former convictions about the war had been shaken by Russia's treaty with the Nazis.11

But by the next year he was to begin to publish poetry in publications outside the domain of the university community. The main impetus for the poetry of this period, no doubt, came from "Poetic Socialism," but it outgrew these sources and found its first roots in such poems as "Medley for Our Times" and "Old Halifax Cemetery." Despite the derivativeness of these pieces and their echoes of Elizabethan verse and Tennyson, some patterns began to emerge—patterns that were to be developed upon and refined in the next decade. At the onset there were the weak poems centering upon the act and significance and forms of creativity. At the end of this early period poetry first
is used as a vehicle for statement, observation and comment. Later the poems demonstrate a drive for a more visual and poetic order. Layton was to build on this shaky foundation and two forces were to propel him: involvement in the literary community of First Statement and his first really inspired and urgent poems of 1944.
NOTES


2 Irving Layton was born Isadore Lazarovitch. "Vigil," in *The McGilliad* in 1931 is published under the name of Irving Lazarre. "Masquerade," published in the *Failt-Ye Times* in 1936 appears under the name, Irving Lazarovitch. Most of the poems which appear in 1937-38 are published under the name Irvine Layton, a more anglicized version. And it was only by 1940 with the publication of "Old Halifax Cemetery" that the poet's present nom de plume makes its appearance as Irving Peter Layton. The P. or Peter is dropped shortly afterwards, but crops up as the middle initial under which a few reviews appear in *First Statement*.


4 Edelstein, p. 22. When Layton's poem was published in the April 1931 issue of *The McGilliad* the editor, then, was David Lewis. Lewis edited the second and last volume of the magazine while his friend Klein had edited the two numbers of volume one which had appeared in March and April of 1930.

5 Edelstein, p. 23.

6 Edelstein, p. 43.

7 Edelstein, p. 6.

8 Edelstein, p. 27.

9 Edelstein, p. 31.

10 Edelstein, p. 51.

11 Edelstein, p. 56-57.
CHAPTER II

Underwater Slums: Poetry of the Forties

Layton began having his poems published in *The Canadian Forum* soon after he entered McGill University in 1940 to do graduate studies in Political Science. At this time the *Forum* was the national magazine in which every young writer aspired to have his work appear. In a series of articles and exchanges in the "Correspondence" columns of the *Forum* between December 1943 and July 1944, there were various reactions to Smith's anthology, *The Book of Canadian Poetry*, in which the journal's role is emphasized. And in an appropriate letter in the July 1944 issue Smith points out:

*The Canadian Forum* is performing an important service to the cause of a genuine and critical nationalism by making imaginative work of this calibre available to the general public. When I recall that within the last two or three years you have published Birney's "David," Klein's "Autobiography," Avison's "Break of Day," Page's "The Stenographers," Gustafson's "Epithalamium in Time of War," Anderson's "Summer Joe," and Pratt's "The Truants," I realize that the *Forum* is not only Canada's leading journal of political opinion but a true cultural force.

Smith does not mention that the work of some of the younger poets of the *First Statement* group also appeared during this period. But it is in this backdrop that Layton's poems began appearing. He was in good company.
Nevertheless, it is in the little magazine activity in Montreal that Layton found himself. In two articles Wynne Francis has outlined Layton's involvement; her lively manner evokes much of the spirit of the *First Statement* group in her article, "Montreal Poets in the Forties." She also manages to add a few more perspectives to this period in her article on Louis Dudek, "A Critic of Life." Louis Dudek and Irving Layton were both students at McGill University in 1940. Dudek worked on the *Daily* that year and the occasion for their meeting is related by Wynne Francis:

Another poet publishing in the *Daily* at this time was Irving Layton. At a Literary Society meeting in 1940 the two men met and recognized each other as poets having much in common. 

How Layton and Dudek then got involved in John Sutherland's magazine is further related in "Montreal Poets in the Forties." The fortuitous occasion which brought them all together would not have been possible...had not a hat-check girl told a friend about her brother's venture into publishing. The hat-check girl was John's sister, Betty; the friend was the sister-in-law of Irving Layton.

In the period of Layton's enlistment in the Canadian Army from July 28, 1942 to June 12, 1943 (he was honourably discharged from the Army because of his "left-wing" activities in the late thirties at MacDonald College) he began his association with Sutherland, and probably brought Dudek into the group:

During a visit to a sister-in-law, who was working at a restaurant, the Venus Grill, he had met Betty Sutherland, an artist, and spent his free time with her and her brother, John, a writer.
Upon his subsequent discharge Layton threw himself into the work of the new magazine. Dudek reminiscent to Wynne Francis, related the role Layton assumed quite early in the group:

'I always felt myself 'third.' Sutherland was the leader and editor, Layton was 'the poet'—we all expected he would soon be recognized—and I was best at handling the mechanics of the printing press.'

Though in hindsight Dudek may be minimizing his role as the other poet of the group, he had already been impressed with Layton's poetry soon after he had met Layton at the Literary Society meeting in 1940. Dudek must have been impressed with Layton's assertion and assuredness, and probably as well with the authority of tone in the first poems. Characteristic of Dudek's interest in other poets, he immediately had a project in mind:

Dudek was sufficiently enthusiastic about Layton's poetry to make it the object of his first publishing venture. Using the facilities and knowledge he had acquired at the Hayhurst Advertising Agency, Dudek set to work to produce a book of Layton's poems. The job was never completed but meanwhile the poets became close friends.

Soon after, both joined Sutherland. Layton was to wait until First Statement press was to launch its New Writers Series in 1945 before his first book was to appear. Meantime, he continued to write and publish frequently in the group's magazine. As well, the rivalry, which was indeed fruitful, between this group and the Preview group, had its effects. Wynne Francis relates Layton's impressions of that rivalry:

Not that we wanted to be like them but we wanted to be as good as they were in our own way. It made us tougher than we would have been and provoked us into working harder than ever. I secretly read and studied Anderson's style and went back beyond it to his sources and models and I gained a great deal for myself in the process.
For the poets, this rivalry had the immediacy of a very real struggle. Sutherland's trenchant criticism of *Preview* revealed the aggressive critic in him. The rivalry itself was to move Raymond Souster to speak of it in these terms in his memorial poem, "John Sutherland 1919-1956":

> While bursts of our forty-fives shivered against the rifle-range's test wall, I read *First Statement*, your magazine kindling a war back in Montreal more cold-blooded than the Coventry razing, more ruthless than a Commando raid. All this seemed far away to me on Cape Breton Island, even further in Yorkshire the next year. When I came back to Montreal the war was over, your fighting nearly over too.10

The spirit of this literary confrontation was to reinforce Layton's own aggressiveness. It could not have been such a novel experience for him since he had already experienced much opposition from the student body when he was writing his articles as a student in MacDonald College.

In the meantime before Layton was to throw himself into the magazine activity, he had begun to publish in the *Forum*. The early poems published in this journal demonstrate how he was moving into his own voice and refining the techniques he had discovered in the last poems published in the *McGill Daily*. Almost half the poems (13 of 32) to be collected in *Here and Now* had their first appearance in the *Forum* between April 1941 and April 1945. Two other poems published in the *Forum* during this period were not included in the poet's first book. Of the two, "Debacle," published in the April 1941 issue, has as its immediate backdrop the war-time days. It is a rudimentary poem whose tension rises from the discrepancy between what seems and what is.
The long slow summers days are here
Once more; the raspberries appear
Like a woman's nipples; the dust
Lies on the vans like a fine rust.

The first line begins with a tinge of earthly nostalgia which acts as a pallid prologue for a Canadian ode to summer. The ripeness the earth engenders suggest a seasonal sexuality. Nature, made fecund by the insight of the poet, takes on the features of a woman. But the transitions shift to a suggestion of the inevitable decay of the "fine rust." The "gossamer scenario" of this poem extends to take in the "mired alleys" where "the heat" lies in waiting to ambush the office workers freed "at six o'clock." The poorer sales girls give way to the other figures of the war-time tableau:

...some, their lackeys at the door,
Compute the dividends of war,
Consider wisely how and when
A corner in the flesh of men

May be conjured. 0, I suppose
There is a beauty in the rose
That never dies. But can one praise
The blood and heat of murderous days?

Seeming lax and relaxed, the poet can not hold back his complaint almost rising to a rage. The summer daily routine does not leave him free of his obsessive vision. Once again it is "The sun, impatient now of all / Nice difference" which has given him this perspective of light, of vision. This poem's pattern repeats itself in other poems of this period. "Debacle" suggests the disquiet which informs the poet's vision. The looseness of this poem is bypassed in other poems of this period, and a classic tightness begins to fuse
the poems. When the poet can not remain content with this disquiet, this unsettling vision of what he sees and apprehends, he goes on to write "Epitaphs" in pitches of intensity and scorn. He has become the observer; and it is his eye, his vision which becomes the chief tool of his poetic practice.

In the first years of Layton's association with First Statement, his poems grow in complexity and begin to exhibit the varied finished qualities which were to be his stylistic hallmarks. Soon after he had met Sutherland, his poems begin to appear in First Statement. Three poems were published in Vol. 1, No. 9. In "House to Let," the statement is a twist on the "cultivate one's garden" theme:

Go build yourself a house,
Something against these unseasonable times,—
The puffy, leering lips of old women.
The unanswerable protest of a hungry child.
The nakedness of men before the great terror.
The smoky sun sinking down
Like a stricken charger on a battlefield.

There is a similarity between this poem and "Medley for Our Times." The same central image of the house crops up. Here the house is both a shelter and a trap, both a home and a prison. But there is some consolation to this new structure. For after completing the construction, the builder is told to "Go out and listen to the wind—/ The sun will look different tomorrow." The essential difference here is security. But it is the security of a half-way house between the contradictions and limitations imposed by shelter and security. The title of the poem sheds light on the theme. In these early war years in Montreal houses were difficult to find and rent. Thus, the poem suggests that one would have to
go and make one's own house, so to speak. This is almost a call for individual effort. The literal and figurative house of the thirties, which was in disarray and decline, seems to be abandoned. There is another alternative to the collective effort.

The third poem of this group, "A Jewish Rabbi," is printed intact in the version first published in 1936. It suggests that Layton was not turning his back on his early efforts, and realized that this laconic poem should not be abandoned. Of the three poems of this group, it is the most effective, and the only one he was later to collect in his first volume.

Layton's debut in First Statement was in the special poetry issue, Vol. 1, No. 12. Layton's poems appeared with Kay Smith's and Louis Dudek's and were prefaced by Sutherland's introductory essay "editorial", "Three New Poets."

The present issue exhibits the work of three relatively unknown poets....Irving Layton is probably known to the readers of the Canadian Forum. None of them has received any public recognition, and even less critical attention. Yet each one is producing work that may appear, in the future, as a valuable contribution to Canadian poetry.

In this case some biographical facts are significant.... Irving Layton is a member of the Canadian Officers' Training Corps, and is engaged, with characteristic energy, in completing a thesis for his M.A. degree.... All three have a Canadian background, and their development as poets and individuals has been typically Canadian.

The last point in Sutherland's article indicates his dedication in encouraging native Canadian writers to write from their experience. The three poets shared this in common: They were each in his own way reacting to the here and now of

...
their experience. It is an indication of Sutherland's astuteness that as an editor and a critic he noted the seeds of Layton's development in the early poems. In comparing Kay Smith's work and Layton's, he notes:

Both poets have a moral interest and this urge to find the symbol. Layton, perhaps, speaks with more directness and a masculine vigor, but his personality is not so deeply involved in the web. He writes a poem, still complex and mysterious, in which nature symbols are largely absent. "Providence" seems to contain the seeds of a personal mysticism, and, if one remembers his Hebraic inheritance, it appears possible that this strain in his poetry will develop with time. Sutherland is incorrect in his comment on "Vigil" (reprinted now almost ten years later), for it would be difficult to maintain that this poem is devoid of personal elements. The poem may be descriptive and imagistic, but the seeds of a personal viewpoint lie in wait in the imagery. Yet in his own tentative way Sutherland was on the right track.

Layton bears some resemblance to Abraham Klein. Both have a love of romantic beauty, coloured by the poetry of the Old Testament; both have a satirist's pleasure in the affairs of human beings. But whereas Klein was engaged in unearthing relics of forgotten personalities, Layton only mentions the rabbi in passing.

Sutherland does pinpoint a few of the more salient resemblances between Klein and Layton. Romantic beauty may be a touchstone in Klein's Jewish rhapsodies, but in Layton it is the Romantic stance and flamboyance that is the key. Klein's Jewish personae are not Layton's. If there is the Hebrew in Layton, it is the Hebrew resolving moral, historical and ethical dilemmas. And in any case, in 1943, Layton's poems on Jewish subjects were a far cry from Klein's early poems in Hath Not
a Jew or the Poems published a year later. The satirist in both is actually an outgrowth of their Jewish, rather than their Hebrew roots. By this Jewishness I mean the attitudes springing from the point of view of the diaspora Jew who was on the circumference of his society and times. The Hebraic springs from more rooted concerns, and tends to take into account more fundamental notions of time and history.

Klein tended to be the more Jewish poet only because his identification with his own traditions were positive on the whole. In "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" the outsider Jew has become the poet, and in his Zionist allegory, The Second Scroll, Klein's themes may be seen as variations on the theme of the parochial itself. The Insider-Outsider, Jew-Poet, if you will, is strongly entrenched in his own world. This world finds itself in a minority position in relation to other cultural worlds. The Jew (and note the Jewish personalities Klein chooses from the past, all of them variations on Uncle Melech), the French-Canadian, the Indian, the Poet-Adam—each in his own locale, so to speak, remains exclusive, and in a minority position. If Layton may be said to have picked up on Klein's figure (and he does not as I will demonstrate later), his poet figure is not an exclusive figure, but an inclusive one who embodies all aspects of the creative and the imaginative in man. In any case, these differences and comparisons will clarify themselves later in relation to "The Swimmer," and in relation to Layton's drawing upon his Jewish sources in The Black Huntsman. Layton as satirist exposed his fellow religionists in a more astringent manner than Klein. Layton's sharper criticism was tempered by his political studies and concerns--
at the same time it also afforded him a wider, less parochial usage of his Jewishness. He never in fact rejected his Jewishness; neither did he embrace it fully. This balance and tension allowed him to grow; his eclecticism afforded him more scope. Sutherland had made the obvious comparison and it would be some time before Layton's work would be seen without the mantle of Klein. Uncannily, Sutherland's observations took account of early motifs:

Layton's interest is in politics, and this frequently shows itself in his poetry. "Say it again, Brother," soon to be published in Alert, is reminiscent of Sandburg, but has more vigour and a more consistent poetry than other poems of this kind. "Obstacle Course" is a fusion of the two interests: fantasy is coupled with vigorous criticism.

In that last sentence Sutherland put his finger on a very conspicuous Jewish element common to Klein and Layton, and common to many Jewish artists of the times: fantasy coupled with criticism. This describes accurately a mode Layton developed in the phase of the middle fifties, and the poems of which first gave him the critical recognition and acclaim he deserved. But the signs of this kind of imagination and visual play were apparent in "Medley for Our Times," and in the more realized poems of the forties collected in Here and Now. This combination of fantasy and criticism stems from a very Jewish source--the ability to face the slum or ghetto reality and the desire to transcend it at the same time. The discrepancy between what one faced and what one hoped for, afforded this humour and irony, as a kind of relief. Yet the poets managed to hold both elements together, for
without criticism fantasy remained merely wish-fulfilment without clarity and focus, and without fantasy criticism reduced itself to joylessness.

Sutherland has little in "Three New Poets" to say about the rhetorical devices or the formal aspects of Layton's verse. His bias was toward what goes into the poem as its content. "What they write is essentially readable, and it is valid and real as poetry," is his final comment. But there was little to say about either Dudek's or Layton's formal means. It was only later when Dudek came into contact with Pound and Layton with the Black Mountain poets that the shape and form of Layton's poems become more loose, more adaptive and organic.

Sutherland's bias was to remain with Layton and it was to be one of Layton's touchstones, as well. Poetry was a whole expression; language was not to be worked on for itself alone. First Statement's viewpoint can be seen as an outgrowth of the social realism which dominated the awareness of much of the best of English Canadian poetry in the thirties. What Sutherland added as the critic of the group, and what Layton seemed to practise, was the emphasis on the immediate, the here and now. In this respect, Sutherland was to make some cursory observations on the role of "nature" in contemporary Canadian poetry. He seems to be developing a point of view which gains prominence in the late sixties, that no Canadian poet can escape the sense of place, and that the landscape and urban environment figure as central concerns:
...that since Canada is an agricultural country it is hardly possible for the poet to avoid contact with nature. Nature not only rules great sections of our country, but it also invades a metropolis. It enters the heart of Montreal and sits down in the form of Mount Royal. We compared Kay Smith to Dorothy Livesay, and I think that her identification with nature partly explains one's feeling that Miss Livesay is so essentially a Canadian poet. Neither she nor Miss Smith nor Irving Layton are giving us nature pure and simple; or absorbing for other purposes a peculiarly Canadian landscape, as Earle Birney does. But their link with nature is inescapably a part of their experience of living in Canada.

This awareness is, at first, slightly coloured by a social awareness: Canada was a predominantly rural land, and a land in which landscape impinges on poetic awareness. Though he was pointing to a central force in Canadian poetry at this early stage in his own critical awareness, it is thoroughly imbued with a Canadian literary sense of context. The symbolic landscape may not be solely a Canadian literary motif, yet it is one which almost all Canadian poets have taken up. And this symbolic landscape crops up continuously in Layton's work and provides the means for his major statements. Sutherland, however, does not go on to compare the sources of a rural culture and an urban one, for the First Statement poets were to write out of a Canadian urban landscape or background, and that was the emphasis they were to give to Canadian poetry, and one which dominates the first two books of Layton and the early Dudek in East of the City and Cerberus. The poets Sutherland was now introducing (and he and Dudek were still in their twenties) can be seen as the first generation of Canadian writers; like Sutherland they looked to their own experience as the first sources, and they no doubt developed themselves in reaction
to Canadian literary sources. More than Smith, Scott and Klein, they forged their own idiom and turned whatever they absorbed into a real "first statement." This group's emphasis, it can not be disputed, provided a vigorous new climate in which even Scott and Klein were affected. Scott's developing poems on the Canadian landscape and his satirical barbs, and Klein's development to the poems of *The Rocking Chair*, in small measure, owed something to the renewal which Sutherland and his group initiated—an even more vigorous drive than the *Preview* group attempted. It was an integrated emphasis on the Canadian here and now and it was a combination of Sutherland's concern as an editor and a critic, and Layton and Dudek's more creative efforts which gave a coherency and continuity to *First Statement*. Aiming at a larger audience than *Preview*, it was only natural that they were to amalgamate with the older group and become the guiding force behind the new magazine, *Northern Review*. It was the energy and persistence of the younger group which carried this movement and its concerns, and later carried over into the work of *Contact Press, Civ/n, Delta* and other activities.

Sutherland was not trying to make his claims on Dudek and Layton exclusive. As an answer to the mock poetical lines drawn by Gustafson in his anthology of 1943 (the traditionalists of the 19th century and the new modernists, Scott, Kennedy et al.), Sutherland prophetically sees a new beginning for Canadian poetry:
Here we have the answer to our present problem: Dudek, Layton, and Miss Smith somehow contrive to bridge the gap; they represent a fusion of modern and traditional elements. Their work is part of an exciting, new tendency towards unity, that is observable also in Contemporary Verse and in poems appearing elsewhere in Canada.

Even in this final comment in "Three New Poets," Sutherland saw the development in native, that is, Canadian terms. It was this emphasis that was the "first statement."

Of the four poems which Sutherland selected to represent Layton, "Vigil," the poet's first published poem, had appeared before. "Providence," comprised of three rhymed quatrains, forces its wry statements into inverted rhyming lines, and does not measure up to the promise Sutherland saw in it. "Day" is an imagistic poem which is not as successful as "Vigil." "Obstacle Course" may have arisen from Layton's experience in the Officers' Training Corps:

Like schoolboys upon a frolic, these,
Whose bodies anticipate no maim,
Creep forward slyly upon their knees
For that tomorrow to clutch sans blame
A Swabian's throat with final ease:
Beware when grown-ups play a child's game.

In this poem, the scene shifts to an admonishment; the poet is observer and commentator. And as in all his verse to date, he is definitely striving to say something, to state. It seems as if he has little interest simply with the poetic means, with a delight only in words. In three of these poems the statements are disturbing in their implications: the poet's eye does not see only embroidery. In "Day", the daily solar death is the "ancient malison"—it informs all of reality. And in "Providence," it is the stars themselves who finally sum up man's destiny and significance. But these four poems
do not substantiate the claims Sutherland makes for Layton's verse. It seems that his observations and his discussion on landscape really apply to the poems Layton was publishing in the Forum at this time. "Boarding House" and "Restaurant de Luxe" are two poems published in the Forum whose imagery, form and theme suggest Layton's surer direction. Though Sutherland's critical remarks in the introductory essay may seem incongruous in the light of the four poems chosen to represent Layton, these remarks, nonetheless, uncannily apply to the other poems Layton was writing and publishing.

I have not discussed Layton's poems in a context of technical growth or competence for in a succeeding issue of the magazine this became the issue of a controversy. Patrick Waddington wrote a long letter analysing Layton's poems and a story, as well. The crux of Waddington's complaints revolved around Layton's use of neo-Tennysonian devices and other quite outdated poetic effects. Even Layton had to admit these shortcomings. Yet this first of Layton's literary correspondence in print demonstrates Layton's dogged self-confidence. Even when Layton assents to Waddington's criticisms, he does so by half, with tongue-in-cheek. Layton's plaint is, "It's the old, old story of a man reading a poem or a novel and attributing his own poverty of imagination to the poet or author." The reader is implicated as well as the critic. This printed correspondence is Layton's first assault on Canadian literary taste. Sutherland was to be more vigorous in his attack on fellow poets and critics, and his boldness found a parallel in Layton's personality. But more
revealing in this instance is Layton's self-assurance in the face of criticism, and his belief in creativity, albeit immature and awkward, over criticism. This exchange also revealed Layton's reproof of gentility in literary taste. These two strains in Layton's reply to Waddington carry over in First Statement's stance against the prevailing accepted tastes in Anglo-Canadian literature. In the same issue then, Vol. 1, No. 16, there is a parodic expression of this stance in relation to the poets in fashion at that time:

Since Auden set the fashion,
Our poets grow tame;
They are quite without passion,
They live without blame,
Like a respectable dame....

Poets are shocking, you say?  
Villon, Baudelaire —  
Ho! They come gentler today;  
Their language most fair...  
Ah-ha, you'll order a pair?

In order to prepare the way for the poems he was to write, Layton had to engage the prevailing tastes. This was in keeping with the tenor of First Statement—aggressiveness and boldness of language and purpose. In a subsequent issue, Vol. 1., No. 19 (May 14, 1943), all was not merely shock tactics and abrasiveness. "Say it Again, Brother" is a colloquial vindication of Layton's stance of standing up for what one believes in and expecting opposition. In this case, it is the political overtones of the fight in Europe. In the next issue of the magazine, Layton directs his poems to the urban slum and underworld—their very subject matter and language is meant to shock and present a non-bourgeois point of view. In "Gonorrhea Racetrack", the vice of the poor feeds the rich eventually:
Outrages
That no one remembers us,
Even tho' the townsfolk
Grow more prosperous.

In "Upper Water Street" the tone moves into the more contemporary and colloquial.

The fog lays her bandages
over the foreheads of failures -
they start as they recognize for the first time
how pitiful they are.

The fog tickles herself under the armpits
and laughs
inaudibly.
She has
chlorotic gums.

Both these poems are effective, in part, because they contain echoes of other poetic voices: in the former, echoes of Skelton or Renaissance colloquial verse; and in the latter, the simple imagism of Sandburg. In the latter case, Layton's parody functions as a criticism of Sandburg's almost naive populism. For that attitude in reality changes nothing and sentimentalizes the degraded and desperate lives of the urban poor. Layton is using another poet's means to make his statement. It is a statement of social awareness that is two-pronged: at literary convention that falsifies, at the urban world which is past even pitying. In this regard Louis Dudek's article in the same issue of First Statement, "Poets of Revolt...Or Reaction?" points to the fact that poems as the above are not written to a political programme; they are not, in a strict sense, poems of revolt:

This is one key to the enigma of the modern revolt in poetry. It is, in fact, not revolt, but reaction. Whether some of these poets are also reformers and socialists is beside the point; their mental solution is less important than their inner conflicts and urges. By these they
betray that they "do not belong." They share in a sheltered culture which is everywhere being beleaguered, and they are trying to think their way out of it.

Whereas Dudek sees these developments in terms of the change in sensibility, in the rise and fall and application of ideas in relation to history, Layton's perspective is shaped by economic and political considerations. Layton's own thinking, as expressed in his articles in the MacDonald College paper and in the McGill Daily, was not doctrinaire. His eye was always fixed on what was happening in the larger political arena around him, and he had a definite urge, or even need, to express his own view of things and his own solutions to political and social problems and developments. One of the men from whom Layton learned much was the British socialist and educator, Harold Laski. Layton was to write his M.A. thesis in political science on Laski, and he contributed a short essay on him entitled, "Harold Laski", in the December 1941 issue of the McGill student's literary magazine, Forge.

In this essay Layton points to the features of Laski's political thought that he found most relevant and cogent:

Acute, and wielding a vigorous prose, he has consistently preached the by no means popular gospel that liberty is an illusion, save as it is placed in the context of equality. He warns us that if democracy is to survive its margins must be continuously extended, its spirit must reach out to inform the lives of even the humblest citizens. More shrewdly than any one else, he has been alive to the implications of capitalist democracy. If we often speak nowadays of the marriage between capitalism and democracy, it can be asserted that Laski has bent all his energies to a skilful reading of the terms of the contract. His conclusion, broadly speaking, is that the two are no longer compatible; that sooner or later, one or the other must begin divorce proceedings.
The key to understanding the relationship between Layton's socialist thinking and his writings lies in his understanding of Laski's role as a social thinker:

His achievement lies not so much in the specific remedies he proposed as in the recognition of a problem which others were content to ignore or dismiss.

This "recognition" is the crux. This emphasis on awareness and recognition reveals that Layton was not merely interested in formulas but also in the man's quality of mind. He grasped for himself the significance of the role that Laski played in going beyond accepted thinking and coming up with unorthodox solutions and ways of thinking. This process in Laski was as important to Layton as the products of his political researches. This trait was to grow and develop in Layton himself, and in no small way provided him with the intellectual means to widen his own awareness and application.

Layton was also taken with Laski's undoctrinaire pragmatic application of socialist and "Marxian" positions. For at the conclusion of this same essay, in summarizing Laski's contribution to English politics and social awareness, he notes:

For none has so consistently held up a mirror to the age or well discerned the changing contours of our social fabric. Both as an interpreter and a critic of capitalist democracy, he has helped to prepare men's minds for the inevitable changes that the march of time has rendered necessary. It is given to few men to help shape the outlines of the future.

As a poet, Layton did reinforce his own habits of mind from this "interpreter" and "critic." In fact, these two roles can be applied to the Layton of the first two volumes, Here and Now and Now is the Place.

In the pattern of Layton's own portrait of Laski as interpreter and critic,
then, may be discerned the two elements of Layton as poet, in the forties.

In "Politics and Poetry," published in First Statement (Vol. 2, No. 1, August 1943), Layton made the further connection between the two roles he ascribed to Laski, which in turn can be ascribed to him at this period. He was thirty-two at this time and already in a mould of his own making, shaped by his years at MacDonald College and his first two years at McGill, by his first unsuccessful marriage, and his brief career in the Canadian Army. At this age it is safe to say that his sensibility was already beyond the point of initial shaping. The forces which aided Layton in writing both political articles and poems were now beginning to work in a new cohesion and coherence.

In "Politics and Poetry," Layton's apparent subject is the renaissance of English poetry which followed in the late thirties and early forties soon after Auden, Spender and Lewis were established. Discussing the new poetry, Layton provides a mirror to his own poetry and to the poetry of the First Statement group themselves. What he notes of the English literary climate can be applied to Layton's milieu, as well. In any case, the variations and designs Layton notes in English poetry find their complements in the Canadian poet, for whatever he comments on has antecedents in himself. "Politics" supercedes "poetry" in the title. It is as if one arises from the others. Poetry for Layton, then, is not produced in a vacuum and the context is the changing social and intellectual scene. Layton notes the new interest in poetry in England during these war years. The presence
of the war and its pressures upon human life lead many to poetry; and the latter takes on a new dimension for those searching for meaningful human statement and communication. The poet speaking of the world he knows—the experiences of pain, fear and death has a ready-made audience in war-time.

The people have taken the poets out of the libraries and put them in the bomb-shelters. Surely this points to an intense intellectual ferment. To find a parallel in English history for the present mood of earnest bewilderment one must go back to the seventeenth century. Today, as then, the intellectual fabric reveals the familiar symptoms of an age in transition. Today, as then, the dominant note in the politics, ethics, religion and literature is one of criticism and impatience for change.

When Layton describes the central concerns of the poets of the thirties, he is describing as well the verse and writing he did in the same period:

Politicians, like Byron and Shelley before them, they (Auden, Spender etc.) injected into their verse an urgency and a moral fervour that marked an important advance upon the poetry of the previous decade. Even when they were expressing their own maladjustments they indirectly exposed the crippling malaise of the period. It is at this point that a fusion takes place between psycho-analysis and politics, between neuroticism and a moribund economy. Introversion and extroversion; Freud and Marx.

To summarize: the poets of the early and middle thirties were diagnosticians and prophets; they were critical of the prevailing institutions and temper of the people; they strove to explain to their fellowmen the implications of a collapsing social order.

And in pointing out the new tendencies in English verse, Layton is already speaking of the changes his own verse was to take—the changes from the early efforts of the thirties, to the first poems of the forties
and reaching into his first major phase of the fifties. This is all characterised in his own work:

The foregoing quotations make it clear that the newer poets are no less aware of the social issues than the older poets were. Where, then, lies the difference? I think the difference is one of mood, emphasis, of philosophical temper. For the doctrinaire Marxism of the 30's, they have substituted a willingness to observe and experiment; for metaphysics, science; for rationalism, empiricism; and for a narrow dogmatism, an active skepticism.

The search is still for a formula, a synthesis, but the formula and synthesis must be broad enough to include the many facets of the human personality. This emphasis upon personality, which borders upon the religious, is all the more significant since it directly contradicts the arid intellectualism of the earlier poets....Men have begun to dream again, but this time with only one eye shut: the other eye is carefully focussed on the doings of their rulers. Romanticism, yet, but within the context of the machine age and power politics.

It is all summed up in the final sentence which sums up the nature of Layton's poetic efforts of the forties and fifties.

Patrick Anderson's presence, and his editorship of Preview, still kept English poetry predominant over American as a source of influence. The whole question of this influence is not as important in Layton's case as in Dudek's and Souster's. The latter two kept their eyes fixed on the poetry being written south of the border. But Layton's essay above suggests how First Statement was still engaged in an interim period in Canadian poetry, a period when the promise of English poetry, as outlined by Layton, began to wane quickly. With the founding of Contact and Contact Press, the shift to American poetry that John Sutherland prophesied in his polemical "Introduction" to Other Canadians finally began to show results. Yet with Sutherland's continued focus on Canadian poetry and poets in his reviews, articles
and editorials in *First Statement*, Layton could feel that he belonged to a native tradition. The writing that he was doing had some of its roots in what had been written before in Canada: in the poetry of the McGill Movement poets and the poems of Archibald Lampman.

Layton's book review article on Archibald Lampman's posthumously published *At the Long Sault* and other new poems appeared in the March 1944 issue of *First Statement*. It demonstrates how focal the social awareness was for him.

To this reviewer, however, the two poems "Epitaph on a Rich Man" and "Liberty" came like two mortar blasts. For these poems reveal an unexpected social awareness in Lampman. They indicate clearly enough that Lampman, an underpaid civil servant, was not only interested in observing Nature but also the shenanigans on Parliament Hill. Which one of the financial buccaneers of the day who "tilled and seeded and reaped plentifully From the black soil of human misery" Lampman had in mind, one is unable to tell; doubtless; there were several models to hand. "Liberty," without its somewhat antiquated rhetoric about Kings and Tyrants, might have been written by some aspiring poet in the *New Masses* or the *Canadian Tribune*.

Layton links Lampman's satirical poems to the writing of the left-wing magazines of the thirties. He suggests the beginnings of a tradition of social awareness and criticism in Canadian poetry. This connection helped to create antecedents for Layton's own poetry of social satire and social awareness; and for Dudek's and Souster's as well. It is as if Lampman were preparing for Layton's own criticism of the perennial "shenanigans". We have now moved from the political and economic perspectives of the Laski article--from the concern with the intellectual and social forces which affected the poetry of the thirties and forties to a direct application of this concern in Canadian poetry.
In the last article that Layton was to publish on politics and poetry in this period of *First Statement* magazine, we find the first full-fledged prototype to the Prefaces and Forwards that were to mark *Cerberus* and *A Laughter in the Mind*, and were to continue to be an important form of self-definition and articulation from *A Red Carpet for the Sun* to *The Shattered Plinths*. In "Let's Win the Peace," published in the May 1944 issue of *First Statement*, Layton applies his own socialist viewpoint to the problems that will be faced once the war is won. These ideas are carried over from the Laski article and inform Layton's forecasts on the problems of the post-war world. At first, his insight included focusing on the forces which led to war in the first place. The roots of World War Two did not simply stem from Hitler and Nazism, but from the complicity of the capitalist Western democracies:

Let us admit it openly: we were accomplices before the crime. We helped to arm Hitler, and Mussolini, and Hirohito, the unholy trinity against whom our statesmen now unleash their most violent rhetoric. Our own Prime Minister publicly congratulated himself that he had secured excellent business relations with the Japanese—we were shipping them scrap iron and metals—one month before the outbreak of the war....Directly or indirectly we connived at, encouraged and supported every one of Hitler's aggressions. With a wink and a nod and a final handclasp under the table, we assured Hitler that it was quite safe for him to rob and plunder his neighbours.

The argument is direct and aggressive. There is no mincing of words, nor any attempt to adjust rosy-glasses over war-weary eyes. In a way, the prose and the thinking are unrelenting, and do not waver from the issue. But Layton is not content to leave his analysis solely on a
political and historical plane. He begins to develop a larger theme by discussing the more universal human features of the rise and spread of the Nazi phenomenon:

Let us, I say, admit all this openly. For unless we do so, and unless we draw the proper conclusions from the facts, this frightful bloodletting will be a monstrous, unforgiveable crime. It will mean a betrayal of people's hopes greater and more shameful than that which occurred after the last shambles. And the consequences will be even more terrible. Instead of one Hitler, ten will arise to scourge the human race. The fabric of morality will be shattered forever, and tyrannies will spring up beside which Fascism will appear beneficent. We were blind. We were indifferent to human suffering. We were incredibly stupid. In this indictment I include not only our leaders but also the many people who through intellectual and moral inertia allowed themselves to be misled and duped.

His warnings have almost the hysterical urgency of a moralist and a prophet. The seriousness is unrelenting. But Layton the writer and poet must sum things up in a pronouncement as if he were putting the final touch or statement to a poem.

History some day will give the final answer; for now it is sufficient to say that Hitler was the amorphous embodiment of capitalism's decay. Like some primitive monster, he crawled out of its slime and corruption.

This image of an amphibious monster-insect was to crop up abundantly in his poems though here it has none of the later irony in its expression.

Two strains of thought become visible: the first is an attempt to come to terms with political and social evil and degradation: the second is the pinning of the blame for this almost ritual slaughter on the economic order which aided and abetted the spawning of Nazism. These two strains provide a tension in Layton's thinking. He swings back and forth between these two polar analyses, between putting the finger
of blame on the "system's" forces which contributed to Nazism, and the perennial aspects of the human condition and of man's nature. But these two strains complement each other as well for Layton comprehends how economics contributed to the political decisions of the leaders of the Western democracies; and at the same time he is aware of the human propensity to evil, destruction and social madness. Layton was to shed the socialist trappings of his viewpoint, and he was to hone the other instruments of his vision of man as the diseased social animal, and of man's inhumanity to man, and of man's irrational destructive impulses. But he was to analyze, as well, the contributing forces of technology in its effect on post-World War Two North American society. His central concern remained unchanged: the paradoxical nature of man, the individual and the social animal.

In "Let's Win the Peace" he has grown beyond the more exclusive concerns of Laski. He is aware of the role of the artistic sensibility and its involvements with the dilemmas and tensions of the age. He is fully aware of his own role as a thinker and writer concerned with his times and with history for he underlines the artist's vision as a contribution in mirroring the age. The forces of history and the forces in man inevitably make their way into art and literature:

A competitive society is a society without a common ethos. Where groups and classes exist, having contradictory economic interests, they will pursue those interests with a banal ferocity. There will be insecurity; insecurity breeds fear; fear, hatred. The pattern is as old as Greece and Rome. With good reason, Plato had equated Justice with social harmony. A competitive society which hurls class against class, group against group, is morally sick. It must disintegrate or submit to dictatorship.
Playwrights and poets, novelists like D. H. Lawrence and James Joyce, have given literary expression to the hatred and self-contempt which like chlorine gas was seeping through our civilization. Very few really escaped it. There was a little corner in people's hearts that was Hitler's before he ever started. That was the chief reason for his success—that plus the heavy backing from the Ruhr industrialists.

The last sentence reveals a more radical approach to the nature of evil in man, and it is an admission which goes beyond mere economic or political theories. It is more the admission an artist would make in the face of the destructive in man, than the statement of a political commentator or scientist. It asks for an imaginative leap of understanding, and it was an altogether unorthodox approach in Canada at that time. If one must look beyond Laski for sources to Layton's statement, they are given by the poet himself. He refers to Lawrence and Joyce and he was aware of their vision of twentieth-century man. The seeds of many of his later themes were stated in this essay and were to be elaborated in book after book. Poets and artists, then, must come face to face with all aspects of the human condition of our age. The poet must look into the heart of darkness. And this touchstone becomes a gauge that Layton employs in assessing the success and scope of Klein's Poems and The Hitleriad. Layton's two reviews of Klein's books will be taken into consideration in a later examination of The Black Huntsman. Layton was not to publish prose articles or criticism after First Statement gave way to Northern Review. It was with the founding of CIV/n in the early fifties in Montreal that Layton was again to contribute this kind of prose.
In this essay, "Let's Win the Peace," which is a prototype for the prefaces of his later books, Layton reveals the prophetic voice he was to develop. His insights into human nature coupled with an awareness and concern with the dilemmas of his age point to a role he was to assume with greater clarity and complexity. It is as if he were heeding Wilfred Owen's realization that the coming of technological and mechanized war, a new era would be ushered in:

All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful.13

This was to be Layton's own measure of poetic significance and relevance. He had now stepped outside the confines of the merely aesthetic and literary. He was to write with an ambitious intellectual range, and with a consciousness that would be wider than that of either of his two compatriots in Cerberus. The range of interest of these three poets becomes apparent in that latter book's prefaces, and will be examined in that context.

By about the time the last of these prose pieces was written, Layton's poems had begun to grow in complexity and were exhibiting a finished quality. From one of the many articles written about the poet, we can glean that an important event happened to him in 1944, an event which he has continuously underlined with the passing years.

Layton was writing short stories for First Statement and a few poems. The latter had been heavy going; his first wife had been so alarmed to watch him mumbling over the construction of a poem that she had run for help. Suddenly two poems, "The Swimmer," and "DeBullion Street," simply wrote themselves. "The lines just came, so easily," he says. From his reading of the lives of great poets, Layton knew that this psycho-phenomenon was common to all of them. He decided, with jubilation, what he was: A poet.14
June Callwood's article was written in that flush of publicity which followed the publication of *A Red Carpet for the Sun*. Published in February 1960, it does relate the germ of the event, yet it is overwritten. Edelstein relates more accurately what transpired that day, and his version was written after three extensive interviews with the poet in the spring of 1962.

On a hot summer day, in 1944, Betty Sutherland, Layton, and Louis Dudek and a companion drove to the Indian Reservation of Caughnawaga. This innocuous picnic proved to be one of the most important days in Layton's life. The events of that day triggered a chain of thought which germinated in a poem that Layton called "The Swimmer." He wrote the poem while on the beach and, when it was completed— for the first time in his life he had no qualms about his creative abilities as a poet.  

It seems apparent that Layton was bent on being a poet even before this epiphany. But finally his own insecurity was dispelled; it was now a matter of deep belief and faith in himself that it was his 'calling' to be a poet. This insecurity and concern with his fulfilling the role of the poet may not be apparent in the earlier poems he published in *First Statement*. In the "Preface" to *The Laughing Rooster* Layton gives his own version of the "creative process." He also relates the impressions of that experience of that first donné poem, that first ecstasy of inspiration:

Though I had composed a considerable quantity of verse while I was at the university, it is only with the writing of "The Swimmer" that I realized the poet's vocation might be mine. I had taken my wife to the beach at Caughnawaga where we spent the morning and the better part of the afternoon. After we had returned home I went out for a walk along St. Catherine Street and turned into a restaurant for a cup of coffee. When I was seated at the table, without warning a succession of images, induced no doubt by the day's experiences, threw my mind—
there's no better way I can put it--into a lucid turmoil. The images were accompanied by an insistent rhythm that seemed to be scouring my innermost self for words and phrases to attach itself to or lift up from my buried consciousness and carry forward in its irresistible sweep. Perhaps that's all that rhythm really is--the sound we hear when ideas and memories are fused and the past takes on the startling immediacy of the present. Rhythm is the sound we hear when time is wiped out; when there's no past or future, but only NOW. Luckily I had a pencil with me. I grabbed the napkin and spilled the entire poem onto it in a mood of such intense concentration, the restaurant and all its noises were completely blotted out from my awareness. Nothing existed for me at the time except the words I saw forming on the napkin: an irregular black stain whose magical growth gave me a sensation of almost unbearable ecstasy and release.

These three versions underline the importance and significance of this event in Layton's life and writing. But the surprise and revelation of this poem's writing is not merely limited to Layton's first instance of genuine inspiration. The poem is a key poem to the body of Layton's poetry. It is his first inspired vision, and the poem itself is about the creative process and the poet. It is about poetry itself, and as such it points to the central theme and preoccupation. Milton Wilson in "Klein's Drowned Poet" links this poem with Klein's "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape." It would not be accurate to see "The Swimmer" "like a redevelopment of Klein's 'Portrait."

Firstly, "The Swimmer" was published in the Dec. '44-Jan. '45 issue of First Statement (Vol. 2., No. 2), "We Have Taken The Night" (Vol. 2., No. 6), "Jewish Main Street" and "April" (Vol. 2., No. 8.), and these already exhibited the cohesion of metaphor and statement which miraculously fused in "The Swimmer". In these poems it is possible to see some of the
elements which preceded the latter poem, but which also prepared the way for its inspired composition. All the signs were there already, and the spark of an experience or an inspiration brought them to a flash. Klein's poem (first published as "Portrait of the Poet as a Nobody") first appeared in First Statement issue of June-July '45 (Vol. 3, No. 1). Klein's poem in imagery and construction is radically different from Layton's. It is a more explicit poem on the poet, and the water imagery is not the only predominant feature of the poem. That Layton's poem appeared first is no conclusive proof that it was not influenced either by Klein's or by Klein's proximity to Layton. Both these poets may have bandied the ideas in their poems in conversation. The same image may have been in the air between them, and in any case, both poets knew each other well enough for such cross-fertilisation of image and symbol. The essential difference is that Layton's poem springs from a place, from the locale of the beach he names in his account of its writing. It has many of the same features of imagery and construction as "Debacle," for example, which appeared in the April 1941 issue of The Canadian Forum. In this latter poem the images become signs, and the poetic imagination organizes them unconsciously into a symbolic pattern which yields its own statement. Essentially, this makes Layton's poem differ from Klein's. And it also disproves, in some measure, Wilson's claim and his reading of Layton's drowned poet as a gloss on Klein. It may have been that Layton's poem precipitated Klein's, for Layton may have read that poem to all and sundry in those weeks after its composition in the summer of 1944. Layton's preoccupation with the poet figure and with the creative process
or poetry was to grow and Klein was to move on to his theme of the
rebirth of language and poetry in the new Zion of *The Second Scroll*.
Is this preoccupation which they both shared, yet developed in
different ways, also a function of other Jewish Canadian poets as
Mandel or Cohen? It can be argued that this heritage of themes did
carry over into the latter two poets and had their effect on the
generation of poets that were to spring up in the sixties. In
Mandel's work, poetry as oracular speech staves off madness (*An
Idiot Joy*). And in Cohen, poetry as psalm or prayer is a means to
reaching a state of grace (*The Spice Box of Earth, Beautiful Losers*).
In all four, poetry and language hold unique places; and in no small
part this stems from a Jewish reverence for language.

As John Sutherland notes in the editorial to the same
issue of *First Statement* that "The Swimmer" appeared in, much
had happened in Canadian poetry in 1944. Gustafson had prepared
another Penguin anthology, Smith's *The Book of Canadian Poetry* had
appeared, as well as volumes by Pratt, Livesay, Klein, Smith, and
Gustafson. Speaking of these books, Sutherland's observations can
well characterize Layton's first book as well:

> It is doubtful if there has ever been a time when
> so many important books by Canadian poets were published
> in a single year.
> The new volumes make it plain that the modern poetry
> movement, which had its beginnings in Canada during the
> thirties, is gathering fresh impetus. To a greater
> or lesser extent, all of these poets are occupied with
> problems of a social kind. All of them are exploring
> the resources of a style that is, in one case, more
direct and vigorous, and, in another case, more complex
and analytical than anything we have had in previous Canadian poetry. Other writers will regard the appearance of their work as an encouraging sign that the Canadian audience is at least ready to receive progressive writing.

But there are many new writers in Canada today, producing significant work, who have no opportunity to publish their poetry. It is in order to supply an outlet for them that First Statement has decided to publish poetry in book form during the coming year. Each volume will be devoted to the work of a younger writer and will consist of representative selections from his poetry. If finances permit, we hope to extend the scheme later on to include the publication of representative prose.

Work is now going forward on the books of poetry. A selection of important work by Irving Layton will appear during the latter part of January.

Layton's *Here and Now* appeared later in the year and was the first volume in the press's *New Writers Series*. What then did Layton put together for himself in *Here and Now*? It was an attempt to select and give order to the poetry he was publishing since 1936. The next two books can be considered in this light as well; they are also attempts at defining and redefining the work he had accomplished to that point. The sense of consolidation marks all three first books.

But without this consolidation Layton might not have built up the body of early work that he did, and he might not have been able to continue with his growth and prepare himself for the burst of poetry that characterized the early and middle fifties. It was as if he were preparing his spring-board. And fifteen years later Milton Wilson was able to pinpoint this pattern:

> Layton belongs among those not uncommon poets who grow by discovering with surprise, delight and horror what their previous poems really meant and then writing new ones to prove it. The process can go on forever, as the images and themes renew themselves in poem after poem.17
Yet the pattern was not as clear as Wilson would have it. Though with selective hindsight it is possible to array a number of poems to prove the point.

It would be in keeping with the character of the First Statement group that Layton's first collection of thirty-two poems should be regarded as almost a poetic manifesto on what poetry should be. As far as subject matter is concerned, Souster's subsequent book in the series, When We Are Young, and Dudek's Ryerson Press book East of the City, are more in keeping with an observant urban realism. In a polemical article directed against the Preview group Louis Dudek underlined the perspective of poetic method and vision:

First Statement does not deny that poetry can express matters which are not in themselves essentially poetry: matters geographical, socio-logical, etc. It even encourages literature which will reflect the atmosphere and currents of Canadian life, as all good writing in Canada must do. But it underlines the "reacting honestly... first hand," as the chief concern of the poet.  

The assertion in the title of the book, Here and Now, suggests a poetry which deals with immediate experience in a context of what is before the poet and what world he moves in and lives. What was not added to the emphasis in the title is its urban stress and its implicit drive to realism. Layton's locus is Montreal. But though Dudek's comments above and the title of the collection suggest one thing, the actual poems give a different impression from what readers of First Statement may have expected from this first selection from the writers bent on the "native" tradition, that is, on the particular.

The subject of many of the poems in Layton's book spring
from the urban ghetto Layton grew up in—the Jewish quarter of Montreal, the surrounding slums, and the rest of the habitable downtown of that city. But in effect were these poems attempts at urban realism in poetic form? Layton's account of his first inspired poems, "The Swimmer," and "DeBullion Street," already suggest that he was early impressed with the image of the poet, his own self-image as poet, and with the process of creativity.

"The Swimmer" is the key poem to this period of Layton's writing. The predominant movement in this poem springs from the swinging to and fro motion of opposites; and this holds as well for the organization of imagery, for the flow of syntax, and the underlining visual pattern of perception. The swimmer himself is the embodiment of the amphibian spirit who is able to move in two elements, in two worlds. Being a man and a landed creature, his foray into the water is an act of violence. The plunge of the swimmer is both a declaration and act of war; it is his first aggressive stage as the diver. When he makes the plunge the "snake-heads" of the waves strike momentarily. They herald the swimmer's disruption of a unity, a cycle. Yet what has transpired in this first stanza has been set against the specific time of day: the foreclosing afternoon, the time of the meeting or merging of opposites, of day and night. In this first scene the swimmer has plunged from a raft, a man-made island; and his flowerlike act of plunging has opened "spray corollas." The plunge is suggestive of a sudden organic beauty—a will to power coupled with a will to beauty. The "snake-heads" then seem to suggest the multiplicities suddenly being stirred up as if they were heralds of the beginning of some kind of journey of discovery.
While on one hand the poem is directing our attention to a particular scene, the images selected and their symbolic overtones suggest that we are also looking upon a symbolic action in a symbolic landscape or water-scape.

After the initial shock of the plunge, the swimmer emerges. He is floating now, that is, within, yet upon the surface of the water. He is "imminent upon the water." He is its blossomed flowers, its "weed with marvellous bulbs." As he floats there light and sound seem to come to him with a "sharp passion"—the numinous senses are almost personified. Yet light and sound would be the two closest senses to poetry: the light of imagery and vision, and the sound of words and music. Yet Layton does not go to these limits of identification; he is content to leave the elements in the poem, in solution, as it were, rather than crystallize too neatly imagery and symbols, theme and statement. The "gonad sea", source of fertility and sexuality, is also the source for these opposites of light and sound, vision and song. With the image of "the Poles", the swimmer becomes next an embodiment of the world, a man-world figure image. But the suggestions prove ambiguous; the "Poles" may be the actual poles, North and South, or the head and feet of this swimmer—in all cases, complementary opposites, as might be expected. To climax this shift in scene the "bright cockle-shells about his ears" become auras, and emblems of art. They provide the final stroke to this strophe and fit in well, descriptively and symbolically, into this mosaic portrait of the swimmer on the water.
The vision in stanza two is momentary in keeping with the shifting scenes and backdrops to this poem's imagery. The shifts suggest another underlining theme which is to be underscored in the last stanza. The theme of constant flux and change—the world of becoming which the swimmer moves with and is transformed by—finds its appropriate element in water. By stanza three we realize that the swimmer has no face, for he is constantly face down upon the water. And if his features become apparent, they are part of a rear-view portrait of him. Back of the head, back, buttocks and legs have provided the details for this progression from flower to cockle-shells. Yet this visual progression, in its various angles and focuses, becomes a kaleidoscope. The perspective of vision shifts between close-ups, fade outs, and long shots. And the rhythm and movement of this vision complements the moving mosaic. It is all built up to the end of the second stanza in which the cockle-shells also become the apotheosis of art: holiness and celebration: christ and artist. They break "about the ears", the organs which receive sound and language. And in the last stanza in the poem, the eyes figure as the other dominant organs. The swimmer has no face for he has the impersonality of an archetypal figure.

From this last momentary climax "about the ears" the swimmer's next phase is immersion. This penetration of the water is not only one progression downwards through level after level of discovery or journey. "He dives, floats, goes under"—it is a spasmodic movement in keeping with the ambivalence and oppositional tug of war, the give and take already established in the poem. This going under may be
Nietzschean and ambiguous for the swimmer "goes under like a thief." His going is stealthy and he may feel guilty about this foray. He may also be stealing his way into a sanctum. For he is an outsider to this element and his entrance has the connotations of the criminal: one who goes in from the outside in a forbidden or secret manner.

As an archetypal artist figure, the swimmer's movement back to the unconscious water world stirs a primeval urging in him: "his blood sings to the tiger shadows." The elemental darkness of the depths throws him back to an animal charade. The tiger shadows in himself are deeply rooted in his blood, his own coursing water element. He moves through and beyond this encounter with the animal unconscious to the more Eden-like "scentless greenery that leads him home."

His return is instinctual for he is "a male salmon." Significantly, at this point in his journey into this submergent element, he goes "down fretted stairways/Through underwater slums." It is as if he were returning to an elemental urban world where anxiety and poverty represent the last refuge, the final territory of home, the resting and spawning place. Since these "underwater slums" are the end of the journey down the descending stairway, they find their counterpart in the rest of Layton's poem in *Here and Now*. For the here and now is this underwater slum as both a real and imagined place. From the "scentless greenery" the swimmer has reached a negative world, the urban opposite to the former. If we look at the stages of the swimmer's immersion we see a movement from the numinous "imminent" world of stanza two. The movement continues through the stages of stanza three to the rock bottom vision of poverty and deprivation of the "underwater
slums." But this is as far as the swimmer goes down; it is as far as Layton goes in this poem as a map of where the other poems in his first book also proceed. The poem, then, is a projection of Layton's poetic world and also of his poetic dialectical methods and means.

The fourth stanza, however, must be taken into consideration, as well. The hiatus between the third and final stanza is first of all a temporal one. The swimmer is now upon the beach. It is as if he blacks out at the "underwater slums" and could not go further. And so he must return to shore, his amphibian nature limiting his endurance. Yet as he went "down fretted stairways" he was inevitably swimming back to the shore itself. This ambiguity may be intentional, but it is an ambiguity which delimits. After reaching his farthest depths, the vision there may have "stunned" him. For on the beach, on the security of land and fixed reality, he can only remember those fish-like vestiges and the feeling of being a water creature. He now must create images of his landed predicament: "gestures of self-absorption," drawings on the sand. Since he can not remain forever in the imaginative world of the unconscious where he played and held the opposites at bay, his narcissism extends from the drawings upon the sand to the anthromorphic vision of nature: "the skull-like beach." In this sense, this activity is symbolic of the poet's return from the world of the imagination, from the ecstatic embrace and play with the contradictions of illusion and reality. His activity on the beach complements his activities in the water element of the first
three stanzas. But these drawings upon the sand are the very products of his immersion; they are the forms of art upon the "skull-like beach": art recreated itself in a death of sorts. The death is manifold: death of the swimmer's recent foray into the water; the end of his return to the unconscious and memory; the very death-like quality of art as the recapitulation of experience. For the "gestures of self-absorption" suggest that the swimmer poet absorbs himself in what he is and what he does: art is about art finally and poetry about poetry. Creativity devolves upon itself in every way.

And this death or stasis upon the beach leads the swimmer into an identification with the poet-observer who has written this poem. The swimmer's "instigated eyes" see another sacrifice in the emptying of the sun upon the water, the death of a larger force or god into the universal flux represented by the water. And the water itself by now becomes, in those eyes and that self-absorbed spirit, another extension of the swimmer. The water itself takes on the vulnerability of the swimmer and of man in the face of transience, the inexorable movement of time, and growth and aging:

And the last wave romping in
To throw its boyhood upon the marble sand.

It is as if the poet were finally throwing in his boyhood. His final awareness of transience is a far cry from that first assertion and plunge at the beginning of the poem. The boyhood thrown upon the sand may also represent the energy and bravado of the swimmer of stanza one finally losing himself against the immutable sand, upon which the drawings may now be disappearing at the onslaught of the waves.
The marks of the artist upon the unchanging beach—his signs and symbols—are washed away by the day's "last wave" of time and flux. The wave now plunges against the land. The wave is another swimmer of sorts, and the identifications complete themselves.

The vision of art and life expressed in that last stanza does not fully emerge as tragic. It is a more cyclical vision of nature and consciousness and art, and it represents the seeds of Layton's major metaphysical poems of the fifties and sixties. And it is a good indication of the scope and ambition Layton was to exhibit in his later work. But meantime the first three stanzas present imaginatively and accurately Layton's poetical "here and now" and "now is the place" of the forties. "The Swimmer" underlines Layton's continuous central concern with the poet and with creativity.

The poet in the "underwater slums" takes on many disguises. In many ways he is the "Newsboy" in the poem of that title:

Neither tribal nor trivial he shouts
From the city's center where tramcars move
Like stained bacilli across the eyeballs;

At the heart of this city-scape disease, illness, and perversion breed. The newsboy's role in the universal metropolis as one of the poet figures is multifaceted. This guise of the poet as newsboy lends itself to different guises, all functions of the poet in the urban technological world of the mid-twentieth century. For he is "a Joshua before their walls," "The Zeitgeist's too public interpreter/ A voice multiplex and democratic." This voice hawking papers takes all the contradictions of the urban world into itself and becomes a
projection of all of its aspects. What he pronounces is what the papers proclaim: the surreal juxtaposition of violence, love, upheavals personal and social—and cosmic, as well, as in "The Swimmer." This juxtaposition provides the tableau to Layton's urban "underwater slums" in Here and Now.

In each of his identities the newsboy assumes the various roles of the poet figure. In the first stanza as the Joshua circling the people sporing in composite buildings he is the poet as destroyer and nay-sayer. His next role is as the "public interpreter" and recorder of events, chronicler of all classes, and groups. In the third stanza he "domesticates disaster: and is the tamer of tragic and destructive reality; the poet who speaks of these matters and makes man come to terms with the irrational and destructive by naming them. And in the last stanza he is not really the poet as prophet but is the mover of men's minds and the unacknowledged shaper of their times. But he also provides the imaginative extensions by which men can be inspired by entry into unknown states of consciousness and experience. And this last role is defined by the poet's projection of the contradictions of existence and reality, for "his dialectics will assault the brain." His task takes on the aggressiveness characteristic of modern urban life. He takes on the criminal and martial energies and commits aggressions in the imagination and spirits of men. Yet this role has about it the suggestion of the magician who can bring into play either good or evil, or the creative and the destructive. His dialectics take on the tension of the age, but in a ritual cloak as well:
Contrive men to voyages or murder,
Dip the periscope of their public lives
To the green levels of acidic caves;
Fever their health, or heal them with ruin,
Or with lies dangerous as a letter:
Finally to enwrap the season's cloves,
Cover a somnolent face on Sundays.

He is the newsboy as poet in the roles of black and white magician,
healer and shaman, deceiver and priest: the dialectics and masks
of Layton's image of the poet.

"Newsboy" stands as the opening poem to Layton's first
book. This poem prepares the way for the other thirty-one poems of
this collection, and also prepares for the range and categories of
Layton's subsequent poetry. In lieu of an introduction this poem
serves as an 'ars poetica' outlining the dialectic means and the
various subjects of poetry. It also summarizes what we can expect
in this book: the emphasis of theme and the device of the poet
figure as the central persona of Layton's body of work.

It is no accident then that the book closes with the
satirical, "The Modern Poet." The poems of Here and Now are
sandwiched between "Newsboy" and the latter poem, with "The Swimmer"
providing the focus to the center of the book, along with its
complement, "DeBullion Street." These four poems provide the
pattern of interpretation of Layton's vision and poetic. Layton's
use of the poet figure is not a rigid one. It is an inclusive persona
who embodies all aspects of the human condition. As a means of
emphasis, it provides the most useful literary tool and device for
gauging Layton's growth and development. The redefinitions and
recastings of this poet figure in Layton's key poems throughout his
career suggest his evolving themes and the success and refinements of his craft.

"DeBullion Street" is a finely wrought poem about the "underwater slums" of the newsboy's "city's center." It is in that part of the city'

...where tramcars move
Like stained bacilli across the eyeballs;
Where people spore incomposite buildings
From their protective gelatine of doubts,
Old ills, and incapacity to love...
("Newsboy")

Edelstein provides the biographical background which accounts, in some ways, for the reductive imagery in the above passage—imagery which was to carry over into the poem about DeBullion Street, another notorious red-light street in the area Layton grew up in:

In 1926 (when Layton was fourteen) the Lazarovitch family moved from St. Elizabeth Street to City Hall Street, where Mrs. Lazarovitch again opened a small grocery store. They had moved away from the "red light" district, although City Hall Street had its share of prostitutes, to a slightly better locale. As a child, Layton had been continuously warned that a certain type of woman in his neighbourhood was not "respectable." The prostitute became symbolic of forbidden and mysterious perils which were to be avoided in the same manner as the name of God was forbidden, but there were no connotations of evil in the word "prostitute."19

Layton describes the district in another story, "Piety," published in the last issue of First Statement, Vol. 3, No. 1 (June-July '45). He outlines the way the immigrant population shifted and how their moving still left them within the confines of the ghetto:
They were immigrants, the Karpal family, recently come from Galicia. The house which they tenanted was the shabbiest and most rickety in that street of shabby and rickety houses. It had a doleful, thrown-together appearance and when it rained the floors and ceilings wetted simultaneously. Damp and cold in the winter, in the summer their dwelling became a dangerous, suffocating furnace. And ours, a red-bricked, stunted building, was not much better. The first wave of immigrants from Eastern Europe had broken against Ontario Street and as it receded it dug narrow channels; mean, dusty, refuse littered streets like St. Dominique, Sanguine and St. Elizabeth. Running parallel to them, Cadieux St. had had its name for delicate reasons changed to DeBullion; nevertheless the whorehouses were left untouched.

The imagery in "DeBullion Street" is suggestive of two shapes: openings and closings, holes and slits. The objects observed on this street suggest one or the other. The movement of openings and closings suggests the pulse of DeBullion Street. Suddenly activities open to view and close as quickly. Images of squinting and openings abound from "inverted bell-jars," "tiny moons," "A red light winks/viciously," to "narrow slits" and "the barricaded door." This underlining movement in the imagery links up with the unspecified acts of illicit sex and perversion. Though this slum world is not a healthy one, resolution is found in the marriage of heaven and hell: the mating of the reptile and the virgin.

The self-righteous bourgeois are responsible for the degradation:

Where those bleak outposts of the virtuous  
The corner mission and the walled church grow  
Like hemorrhoids on the city's anus.

The mission and the church are represented as tightly enclosed structures not open to the Baudelairean finale:
O reptilian street whose scaly limbs
Are crooked stairways and the grocery store,
Isolate, is your dreaming half shut eye:
Each virgin at the barricaded door
Feels your tongue-kiss like a butterfly.

The fairy tale reptile has not been roused and slumbers. That reptile element in DeBullion Street (the amphibian again) does not fully rise to transform its ugliness. It has an attachment and attraction for the virgin, the untried and the innocent which may be a correlative for the poet who finds this reptile of ugliness appealing. The poet's reaction then is one of a flirtation with degradation for the virgins are receptive to the tongue-kiss. The kiss (or the poem) contains a beauty and vitality of its own and almost transforms the situation, for the butterfly is symbolic of a resurrection and a new springing to life. DeBullion Street may have its features of ugliness yet the poet is drawn to its degradation; and in this mating, something regenerative emerges. The poetic redeems the ugly and banal "underwater slums" as the newsboy redeems the "city's center."

In "Words Without Music" that animal presence that lies lurking finally breaks the bounds. In the imminence of destruction and madness of this war poem, banality contains within itself straining, compelling destructive urges. The train full of soldiers going to the training camp becomes the odyssey of the modern world in which men have to repress their sexuality and human energy to the breaking point:

The senses
Run like swift hares along the fences;
These are the fire lands and this a sealed train
Of cold excursionists throats buttoned up
With yellow timetables. On folded hands
The minutes drop like dandruff, the
Jetted column survives in a black foetus
And the goats leap into our faces shrieking.
The imminence of the demonic finally bursts in a fit of grotesque madness. The demonic and the satyric are released, yet the poem makes it unclear whether it is really happening objectively, or whether the leaping goats are making the inner faces of the excursionists shriek in an hallucinated landscape or experience. This imminence of subconscious, irrational or demonic forces informs "The Swimmer," "Newsboy," and "DeBullion Street." As it rears up in each of these poems it takes on various faces and figures. It is a salient feature of Layton's poetic world and its various forms will be examined, in all their changes, throughout the body of the poet's work. This imminence goes hand in hand with a dialectic poetic in which terror accompanies the tragic vision.

The dialectic in Layton's poems extends into the apprehension of imagery and time. In "Winter Scene", the season (winter) and the time (evening) lead into that twilight zone where oppositions meet and are reconciled:

O consider this mind
on any gusty night
cursed by division
half darkness, half light.

But the reconciliation is only in the realization of the division, in the apprehension of the ambiguities of existence that are also mirrored in the natural order or world. The title, then, of this collection is also in keeping with this dialectic. Time and place provide their own ambiguities—and they are the two-fold facets of the poet's world. The "here" is usually described at the expense of the "now" in the poems discussed above. Yet the "now" invariably falls in the twilight zone noted in the passage from "Winter Scene." Most of the poems seem to take place in a literal or metaphorical twilight or imminence of darkness as in "The Swimmer."
Layton's next collection is a reinforcement of his first book. The title itself, *Now is the Place*, is a reversal in order of the two dimensions of *Here* and *Now*. The emphasis has changed and the title suggests the timelessness of the immediate. The immediate in the leading story, "Vacation in La Voiselle," is fraught with misunderstanding and failure. The state of mind of "Winter Scene" describes the protagonist's. Hugo is in approaching middle age—another twilight zone and is disillusioned with his participation in the politics of the thirties and forties. His sexual failures culminate in a frustrating unfulfilled episode. No matter which way he may choose at the end of the story, the signposts declare that though the distances be different, the destination remains the same. The destination is the city where he will have to build anew. He has a momentary yet unsatisfying relief from the "underwater slums,"—the vacation was an intermediate stasis. And so it is with Layton in the collection of poetry. *Now is the Place* is an intermediate collection—a recapitulation, and a partial movement forward. Two new stories make up half the pages, and sixteen of the twenty-seven poems are reprinted from *Here* and *Now*. The movement of opposites has come to an ambiguous destination. Self-division has its crippling effect of paralysis. Between these stories and poems Layton really does not develop much further.

"The Eagle" prefaces the poetry selection in *Now is the Place*. The poem could easily be the fantasy and musing of Sammy in the other story, "A Death in the Family"—a Sammy a few years older than the boy of nine.
Above the polished snow
The icicles spoil like fruit.

What emblems are contained in this first stanza? The polished snow suggests the sheen of coffins or the self-containment of a gleaming ego. It is an emblem of the artificially brightened, civilized and tamed elements of reality. The icicles embody life subject to change and mutability. Mutability is living and fertile; immutability is death and permanence. The icicles may be spoiling above the snow, yet that does not deter the inevitable.

This is not any kingdom
But an overripe slum...

And "crazily" the poet would like to find here some permanence and security—"A rockbound province of the mind." Surrounding light, in the shape of street lamps, seems to be threatening and then assaulting him. Those other "princes" returning to this slum kingdom are "disenchanted and sorrowful"—not unlike the intellectuals at Horn's in "Vacation in La Voiselle" (that place name may be translated as an agglutinate word meaning 'the way to her' or 'the way itself' with its feminine character underlined):

The intellectuals that met every evening at Horn's to exchange their sense of failure for moral indignation, that palmed off on each other their bonelessness for idealism, that talked with so much assurance of their inevitable milleniums— he was one of them—they were freaks and chatters.

The release these chatterers offer him "Is heavy and colder than ice."

This "doorknob" is similar to that "polished snow": the world of stasis and death.

The last stanza of the poem approaches the realm of fantasy or vision. Between the alternatives of permanence and mutability,
between the "overripe slum" and the cold "doorknob", at each retreat appears the imperial bird, "the eagle." The "kingly bird" died at the stabbing of an icicle. Thus, what is vouchsafed from the confrontation of icicle and snow is tragic death.

The pattern emerges from the poem's four stanzas. In the first both antitheses are presented as coevals. In the second, the impermanent world and its limitations are made apparent. In the third, the limitations and defeats of impermanence are accompanied by, first, the terror of the self's annihilation, and second, by man's compromised rebelliousness. And in the fourth, permanence and impermanence both turn against the imperial in man. Man in the tragic condition caught between both, leaves but a stain as the emblem of his predicament. The bird offering release and freedom (as the butterfly in "DeBullion Street" and the plunging diver of "The Swimmer") has an inevitable tragic fate. The eagle as another form of the poet figure is "blooded" by the condition of mortality. "The Eagle" and "The Swimmer" are forms of the self-same figure:

Heard his inescapable cry and seen it bed
In snow like a blot of blood and far more red.
("The Eagle")

And the last wave romping in
To throw its boyhood upon the marble sand.
("The Swimmer")

The final gestures are similar and share the same significance.

The poems of these first two collections express these comprehensions of opposites in the forms they take. In both stories of Now is the Place we find glosses on "The Eagle." In "Vacation
in La Voiselle" the protagonist struggles with the forces of impermanence represented by the spoiling icicle. And in "A Death in the Family", the protagonist is pitting himself against the unalterable fact of the permanence of death represented in "The Eagle" by the "polished snow."
The last paragraph of that latter story parallels the plaintive note in the poem's last stanza. Both are concerned with mortality and loss:

It was growing dark outside. The boy turned away from the window and walked over to the sideboard. He loved the feel of the hard wood under his hand. He ran his fingers across the panels and along the flat, comfortable edges. Then, opening the cupboard door and putting his head inside, he took a deep breath. The next instant he uttered a cry and drew back quickly, as if he had found a rat curled upon the starched linen. The cupboard smelled of gas and disinfectant! He banged the door shut and threw himself against it, making the sideboard quiver. He stepped back and stared at the door uneasily. Something was tight inside him, like a small fist in his throat. He felt a sense of loss and he was scared and he suddenly felt sad and he began to whimper. He glanced at the parlour table behind him. Then he went quickly out of the room.

(In Layton's first "selected poems," The Black Huntsman, published three years later, "The Eagle" has been retitled "Lenin." The nuances of the new title are political, and the poem becomes the revolutionary leader's monologue. His solace and comfort now as a beleaguered revolutionary lies in the inevitable dying of the imperial social order represented by the Czarist eagle. The dialectic in the imagery and symbolism of the poem would be in keeping with a Marxist philosophical perspective. I find the first version with its former title more suggestive and metaphysical. The Lenin allusion serves to neatly strangle the poem's possibilities into one noose of interpretation and focus.)
In "The Yard" the imagery and imaginative leaps move the poem into the realm of the fantastical and the surreal. The surrealism is ironic and Jewish, Chagallian without the warmth and vagueness of that Jewish artist. The eagle in the above poem did not speak for itself, but the yard in this poem becomes the speaking voice. It becomes another representation of that "overripe slum." It is the translucent figure embodying that slum world, and it takes on, with Layton's poetic ingenuity, the function of being the clearing house for all the accoutrements of that world. This personified yard becomes another figure for the poet: the yard as witness, for through it, all transpires and passes and takes on significance. If "DeBullion Street" offered a hope of fairy tale escape and resolution, "The Yard" offers a more complex resolution.

The poem begins with a flat assertion: "No one prospers outside my door." The yard "like a suave criminal" spies on this slum world where prayer may be the opiate of the poor. The sense of imminence suggests what is being prepared in this microcosm: "the clotheslines arch like scimitars," and "windingsheets swell under a bolshevik moon." Will anything materialize from this foreboding scene? The yard notices the "fatal actors," the poor. Their pantomime is sad and unclear, for they are "Waiting with their garbage pails for the blue corpses." The blue corpses of a despairing Picasso canvas? This all has the dimension of an unreal drama. Children will prod the fire for shards of glass finding elements of a broken beauty in this garbage's blaze. But this random childhood act of celebration will be marred by the defeated, sullen, joy-hating adults, "the cold eyed
men" infecting the weather. In this almost nihilistic mood, what is there left for the speaker poet figure, the witness of the scene? Layton arranges the imagery as props of his symbolic city-scape as he did in "The Swimmer" and other poems discussed. "A column of whispers rises from the summermoist yard"—is it some kind of fecundity that rises from this yard? These voices (the voices of poetry?) make a seeming "neanderthal/Tree of eden," a primordial crucifixion image which lifts "its immense branches/Over my banisters for manslayer or saint." This tree, symbol of affirming vitality, encompasses the opposites of manslayer and saint, criminal and old woman, scimitars and revolutionary moon, urchins and cold-eyed men. It is the life force which undaunted moves through the contradictions of nature and society embodied in this "yard." The final declaration, reminiscent of Baudelaire, indicates a fusion of identities into a new transformed anonymity: the transference of poet to reader. All contradictions are now united by this resolution's statement, but only on first glance, for there is a hint of detachment and irony in this final line. It is as if the poet were drawing the reader into the alibi of the observer who seems to see but does not participate: "And I am neither I am neuter I am you." This sums up the yard in all of us, the area in our consciousness where the antinomies meet and are suspended but are not fused for an ameliorating progress.

"Proof Reader" is another important variation on the "Newsboy," "The Eagle," and "The Yard." The proof reader is another figure in
the news world in which language splashes itself upon the contemporary psyche, interprets and transforms it. He becomes another persona of the poet caught up in the urban world and its poetry recreated in the mass media. He is not the declaimer of the news, but he who is involved with the very mechanics of the diffusion of news by means of type and language. This proof reader whose vision strains in the correction of the papers the newsboy will sell, thinks "Cyclops luckier in his wounded cave." He would rather be a Polyphemus blinded by Ulysses. Then, perhaps, a single eye or vision might yield less pain in the long run than this double tragic vision of his condition. Sensing his eyes as "a transmission belt," he becomes a linguistic version of Chaplin in *Modern Times*. The proof reader role renders him an unwilling accomplice to the perversion of language and truth which is the modern newspaper. History moves through his personal consciousness and fills it:

As marshals peering through binoculars
Drive their offensives through my hollow mind.

As in all these early poems, the sense of sight is emblematic of the total world vision. Perceptions and perspectives are connected to sight and vision; and thus the stress on imagery and the visual symbol in Layton's poems.

The pivot of the poem introduces imagery which will tie up and complete the poem:

O my eyes are like extravagant bees
Hugging paper gardens where words are weeds.

As in the skillful pattern of end half-rhymes and sound leading in "Newsboy", the sense of interlocking realities—of what is seen and
what really transpires—is reinforced by the sound echoes in the above passage. The "sound and light" of "The Swimmer" are the two antipodes of the poet's art. What seizes upon the proof reader's consciousness is the death drive implicit in his work--his transmission belt activity in itself a configuration of the murderous world described by the news type he reads and corrects. He finally becomes part of the world shop where the compositors are hammering "Upon the bones of heretics, martyrs". These human types are also reflections of the figure of the poet. They and the proofreader become "finally/
The clockwork victims of insolvent guns"; the taller, impersonal destructive forces of modern industry and war. But if the proof reader poet's eyes are bees vainly seeking nourishment from paper gardens, he becomes an egret, an osprey, a bird. But there are three versions to the end of this poem:

Till I, cold egret in a mere of ink,
Idly surface the black frogs thick with speech
When History having eyes but no ears
Morsels now sauerkraut now caviar
Seeking the winged serpent in the tree.
(Here and Now)

As I, an egret in a mere of ink,
Idly surface the black frogs thick with speech
When History having eyes but no ears
Seeks out the winged serpent in the tree.
(Now is the Place)

As I, an egret in a mere of ink,
Surface the black frogs thick with speech
When having eyes but no ears history
Like a dissolute Tzar runs,
Taper in hand, to fire a sleeping city.
(The Black Huntsman)

Of the three versions, the second one works best in terms of the overall imagery of the poem. The proof reader may imagine himself to
be a bird stirring up the black typefaces, but History having eyes has no ears for the suffering cries of the city. The indifferent History is equated with Germany (sauerkraut) in the first version, or with Russia (caviar). And in the third version History is identified with a "dissolute Tzar" who like a nihilistic Nero will spread an apocalyptic destructive fire. In the second version, the one I take to be most organic, the identification of History is left open. The proof reader egret and the black frogs join in the image of the Caduceus, the reptile that can fly (suggestive of the swimmer) and live in two elements. The winged snake is a symbol of healing and of unity which thus far eludes even History's seeking. A symbol of wholeness still remains—though an ancient mythic totem—in the representation of the proof reader, the poet figure, with the winged serpent. The life force may be in danger yet it is still living upon "the neanderthal/Tree of eden." The mythic dimensions of this last image will extend into such later major poems as "The Cold Green Element," "Cain," and "The Tall Man Executes a Jig." The changes and revisions suggest Layton's unease with this poem at this point in his career. It reaches out to a more mythopoetic mode and perhaps was not what the poet was willing to develop in his poetry then. The revisions also suggest why this poem has never been included in any of the various "selected" or "collected" poems that the poet issued until The Collected Poems of 1971.

Language and poetry, we have seen, are often related to flight and birds. In "English for Immigrants," the teacher becomes another poet figure leading the immigrants into flight into the newly-discovered
linguistic dimensions:

Then my birdcall scatters their eyes like chicks
And I am Caesar I cry I am Saint Francis,
I am this misty slate and a lump of chalk;

Bird imagery suggests release and transformation which is always associated with the poet. In this poem, wit and gentle irony are a change of tone from such solid, tight-fisted poems as "Proof Reader". The sharp-eyed poet of Now is the Place can also place his poetry in the role of uplifting his readers:

Yet from me, a hawk, they take whatever feather
Can start their heavy wishes under a stone,
When a May evening that is shaped by thunder
With gramophones and smiles shall graduate
Forty amphipods pointing flutes at heaven.

This flight will be occasioned "by thunder", and even in this flight of poetry's fantasy Layton senses the imminence of disruption when these students break forth into the imaginative flights of their new language. Even flights of imagination may be attended by disruption and pain.

Now is the Place reinforces the scope of Here and Now and suggests that Layton continued with the vision and methods of the first book. With careful selection Layton redefined the work he had accomplished thus far and retrenched his vision in the image he projected of himself in the various poet figures. However, his association with Sutherland ended by the end of the summer of 1948, when Sutherland began to turn his back on the movement he had helped and became more conservative in his attitudes. And in the case of Layton's association with Dudek:
The two had ceased to correspond since about 1947 when Layton had taken violent exception, in a series of letters, to Dudek's changing opinions, especially in regard to political thought, while he was at Columbia.20

In effect Layton was to continue writing all alone until 1951 when he published his first "selected" poems at his own expense. And in that year he and Dudek were to be reconciled and a new era of growth would begin for Layton and for Canadian poetry.
NOTES

1 Even though Layton was soon to join forces with the First Statement group, he never really ceased having his poems published in the Forum. He continued to do so for over three decades and his poems still appear in that journal. This may be due in no small part to his sense of loyalty to a journal which first presented his poetry before a larger national audience. In many instances in the fifties and sixties Layton was to conduct many controversies in the columns of the Forum. The role of this journal in encouraging the renaissance in Canadian poetry in the forties must be written one day. At that time the journal was the backbone literary magazine for Canada, and it complemented the other more partisan and more literary minded little magazines and periodicals.


6 Edelstein, p. 58.


10 Raymond Souster, As Is (Toronto, 1967), pp. 72-73.


15 Edelstein, p. 62.


17 Wilson, p. 16.


19 Edelstein, p. 15.

CHAPTER III
The Early Fifties

Layton still maintained his contacts with Klein between the publication of his *Now Is the Place* in 1948 and *The Black Huntsmen* in 1951. It was a time of maturity and achievement for the older poet who published his two finest volumes, *The Rocking Chair* in 1948 and *The Second Scroll* in 1951. In fact, after the publication of *Now Is the Place* Layton was still mainly on his own. But in the "Acknowledgements and Note" of *The Black Huntsmen* Layton singles out Klein for his "advice and criticism." This third book is marked by the shift in emphasis on Jewish matters, and a development of metaphor and the use of Yiddish vernacular in Layton's satirical verse. Layton's closeness to Klein and his interest in the older poet's development are marked by the two incisive book reviews he wrote in the last issues of *First Statement*. These two reviews reveal the extent of Layton's own independence of vision and the peculiar nature of his development. They demonstrate how Klein's influence was a limited one, mainly focusing on poetic technique, and metaphors and allusions to Jewishness, that is, if Klein's example proved to be that kind of inspiration and source for Layton. And it is difficult to see whether that was the case, for Layton was well aware of the Jewish world that surrounded him in Montreal. Layton's vision was not altered substantially by Klein, though Layton's keen criticism of
Klein's outlook helped to define his own.

In the first of Layton's reviews—a review of *The Hitleriad* in *First Statement*, II, 9 (Oct. and Nov. 1944)—he begins on a positive note in which he dwells on Klein's technical virtuosity:

Extremely cunning is the versification which, with the couplet for ballast, makes use of a variety of patterns that ranges from vers libre to the formal terza rima. The techniques of contemporary verse are deftly pressed into service without destroying the poem's essential unity. These are never arbitrarily introduced but accommodate an artistic progression of temper that begins mock-heroically and concludes with the prophetic.

This attitude to form and versification reveals Layton's own practice. He admires Klein's organic usage of the formal devices for the key phrase is "the poem's essential unity." In Layton's poems there is a consistent sense of unity, and a control over imagery and metaphor and to the plot of the poem's argument. There is a marshalling order to Layton's poems. He has an impulse to order and manipulate all the elements in his poetry which provides him with the strength to consistently pursue the organic implications of his images and vision. Layton's awareness of Klein's "artistic progression" is a further indication of this will to order in the early Layton—an artistic trait, which in the hands of an ambitious and committed poet at an early stage, gives him the means to grow and develop his own world in his poetry, and to speak with a large voice. For the poet who was aware of the dimensions of the role of the artist, this self-consciousness informed the poems "Newsboy," "The Swimmer," and "The Yard." This same concern for the figure of the poet and the creative process becomes evident in all of Layton's writings, poetical and critical.
In this sense it was not Klein's direct example which shaped Layton's vision of the artist. Layton's own concern arose from the pattern of his own personality and revolt, and this distinguished his Jewish identification from Klein's. In any case, Layton's criticism in these two reviews reveals a maturity of literary and artistic awareness. This maturity reinforces the view that Layton's poems of the first two books revealed already a rare complexity and finish. How far these two reviews influenced Klein can only be speculated upon, but Layton's criticism and the example of his own writings in his first three books (and his closeness to Klein, and his being the only other Jewish poet close to him, in the forties) must have contributed to Klein's own growth.

Layton's two reservations about Klein's *The Hitleriad* reveal the differences between these two Jewish poets. Layton's reservations about Klein's satiric detachment revolve about the paradox of satire:

...I become aware of a curious paradox, for the poem a central and inescapable one. Satire is consequent upon the jar between fact and ideal, between things as they are and things as they ought to be. It demands a consistent viewpoint, a philosophy or at any rate an eccentricity that places the writer a little to one side of the object satirized. Its hallmark is a cool imperturbability, an urbanity that understands the mortal thrust of reticence. Or stated another way, satire requires two wings if it is ever to get free from the ground. Mr. Klein's subject unfortunately provides him with only one, namely the real.

The distance afforded the satirist has been displaced, and the model, although implicit in the poem, which would allow the satire to be effective and controlled, does not allow "the ironist to step to one side." Miriam Waddington in her discussion of this attitude to Klein's
poem does not vindicate Klein. Instead, she attempts to vindicate him by commenting on Pratt's acceptance of Klein's lack of detachment, and by making the gross overstatement that her own poet Klein was the sole poet to write about the "historical event." What she does not note is Layton's further diagnosis of this flaw in Klein's poem: his vision of evil. Klein may have been taken up with the emotion of his attitudes to Nazism but choosing the mode he did, Layton's comment is succinct: "From one point of view Mr. Klein can not say enough, from another what he says is superfluous." But Layton's understanding of this difficulty presented by the mode is informed by the implications of Klein's subject. Layton does not see the limitations as Kleins' fault alone:

For satire intends to ridicule the follies of mankind and not its beastlier perversions unless, as was the case with Swift, mankind itself is regarded as a beastly perversion. Therefore, and this is the paradox, in order to write about the Nazi leaders at all, one must first set about humanizing them and this Mr. Klein does by endowing them with human characteristics albeit of the unpleasanter kinds. Since an exhibition of the cloven hoof is not possible, Mr. Klein must insist that Goebbels is halitotic which is illuminating but is not exactly the circumstance that makes him so unpopular.... The viewpoint in this while consistent, is a universal which does not enable the ironist to step to one side: it admits by default that Nazism was an outbreak of humanity. It places the satirist in the unenviable position of having to kiss first and kill afterwards.

Layton is providing a standard and a perspective for the satire he was to write so profusely in the fifties. Already in his first two books, Layton had begun to come to terms with the "beastly perversion" of man by means of another method: by placing this insight into the nature of man in an imaginative visionary context.
Namely, in "Newsboy" and "The Yard," Layton is not addressing himself satirically to this vision of man, but was identifying the persona and the reader with this universal aspect of the human condition. In order to do this, his poems employed series of metaphors linked in a dialectical manner, and further, these developed into symbolic landscapes or city-scapes. Layton's method, in terms of the mode of his poems, contained a built-in artistic detachment. Satire demands the detachment of its own convention. Layton's satire rarely tackles such large themes as Klein's. Layton attacked literary attitudes in "The Modern Poet," but the larger themes of human evil and degradation are dealt with in such poems as "Newsboy," Satire's scope has built-in limitations for Layton so that themes such as the nature of the poet and the contradictions of his sensibility, are developed in poems of the mode of "The Swimmer." This problem of detachment will be discussed in relation to the satire Layton was to write in the fifties. But in his discussion of Klein Layton provided a measure for his own success and achievement.

In his discussion of The Hitleriad, Layton does not dispute Klein's handling of the formal means of the mock-heroic poem. The very choice of such a form does not enter into Layton's discussion. His reservations are directed at the content and the treatment of theme, and these criticisms implicitly reverberate on the choice of Klein's formal means. Layton's emphasis suggests his own bias towards theme and content, and points to his own early faltering choice of means for his satire of the fifties. He repeats some of Klein's ill-advised choices in The Long Pea-shooter, and has difficulty then realizing
which voice he should adopt for his various satiric stances.

In Layton's review of Klein's Poems (FS, Vol. 2, no. 12, April-May 1945), the critical attention turns to the nature of Klein's "passionate debate with the Deity."

To know God truly, one must also have known Satan; Klein gives no evidence of ever having been within a hundred yards of that versatile gentleman. A brisk acquaintance with the latter might have injected a deeper note into some of the verses. As it is, the Psalms are not a record of spiritual trials undergone and the religious insights derived from them, so much as a recording of specific, communicable emotions.

This limitation underlines Layton's belief that the poet must be aware of the tension between good and evil. The poems in his first two books underline man's suffering, degradation and struggle. Layton cannot condone a poetry of spiritual trials which does not confront the demonic. Thus both these books of Klein's present the point of difference between both poets. And in fact both reviews tend to demonstrate how much Layton was set in his own vision; and how he had defined that vision as a perspective on Klein's.

In a later statement, Layton returned to his reservations about Klein:

Herein Klein's strength and weakness. There is an instability in his work. The Walter Scott of the Jews, he romanticizes the Jew, presents him as quaint and vanishing. The emotions he exploits are the minor ones—sentiment, disappointment, heartache. There is a backward looking quality in his poetry. I believe he wrote The Second Scroll precisely because he found that modern life, Jewish or Gentile, could not support the spirit, the soul. Today there is a destructive element—a poison in the atmosphere—making it difficult for the writer to sustain himself, find nourishment. Sensing this, that the very Jewish community he extolled and celebrated no longer give him spiritual nourishment, Klein took refuge in the messianic vision.
Speaking of Jewish writers, Layton emphasizes the limitations in that Jewish ethos and sensibility; and these apply to Klein. The passage alone also suggests why Layton found that he had to go past this point; and how the forces in his upbringing and his education and early writing afforded him a wider framework than Klein's. Layton's early rejection of Judaism put him into the role of being an outsider as well, to his own Jewish community. Though he is able to see the limitations he notes below, he still keeps a significant Jewish awareness, built on the tension of his rejection and his roots.

For all their (Jewish writers) cosmopolitanism there is something parochial and limited in their outlook. A writer today must go right into the very abysses of the human heart. Jewish writers have not done this. They fall just short of exploring this continent of human darkness and evil.

This demonstrates the continuity of Layton's attitudes, and explains the nature of this limited Jewish outlook in Klein.

Asking why, Layton pointed out that the Jew, because he is an old people, has a sense of continuity amounting almost to a sense of causality. He looks for design, meaning, purpose in history; has the notion that history is in some sense redemptive; that God reveals Himself in history; that men and women redeem themselves. Yet, "the whole point of modern literature is 'the destructive element,' the acid that burns away every pre-conception." A writer today must immerse himself in it. But the Jew "is an optimist. The most amazing paradox--Jews are the most optimistic, forward looking people, full of life and vibrance: the only people where the chief mourners are sent out of the cemetery first--into life.

"This, the strength of the Jew, is also his weakness in writing. The Jew by training, by history, by heritage, cannot believe the human animal to be as base as it is. He blocks out of his consciousness the murders, the whole litany of suffering of the past. Otherwise--he
could not go on. Because the Jew has suffered from human baseness in a way no other people has, the Jew must reject it, must set up a psychological block. It is this that prevents the Jew from having complete insight; that prevents the Jewish writer, for all his great gifts of humour, wit, fantasy, invention, from attaining to the very first rank.  

But above all, this demonstrates Layton's own exploration of the destructive element, and his attempt to comprehend the contradictions and the dialectics of human experience. The early poems show how firmly entrenched Layton was at the early stages of his development, and how in such a poem as "Newsboy" he followed his own prescription for the poet's dilemma in the face of the destructive element.

The title of Layton's third collection marks a new direction. The title of the lead poem, "The Black Huntsmen," demonstrates that the poet has moved on from the specificity of Here and Now and Now is the Place. Since the last collection, Layton was moving into an awareness of the symbolic overtones of his earlier poems. The change in this title, The Black Huntsmen, reflects his movement into the metaphoric overtones of his poetry, and into full acceptance of his visual preoccupation with imagery and symbols. The lead poem demonstrates that he has taken another aspect for the poet figure. This new persona, the outsider, stems from such poems in the first two books as "Jewish Main Street" and "Spinoza." This outsider and persecuted figure appears in the garb of the Jew. But this is not a startling new departure, for it is a redevelopment from the earlier poems with the added emphasis of being a metaphor for another phase in the narrative of his poet figure.
Klein's "Autobiographical" tends to nostalgia for the times that have passed in the locale of the Montreal ghetto both poets grew up in. It was first published as "Autobiography," and serves the same impulse of reminiscence as Layton's "The Black Huntsmen." In Klein's poem the world memory recreates is "the ghetto streets where a Jewboy/Dreamed 'pavement into pleasant Bible-land.'" The poem is as literal as it can be in the hands of such a poet as Klein, and the sentiment of nostalgia is reinforced by a pervading sense of the quaintness of a world of childhood that has passed. For memory rises "Out of the jargoning city I regret"; and this regret is almost a regression. Layton's Jewboy world, recreated in his poem, takes on the overtones of the "underwater slums," where fear and persecution were the features of Jewish life. To this Layton adds Tennyson's Romantic world and tries to create the effect of a total tapestry of the poet figure as Jewboy poet child living in three worlds at once.

The poem returns to the time when "The childish heart" was rapt up in the joyful expression of the senses. Though the playground was "the torpid slum street," "A cut vein of the sun," it still offers a golden unnamed (ethnically or culturally unspecified) world. With the discovery of Tennyson and his poetry's world—the world of King Arthur—the child poet takes on the whole medieval world, and in his Jewish slum "grocery shop" world "bowing to left and to right", he becomes "a diminutive King Arthur" donning his mother's sheitel (ritual wig) to approximate the knightly king. But now, speaking as an adult who has left that world behind him, the poet is conditioned to be apprehensive. In that Tennysonian world there lurked the presence of
medieval persecution and the slaughters by the Crusaders. But if the poet "knew delight as water in a glass in a pool," he now continues his fantasy. Since "the evil retinue" of anti-semites or present day fascists come "out of the forest of gold", he must still keep up his vigil and be wary. Even though his Jewishness, his tzitzith (fringed garment) may be woven into the tapestry, that is, assimilated into Christian culture or the goy world, he would ultimately prefer a pure and poetic death rather than being tortured or burned in an auto-da-fe. The poetic death is preferable to a death at the stake, to a death that would signify his stubborn willingness to die for his faith.

Though for myself I had preferred
A death by water or sky.

If he is to die by drowning, it would be as the failed swimmer in "The Swimmer". And if it is a death by sky, it would be the bloody stabbing in "The Eagle," a bird brought down from flight, an Icarus. Yet these two kinds of death suggest a final return to the elements which stimulated the "childish heart" and gave it its innocent playfulness. When then did the poet figure discover that men were hunting him? When he discovered he was different, totally given to the celebration of the world described in stanza one. Or when he discovered his loss of innocence by delving into the world of King Arthur and came upon the realization that there was a discrepancy between his poetic fantasy world and "the cold stones of City Hall?" "The evil retinue" then may be the very elements of the world of poetry he discovered in Tennyson, which found their projections in himself, and threatened his early undifferentiated joy by immersing him in a world which was inimical to his tzitzith. In effect, then, Layton is preferring "A
death," an immersion into the elemental world before the clash developed between his Jewishness and the threatening figures from the gentile poetical world. His real world of poetry, then, is the world of the senses; but this realization is only come by through another clash of opposites. The poem then represents a different vision than that afforded in Klein's warm nostalgia. The biographical roots of both poets also informs this difference:

Klein had a rich, happy childhood. His parents appear to have been generous, devoted, and kind; their poverty was never regarded as a serious obstacle to happiness, nor was it accompanied by the spiritual poverty which so prevailed in the Layton household. Thus the poetry of Klein's early period, that which deals with the Jewish world, and the poetry which appears in The Second Scroll, in which he returns to the themes he took out of his childhood and youth, are free from any feelings of resentment or disgust. These facts are important to remember when one contrasts Klein's early life and its reflection in his poetry with that of Irving Layton, whose childhood and adolescence were acutely unhappy.9

"Gothic Landscape" is another version of the same theme. In this poem the landscape is informed with history, but as in "The Black Huntsmen", there is the imminence of persecution and fear. The whole history of medieval Christianity's treatment of the Jews is encapsulated in this poem. The allusions are varied but unified by metaphor; the kaleidoscope of images is surrealistically oblique and Jewish. Here again it is the world of the Jewboy and the hallucinating fears which fling themselves upon his experience and mind.

There is an exuberance and exaggeration in this poem's imagery—a kind of Jewish extravagance not unlike Klein's or Chagall's
visual imagination. The informing sense is sight. Every image takes on its effectiveness and the burden of the pathetic fallacy from the transformation of detail into metaphor. In this landscape the trees "stand like penitential Augustines." It is immediately Layton's fulcrum; the landscape becomes charged, transformed into a tableau, a "tapestry," which brings into play the poet's memory superimposing history on the Canadian winter landscape. The imminence of fear becomes full blown; an historical identity and persona takes on the paranoid streak and is propelled by the supposed persecution. This persecution complex emotionally charged history.

Since the trees are monks who evoke fear, they lead the speaker to remember an incident of his childhood. In this instance, some priest may have tried to speak to him. The "Jewboy" may have almost bumped into one, and so he cannot come near a priest without fear of dire consequences. The fifth line, describing his hasty retreat is visually and aurally quick, and corresponds to the movement of the child: "But I escaped, tunnelling the snow to my mother's face." In the refuge of her shawl, the childhood imagination found respite in a vision of "God's Assyrian beard," the fixed and powerful Semitic God. In this respite the next image to be imprinted upon him at this crucial time is of "a page of lamads racing towards me like ostriches." The boy's mind is moving fast. The images rush. God's name in Hebrew, Elohim or El, always required the Hebrew lamed—the liquid consonant whose sound and written character on the page resemble the quick movement of the provoked bird, running quickly in a
moment of danger and burying itself away from whatever it does not wish to see and face. It is an apt analogy for the boy himself buried in the warm security of his mother's shawl. Here again the bird appears as another projection of the poet child eschewing speed and learning how to survive in this desert of the imagination.

In the next stanza the lines shorten. The "Jewboy mind" will not forget the inquisitors, "The torquemadas stirring in the frosty veins," and the intimations of coldness and of death. "The cloister bells" he hears become insults. The conspiracy against him grows around him. The lateness of the day— the oncoming winter evening—suggests, as well, the gothic overtones of Montreal in the snow. A pun suggests the ominous city lights: "Autos-da-fe make red the immaculate sky." The sky is the domain of purity, and as in the Hebrew bible, represents a dimension removed from earthly suffering and pain. The Augustine period leads to the Inquisition of Spain; the latter, in turn, brings to mind the early Protestant era of England. The poet apostrophizes with overtones of prayer:

Come soon, O bright Tudor sun!
I do not like this monastic whiteness of winter--
It is a Christ drained of all blood.

The Gothic has become the bloodless, almost unhuman austerity of Catholicism, bringing with it threat and destruction. The sun will usher in warmth and spring—a rejuvenation. The Protestant Tudor, then, becomes a Christ with blood, with feeling. The winter evening will give way to a new morning, a new Christianity, perhaps with more hope and charity for the Jewboy—and more toleration.
Skillfully, Layton has drawn out a sensibility by way of imagery and allusions. The final stanza and its resolution may be less than satisfactory for while the image of the sun may be in keeping with the unity of imagery of the poem, it nonetheless closes off the poem in too neat a fashion. This denouement is a form of poetic hyperbole for it diminishes the overtones of the first stanza. The poet does not fully convince by remembering that the Jewboy mind may find solace and small comfort in a less perverse and persecuting environment than this Catholic landscape. In effect, the poem seems to be saying that the demise of the complex and menacing Catholic environment, in giving way to Protestantism, offers the Jew more comfort. It is a choice between the lesser of two evils. Yet historically Tudor England was no panacea for Jewish fears. The historical Jewish perspective becomes submerged in the overall unity of imagery and thrust of the poem.

"Gothic Landscape" bears comparison with Klein's "For the Sisters of the Hotel Dieu," in The Rocking Chair. Instead of fear, a persecution complex and the imagination's paranoia, the emotion of Klein's poem is one of nostalgia and gratitude. The nuns, "the safe domestic fowl of the House of God," become the warm, caring counterparts of the Jewboy's "monks." The bird imagery in Klein's poem transforms the Sisters into "biblic birds," and almost "angels." Catholicism provides a refuge for this other Jewboy and becomes the object of praise and thanks. Klein's historical sense informs these nuns with a biblic aura rather than with Layton's Diaspora persecution complex. Klein bridges the security of the biblic world and
the days of his illness in hospital. Klein's parochialism allows him to romanticise the French-Canadian and closed world of Catholic Quebec because in it he found projections of his own Jewish ghetto. Like attracts like, so to speak. Klein rarely leaves the refuges afforded by this parochial world; and the lineaments for this acceptance rather than rejection also stem from the nature of his childhood's experience, as referred to above. The biblic world affords less fear of the Gentile, and Catholicism, as in the last poem, is a further extension of the secure Jewish environment. Whereas Layton bases his childhood, at first, in the celebration of the senses, Klein bases his, in this poem, in the common biblic tradition. His tendency is to welcome and accept tradition, while Layton regards tradition and history as menacing and threatening.

Layton also employs biblical sources in The Black Huntsmen. He may be dealing with the dire aspects of the Diaspora as projections of the universal meanings or significance in biblical myths. In the sole "Notes" to the book, Layton takes a page to explain two of the poems. He glosses the line, "a seedless Joseph, castrate, storing grain—", from the poem, "The Poet and the Statue."

The Joseph story has stirred the imaginations of countless poets and story-tellers, Thomas Mann being only the most recent. The inner meaning of this beautiful and poignant narrative has, however, somehow managed to elude them. Joseph, it plainly appears, was castrated by his brothers for bringing back to their father the story of their sexual licentiousness.... The real grandeur of the Joseph story, and what makes it dramatically one of the most affecting in the history of literature, lies in its portrayal of a man who, himself unable to procreate...
life was yet the instrument for preserving it: that of the Egyptians and—all thought of vengeance nobly put aside—that of the unnatural brothers and of their children.

In the poem, Joseph becomes another poet figure. He had to be castrated in order to get his many-coloured coat. He who was singled out by his brothers, makes dreams and also ensures the continuity of life in Egypt. In these two functions he is the procreative poet who gives up physical potency for the divinatory powers, and for the political power which allows him to salvage the commonwealth. He is the prophetic poet who can see into the future, and also impose his vision upon men for their salvation.

The scene here "At the city's outskirts" underlines the poet's isolation and his place at the periphery of society. He is the outcast, the "rich man's butt," and as he speaks of himself, "A Literary fool." His confusion began with the dimensions of the imagination and dream, that is, poetry: "The dream about sheaves confused me. I was young." In the sphere of the everyday "The envious borthers are always in the right." They envy him because of his special qualities; since he was the favourite he was given "princely garments to wear." This envy of the poet figure goaded them to maim him. This represents society's desire to castrate the poet; to make him pay with injury for the glory he has been given as a gift. This theme would preoccupy Layton in the later books. Yet the outcast poet still is "A seedless Joseph, castrate, storing grain." Though maimed by his brothers, though his own procreative powers have been robbed from him by an act of envy and cruelty, he can still maintain a positive and creative vision. He can still stand
for life and can still see a human response in the face of death. Though he was castrated, he does not lose his belief that man is still the measure of creation and is capable of good. He affirms this even in the face of his own individual destiny and in the face of the destructive actions of his fellow man. And even in the face of a world (and nature) that may be barren and impervious to man's needs. Thus the poem's final lines speak from a Jewish vision, from an affirmative point of view of history as man's significant journey in time:

Knowing the universe is the home of us all
And that no man dies like an animal
Without grief.

As in the account of Layton's talk, "Fire-drake," Layton is underlining his notion of the Jew as he who seeks for "design, meaning, purpose in History." History then can be redemptive, and men and women can redeem themselves; and the Josephs do so in the face of "the destructive element". Their actions are doubly meaningful in the face of this knowledge of their fellow men and the universe's indifference to man. And the Joseph poet is he who can still affirm in the face of personal defeat, injury and tragedy.

In "The Poet and the Statue" a meaningful death includes mourning. For no matter the degree Joseph is considered an outcast, the loss his death represents will be real for others. Grief, however, makes his and others' death, human, and thus meaningful. The poet's double, the statue, does not respond. It represents the opposite pole to the empathetic and living Joseph. This statue may represent the form into which history will preserve
the poet, and thus can give no contradictory testimony to the living speech of the poet. It merely confirms the form of continuity into which the poet will turn.

"Mrs. Potiphar" is an internal monologue in which the wife of the Egyptian governor discovers herself in the bleak womanly condition, caught between her repulsive husband and the unfortunately impotent Joseph:

Then 0 his dead eyes open and you stare at me
From your dark rabbinical face
And your earlobes are like the fine droplets of glass
As I bend to your lips with my open mouth.

But this poem is obliquely connected to "The Poet and the Statue."

It is a kind of footnote to the other Joseph poem, and suggests the possible beginnings of a serial poem in which all the protagonists may be given more space and words to delineate themselves. As with this poem, many of the other poems in this book are in the first person singular and plural. It is a sign of Layton's recently found ease in maintaining his device of the speaking persona. This began occasionally in the first book, found its formative expression in such poem as "The Yard", and comes to the fore in "The Black Huntsmen", "Gothic Landscape," and the two Joseph poems. This demonstrates how Layton's growing assurance for the speaking persona is but an extension of the poet figure. What would be more fitting than to finally allow these various personas to be themselves their own voices?

For if The Black Huntsmen is a gathering, as Layton planned the book to be, it is also a transitional book. It defines what he wished to preserve of his work until then, and also points to the
the directions he was to assume in the books of the fifties. Layton suggests the Janus quality of this book in an afternote printed at the bottom of the book's last page:

Encouraged by the enthusiastic response to the Black Huntsmen [sic], the author decided to add several more poems from his two previous collections, Here and Now and Now is the Place to the remaining copies of the issue. Some of these poems have been revised and they will be found in the middle pages [.]. The author asks that the Black Huntsmen [sic] be considered as a volume of his selected poems which includes many new poems hitherto unpublished.

It seems that between the first issue of the book and these first responses, Layton added a middle section of poems which swelled the number of previously published poems to the collection.

Poems as "Auspex" and "Mont Rolland" stand out as examples of Layton's developing maturity. "Auspex", as the title suggests, is a poem of foreboding about the future. Written in the late forties and published in this book, it expresses the fear of the imminence of war and the uncertainties of the Cold War era. Layton's development is marked by the skillful usage of time, allusions and metaphor. The poem is well constructed with a beginning, a middle and an end. Each of these points is exactly and skillfully arranged and gives the poem a sense of fine finish. As in "The Swimmer", imminences are present everywhere. The poem is set at the close of day, and the sky is cloudy. Within this particular setting, "The wind rose like an American tariff." The sense of foreboding is linked to the Cold War and with the economic act of protectionism and isolationism. What are the signs the poets is waiting for "to fall out of the sky"? The omens will come from a world above and outside
the more immediate one at hand. It is to be ...

An eagle, like a piece of gunmetal,
Cracking the wall of air, flashing
The forbidden message from broken wings--

The eagle may be American or Russian. Its message will be no other than notice of a doom of sorts. It may be "Perhaps a never-before-seen snake," emblem of a new cunning, a new political treachery disguised as an ideology. These images of the eagle and the snake are reminiscent, as well, of the final image in "Proof Reader," a poem similar in form and device to "Auspex." But finally all possibilities cohere and the poet sees in the sense of being a seer and a diviner. Sight thus leads to another aspect of vision. All the poet eventually sees are hints of criminality which add to the political nuances of the landscape: "great swathes of shadow / Moving across the field like escaped jailbirds." The afternoon sky become "Mediterranean" and thus the clouds are "Like Greek city states." Thus begun, the allusion to Greece gives way to another analogy. For "In the north the Macedonian king" approaches as a threat to these city states. Who is this Phillip of Macedonia? His modern counterpart must be Stalin, for he "has fastened his grey tunic," which reminds us of Stalin's proverbial garb. The sky darkens as a storm seems to be approaching and the common people, the proletariat even of other countries, are frightened and abject and are represented in the landscape as "The rabblegrass." Communist totalitarianism frightens even those classes it presumes to represent. As the storm progresses the poet is caught up in the omens he has noted in the weather and the environment around him. Caught up with the foreboding of the impending
world war he speaks to his own bonneted daughter held in his arms:

O helmeted goddess,
My little one, head nesting on arm,
I am afraid.

The imminence of fear here arises from the immediate political world. The "Jewboy mind" has embraced present day history. This more mature, paternal seer complements the susceptible earlier poet figure. "Auspex" was later re-titled "Haruspex," namely, a soothsayer of Rome who interpreted the will of the gods from inspecting the entrails of sacrificed animals. In *Collected Poems* "Haruspex" follows immediately after "The Black Huntsmen." And this suggests that both aspects of the poet as seer were connected in Layton's own awareness of the poet figures represented in his poems. The earlier Jewish awareness prepared the poet to assume the same role in a more pagan identification. The "Jewboy mind" and "Haruspex" were to function as two poles of Layton's sensibility caught in the tension between the Hebrew and the pagan, and would express itself in subsequent phases of the poet's development.

In "Mont Rolland" the poet seer interprets again by means of a landscape, or a tableau of sky and natural setting. In a gloss on the poem, probably written by Layton himself in the anthology he and Dudek edited, he clearly was aware of the implications of his mode of using landscape symbolically as a projection of his own themes and vision:

Ostensibly a description of a landscape, this poem projects human qualities on the objects described, in such a way that it also becomes a discourse on the writer's human relationships. The characterization and references throughout the poem are representative of either domination or submissiveness in a class-divided society. The poet
is initially "pitiless towards men"—the mass of men—possibly because he is exhausted by the frustration of daily living or because of his sense of being thrust into an unsympathetic utilitarian society. He then conceives of certain trees as individuals who would be more sympathetic to him: "impractical trees"...a "tolerant monk"...a noble "straggler"...even a "buffoon." In this congenial company the poet feels "favoured" and seems on the verge of some imaginative thought. But at this moment he is interrupted by a noise of a railway train, which "trivializes" his poetical mise-en-scene and spoils his meditation. (The "blossoming cherry trees" are no doubt great puffs of white vapour from the train's engine.) The poem closes with the ironic image of "untamed hills" being caught in the lariat of a highway.

"An immense silence made for primeval birds" prepares the scene and the moment for the poet who is "favoured intruder". "The Lilliput train trivializes" this creative moment, "this whirlpool of silence". (Bird and whirlpool suggest the imagery of flight and swimming which attend the poet figure's creative act.) Technology and the communication systems of rail and road which prepare economic exploitation (the highway, "A suture in the flesh of a venerable patrician") spell the end of the aristocratic order, the world of "a Tolstoyan disciple," of the tragic "Absolom." The highway, civilization's "lariat on the proud necks / Of the untamed hills" marks the end of an era, the wild period of capitalism heyday of opportunity for everyone, and rampant individualism. Yet now technology even conquers "the untamed hills," the wild spontaneous Dionysian element in man and nature. "Mont Rolland" states that something drastic is happening to the world. A world force which is erasing the distinctions and values of history and other cultures, and further, is toxic to the creative frenzy that gives man and nature the will and the power to be creative. In this statement Layton has gone further than in any other poem to date in
speaking of 'the destructive element' in post-war technological North American society. It marks a new phase in his vision, and he was to underline this in the preface he was to write for Cerberus, published a year later, which was to signal a new phase in modern Canadian poetry:

What brings us together in Cerberus is the belief that to write poetry is to say a loud nix to the forces high-pressuring us into conformity or atomic dispersion. Also, that the best part of any man today is the hell he carries inside him; and that only poetry can transmute that into freedom, love, intelligence.

Layton's satire is given more scope in the selection of The Black Huntsmen. What was occasional now becomes part of the poet's repertoire. The satirical poems are arranged and intergrated with the other poems in this book. In "Songs of Half-Crazed Nihilist", the satire on modern times, on Canada and on the current cultural and political scene, is rendered in the manner of a Vachel Lindsay poem, but with the added feature of a scatological refrain in Yiddish vernacular (an ironic and mocking debt to Klein?):

Dreckh!
Shmeckh!
Layg allis avecke!
Warm your hands on a pussycat,
It's the warmest spot in town.
This is a cold country.

The Nihilist mouths this assault on Canada, and he provides a convenient persona for Layton to unbend. Perhaps this is the first scatological satiric poem to enter into the corpus of serious poetry in Canada. Its "brio" and its unabashed delight of "épater le bourgeois" was a refreshing but much maligned note in Canadian poetry. It is what put off many of the critics and reviewers in Canada, for a
tradition of satire and invective was not strong in Canada. An example of such a response is the review in the February 1952 issue of The Canadian Forum by Anne Marriott:

In his effort to drum up poetic power, Mr. Layton even falls desperately back on an adolescent use of four-letter words that in these contexts do not have the stunning force he hopes for.

It took the full force of Layton's satire and polemics of the fifties to usher in a change in the Canadian sensibility, and renew and fortify a tradition of disrespectful verse and trenchant satire.

The more unsuccessful satire in The Black Huntsmen suffer mainly from the uneven use of the conventions of rhyme and metered rhythms. These poems sometimes succeed as in "Aerolite VI" where satire and neatness combine to make sharp light verse:

A spider danced a cozy jig
Upon a frail trapeze;
And from a far-off clover field
An ant was heard to sneeze.

And kings that day were wise and just,
And stones began to bleed;
A dead man rose to tell a tale,
A bigot changed his creed.

The stableboy forgot his pride,
The queen confessed an itch;
And lo! more wonderful than all,
The poor man blessed the rich.

In "The Modern Poet" reprinted from Here and Now, the point may be well made but the verse approaches doggerel at times. With the barbed free verse satire of the later books, and the satirical allegories, Layton the satirist emerges and fulfils the signs that are apparent in the examples of the mode in this "selected poems."

"The Ape and the Pharisee" is a longer poem with a satirical thrust which fails nonetheless. Since it is addressed to A.M. Klein,
it provides another perspective on the relationship between both poets.
The "Ape" in this poem represents Layton while the "Pharisee" is Klein. The "Ape" addresses the "Pharisee":

O Poet Mocker,
Get off your phylactery boxes
For how will you run
When you hear the foxes?

Edelstein in an explanation of this poem notes that...

'Poet Mocker' is a reference to Klein's status as a poet with a firm adherence to his faith; his mockery is not directed towards other faiths, but against those who, like the ape, have veered from the established religious scholarship and are occupied in more prosaic pursuits—"the scratching of the behind."

For the "Ape," the religious world of the "Pharisee" will trap the latter's energies and awareness instead of allowing him to be aware of the more ominous threatening forces represented by the "foxes."

Layton's position is that in the face of an hostile world one cannot rely on the self-induced blindness afforded by faith. This is an exaggeration of Klein's "secular Jewishness", or yet it reveals Layton's position that both he and Klein, as Jewish Canadian poets, must seek wider horizons and viewpoints so that they may face the larger, darker themes presented by the human condition in the twentieth century.

This brings its full circle back to Layton's reservations about The Hitleriad. It is evident that though Layton did not have Klein's consistency and technical mastery, he had certainly a complex awareness of the themes that were developing in his poems. He had demonstrated his zest for satire, and he was to sharpen that poetic weapon and direct it at the "black huntsmen" he found lurking in his
environment. This third volume reinforced his early tendencies and demonstrated that while he was composing imposing "meditative" poems as "Mont Rolland", and growing to new insights and techniques of imagery and allusions, he still had not the full confidence to present his new work in a separate book by itself. Each phase was still not independently defined for him, and he needed the assurance gained by including the earlier poems he had written.

The founding of Contact and Contact Press mainly stemmed from Raymond Souster's and Louis Dudek's association. In her article on Louis Dudek, Wynne Francis relates a meeting in which the two poets and Irving Layton may have decided on their course of action:

The three poet friends, with their common needs, grievances and dreams, met together in the summer of 1951 in a house on Dudek's grandmother's farm near Charlemagne, Quebec. On this occasion Dudek dumped on the table, in front of Layton and Souster, the file of Origin which he had brought back from New York. The three friends pored over the magazine. They spent many hours critically discussing its merits and its relevance to their ambitions. Souster, it seems, was especially impressed by Corman's magazine; Layton and Dudek were more critical. At any rate, as Dudek was to write ten years later, "the result was a string of new writers in Souster's Contact, Layton's appearance in Origin, the Layton discovery by William Carlos Williams, and some of the new work in CIV/n, the magazine we started soon after."

The 1951 meeting at Charlemagne had other important consequences. Shortly thereafter, the three poets, determined to see their own work published, as well as that of other deserving Canadian poets, founded Contact Press. Souster's Dr onto home became the headquarters of the press but the editorial responsibility was shared equally by all three.13

Raymond Souster's account of this meeting is more specific and affords us the advantage of reading what one of the main participants had to say.
Souster's magazine provided the first impetus, which carried over to the founding of the press:

Then in the summer of 1951 my wife and I visited Montreal on a short holiday. I'll always remember the day at the farm on the Little Jesus River, with Louis Dudek throwing the first two issues of Cid Corman's *Origin* down on the picnic table and saying "this is typical of what the nuts in New York are doing these days." I remember casually flipping through both copies and then giving them back to him—I was not yet ready for Charles Olson and Robert Creeley....

Back of all this was the fact that Irving Layton, Louis Dudek and myself had moved into the Fifties writing more strongly, and certainly more productively than ever. But not only were the regular book publishers indifferent to our work, but the one or two little magazines still functioning, foremost of which was John Sutherland's *Northern Review*, were now closed to us.

In the Fall of 1951 I took the bull by the horns. I purchased a mimeograph machine, solicited an editorial "Ou Sont Les Jeunes?" and some poems from Louis Dudek, other poems from A.G. Bailey, George Nasir and yes, Kenneth Patchen, and cranked out Contact One. It appeared under the date of January 1952, and as a feature I reprinted four poems from Irving Layton's privately printed *The Black Huntsmen* together with a short review signed with my initials. I think 200 copies were hopefully printed and sent out....

Concurrent with the launching of *Contact* magazine, *Contact Press* was founded by Louis Dudek, Irving Layton and myself; and it was perhaps inevitable that our first book published April 1952, *Cerberus*, should be poems by these same three-headed poetical doorkeepers.13

The distinctions between Souster's and Dudek's attitudes, related by Michael Gnarowski in a detailed study of the correspondence which passed between both poets, reveal how Layton took up something from each of them, but in staying clear of their objectives, forged ahead with his own poetry and took advantage of the publishing opportunities which presented themselves:
And so Dudek, without every being directly or intimately involved in Contact, became the eminence grise behind the magazine. The friendships and contacts which he had established during his stay in New York City between September 1944 and September 1951, served the magazine in good stead.

It was this set of Dudek's connections with American writers and poets, to say nothing of his pre-occupation with Ezra Pound which urged Contact along the road of literary internationalism—both North American and European. The pressure of this influence coincided neatly with Raymond Souster's own desire for magazine with a policy of wider orientation, and placed Contact in diametrical opposition to the specially defined and circumscribed nationalism of John Sutherland and Northern Review....

He [Dudek] saw Contact not only as an international little magazine, but also as an emancipating agency which would free Canadian poetry, and be instrumental in countering the influence and authority of Northern Review. 15

Dudek and Gnarowski summarizing this activity, reinforce the impression that the joining of forces had a great influence in shaping the patterns of involvement of the three poets and those who would be affected by their example:

...a more central reintegration of the poetry movement occurred among poets in Toronto and Montreal. Here, we must recall that the Montreal group had dispersed in 1944 (an actual agreement of dissolution of the partnership of Layton, Dudek and Sutherland in First Statement was signed on September first, 1944) and that late in 1947 a gradual weakening of Sutherland's sense of modernism had created a lull in the literary scene. Raymond Souster, becoming increasingly restive in the face of this literary reaction, pushed for the launching of a new little magazine which would challenge the hegemony of Sutherland's Northern Review. Contact magazine was founded (after much soul-searching on the part of Dudek and Souster) in January of 1952, and the mood of revived activism in Canadian poetry which it generated led to the founding of Contact Press and the publication of its first title: the embattled book Cerberus containing individual prefaces and poetry by Dudek, Layton and Souster.

Both Contact magazine and the press which stemmed from it, were events of major significance for the Canadian scene. Not only was the poetry of a tough and uncom-
promising realism making itself heard once more, but the connections which Souster was able to establish with a new middle generation of American poets (Creeley, Corman, Olson and others) through the agency of his magazine (Contact) produced an infusion of newly-developed American tendencies in poetry, and would be related to the success, ten years later, of the influence which this school of writing would have on Canadian poets on the West Coast.16

Yet as far as Layton was concerned, these activities provided him with an arrangement whereby he could publish his new work, and thus give him the confidence that the outlets were available and there were others who were trying to develop their own voices and writing. The difference in literary attitudes between Souster and Dudek led them later to publish separate magazines of their own in the late fifties, namely Combustion and Delta respectively. Though Souster and Dudek committed themselves to fostering poets and poetry which fitted in with their own ideas as to the direction Canadian poetry should take, Layton did not indulge in activities of the same nature. He had The Black Huntsmen privately printed.

Dudek had returned to Montreal in September of 1951. He had been writing all the years he was living in New York. When his second manuscript had been whittled down to the chapbook, The Searching Image, he realized from his discontent with Ryerson Press, his publishers, that some other means must be established to promote poetry.17 As a background to Layton's participation in Contact Press, it must be noted that Layton probably got involved through Dudek:

And he [Dudek] had not been in town very long when he received a phone call from Betty Sutherland, then married to Irving Layton, urging him to reopen his heart to his old friend. The two had ceased to
correspond since about 1947 when Layton had taken violent exception, in a series of letters, to Dudek's changing opinions, especially in regard to political thought, while he was at Columbia. The reconciliation made in 1951 was to prove fruitful for Canadian letters throughout the Fifties, though by the end of that decade the two poets were to be again bitterly estranged.18 Layton had no publisher, and was worse off than Dudek in regard to publication. Layton had not appeared in any of the anthologies published to that date except for Sutherland's Other Canadians. And since Souster had himself just recently suffered the same fate as Dudek in regard to his new book with Ryerson Press the scene was set for the poets to join together to publish themselves, and later the poetry written by others.

The next four years were to be the richest in terms of Layton's involvement with publishing and little magazine activity. If he did encourage poets, it was done almost as an individual effort. He rarely expressed Souster's or Dudek's sense of commitment, as if a press or a magazine were a cause that must be pursued as doggedly as possible. He had published his third collection on his own, and this act may have provided both Souster and Dudek with a ready example of what was possible for them to do. Layton's involvement with Contact Press can be seen as a stepping stone, for in 1956 he left the press and struck out on his own with a publisher in the United States, and later with McClelland and Stewart. Layton had been on his own since he had broken with Sutherland. He was a loner from then on and was to continue to be so. His championing never took the form of supporting a "school" of poetry, or the direction of a movement, as Souster's support for American influences, or Dudek's advocacy of a technical and "modern" tradition.
Layton's contribution to Cerberus demonstrates the authority and confidence he had achieved in the newer poems of the last book. If The Black Huntsmen was a transitional collection, Layton's contribution to this new collection marked confirmed signs of a new maturity and development. In the next four years, 1953 to 1956, Layton was to build on this and reach a peak. He was to publish eight more collections by 1956.

In the preface to his poems in Cerberus, Layton turned to the figure of the poet as an image of himself as a Canadian poet:

> The Canadian poet, however, is an exile condemned to live in his own country. He has no public, commands no following, stirs up less interest than last year's licence plate. It is worthwhile to speculate on the reasons that make this the most philistine country in the world, not excepting the United States.

The blame falls upon the society the Canadian poet has found himself in, or where Layton now finds himself. Layton looks with characteristic bluntness for the source of this social condition:

> Is it professionalized sports? The ape intelligence of a vicious, profit-seeking press? An educational system bevelled to the needs of business and technology? These, of course, are partly to blame. More important, I think, is the drag of middle-class morality, suspicious of all enjoyment and neurotically hostile to the release of art and sex; and gentility, the gilded and gelded pseudo-culture of flourishing bankers and brewers.

Layton singled out "gentility" as a hallmark of the English Canadian sensibility. He directed not only his prefatory remarks but his poems as well, and names those aspects of the Canadian sensibility which would be the object of the satire he was to write:
Gentility, propriety, respectability--give the thing any name you will--is responsible for nine-tenths of the miserable, devitalized stuff that passes for poetry in this country; and for the infantile prurience that is the stock response of the great majority of Canadians to the appeal of art. So powerful is the grip of gentility that even those poets who in rebellion against it write a kind of well-dressed, empty, pseudo-mystical nature verse, or leftist poetry with a Methodist flavour. Unless we fold up this genteel tradition, a tradition called into existence by a graceless leisure class but preserved by clergymen, underdeveloped schoolmarm's, university graduates, and right-thinking social workers, very little vigorous and original artistic work will ever be seen in Canada. Whitman's 'barbaric yawp' is wanted to send them finger-plugging their ears and scurrying for cover under their tea-tables.

The first poem in Layton's selection follows up on his prefatory remarks. "Rembrandt", a portrait of the artist, becomes another of Layton's poet figures. The painter, the artist-poet, gives up his own normal, natural sight in order to invent and create a world of his own--a world whose main solar and astral bodies are his eyes, his vision. He declares outright his risky act's bravado, yet he commands innocence and "wonder" as a child might:

I flung my bright eye into space
0 wonder it became a sun
I hurled the other there
It grew an ochre moon

"The burghers that stare" with their own intact eyes think the artist's "face a ruin." His sacrifice has given him "a hideous face." Those who are caught up by gentility, and the genteel tradition, have no understanding of the beauty and terror of the creative process. For them, the poet's life and sacrifice make him into a repulsive freak. The irony lies here in the disparity between the visions of the burghers and those of the poet. The burghers, the middle-class, do not really see the art work for what it is but are caught up in noticing the
poet's outrageous behaviour on behalf of his art and his non-conforming hideousness. And though the poet may seem repulsive to the burghers, he himself is prepared to sacrifice himself for his art.

Stanza three presents the curious solace that all life is vulnerable, and death is the inevitable end for all. For all "Must go to grass," and thus the burghers are oblivious to the central transience of all life. There can be no defence against this, and the poet's sacrifice anticipates his own physical decay. Death and art are linked, and art becomes a defiant gesture in the face of death. And in the face of this, the poet reaches out to identify himself with the life force, with solar warmth and strength:

An Isaac of a sunbeam
Dances about in the wind
I bless
With blinded hands.

The poet, whose sight was a portal to the wonder of the universe, finds himself celebrating, albeit through the medium of his "blinded hands." These limbs are the ones he employs in making his paintings, and they are sunshocked by the creativity represented in the symbol of the sun. The artist becomes an old, infirm and blind Jacob figure, who extends his blessing to one of his sons, "a sunbeam." He becomes another version of the poet figure as Joseph. For blinded and maimed he still blesses whatever is creative about him. He blesses even though he is cursed. He blesses in the face of death, his own sacrifice, and the repulsion of the burghers. This is Layton's artist figure reinforcing what he has declared in the preface of the book.

But if the poet is cursed by the nature of his calling, and if he is the object of society's mockery, he can direct his own raillery
and mockery at the burghers, and at the false Rembrandts, also referred to in the preface. For many of the poems Layton contributed to Cerberus are satirical and concern themselves with the role of the poet, the nature of poetry, and the ridiculousness of the poetasters. This first poem has introduced a vision of the artist, and the two themes of art and death in "Rembrandt" are those of this collection.

"Trumpet Daffodil" is another version of "Rembrandt." The "Trumpet Daffodil" becomes the poet:

I praise the hairs on my wrist
And an indestructible egotist
Resolve this day not to glance
At what I may not influence

In this new garden the poet sees himself worthy of his own self-absorption and glorification while the rest of the world passing this flower-bed daffodil are carrying "their disenchantment graveward /
Like an identity card." Social-organization is an anonymous, deathly ritual. The poet must have the ability to delight in himself and in the image of his health. This delight is reinforced in contrast with the rest of mankind who are caught up in the technological mass society. Self-affirmation is not only a necessary testimony, it is an act of defiance.

Death figures strongly in this poem. The poet is almost immune to death, he being "indestructible." But it is his own sense of himself, his "ego", which may evade death by celebrating and flaunting his celebration. And the daffodil poet staring out from behind the window (in the house of art and immortality?) notes how his own vision transforms things, and how his own vision reflects his immortality,
his evading of the life-destroying forces that others capitulate to:

The light hangs like a wet towel
I scan the glass for my deathless smile

He sees his image everywhere, and amuses himself with what the critics will have to say about him once he is gone:

Then I thresh out whether the literati
With faces like garlic when I die
Will lay their opera hats on my coffin
And their voices soften.

And the sun, the Jacob poet, can destroy as well as bless.

For those who do not have the same will to live joyously, it can be a corrosive force.

I think the sun
Has already begun
To burn their casualness and need
And themselves to a brown weed.

In this poem and in "Rembrandt", the sun figures as a force which is reminiscent of D.H. Lawrence. In the back flap of The Improved Binoculars Layton acknowledges his kinship to the British writer, naming him, Marx and Nietzsche as his "teachers." For Lawrence he singles out his "worship". And an informative passage to Layton's continuous usage of the sun as metaphor and symbol can be found in Apocalypse, Lawrence's last prose testament:

Who says the sun cannot speak to me! The sun has a great blazing consciousness, and I have a little blazing consciousness. When I can strip myself of the trash of personal feelings and ideas, and get down to my naked sunself, then the sun and I can commune by the hour, the blazing interchange, and he gives me life, sun-life, and I send him a little new brightness from the world of the bright blood. The great sun, like an angry dragon, hater of the nervous and personal consciousness in us.19
In "Genius Love and Poetry," the mockery is delivered at the expense of the one-dimensional "proletarian poet" whose mind

...was like the grease-covered bottom of a cold unwashed fryingpan
and that he was prudent to avoid all fires especially the Muse's.

And there are many other minor villains who are full of shortcomings, or who are the sad remains of once vital individuals. Layton continually notes the discrepancies between vitality and decrepitude, between aspirations and final disappointing realities.

In the preface to *Cerberus* Layton had attacked the genteel tradition in Canada, but in the poems he also attacked the poets whom he saw in the grip of gentility. His defiances thrust is aimed at those poets who "write a kind of well-dressed, empty, pseudo-mystical nature verse, or leftist poetry with a Methodist flavour." Layton includes a number of satirical barbs directed at a Marxist in "Vignette," Earle Birney in "Little David,", Northrop Frye in "The Excessively Quiet Groves," A.J.M. Smith in "News of the Phoenix," Canadian culture in "Lines on the Massey Commission," a critic in "Good-Bye Bahai," a poetess in "Poetess," poetry and "these fabulously evil times" in "Letter to Raymond Souster," and the intoxicated poet in "Anacreon." More than half the poems in this collection are devoted to hitting out at the literary targets Layton had set out for us in the preface. And this whole issue of the genteel tradition comes to the fore in the controversy which raged between Layton and Smith and others in *The Canadian Forum* in 1956-57.
Layton also directs a few more poems at the same targets. Taking off from "Rembrandt" and "Trumpet Daffodil", "Hymn to the Rising Sun" moves to a more reductive note. Consciously seeking a more direct and offensive language, Layton is nasty and vitriolic—habits which already had not endeared him to many critics and poets in Canada who had a more circumscribed and genteel idea about what poetry should be. The satiric "sun" burns the "brown" weeds. In "Hymn to the Rising Sun," "The dawn pours its soured milk" upon "the black industrial chimneys." In this urban sourness the poet has little patience with the middle-class and elitist soul self-searchings upon the state of Canadian culture. His barb at official Anglo-Canadian culture is meant to be as nasty as Lawrence's:

I make for the watercloset
Where my daughter will hand me some bumpaper
Ripped from the Massey report;
I shall make my 'total commitment'
In the watercloset.

Let me consider the acta
Of our native anglosaxon
Wetting like Onan his doorpost
With the wet
Of a thin reluctant orgasm.

Layton had his literary audience in mind and so directed himself with as much "bad taste" as possible. This is the kind of expression which he knew would upset those who had a stuffy Ivory Tower attitude to poetry and culture. But this "bad taste" does not merely shock, it directs itself as well at the Puritan elements which still dominated academic and literary circles. To have told Layton that he was childish was to fall into his condemnation; to claim that this was adolescent also betrayed a hauteur which was not willing to look below surface
sophistication and refinement. But there is a further link to Layton's satirical methods. In "Lines on the Massey Commission"
Layton underlines the ethnic sources to the genteel tradition.

Do you want culture?
I'll tell you what to do:
Subsidize a talented
Italian or Jew—
A neurotic Roumanian
Would also do!

In this slight poem, the message is clear: a European contribution to the Canadian sensibility may change matters. The "neurotic Roumanian" (Layton's own epithet for himself) is diametrically opposite to the genteel English Canadian—so is the Jew, or the slavic comrade and alter ego of the poet, "Volodya," in "Hymn to the Rising Sun." As a contrast to the concerns of the Canadian philistine, they will both

...discourse on Marx's gravediggers
And on the holy trinity
Of sex revolution.

After the next collection, Love the Conqueror Worm, Layton's satirical poems would find their way into separate volumes, for in the next four years Layton's productivity was to intensify in all modes. Is Layton merely attacking a "paper tiger," or is he directing his satire at real inhibiting forces in Canada? Layton's attack was more direct than either Dudek's or Souster's. Dudek somewhat followed Layton's brash lead and gathered his satire in Laughing Stalks. Souster's presentation of the Toronto he knew implicitly gave force to Layton's position. This concern on the part of the three poets did not find corollaries in the poets of Origin and The Black Mountain Review. The writers who begin to appear in the last issues of the latter magazines edited by Robert Creeley include Ginsberg,
Kerouac, Patchen, Selby Jr. and Jonathan Williams. These writers represented a shift in sensibility in American writing which was not reflected in the more austere and theoretically inclined poetry of Creeley, Corman or Olson. And that perhaps may explain why some of the writing of the early fifties did not enthusiastically move the American poets to take Canadian poetry seriously—the American poets involved with Black Mountain then did not try to play a dominant role in the activities of Contact Press since the Canadian direction had its own almost separate focus.

But if Cerberus seems to be just the barkings from one angry watchdog at the gates of the Canadian hell, "Rembrandt" sets out the scope of the book. Though the burghers have taken the attention of Layton's muse, that does not remain the poet's sole concern. The other large theme in this collection is death, the subject of the third stanza of "Rembrandt."

Yet the boy's shelled head
And the hardiest flesh
Must go to grass
The virgin lie with her goldfish

The satiric poet considers man's vulnerability to time and decay. Death reinforces and adds complexity to the satiric vision, and informs the absurd with a pathos that can allow for compassion at the same time.

"Ex-Nazi" which begins in a city park or lawn landscape revolves around another aspect of the theme of death. The landscape and the incidents assume larger significances in the manner of such poems as "Auspex" and "Gothic Landscape." The speaker in the poem has begun by playing an imaginary "blind man's bluff / With scarred
bushes." He is the Isaac again who figured in "Rembrandt." Nature has suffered injury already. In the midst of this an "unguessed-at pole" (pun intended on the latter), a processed log, becomes "Spooky as an overturned ambulance." An accident has occurred in this vague "morning" which "Life a sick anti-semit / ...struggles to reveal itself." The next person in this scene is the neighbour. Here the title of the poem fill in where the poem's allusiveness is weakest.

Where nations have decayed  
My neighbour's veins are full of pus.

Layton's compassion encompases this man's mental disease, and hallucinations. The neighbour is haunted in his dreams:

At night the whitened streets  
Lean into his dreams like a child's coffin.

Yet in his "summer craze of the sun", the ex-nazi is caught up with the seasonal mood. And the man's dog's "tail flicks from conscience / The yammering guilt." Yet though "the hot sun dessicates" the ex-nazi's guilt, the aridity extends to all of nature. The ex-nazi thinks in his own twisted mind that he will be vindicated, whitened one day by turning into the ambiguous "snowman." Between the observer and the man who is still caught up in his nightmarish activities

...the pale dust hangs  
Like particles  
Of sacrificial smoke.

Nature still bears signs of the Holocaust. His own guilt is sacrificed in the summer landscape as the Jews were in the concentration camps. Yet the remains are still visible, as if the world were still witness to the atrocities.
Youth and old age are also caught up in the universal sacrifice which encompasses the artist in "Rembrandt," the "Ex-Nazi," and the "scarred bushes" which represent nature itself. The "Execution" returns to the world of the "grocery shop" in *The Black Huntsmen*. In "the glowing morning" events are exaggerated in the boy's mind. The boy is out shopping with his mother and imagines himself upon his "boycart throne." His mother emerges as a Salomé in the marketplace:

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Her cheeks were red with bargains
And she moved to the money cries
Like an enchanted dancer
With wide enchanted eyes.

The yells, the cries were frenzying;
Her cheeks grew pale with bargains:
I laid my boyhood head
Among the golden onions.
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The "boyhood" poet is willing to allow himself to be decapitated in this fantasy; he gives himself up in that arena where his mother finds her most natural expression. The woman representing the female principle can claim him for he is caught up in her enchantment. The first stanza presents the two other correlatives of the boy poet: "the rooster's beak" from which "the glowing morning" drops, and "the frozen famous statue" which is "too amazed to speak."

Mother becomes muse, and muse claims the center of the poet's consciousness, which he is willing to give up in the frenzy and the cries of the ritual happening. But the young poet can give himself up in fantasy, and Layton can present it in a witty fashion. Fantasy can transform even death. Poetry can weave its own enchantment even around death if innocence attends the poet figure. The "boyhood head" is certainly lighter than the artist in "Rembrandt." Though
even in that later poem, the imagery is as arch as in "The Execution."

Fantasy creates a distance between the poet and his theme. This detachment, when coupled with metaphor or extravagant usage of figures of speech, tends to the rhetorical, which is also evident in Love the Conqueror Worm, the next collection. When this weakness is bypassed, the imagination that informs the fantasy directs itself with the heightened seriousness to the larger themes in the books, In the Midst of My Fever, The Cold Green Element, and The Bull Calf and Other Poems. But the signs of that development make themselves apparent in a striking poem in Cerberus.

In "To a Very Old Woman," the woman close to death can still "bless." She and Death become linked by motherhood, as if Death were to be the child of the Darkness whom she holds in her "lovely embrace." Death, the child of Darkness, grows in her womb. When the child will finally be born, "Death and Darkness" will embrace over her; and as she says:

I shall have no face
I shall be utterly gone.
Use the blackened wick
For a headstone.

When father and son embrace she will disappear and die. The birth of death will end the paradox. She, life, will be fulfilled then. Life in the process of being impregnated with death--life's "face is a halo of praise." Acceptance of the eternal cycle provides its own "composure", and rage and bitterness finally give way, and life in its own way swallows up and embraces death. This embrace merges the opposites and contradictions of existence:
Flame serenely
Till like a warmed candle
I curve over
The arm of my hurrying bridegroom and lover.

Death, as in "The Execution," is a transformation which provides
a beauty of its own, and therefore it akin to the creative act.
Death and creativity, art and sexuality are linked in the vision of
a "Rembrandt," the poet figure of Cerberus.

Layton's next volume complements his selection in Cerberus.

Love the Conqueror Worm contains serious poems and satire, much in
the fashion of the last book. The themes of this collection com­
plement the two themes of death and art of the previous volume.
However, instead of stressing poetry, Love the Conqueror Worm focuses
on the theme elucidated in the third stanza of the lead poem
"Rembrandt."

The title poem, "Love the Conqueror Worm" functions in the
same manner as a lead poem. The landscape of August with its changing
"scene-shifters" affords the poet the insight that Nature and Death
are linked like the Old Woman and Darkness in the poem discussed
above. In this instance, the Old Woman has become Nature, the female
principle represented in the earth. The poet

...pardons Nature her insanities,
The perversity in flesh and fern;
I forget her lecheries,
        Her paragram:
    LOVE THE CONQUEROR WORM

Death, represented in the phallic worm, and Nature are mated sexually.
The personifications take on the characteristics of humans, such that
the "oaks" standing "bare" in the autumn become "courtly masochists / Whimpering 'Encore! Encore!'" The whole spectacle of the changing seasons has taken on the overtones of a theatrical stag show, and the relationship between life and death is seen as a perversion of natural procreation and sexuality. Death diseases the very landscape itself. And this theme is diametrically opposite to the mystical acceptance and union presented in "To a Very Old Woman."

But if the opposites of Nature and Death are related perversely, human beings can still reach other reconciliations. In the closing poem to the main section of this book, Layton has placed the fine "Reconciliation." Here man and wife, male and female, can still find "such unhoped-for / delirium." But reconciliation itself is almost a miracle by the token of these last lines. It is a state of grace one must feel especially glad to have received. In this poem, reminiscent of the earlier "Winter Scene" (Here and Now), the falling of snow comes between the opposites of "harbour" and "the great Crucifix," between the commerce of the port of Montreal and the Christian myth, between the water and the mountain—that is, it "falls / white and astringent" upon that downtown which lies in this area of the city. Nature seems to unify opposites, or at least to hold them in a kind of suspension. The "wind" and "the wild cries / of the pitiful man" who are throwing themselves "against the cross" are the next pair of opposites. The poet "can not cancel" this passage of pain and suffering; he can observe and note it as part of the opposites he observes. Yet the woman and the city are compared, each "full of perverse appetites, / devout, beautiful." The woman is equated with the city: and both then are
equated with the Nature personified in "Love the Conqueror Worm". The perversities of woman and nature can be reconciled, for he "doubly marvels" at the reconciliation. On one level, the falling snow has reconciled them and all the other opposites in reiterating the fact of the continuous beautiful cycle of nature. And on the second level, the poet is thankful, for this scene has provided him with the insight of the reconciliation of the opposites of his world, at a time, perhaps, when it might not have been hoped for.

This poem and the lead poem differ from each other in their form and flow. In the lead poem, Layton has placed his lines into the mould of four five-line stanzas and used the devices of rhyme and half-rhyme. The personifications and pathetic fallacies reveal a glib reliance on metaphor. It is as if the poet himself were a scene-shifter, employing the too easy figures of speech which would make his theme more than apparent. Conceits of imagery, and exclamatory lines suggest a falseness of tone, a sense that the theme has not been wrested from the poet's rapt vision. In "Reconciliation", the lines are broken by the phrase for the effects of meaning and rhythm. The sound works in conjunction with the statement: "Betwixt", "Crucifix", "astringent". Sound links are more subtle and reinforce the effect of the shifting flow of opposites intimately linked and unified both in image and meaning. The use of r's and s's in the fourth stanza, as well as the liquid l's, complements the complexities and subtleties of the poet's partner:

You are like my city
full of perverse appetites,
devout, beautiful:
Cobras coiled in the snow,
white foxes, priests' surplices;
The devices of alliteration and assonance correspond to the apprehension of interlocking opposites. The visual and the emotional cohere. The falling snow is "white and astringent," and suggests a clarity of mind and mood. In 'the tinfoil air" the poet "doubly" marvels. That sheen of the air corresponds to a "delirium" in the mind. The objective is an emblem for the subjective; and meaning and sound reverberate upon each other.

Comparing this poem to most of the poems Layton had published in his first four collections, one notices how refined and masterly the poet has become. The poem is not long but its brevity does not hinder it from being complex and perfectly written in an organic manner. The possibilities of free verse bring out the best in Layton; nor does free verse make him sacrifice theme or craft for any arbitrary poetic convention. The poem also displays an immediacy which "Love the Conqueror Worm" lacks, and in no small measure this is accounted for by the language and the means employed.

In the poem "Street Funeral", which follows the lead poem, the theme of death is stated with a pointed insistence. As with "Reconciliation", the short lines are effective in presenting the unrelenting poetic logic. Seeing the funeral pass by on the street, the poet begins his reductive vision of a man's life:

Tired of chewing
the flesh
of other animals;
Tired of subreption and conceit;
of the child's
bewildered conscience
fretting the sly man;
And the poet wonders rhetorically whether the dead man is finally glad that "after all the lecheries, / betrayals, subserviency," and "After all the lusts, / false starts, evasions" he can go on to

... begin
the unobstructed change
into clean grass
Done forever
with the insult
of birth,
the long adultery
with illusion?

This vision of a man's life as "long adultery / with illusion" is a more laconic statement of the theme in "Love the Conqueror Worm."

The poem builds and accumulates to its last lines and their final thrust. This device of the last line becomes a hallmark of much of Layton's reductive and satirical poetry, and in the best of these the punch line reverberates back into the lines that precede it, and gives the poem a final, double edge.

After "Street Funeral", "Cemetery in August" follows to complement it. In this cemetery's domain

...these iambic stones
Honouring who-knows-what bones
Seem in the amber sunlight
Patient and confounded,
Like men enduring an epoch
Or one bemused by proofs of God.

The cemetery represents the poem; the poem is conventional with "iambic" lines, and seems long-drawn, suggesting an historical theme, or metaphysical poem on the Deity. There is a tedious sense to this cemetery; the sense that it has its own conventional, almost expected mediocre pace and shape. In the first stanza, the elements of this cemetery are enumerated and the conclusion is not extraordinary:
The generation of Time brings  
Rind, shell, delicate wings  

And mourners.

The human element enters in the second stanza, and their voices are also a part of "Summer's babble of small noises." The first two stanzas sentences, in keeping with the matter-of-fact tone, are composed in natural order. The three stanzas move from the realm of nature to man, and then to poetry, metaphysics, and history. In tone and theme, this poem differs from "Street Funeral." And the three stanzas with their casual half-rhymes and rhyme patter of abcbdd reinforce a stolidity of statement. The rhetoric and loudness of "Love the Conqueror Worm" is absent, as well the "delirium" of "Reconciliation." The speaker is reconciled in "Cemetery in August," for death, which the cemetery represents, is something that is simply endured, and upon which one may speculate bemusedly. This cemetery as an artistic artifact is prosaic, and presents itself as an unexciting vision of death.

In the second story of Now is the Place, "A Death in the Family," Layton writes about his father's death in 1921: 

"...the manner of his death was like the life he had lived for fifty-four years: dignified and gentle and unimportant." Yet the death itself made a great impression on Sammy, Layton's fictional alter ego, in this story. And it seems that this was true of Layton himself:

Suddenly the pattern of the family life was broken by the death of Moishe Lazarovitch. He had been ill for some time, and then he finally died as a result of a
stroke. The father's death was the first macabre event in Layton's nine years and he was intensely affected by this first experience with death, especially since it occurred at home.\textsuperscript{20}

Layton corroborates this in an interview on April 11, 1962:

Death was very close and very mysterious and you have all of an Orthodox Jewish boy's feelings about death, the afterworld, the loss of it, God, even Hell. And all the mourners there in their black skull caps, women weeping and my mother sitting by the stove, being comforted.\textsuperscript{21}

We have seen Layton's regard for his father's Jewish scholarliness and otherworldliness in "My Father" (\textit{Here and Now}). But in the poem, "Death of Moishe Lazarovitch", in \textit{Love the Conqueror Worm}, the mature poet returns to the memory of his funeral:

My father's coffin pointed me to this:
0 arrogant with new life his black beard
Fierce and stiff and partner to the dark wood
Send me the way to what I most had feared

What the poet "most had feared" in the past was the religious world and its evocation of death. That beard is reminiscent of "God's Assyrian beard" in "Gothic Landscape." The beard's "new life" turns it into a new living substance, and transformations occur before the eye of the poet such that the whole experience becomes psychic in nature.

Became at the last a ring of bright light,
A well whose wall of mourning faces turned
My sighs to silence to a deep wound
Which stained the outstretched figure as it burned.

The ring takes on the depth of a well, in whose depths the liquid becomes the blood of a wound and the liquid fire of the transformation the poet is beholding. Death has transfigured the dead man, and the scene takes on the overtones of a sacrificial conflagration in which
the fire, symbol of cosmic energy and flux, unites death and life in the cycle of change and becoming.

I do not know how they lifted him up
Or held the vessel near their mourning silk,
But their going was like a roar of flames
And matter sang in my ears like poured milk.

The poet wonders how the pallbearers have managed to carry his coffin and have that "vessel" near them without being moved or touched by its fiery presence. The final two lines suggest that a ritual "going" is taking place which takes on cosmic and spiritual significance. "Matter" being compared to "poured milk" takes on the overtones of the human, the organic, and the qualities of some heated purity pouring as if in some religious sacrifice. The dimension of death is extended beyond the apprehension of "Love the Conqueror Worm," or the reductiveness of "Street Funeral." On Part Six of the documentary, "Poets of Canada 1920 to the Present" on the CBC Radio Programme "Anthology," (June 19, 1971), Layton declared that he really did not belong to the tradition of poetry which Frye and Jones relate as that poetry which had arisen from a sense of terror and alienation from the Canadian landscape. Instead Layton put himself into an Hebraic tradition and declared that he has always moved between "the holocaust" and "holiness." In "Death of Moishe Lazarovitch" he indeed moves between the holocaust and holiness and from holiness back to the holocaust. That is where his father's coffin pointed him to in this poem. The sense of the poem's movement was already foreshadowed in the earlier story in Now is the Place. And the imminence of psychic and objective forces in the poems of The Black Huntsmen breaks out into the vision of "Death of Moishe Lazarovitch."
But old age need not leave one with the sense of the mystery and awe of death. In a short-lined poem in the manner of "Street Funeral" Layton can conclude with the ironies of old age's almost too smug and reductive view of the world.

"Nature is blind, and man
a shaggy pitiless ape
without Justice,"
the razored old gentleman said,
his acidulous breath fogging the barber's round mirror.
As he talked Iremarked
the naevi, black
and dark purple,
of his crumbling face:
Death's little victory flags.

The old gentleman fogging the mirror with his words is blurring the reflection of himself as stated in his comment. But his own statement, however tough and seemingly realistic, is a reflection of his own physical decay. With such a point of view, he is beginning to give up on life and in his bold assertions he misses the ironies conjoined by the opposites of Nature and Man, his fogged visage and the barber, his blemished face and the anonymous poet observer, and his facial spots or blemishes and the "victory flags." Finally, it takes the poet, in his own poetic barbershop of the poem, to present this "razored" portrait of the man.

In the face of Nature and Death, Layton poses the dilemmas of "Vexata Quaestio", "a vexed Question." The poet fixes his "eyes upon a tree / Macabbean" amidst the other plants, trees, and vegetation of summer. In the season of fullness, the poet seems to be identifying
himself with a tree, which is rooted and stands above the other plants. It represents the state of mind of the poet who is looking for some certainty and vision. And if he is "Maccabean", he is Jewish or Hebraic in the face of Hellenism. The poet listens for "ship's sound and birdsong," that is, the signals of vessels that seem to have a destination, and the song of those celebrating the summer. The biting insects that are dying in his "arms' hairs" may be a projection of his guilts in the face of nature's teeming procreativity. Layton's own gloss of the poem suggests some of these readings, yet does not take a few significant details of the imagery into consideration:

The poem expresses a conflict of moral attitudes, which may be distinguished as the Hebraic and Hellenic points of view. The speaker in the poem, bitten by moralistic guilts and fears (note "bites of insects"), hears nature telling him to cast off self-contempt ("fly dung"..."two-legged lice") and to be free in love and enjoyment. Yet the poem closes with a chill wind and a fearful setting of the "Greek sun"—as though the moral sense had recoiled in horror from the voice of promiscuous nature. The speaker, incidentally, seems detached, yet subject as a man to both these powers.22

Both points of view are not clearly outlined but suggested in the manner of the Maccabean tree set against the "blazing Greek sun."

By the second stanza "birdsong" had materialized, at least, in the shape of "the green prayerful birds." The poet hears a voice "Among the corn" as if he were a Ruth of sorts following the voice that commanded her. Nature's voice speaks to him and directs him to give himself up to joy and celebration. But before the poet can make a choice and a decision, the wind has grown chill and become a destructive "tree-dismantling wind". The destructive
force of death in nature becomes a real threat to the "tree / Maccabean."
What does this Hellenistic point of view present in the face of death and obliteration? The last two lines remain ambiguous as a resolution of the dilemma.

The sun went down
And called my brown skin in.
The sun has set and presumably has taken with it, in its calling, the skin with which the poet has sensed the texture and movement of summer. He has felt the insect bites upon this skin—and this skin represents the covering of his Hebraic point of view, that which was bitten by "moralistic guilts and fears." That part of him has given in and has been seduced, for the poet has given his "stripped body to the sun." Yet only his brown skin may have been called in. The sense remains of his having kept something back. At least the awareness of this "dilemma" remains, and he has not been drawn totally into "promiscuous nature." But it is curious that the sun represents Eros. What is missing in this poem is a further elaboration of these "moralistic guilts and fears."

The poem also employs an indented stanzaic pattern much like "Love the Conqueror Worm." This form does not ease the same kind of rhetorical awkwardness and stiffness found in the lead poem. This stanzaic form, at this stage, is not very fluent, and suggests that Layton's themes, though apparent, were still to grow into a more natural expression—an organic form as "Reconciliation." Or he was to combine the stanzaic and closed form of these poems with the more organic flow of the latter poem into such later poems as "The Cold Green Element." The signature of a Layton poem, often, was this
set stanzaic pattern, and the rhetorical pitch of the following:

"Give your stripped body to the sun
Your sex to any skilled
   And pretty damsel;
From the bonfire
Of your guilts make
   A blazing Greek sun."

This formal pattern, a hallmark of many of Layton's poems of the fifties, usually accompanies a more serious and larger treatment of themes, while the short staggering form accompanies many of the reductive and the satirical poems.

In keeping with the voice of "promiscuous nature", the poet pens some poems "with the best side of my tongue." In "Eros", the poet declares the aristocratic nature of his calling. The woman tired of his rhetorical flights in which he declares that only the imaginative and the great, "Thinkers artists matter," sings to him as a Muse might. Faced with the beauty and sexuality of the Muse, the poet's last statement before he gathers "her / flower and all," is that this union will help "reproduce ourselves," i.e., more poets and beauties. Hellenism wins, though it is hard to be convinced by the arch and tongue-in-cheek lightness of the poem. When the Hebrew emerges in "To the Girls of my Graduation Class," his lust and erotic urges project a different figure of the poet:

Golda, Fruma, Dinnie, Elinor,
My saintly wantons, passionate nuns;
0 light-footed daughters, your unopened
Brittle beauty troubles an aging man
   Who hobbles after you a little way
Fierce and ridiculous.
Hellenic "Eros" is youthful and full of rhetoric, but the poet writing closer to his sense of himself and as "an aging man" (Layton was 41 on publication of this poem) is aware of the "tree-dismantling wind," and the pathos of life. For when the poet figure was younger and still a student at McGill as an Apollonian, a Hellene and a poet, he challenged the aridity of his studies in "Philosophy 34." But having scattered the students of his class with his protests he still

... stayed on
for I saw a bronzed goddess
whose profile enchanted me
all the way down.

In "Love the Conqueror Worm", the poet sees the perversities of Nature and will not be drawn by her promiscuousness. He is the moralistic Hebrew then, holding back. But in these other poems, he finds himself in "Vexata Quaestio," caught between death and destructiveness and the need for the knowledge of a meaningful order, and the desire to celebrate simply in the senses and to rejoice in his body's "gift of praise" — that body so unlike the body of Moishe Lazarovitch, whose world is close to death and the large cosmic mysteries. He has moved forward from the "Isaac of a sunbeam" who could dance "about in the wind," that "tree-dismantling wind." Now if he is to "bless", it is not "with blinded hands."

"The bright light" of his father's "outstretched figure" has widened his vision. The title of the book and the lead poem have suggested the dual theme, Love and Death, Eros and Thanatos.

Again, as in Cerberus, a good proportion of the poems in this volume are satirical in intent. The poems are scattered in the
main body of the book, and others are gathered in the separate closing section of five poems, subtitled "Satires of Circumstance."
In fact, the opening poem of this last section is "Ah Rats!!! (A Political Extravaganza of the 30's)." This poem had first appeared in the McGill Daily on October 5, 1938, and was discussed in Chapter I. Layton had collected a few of his earlier poems as "My Father" in Here and Now, but he was now adding this poem to his fifth collection. This sectioning of satirical poems foreshadows the three satirical books of the middle fifties. It is actually a prototype for The Long Pea-Shooter, The Blue Propeller, and Music on a Kazoo. It also suggests that he was ready to separate the satirical and occasional poems from the more serious work he was writing. Anne Marriott in The Canadian Forum (Vol. 33, No. 338, May 1953), missed the intent and achievement of the book. She overlooked the good poems and failed to see the new direction Layton's poetry was taking. As well, she did not take too eagerly to the squibs and barbs that Layton had also included in Cerberus. She seemed to be proving Layton's own statement in his preface to that last book that the genteel tradition in Canada would flinch at his nasty and peppery assault:

Irving Layton is a talented writer of integrity, whose best work has been written in a deep and expressive anger with injustice and hypocrisy. That makes it more regrettable that for the second time in a row he has brought out a disappointing new collection, Love the Conqueror Worm, having still less of the strength and color of the author's best work than its predecessor The Black Huntsman [sic]. The new poems are surprisingly thin and forced for one of Mr. Layton's stature—though on the credit side one can record that at least most of them do still have something to say.
At such condescension Layton directed some of his more strident poems.

"Nay, I'm no Roman magister
With virga, libelli;
I'm a jester.
So let it be with jester!
The clabber heads
And the giddy heads
Recall my spryness only...
("Corypheus")

As that Greek leader of the chorus, the poem declares some of Layton's intentions, and the role he was setting himself up to fill. Though the book is uneven, Layton was preparing himself for the next phase of his career. In this next phase, encompassing the three years, 1954-1956, he was to publish three books of satirical poetry and three books of more serious poetry. Both these strains were to develop out of the beginnings in *Cerberus* and *Love the Conqueror Worm*. That very few, as Anne Marriott, were to see the signs, did not deter Layton. He had the confidence to continue, and the company of two other poets who were developing their own voices. And he had the confidence engendered by the knowledge that he had already written some very fine poems—poems that were not yet anthologized, but poems that would be rediscovered when he had fully emerged again, as in *The Black Huntsmen*, with the poems of the next six books and the second selected poems, *The Improved Binoculars*. The complexities and the "vexed" questions of the poems of this period were not appealing to the purveyors of the genteel tradition. Layton's sensibility was contradictory and contrary, and these did not bode well for him in the literary climate of the early fifties. His next six or more books were to change that
climate. And his other writings in this next phase were to meet critics head-on in a confrontation of sensibilities and attitudes.
NOTES

1 Layton had first met Klein when the former had been preparing for his high school leaving examination in 1929 after having been expelled from high school. David Lewis had introduced him to Klein who was to act as his tutor. (Edelstein, p. 21). Klein helped to get Layton's first poem published in The McGilliad in 1931.

2 In A.M. Klein, Miriam Waddington underplays the stimulation and influence of the younger poets upon Klein, and Layton's presence, as well: "His frequent publications during these years in Preview, First Statement, and Northern Review, as well as in Alan Crawley's west coast Contemporary Verse, put him in touch with young poets and their influences, for whatever use he could make of them." In A.M. Klein, (Toronto, 1970), p. 62.

3 Waddington, p. 84.


6 "Fire-Drake," Teangadoir, p. 78.

7 "Fire-Drake," Teangadoir, p. 79.


11 Edelstein, p. 11.

12 Waddington, p. 11.


20. Edelstein, p. 11.


22. Louis Dudek and Irving Layton, p. 156.
CHAPTER IV

The Excellence of Anger and Pugnacity

Layton's association with Contact Press was only one of a number of commitments at this time. Between 1952 and 1956 he published nine collections and was associated with three magazines. The first of these was the Montreal magazine CIV/n, which began soon after Contact Press had been established. CIV/n was Montreal-based and provided a forum for such younger Montreal poets as Avi Boxer, Leonard Cohen, D. G. Jones, Eli Mandel, Mortimer Schiff and Phyllis Webb. With Layton and Dudek, and the contributions of Scott and Smith and Robert A. Currie, a new Montreal focus emerged. Writing of the magazine and the group that supported it, Dudek notes:

CIV/n during the years 1953-54 was perhaps not of great moment in the overall Canadian picture, but in the development of poetry in Montreal it played a highly significant role. It followed Souster's mimeographed Toronto magazine Contact, out of which Contact Press emerged, and it confirmed the joining of forces between Souster, Layton and myself following my return from New York to teach at McGill University. The three-man book Cerberus (1952) came out of this renewal of activity, as well as the anthology Canadian Poems, 1850-1952. Later poetry in Montreal, and its widespread influence, owe much to the hectic activity of which CIV/n was for a time the center.

The magazine itself was edited by Aileen Collins in association with a few others. Dudek's and Layton's relationship to the group was unique:
There was always a tactful solicitude on the part of Layton and myself not to interfere with the editorial freedom of the actual editors. We read the poetry before a group at Layton's house, enjoying free comments and debate over the poems, but we made no decisions and left the final choice of what was to go into the magazine up to the Editor.... The result was a magazine that was neither exactly like First Statement, nor like Contact, nor like the later Delta. It was freewheeling to a degree that neither Layton nor myself probably would have made it if we had edited it ourselves. On the whole it was lighter and less pretentious, and more fun, than any magazine I can remember.²

Layton contributed a number of poems to CIV/n which were later included in the books of the middle fifties, and an article, "Shaw, Pound and Poetry," and translations from the Yiddish. The Yiddish vernacular included and used in the satirical poems of Cerberus and Love the Conqueror Worm came from an earthy grasp of the colloquial Yiddish. In the magazine's third issue, Layton translated an article and a poem by Melech Ravitch, a Yiddish poet of note who had been editing and writing in Warsaw before the war and had now, after much wandering, permanently settled in Montreal. By this time Klein had given up his writing in the Canadian Jewish Chronicle and Layton took it upon himself to introduce Yiddish Canadian poetry to the Canadian poetry reading public. It is an isolated instance of translation and interest, for Layton was not to repeat this kind of work.

Perhaps because of Corman's and Creeley's correspondence with Raymond Souster in connection with the magazine Contact both those poets and editors came into contact with Layton. Layton was to serve as a Contributing Editor to The Black Mountain Review from 1954 to 1957, and was to contribute his poems to that publication. He was
in close communication with Corman and edited a special Canadian poetry issue of Corman's *Origin* in 1956. These two periodicals gave a center to the movement in modern American poetry of which Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, and Robert Duncan were the leading exponents. Layton was not only getting American exposure, but it was his editorial guidance and support which accounted for the reception and publication of many of the Contact Press poets in the U.S. For example, *Origin* XVII featured Layton's new poetry and a short story, and in the next issue Layton included the following French and English Canadian poets for his special issue: F. R. Scott, Pierre Trottier, Giles Henault, Gaël Turnbull, Louis Dudek, Raymond Souster, Roland Giguère, E. W. Mandel, Phyllis Webb, Fred Cogswell, Jay MacPherson and Daryl Hine.

In a review article on *Contact* and the books of Contact press, Robert Creeley in the first issue of *The Black Mountain Review* makes the initial assessment:

Layton seems to have sprung from somewhat more hardened stock (in contrast to Dudek). One can imagine him biting nickels, etc., at a much earlier date. His poetry is tougher, and at the same time more gentle. His idiom, to call it that, is much of the old and even 'traditional' way of it, except that he has a very sharp ear, and a hard, clear head for rhythms.... Layton, may well be, for the historian of literature at any rate, the first Great Canadian Poet—he has his bid in at least, not that it is not, in some of these poems, too brief and too random. But Canadian, English, American, or whatever, his poetry can be very good.

This assessment in the Spring 1954 issue of the magazine covers *The Black Huntsmen, Cerberus*, and *Love the Conqueror Worm*. In view of the fact that Layton did not write to the order of the Black
Mountain poets, this statement by one of the leading exponents of the school, demonstrates how his finer work impressed readers who were not familiar with the world of Layton's concerns, and the specific Montreal and Canadian background to his poems. This was also happening when the Canadian literary critics (Frye, Smith, Wilson, Pacey) were not enthusiastic about Layton's poetry. But it is with the next six books that Layton's poetry began to attract the critics' attention. These six collections divide themselves into the books of satirical poetry, and the books of a more serious and meditative poetry.

Layton published *In the Midst of My Fever* in 1954, *The Cold Green Element* in 1955, and *The Bull Calf and Other Poems* in 1956. These were the substantial and serious books. But complementing these he published *The Long Pea-Shooter* in 1954, *The Blue Propeller* in 1955, and *Music on a Kazoo* in 1956—satirical books, as the titles reveal. The books published in each year can be considered as pairs, complementing each other and presenting the two directions of Layton's concerns already in evidence in *Cerberus* and *Love the Conqueror Worm*. Yet the three books of each group represent a progression within each mode, and should be considered as such.

Why did the poet decide to separate his poems into two distinct kinds of collections? And why did he do so particularly at this time, and where did he find, if any, earlier examples upon which to model these books? I think that the impulse to write satire and invective was primarily a bent in his own personality representing a need to show up the correct and the absurd, revealing the discrepancy
between what one sees and what one thinks should be—the tension of the satiric vision. It seems that when Layton attended Alexandra Public School he discovered the effect and power of invective verse in an incident when he rallied to hit back at a girl who had tormented him. This may be a minor biographical fact, yet the Jewish ghetto world in which Layton grew up afforded him a gutsy and colloquial use of Yiddish and English. He refers to his mother's invective as a source of his own habits of speech and mind in his "Foreword" to A Red Carpet for the Sun. His early poems published when he was a student at MacDonald College (and discussed in Chapter I), demonstrate his penchant for the satirical and his uninhibited use of poetry in deriding topical events. In those early poems, as well, there are the first hints of classical Greek and Roman poetry. Horace, Catullus, Martial, the poets of the Greek anthology—these he may have read at the earlier stages of his career. Nevertheless, in the early forties when he penned the various "Epitaphs" that appear first in The Canadian Forum, and then later in Here and Now, it is evident that he had read some models—perhaps Pope or Dryden—for the invective he was writing. In Cerberus, "Anacreon" suggests that he had some acquaintance with the short poems of that fabled, intoxicated poet who contributed to the Greek Anthology. And in Love the Conqueror Worm, "Eros" is as playful as any poem of that kind in the Greek Anthology. "Battle of the (s)ages" and "For Dulla Who Unexpectedly Came into Some Money" suggest
that Layton may have been reading and enjoying the invective of a Catullus or a Horace. He may have assimilated these classical influences in his readings of modern poetry. Layton may have read the early Pound very carefully, for a poem as "Corypheus" could have been written with a backdrop reading of the sharp, barbed poems of Personae. Layton also refers to Blake in the breezy rhymed "Aerolites," (The Black Huntsmen), and in the poem for Northrop Frye in "The Excessively Quiet Groves":

I said: Mr Butchevo Phrye
Make no mistake,
I'm the reincarnation
Of William Blake.

But alas: Mr Butchevo Phrye
Was born to pry
Among old bones
And cemetery stones.

(Cerberus)

If Layton is the reincarnation of William Blake, it is the Blake of The Songs of Experience, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, and the various mischievous poems in which Blake did not flinch from writing in language and terms which were regarded as being in bad taste, and which openly referred to sexuality.

But Layton also had more contemporary analogues. The work of Scott and Smith had already exhibited their satirical tendencies by the time New Provinces had appeared. And Klein had published the radical poems, as well as the sharp and ironic portraits of Hath Not a Jew. By the time Layton was involved in First Statement, Scott's first book had been published as well as Smith's, and in his review of Lampman's At the Long Sault and other poems in First Statement.
Layton took pains to point to Lampman's poems of social awareness and satire, and to suggest Lampman's link to the social awareness of the thirties. The whole tenor of the left-wing verse of the thirties was polemical and satirical, and Layton had already assimilated this bias from his years at Horn's. But it may have been *The Hitleriad* which provided Layton with the first example of a satirical collection. He may also have read Lawrence's poems in this mode, for many of the satirical and topical poems Layton was including in his early collections have the same epigrammatic bite as the poems of *Pansies*, *Nettles*, and *More Pansies*.

Layton's own poems of the thirties suggest that he was well aware of the effect of his satire. In *Love the Conqueror Worm*, he went as far as separating some of the satirical poems in an end section entitled *Satires of Circumstance*. And noting the outraged and disgusted reactions in the reviews to his first three collections of the fifties, he may have decided to go all the way and put together little books of poems which would have the desired effects of outraging and upsetting those in the literary community who took exception to his method of invective, his double entendres, and his use of four-letter words. The three collections, as well, do represent a progression of theme and mode that the titles of the books themselves suggest. *The Long Pea-Shooter*, the first of these books, suggests the satirical hit-and-miss, sniping habit he had developed in poems of the previous books. *The Blue Propeller* may suggest those beanies or small hats which were in fashion in the early fifties. Capped by plastic propellers, they seemed to prepare the children who
wore them for the cosmonauts of the late sixties. This more modern image contains within it the seeds of the fantasy it may have represented to the young minds who adorned their heads with it.

The Blue Propeller, as a collection, does not aim itself at specific objects of ridicule and derision. And some of the poems in this collection are more self-contained satirical fantasies. In the third collection, Music on a Kazoo, the title, once again, suggests the child's toy world. The kazoo is a child's toy of American derivation. Apparently, it is a noisy toy made usually of a wooden tube. The tube contains a piece of stretched catgut which vibrates with a harsh sound when one hums or sings into the tube. It is a crude musical instrument and suggests the kind of satire the poet was aiming at, and also suggests that his very themes may be about the "music" itself. There is a progression from the pseudo-weapon of the pea-shooter to the make-believe flights of the propeller. The title of the third collection goes one step further in suggesting a self-image of the poet and the poetry. Layton, however, set himself up for the critic's aim. For what is in common with these three titles is the child's toy world. Those who could not accept that poetry can be playful and can function in this manner would dismiss the poetry as being childish and petulant, which it was in instances, but it was what Layton himself intended. His Jewish down-to-earthness and playfulness saw no discrepancy in making poems of this nature, and in delighting in literary pranks. After all, not all poetry had to be solemn, serious or sober. And here, the Greek Anthology vindicated him. But it was a decidedly new and different note in Canadian poetry in the early and middle fifties.
The Long Pea-Shooter was actually Layton's largest book to date. It contained fifty-three poems and the cover design of red lines suggested a half-face, with strokes for eye, ear and mouth. Curiously, a drawing of Layton by his wife Betty Sutherland suggested the emergence of the mask of the poet figure casting his pellet poems. The book itself was privately printed under the imprint of Laocoon Press, Layton's own press, which seemed to have published Dudek's *Europe* in the same year, though in the latter book, the imprint reads as follows: Laocoon (Contact) Press. The other book Layton was to publish in 1954, *In the Midst of my Fever* was not published by Contact Press either, but by Robert Creeley and his Divers Press in Majorca. It is difficult to ascertain whether Layton published his first satirical book on his own because it did not quite fit in with Souster's or Dudek's tastes, though his next book, *The Blue Propeller*, was published by Contact Press.

The "Prologue to the Long Pea-Shooter" in heroic couplets outlines Layton's attitudes to poetry and to the Canadian literary scene. In a way it is an apology for his own poetry—and like all apologies it is also an aggressive stance. It begins on the defensive note:

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A friend tells me I must not write
About the workers and their sad plight,
That poetry like dress admits of fashion
And this is not the year for passion.
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If it is not the year, then Layton, of course, will set the time and place for his battle. Tomorrow, the poet says, "The critic may approve of sorrow" as a theme in poetry, and also:
...anger be no blemish in a verse
Which today must neither taunt nor curse.
For now lampooners, themselves grown sick,
Prefer poets with a touch of colic
Who'll speak in soft, deflated tones
That menace no one's sleep or bones.

The poems Layton is preparing us for will taunt and curse. Speaking
of other poets and poetasters, he lashes out at Philistinism in
Canada, and hits out as well at the poets who "Assiduously learn the
art to please/The pimps in the academies--". Layton's 'ars poetica'
and advice for his fellow Canadian poets is ironical, suggesting
only too well what they can expect from him and his long pea­
shooter, and its prodding.

...above all,
Avoid ambiguous words like 'ball'
Or 'ass' or even harmless 'cans':
They give offence to puritans...
And say nothing long, say nothing loud
To charm and please that motley crowd
Of cultured hags who like a poem.
To waft them far from spouse and home
Or bring a fine synthetic gloom
Into their modernized living room.

For literary targets, the poet must "Seek out the poet that is
most sought," most popular. And the Canadian list includes "zany"
"Reaney," Birney, Livesay, Finch, Marriott, Pratt.

In his "Introduction to Pansies" Lawrence analyses the
manner in which four-letter words have become taboo and how the
taboo has made their use and effect grow out of proportion. Lawrence
may have used them with a driving self-consciousness, puritanical in
its own dedication. Layton, on the other hand, is taking advantage
of the taboo for shock value, as well as restoring four-letter words
to a more healthy and unrepressed expression.
What is obvious is that the words in these cases have been dirtied by the mind, by unclean mental association. The words themselves are clean, so are the things to which they apply. But the mind drags in a filthy association, calls up some repulsive emotion. Well, then, cleanse the mind, that is the real job. It is the mind which is the Augean stables, not language. The word arse is clean enough. Even the part of the body it refers to is just as much me as my hand and my brain are me. It is not for me to quarrel with my own natural make-up. If I am, I am all that I am. But the impudent and dirty mind won't have it. It hates certain parts of the body, and makes the words representing these parts scapegoats. It pelts them out of the consciousness of filth, and there they hover, never dying, never dead, slipping into the consciousness again unawares, and pelted out again with filth, haunting the margins of the consciousness like jackals or hyenas. And they refer to parts of our own living bodies, and to our most essential acts. So that man turns himself into a thing of shame and horror. And his consciousness shudders with horrors that he has made for himself.  

Layton's tactic is not so specific. He delights in reminding his readers of their puritanism and the fact that the other Canadian poets are writing in too rare and refined a manner to concern themselves with "passion" and the plight of the "workers." With the subsequent publication of the next two books of satirical verse, he was to engage in a controversy with A. J. M. Smith in The Canadian Forum where he was to speak with more seriousness and incisiveness about the genteel tradition in Canada.

There is a bravado and deliberate lightness to this "Prologue". The heroic couplet and the inversions of natural order in the sentences contribute to Layton's tone, which in fact parodies the rhymed and closed verse of the Canadian Poetry Magazine, and the tradition Scott lampooned in "The Canadian Authors Meet."

In the scope of his 'ars poetica,' Layton outlines the themes that concern him:
About the parts where I've been bitten;
I write about where the shoe pinches;
I also write about the wenches;
Their lips, their hips, and other beauty
(Laying them is a man's whole duty!)
Of all sad things the saddest sight
Are pubic hairs turned grey and white...

Poverty and pain, sex and old age and death engage the poet, for
these are the experiences which poetry must speak of. But the most
remarkable passage of the "Prologue" is Layton's final reductive and
excremental vision of man:

Strange that human blood can spiritualize
The breast of chicken or its thighs
And turn by wondrous transmutation
The creature's flesh into aspiration;
Strange, that pig en route towards the anus
Can disintegrate into loud hosannas!

Layton has now mapped out the rest of the poems in this collection,
and revealed that when the poet has had his fill with the subject
of poetry and poets, his vision returns to the re-returning movement
between "holiness" and the "holocaust."

In an article "The New Laocoon", (Origin XVIII, Winter-Spring
1956), Louis Dudek goes over the same ground as the "Prologue" and
provides an essay which has none of Layton's gaucherie and awkwardness.
His Laocoon is also the struggling artist. On other poets and poetry,
Dudek provides a clearer paraphrase to the "Prologue":

Poetry, in other words, has been divorced from
working ideas, the only ideas that count. The
average poet today has nothing to say about the
main concerns of actual living, the vulgar and brutal
reality around him, or the problem of tackling this
reality. He feels himself above all that!...
It is not the job of criticism to prescribe the
content of anyone's convictions, but something may
be said by way of suggestion. With mountains
of commercial rubbish and barbarism in front of
us, 'Western Civilization' on the brink of self-
destruction, every corner filled with private lies,
public shame—have the poets 'nothing to say'? Oh, that sort of thing, the good, wise critics have learned to repeat, does not make poetry. 'Anger is negative.' Nuts! Anger is positive, and there is plenty to be positive about. Anger, we know, is the reverse side of conviction; to be angry is to be on the way; examine an irritation, what it implies, and you may, eventually, know what to believe.

Layton will prescribe anger for poets in order that they stand up to the joy-hating forces in modern society, and to give them the impetus to join him with their own long and short pea-shooters.

As in the two previous books, Layton preoccupies himself to a great extent with the poet and poetry. Many of the poems in this book read as if they were chapters in a syllabus for poets. "Young Man in Earnest," "Admonition to a Young Poet," and "Cyril Tishpish," are all directed to the challenge of being a poet. Underlining these poems is the message that the poet must be wary of the forces that will come up against him, and that the poet must go his own peculiar way—as the artist in "Rembrandt". And he must be unafraid to vent his anger upon a society that would like to castrate him in every way possible:

Soft Boy be Rough Boy
Let them feel your knuckles
Let them have it in the balls
("Cyril Tishpish")

Layton must practice what he preaches and turn his own satirical pea-shooter at other poets: Birney again in "Poet Turned Novelist"; the perennial poetess in "Poetess"; and "Harvard and English mist" in "T. S. Eliot." He also directs his pea-shooter at the contemporary literati and intellectuals in "Flaubertism, Trillingism, Or," and "On Reading the Holmes-Laski Letters". In this latter poem, he
contrasts the ineffectual and Anglo-saxon intellectual with a hardier breed (something closer to the way he would like to have his poets):

Sundown

Sunrise

Brilliant

& conventional

So much for THEIR minds.

I like my intellectuals lean

and twisted,

white with hunger

--like a bedbug.

These draw blood.

In "For An Older Poet in Despair with the Times", Layton outlines the tough attitudes a poet must be prepared to have in order to survive in these times—not only to survive, but to survive so that the poet can grow and go on with his writing, and open up to experience. For in this poem, probably directed to A. M. Klein, who had begun to have his own difficulties with his life and writing by now, Layton is revealing the need for his own anger. In the face of the reviews of his previous books, and the critics' dismissal or indifference to his work in _The Black Huntsmen_, _Cerberus_, and _Love the Conqueror Worm_, he had to forge his own poetic weapons, however light, to fend off the various despairs that he could have fallen into, as Klein did—despairs which in the end silence a poet, and encourage those fears and self-divisions that undermine his confidence and creativity. Layton was writing a manual on how to be a poet; he
was practicing his own tenets and prescribing them for others. A poet can get strength, a perspective and detachment if he is aware of the destructive forces pitted against him.

This "Older Poet in Despair with the Times" must first note the "Dialectics: Interpenetration of opposites" in human activity. Layton is no idealist when he tells this older poet that "copulating and killing" are the two central concerns of men. He refuses to accept the idealisms which may blind the older poet. People are people, and women are "Goneril and Regan," for one can "expect no mercy/there." Most of the world want "Bungholes and bungalows", want to pursue their desires and have security and money. This older poet is an idealist of sorts, and thus his despair arises from a profound disillusionment with men and with the way they receive art and poetry. Layton analyses the source of such disillusionment:

Did you really think
because you fashioned excellent verse
they would leave off killing and copulating
to read your stuff

How could you be so stupid?

Neither were the "older and wiser men," the Shakespeares and the Dantes, blind to the "especial viciousness" of men. But Layton is asking the poet not to give up in the face of this vision of mankind. Facing this "viciousness" will strip the poet of his illusions and free him to direct his art with a clearer purpose:
You've never understood, idealist,  
the grossness of people:  
the halitosis  
in the centre of their souls:  
the extent of their flatulent emptiness.  
Neither religion, nor politics  
nor the craft  
that wastes your body  
may ever remove these  
nor the fat grease of complacency  
from their awkward faces:

If you think  
the corrupted herd of this age  
or any other  
can be saved  
you go, mister,  
to snare a whiff  
of malodour  
with a butterfly net: are either  
a lunkhead or a sentimentalist.  
The calling of poetry  
has use for neither.

Don't let them wither your balls.  
Take note, spit, and go on writing.

In fact, that last line describes Layton's own tactic in *The Long Pea-Shooter*.  

Another third of the poems in the book concern themselves with "the corrupted herd of this age." In two complementing poems,  
"Two Poets in Toronto", and "Metropolis", Layton fits that  
English Canadian city into the map of his poetic Hades.

Don't go to Toronto  
The people there  
Are half-crazed  
With suppressed lust,  
With loneliness and fear...

For that's History's dump  
Puritan  
Commercial:  
Perhaps not a place  
But a kind of sickness
Prurient, ungenerous
The ravaged
Faces there
Of moneylove...
("Metropolis")

And when the two poets go to that city, they imagine that the lined streets are welcoming them. Instead, they find that they are in the tail end of a circus—the ironic place for poets in Canada to be. That is the geographical longitude and latitude for the Canadian poet.

Turning to "the corrupted herd of this age", the same who line the streets of Toronto to applaud the circus in town, the speaker-poet finds himself misanthropic. He expects the worst each time, and notes the worst:

Now that I'm older
When I see a man laughing
I ask myself: who
Got it? Whom did he do in?

And when he cannot constrain himself,
But when the tears run down his cheeks
And he slaps his thigh
Repeatedly,
I become worried and ask:
How many? A Whole city?

And when I see
A woman smiling, showing
Her well-cared-for teeth,
I think: boredom
And lust—and note
The gathering imbecility
On her face.

I suppose one day
The sun will black out
And these creatures
With their ingenious contraptions
For performing and surfeiting their bodies
Will die.

In the meantime they multiply.
And that other event
Is more than a billion years away.

The other side of boredom and lust is Eros—that force which
man can celebrate in the face of "that other event." But if the
poet figure is making love in this book, it is with an eye for the
voyeurs of society that he imagines are watching him with disapproval.
Openly erotic, the poet is not one to shrink from boasting:

Hell, my back's sunburnt
from so much love-making
in the open air.
The Primate (somebody
made a monkey of him)
and the Sanhedrin
(long on the beard, short
on the brain)
send envoys to say
they don't approve.

But if in this poem, "Look, the Lambs are all Around us!", the
poet takes note of the disapproving leaders of the "herd", he also
speaks to his woman. She is the poet's partner. Besides other
poets, she is the only other personage the poet deigns to address.
This female figure does not care if she's being disapproved of;
she is totally given to desire and love; and fulfills the poet figure.

You never see them, love.
You toss me in the air
with such abandon,
they take to their heels and run.
I tell you
each kiss of yours
is like a blow on the head!

What luck, what luck to be loved
by the one girl
in this Presbyterian
country
who knows how to give
a man pleasure.
And before the poet has gone through the gamut of his targets, he provides an aside to the "Prologue" in "Address to the Undernourished":

And when poets like me
And my friend Dudek desert you
To write triolets
And neat vilanelles
About ladies and their rare smells
Let us also have
The back of your hand—
We'll understand.

But the poet can still find the redeemable in the middle class North American society that he so disapproves of. In the American slang and lingo of "How To Look At An Abstract;", Layton demonstrates how he finds the visual reality of the contemporary technological urban world:

When I got the hang of it
I saw a continent of railway tracks
coiling about the sad Modigliani necks
like disused tickertape, the streets
exploding in the air
with disaffected subway cars.

In the disassociations of abstract painting, America becomes a monstrous distorted female figure:

So help me, when I got the hang
of it I said (the nylon stockings filled
with liverwurst; an honest word
for rage weeping by broken pylons)
middle-class America is ruined, played out,
she's had it.

Cut up the hash, chef,
and take out the chromium cinders.

From this metallic confusion and mixture, there remains the redeemable "chromium cinders," the shining ashes as left-overs, as emblems of these very poems.
The juxtapositions in the above poem suggest the surrealistic fantasy of "Rain at La Minerve," in which, once again, the image of the body is the central figure:

Help me, someone.

I imagine my body is the whole steaming continent of Africa, and millions of animals are squishing through the torrential jungle inside me but one lion in particular I see him, the fierce proud beast--roars, and roars again: roars roars roars roars

By the time this lion has emerged with his roaring, the poet has gone through a series of contemplations, asides and rationalizations on why this rain is getting on his nerves. The rain has so permeated his awareness that it has transformed his normal physical sense of himself. The objective has now transformed the poet's subjective self that his own rage finally uprears itself in the striking image of the lion. A primeval, animalistic mask of the poet makes itself evident as "fierce" and "proud." And the poet in no way impedes this lion from roaring and giving himself totally to roars. Thus, from the "Prologue" and its aimed poetic pellets to the closing roaring mask of the poet has been a varied and uneven progression.

Layton has followed many of his satirical and imaginative impulses, and it is difficult to easily arrange and classify the poems in this first satirical book. But it is important to bear in mind that many of these poems read as complements to the poems in the companion volume, In the Midst of My Fever. "Rain at La Minerve" can stand beside the rhetorical "Seven O'Clock Lecture" in which the
anger and the pitch, however, are not unrelieved and unresolved. Layton tends to let his poems develop in such a manner that the imaginative elements in the satirical and lighter poems often end in the suspended but total world of the surreal fantasy.

If *The Long Pea-Shooter* seems to be aimed at a few targets, *The Blue Propeller* flies off wherever it pleases. Its twenty-six poems are not really unified by theme or arrangement, which is in keeping with the sense of the book's title. In the former collection Layton had quoted Diogenes in the epigraph to the volume: "Most men are so nearly mad that a finger's breadth would make the difference." In *The Blue Propeller*, he omits an epigraph, and yet provides one for the next satirical collection, *Music on a Kazoo*. Sandwiched between these two larger and more substantial collections, *The Blue Propeller* develops as an unstructured interlude. The poems, however, are more pointed than the poems in the first satirical collection. The poems are shorter, and as the lead poem and the closing poem suggest, are concerned with the masks and stances women, poets and assorted human characters have adorned themselves with, much to the mockery of the poet. It is a book aiming its intent at the masks of the other personas surrounding the poet figure. In this regard, the lead poem is neat and pithy as a poem from the Greek anthology.

To guard her virtue this woman resorts to needless stratagems and evasions.
She doesn't
realize
her face
is ample
defence.

It may have been said of *The Long Pea-Shooter* that the poet has resorted to "needless stratagems/and evasions," and that the face of his own persona in such early poems as "The Swimmer," and "Rembrandt" was "ample/defence." Yet this satiric mask is necessary in the face of detraction. The poet's visage or mask becomes the subject of the apologetic, "For My Detractor":

You are astonished
when I open my mouth
to speak of poetry

Who is this butcher, you ask,
with his nose
broken and twisted
like a boxer's?

The poet notes how his long hair and his "heavy gait/ like that of a startled bruin's" evokes exclamations. He is some kind of beast that leads his detractors to "conclude/degeneracy or worse" of him.

Ah, my detractors
this is a rough profession
I have chosen

I need all my strength

And if my face scares,
so much the better;
I have that more space
for myself, and for quiet,
and for the poems
which I gather
with a tenderness
you could never
imagine or intuit.
The tone is quieter than in the more aggressive poems of the last volume, and the vulnerability of the poet emerges both in his defensiveness and in the tenderness which he evokes writing about his creative moods and acts.

But if the poet is defensive about his detractors, he changes his tone of voice in the next poem, "Love's Diffidence."

He may declare at first that:

Love is so diffident a thing.
I scoop up my hands with air;
I do not find it there...

I am confused, forsaken.
I have lost the way.
Love's not as some men say
In woman's eyes, blue or gray;
Nor in kisses given and taken.

Love, I call out, find me
Spinning round in error.
Display your dank, coarse hair,
Your bubs and bulbous shoulder.
Then strike, witless bitch, blind me.

The shift in tone from the first lines to the third and final stanzas of this poem represents the variations of tone of this book. The speaker may seem perturbed in such poems as "On the Death of A. Vishinsky," and he may be "confused, forsaken." But he is forthright and demanding in other poems, especially those in which he turns his poetic propellers in the direction of poets, intellectuals and the habits and manners of the middle-class and philistines. He has no patience with the minor poets when he is before the magnificence of the Canadian winter in "Mount Royal":
Whether in high key or low
no litanies of sorrow, please
--no apprehensions;
the poets with their sadness
and their cultivated anxieties
can, for once, go hang.
Here, sing, choristers, of the Mozartian snow
and the fast-moving skis.

Upon the last scene on Mount Royal he sees the signature of
a larger music and art. In "Canadian Skiers" the poet's vision
closes in on those that "come out the enchanted slopes/Like
children". The skiers become representations of all that is
characteristic of the Canadian middle-class sensibility.

It
Would seem as if ignorance of all perils...
Yes, ignorance is their greatest asset

Look at those banked deposits!

The slopes reveal the "moneylove" the poet has already decried in
a previous poem on Toronto. In the face of this philistinism, the
poet turns to Nature, his compatriot:

And the kindliness that these hills grow
As they come upon a lonely brother
Telling his Canadian troubles to the snow

These "Canadian troubles" underline Layton's statement on another
group of sports-minded philistine Canadians, a statement whose
instructive irony is in keeping with the cultivated and classical
voice of the poem:
Like Sieur Montaigne's distinction
between virtue and innocence
what gets you is their unbewilderment

They come into the picture suddenly
like unfinished houses, gapes and planed wood,
dominating a landscape

And you see at a glance
among sportsmen they are the metaphysicians,
intent, untalkative, pursuing Unity

(What finally gets you is their chastity)

And that no theory of pessimism is complete
which altogether ignores them

The neatness of the argument and the allusions to philosophy are
in keeping with the voice of the poem, and point to Layton's
developing strength already evident in the companion volume of more
serious verse, The Cold Green Element. Actually, when the voice
of the poem is more controlled, the irony and satire complement each
other to fashion classical poems that are quite finished. When
this occurs one can apply Layton's own measure in "Metamorphosis,"
a more compact version of "Rain at La Minerve"—how the poet
appropriates the world and transforms it into his own language:

And with that attention
Envy lends
He steered its sunward flight
Till, dispossessed, he caught
The motion of the bird
And heard within his blood
Its singing pleasure.

And when the propeller catches that same motion, one hears within
the poem a similar "pleasure." This "pleasure" is a mark of a poet
at ease and confident of his powers.
His confidence finds expression in the title of his next satirical volume, *Music on a Kazoo*. The epigraph to this volume is from Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*:

> Go your ways! and let the people and peoples go theirs!—gloomy ways, verily, on which not a single hope glinteth any more! And lost be the day to us in which a measure hath not been danced. And false be every truth which hath not had laughter along with it.

The poet is following Zarathustra's advice to finally give up on the mass of mankind. The superman poet must celebrate his truth with a dance, and laughter and delight should accompany the poet's words. The second epigraph, therefore, reinforces the quotation and is taken from the poem, "The Puma's Tooth":

> Ah, joyous ones, grow tusks; And your poems grind with truth As fierce and as beautiful As a puma's tooth.

"The Puma's Tooth" is another directive for poets, and a step forward. Since Man's a crazed ape" the poet must "Go armed with a club," that is to be reserved "for the savage townsmen/And decayed crones." A poet must be on his guard against the baser impulses in the "common stew." This advice was given by a "most subtle/Most skilled psychologist," who is Nietzsche, no doubt.

Many of the poems in this book are ground with "truth" that is both "fierce" and "beautiful" in the sense that the poems are as well written and fashioned as "Golfers" in the previous collection. Man as the "balled up parasite" is the subject of a number of poems: "Anglo-Canadian," "On Being Bitten by a Dog," "Bookseller," "Original Sin," and "The Human Condition." In
"The Dwarf" Layton provides his longest parable on the condition of the poet in contemporary times. The poet or the speaker of the poem is watching "the butterflies weaving in and out" of the sunlight and the vegetation. These butterflies in their movement "would teach" the speaker "the language of ambiguity" which may be suggested by the insect's movements in the brightness of the creative sun and in the shadows of vegetation. But the apparent "ambiguity" resolves upon "a dwarf...brutally killed/and baked in his own blood." The speaker has juxtaposed his own "wisdom" in the form of this parable with the butterflies' unconscious animate wisdom "as they dive into the dark of the hedges/or kiss in flight." These two areas of movement of the butterflies symbolize death and love, both of which are inextricably bound up together for this dwarf. The dwarf "was ugly" but he was loved by the "mistress to a neurotic manufacturer/of sardine cans." But though he was loved by her, "he/would not grow tall to her whisper." The dwarf seems to be another figure for the poet; he is ugly as "Rembrandt" and he is small for he really is not a towering type in the modern world where beautiful women are drawn to the moguls of technology and commerce.

The speaker follows the rail lines which "were not laid out by butterflies," that is, by instinctual natural impulses--but by engineers. It is as if the straight line of the rails was leading the speaker to the scene of the dwarf's death--his death lies in the direction which conforming modern life has put upon mankind. A deformed freak like a dwarf can not be easily fitted into the Procrustean modern
world. Inside this shack by the rail line "the principals were all assembled." None of them "denied the crime." When the speaker approached, the blonde, "her globes of sex moving a continent/of men", rose up to kiss the speaker who had come as if he were the sheriff, or a marshal of sorts." The poet narrator is there to find the cause for the crime, and thus to possibly discover some measure of understanding—the only poetic justice possible. The scene could have been a stereotype Wild West production. The "religious text" the manufacturer puts up is in keeping with the worst tenets of profit making and capitalism: "KILL ONLY FOR REWARDS." In the face of this manifesto "an abstracted citizen" turned aside from the speaker and "was sick." He represents, possibly, the average citizen today who can not face the cynical and exploitative credo that really governs capitalist and western societies.

"The blonde swore she had loved the murdered/dwarf." She had given him sexual favors she had even denied the manufacturer. He symbolizes that leader who has become ruthless with his power. He had imagination, he had idealism, but profit and philistine society claimed him. He becomes then the worse criminal. He sold out his own self's poetry and then turned against all that was different and exceptional in others. "Poet turned manufacturer. The times breed them./The real killers." Perhaps he was jealous of the dwarf's relationship to the blonde; for in this scheme it seems that the speaker poet is telling us that the other poets, the dwarf, in some way or another attracts women, who in the end sell out
for the security and money of the manufacturers. The dwarf is a
dimunitive penis-man. Yet the blonde suggests the dwarf's own
inability to please her, to fulfill her. He doesn't measure up
in these terms for he does not give himself up to the female
principle, in the final analysis, to be shaped and thus castrated
by her: "You see, he would not grow up to my whisper." And the
others concur, "Yah, he was too small."

The fate of the dwarf poet, then, is to be murdered by
a hardier and fiercer male type. There seems to be only a tragic
end for him in these times. In the end the poet can not trust
the beautiful woman; she will betray him, as she did, to his
worst enemies. The poet must indeed "Go armed with a club," a
phallic club to boot, such that if his manhood be impaired
he can expect it to be used to destroy him as those whom the poet
warns about in "The Puma's Tooth," those that will "crush" his
"genitals." The "tusks," the "puma's tooth", the "club" of this
latter poem, and the gun, the cigar, and the "golden can-opener"
are all versions of manhood, forms of men's power and identifications.
The poet figure encompasses two masks in this poem: observer
and dwarf. The narrator becomes the witness, the dwarf's alter
ego. But the poet as witness bears more incriminating testimony.
The human world is the most dangerous to poet and man alike. All
conspire against the speaker: a doctor, a poet, "the humans who
would like to kill me." Compared to the humans who "are legion"
the speaker declares, "Only once have I been bitten by a dog."
The animal does not have the malice or cunning that the human
possesses. Thus the declaration of "On Being Bitten By a Dog"
presents the other side of misanthropy—the justification.

"The blonde" as the female principle seduces the poet in other identities. In "Woman" she is "Vain and not to trust," and as in the poem by Catullus, she is also "unstable as wind." But her own ignorance, shallowness, and falseness do not deter the poet from her charms. And as in "Rain at La Minerve," the poet gives himself up to another element and emerges in the shape of the proverbial Judean beast, but this time weakened by his lust like a Samson such that he can only go blindly to her:

O not remembering
her derision of me,
I plunge like a corkscrew
into her softness,
her small wicked body
and there, beyond reproach,
I roar like a sick lion
between her breasts.

In "Bargain" she also represents the tempting virginal offering that will lead to infidelity, and hence, another wickedness. But if the poet is impaling his seductress on her "rumpled bed" in the mildly ironic "Modern Love," or acting as the sensual Odysseus in "Nausicaa," he confronts a different female figure in "Suzanne." This Suzanne is linked with "the apples/reddening there on the black boughs." She is health and naturalness in the face of death. As a young poet, an "Icarus" who may have burned himself out prematurely, he was lucky to have met her when he was a left-wing radical. She introduced him to "Ibsen and Shaw," but more important, he owes her simple thanks for his "notion of poetry/as visceral sanity." She herself was a living embodiment of this poetry, for "Her cheeks
In two poems whose central image is fire, Layton delves into the sources of his poetry. The title of the first of these two, "By Ecstasies Perplexed," declares the poet's vortex—the energy and psychic swirl he finds himself in:

By that, by this, by sharp ecstasies perplexed, illumined, a saint streaked with foibles,
    I wore at the heart a hairshirt of fire, wrapped my thighs in a loincloth of bees.

Speaking of the state of possession he has experienced in the immediate past, the poet identifies himself as "a saint." His creativity, "a hairshirt of fire," punished him; while like "The Swimmer," the glowing flower of his senses provided nourishment for other creatures that gathered and attached themselves to him, as the "hairshirt of bees." His own intensity and art "burnished those bluedyed baubles which hang/amorously from sad and arid bantam trees"—that is, the cheap and gawky banalities of existence. He was "illumined" and spread his lustre upon all that came near him. His gift of poetry transformed reality.

Yet this is a poem of reminiscence and searching into memories. The poet's "lust and indignation" are now spent and the "other troubles" of existence have now died down. He asks of himself what made him become a poet "saint," what drove him to poetry:

I ask whether by deliberate will I went or frenzy at a woman's beauty.

And cannot answer. But recall a flaxen-haired boy five years old who one bad night put fire to his gown and watched the flames about him rise blue and gold.
The rhetorical questions remain unanswered: did he really want to become a poet; or was it the need to praise the beauty of women that put the first flame of poetry in him? He remembers an early incident in childhood when he put himself afire so that he could watch himself burn with a pyromaniacal and self-immolating desire. That last incident suggests the source of the poet's mysterious psychic impulses in the symbolic fire. Risk, danger, confusion afford these "ecstasies perplexed!" For the curious it should be added that this incident did indeed occur to the youthful Layton. The poet still bears the scar tissue on his chest today from that early wilful, perplexed ecstasy. Poetry as all creativity is self-destructive, yet provides its enriching "blue and gold" illuminations.

In the closing poem to *Music on a Kazoo*, "Esthetique,* Layton provides a further elaboration on the nature of poetry.

Good poems should rage like a fire
Burning all things, burning them with a great splendour.

One wrapt flame at noontide blends
The seer's inhuman stare, the seaweed's trance.

And poems that love the truth tell
All things have value being combustible.

Out of the rubbish burning burning comes
Mozartian ecstasy leaping with the flames.

From the dissonant kazoo music of the poet has prescribed a more serious composition. From the "rubbish" he will compose "Mozartian ecstasy." And this poetry of a larger scope comprises the three companion volumes to the three satirical volumes, *In the Midst of My Fever*, *The Cold Green Element*, and *The Bull Calf and other Poems*. 
The backdrop to this poet saint is the Canada of "From Colony to Nation." In contrast to the poet, the Canadians are "A dull people," and they are "enamoured of childish games," while the poet inhabits a more complex, illumined world. In the face of the large Canadian landscape the poet

...can ignore them
(the silence, the vast distances help)
and suppose them at the bottom
of one of the meaner lakes,
their bones not even picked for souvenirs.

The poet's fires would be dampened in that element, no doubt.

If the poet has to align himself with other groups or nationalities, he is drawn to more passionate peoples. In "The Cold War: Saxon vs. Slav," he unashamedly asks: "Good Russians, save us." Save Canadians from "the dehydrated Briton," or from the American, the "gold-loving republican," who "Enthrones the inchoate mass." And he begs the Russians to "Dance...wild dances on our sick bodies," and imitate the movements of the creative dance of fire:

Put an end to our miserable bourgeois;
And our poets' dullness, and Wystan's quinsy.
Leap, leap high into the air:
Fall on the Saxon neck with a fine frenzy.

Layton's dance has been one of mockery and ridicule, done to the tunes of his raucous kazoo and he has borne the mask of the satyr and made erotic poems unashamedly as no Canadian poet had done. By dedicating this book (ironically one imagines) to A. J. M. Smith and directing the disrespective squib, "Imaginary Conversation," to him, Layton intended on falling upon the poet whom he considered to be the Canadian equivalent to Auden. And Layton further engaged Smith on these grounds in a controversy that was to rage between them in The Canadian Forum.
One of Milton Wilson's review articles on recent Canadian poetry, "Turning New Leaves," published in the October 1955 issue of The Canadian Forum, dealt with Dudek's Europe and Layton's In the Midst of My Fever and The Cold Green Element. Wilson's ambiguous review of Dudek's serial poem elicited the angry response of two correspondents, among them R. A. Currie, the Montreal poet who was a contributor to CIV/n. In Currie's "Correspondence," the subject of Layton's critical reception is broached: "...and he (Wilson) says appropriate things about two new books by Irving Layton now that Mr. Northrop Frye has suddenly made it fashionable to praise the work of this excellent and long neglected poet."

Layton's subsequent book, the companion volume to Music on a Kazoo, The Bull Calf and Other Poems also published in 1956, was reviewed in the May 1956 issue of The Canadian Forum favourably again by Millar MacLure. In the review MacLure had suggested that one of Layton's chief influences was Ezra Pound. Layton now was the subject of another letter, this time by Louis Dudek, in the June 1956 issue of the journal. Dudek hastens to point out that neither Pound or Williams were influences upon the poems:

For the past five years Ezra Pound has been a constant bone of contention between Mr. Layton and myself: numerous witnesses will testify. Mr. Layton has never yet read the Cantos except to become exasperated and to renounce the method (if not always the motive) of Ezra Pound. He has never been enthusiastic about any of Pound's poetry so far as I can recall. Mr. MacLure's compliment
(or reproof, as some may take it) was therefore undeserved. The influence of Pound might, of course, have come through William Carlos Williams, whom A. J. M. Smith terms "Layton's master" in a recent criticism—but then I have pointed out elsewhere that Mr. Layton is even less indebted to Williams than to Pound.

And closing off his letter, Dudek refers to Layton's poem to Northrop Frye in Cerberus in which the poet declared: "Make no mistake, I'm the reincarnation/Of William Blake." Dudek was making this reference facetiously, but it attested to the confusion with which critics like MacLure and Smith greeted and had reservations about the six books published between 1954 and 1956.

In the next issue of the Forum, July 1956, another correspondent voiced his own criticism of Layton's recent work. His letter contains all the objections many reviewers had been having about Layton's work, especially the body of his invective and satirical poems. A. G. Christopher attributes the change in attitudes to Layton's work to the spectacle of the critics fearing to stand up to the supposedly formidable and bullying poet:

It's at once instructive and entertaining to see how our critics are apt to run after one another. No sooner had A. J. M. Smith shown the way with his review praising the Montreal poet, Irving Layton, than lesser lights have hastened to follow. The same Mr. Layton whose frequent publications until a short time ago were dismissed as dreary, derivative or disgusting...

But I suspect it's not on his poetic merits that he's now acclaimed but on his vigor as a propagandist. For once the critics are completely on the defensive and are positively cowed into applause. Mr. Layton moves to the attack with coarseness and vituperation, massacring the opposition with coprological verse, naming names and sparing none. Let the man who ventures the mildest criticism look to his reputation or lawyer.
Christopher is overstating his case, yet he is right in maintaining that a sudden shift had taken place in Layton's critical reception. He goes on to fence with MacLure's review, and at the same time spars with the erotic and satirical poetry:

This letter is in part inspired by Millar MacLure's review in the May issue of the Forum. It is masterly in its euphemism. Mr. Layton's frequent and rather suspicious boasting of sexual powers, his intimate revelations, are passed over with the phrase: "some of the erotic poems have a pleasing Ovidian flavor." His dislike or dismissal of other human values is noted, but Mr. MacLure commends this as unsentimentality. The poet lacks true passion but possesses an admirable energy, often an admirable technique and occasional humor.

The real battle had yet to begin. But the preliminary skirmishes had taken place.

In the October 1956 issue of the journal, in the "Correspondence" columns, Layton took on Christopher's objections. In this longest of his letters (others were to follow in the succeeding issues), Layton makes his most comprehensive defence and attack on the members of the literary establishment that were now taking notice of him, and meeting him head on. It is the statement, almost manifesto, a poet would make; and in its bluntness and force bulldozes the opposition flat. But at the same time, it provides an extensive and cogent analysis of the forces in the Canadian sensibility Layton had already termed, the "genteel tradition." Layton's manifesto reinforces his poetry and, in effect, clearly opened the way for the younger poets who were to begin publishing in the middle and late fifties, and in the sixties as well. As such it is quoted extensively, for it stands with many of the poet's prefaces as an important literary document:
Mr. Christopher is not the first to gag at my frequent use of coprological and sexual imagery. Long ago in a poem, "Ice Follies," I announced that "in Canada you can't say shit too often." Crude? Perhaps. But so is shock therapy. Was it some civilized Greek or Chinaman who said, "What men do, an honest man may write of"? In this land of delicate lumbermen, fisherman, and clean-minded Mounties, and also in Great Britain itself, you still can't buy an unexpurgated copy of Lady Chatterley's Lover except under the counter. Canadians, victimized by Protestantism and Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy, are for the life of them unable to distinguish between pornography and necessary candor. More to the point, perhaps, they are so little interested in ideas or art they'll pounce on anything as a face-saving formula for having sports and money-making as their only genuine concerns. When a grown-up Canadian pretends that his nervous system, so delicately attuned, so sensitive, is shattered by seeing an "obscenity" in print, I confess I'm more than a little suspicious. "A bungalow-dweller," I say to myself morosely and turn to Rabelais for nepenthe.

It must be said that the critics and reviewers in this country have been of no help to poets battling this pervasive and odious prudery. They may have thought that noticing it would confer upon it a critical status it did not deserve; or they may have been taken up with weightier matters like plumbing the subconscious with an amphibrach or a pypercatalectic; perhaps they believed that fight was over and all the censor-morons and silly old maids had been routed. Whatever the reason—timidity, academic blindness to live issues—they missed a chance to demonstrate that criticism is something other than that which merely waits and is parasitic upon the creative act. Of course the issue goes much deeper than that. My own feeling is that their values are not too different from the bulk of English-speaking Canadians and those values for good or ill are basically and unavoidably Anglo-Saxon. The Anglo-Saxon is not at home in the world of art. Ecstasy, emotional intensity, candour—a poet is a man with a terrifying need to confess, said Chekhov—embarrass and disconcert him. Confronted by them, his strategy as Lawrence so well knew is to convert this raw discomfort-producing stuff into "ideas" as quickly as possible, into the mumbo-jumbo of the latest psychologies, into safe and restful scholarship. The latter have their uses but only an English professor in a Canadian university is capable of the sickening blasphemy of preferring them to the Dionysian element.
By way of illustrating my point I recall the public spanking I got on Critically Speaking for having written and dared to publish the poem, "Intransitive Verb," which goes beautifully like this: "I smell, You smell, We all smell." Now a Russian, or a Bulgar, or a Jew--I've tried the poem on all three--laughs unashamedly to the skies when he's given such an exquisite melange of vulgarity, cynicism, and witty phrasing for they are familiar with thousands equally as good and better in their own tongues. Tolstoy's tabletalk, so Gorki tells us, was not meant for virgins nor, let me add, the prissy schoolmarms and juiceless librarians across this vast and desolate dominion. Ways of feeling and speaking that are alien to the dominant Anglo-Saxon culture patterns are apt to be looked upon with mistrust and only too often with contempt. This is unfortunate and perhaps inevitable. English-Canadians are not overly gifted with either imagination or sensitivity, or with that wonderful accepting emotionalism which can make good the lack of either and which I think the Russians more than any other people I know have got. Certainly in evaluating the work of non-Anglo-Saxons the "ideologism" of Frye and the inhibiting classicism of Smith operate as a culture-osmosis, rejecting "the awkward and alive," the aggressively novel; preferring to them the inoffensive, the elegantly polished, the elegiac.

Three months later in the same "Correspondence" column, A. J. M. Smith answered Layton's charges. Layton, in the above letter, had also directed his critical attack against Northrop Frye for preferring Wilfred Watson's derivative Friday's Child (the Governor General's Award for poetry for 1955) to Louis Dudek's Europe, which had already been under the severe gaze of Milton Wilson. Dudek had already come to Layton's defence in his article in Queen's Quarterly (Vol. 63, Summer 1956), "Layton Now and Then: Our Critical Assumptions." This article was in answer to Smith's "The Recent Poetry of Irving Layton: A Major Voice," Queen's Quarterly (Vol. 62, Winter 1955-56). Dudek was not attacking Smith's article per se, but Smith's belated recognition of Layton's achievement, as well as the terms that he (and others like Frye) had been employing in their acceptance and praise of Layton's work.
Dudek took it upon himself to point out how the critics were not willing to come to terms with all aspects of Layton's work, especially the satirical and the erotic; and attributed this treatment to the same cultural patterns that Layton's long letter in the October 1956 Forum had underlined:

And then to describe Mr. Layton's most praise-worthy quality as elegance! According to Messrs. Frye, Pacey, and Smith, Mr. Layton's militant attitudes, his physical attack on Canadian life, and his sexual imagery, are really his defects. He is to be praised for having the qualities of Douglas Le Pan and A. J. M. Smith—elegance. No, I'm afraid not. A steam boiler is not famous for elegance, gentlemen. But what do we know of that, having seen only the fountains of the Versailles Gardens? "Heaven knows," a steam boiler is a good thing too—but it is not elegant.

The reasons for the long neglect of Mr. Layton and for the present acclaim on the wrong terms are not far to seek. I read in the Toronto Quarterly, in the issue of January, 1956, the opinion that in Canada "cultural devotion to the mother country has been central. Certainly no challenge has come...from non-Anglo-Saxon sources." What in fact has happened, within the last decade and a half, is that this tradition has been challenged on the best literary grounds. The terms of approval from the prestige-conferring culture (the key to the Loyalist-derived and genteel tradition in Canada) are elegance, a well-tailored look, an apparent complexity (that conceals a real poverty of ideas), much verbal and scholarly show, a high tone, maturity, serenity, etc. etc.: art with the mystery concealed in its bosom—"one of us." The test of the new poetry is its relevance to life, not to the art museums; its energy, not its static impressiveness.

To break with the old tradition can come as well from those of Anglo-Saxon descent (Souster, Sutherland) as from others—it is not a racial issue, though it may temporarily be a class one. Mr. Layton, however, is an intruder on both counts. The acceptance of his poetry, therefore, on the grounds of the old stolid virtues, denying as it does his real significance, will be a source of obfuscation for another decade unless the ironies of the situation are clarified.
The clarification that Smith provided in his letter in the January 1957 *Forum* was a combination of the serious and the witty. Smith avoided the whole question of Anglo-Saxon Canadian gentility with the following statement: "Unlike him (Layton), I have no convictions about racial inferiority." Smith then added a poem purporting to be a poetic "precis" of Layton's letter. What in fact Smith was doing was to ridicule and thus take out the serious and significant intent of Layton's arguments, as well as the position Dudek took in the above article. Smith also adds that the verses he has composed "fail to catch...the humorless seriousness and self-righteous indignation with which Mr. Layton castigates" the critics in question. Layton's bluntness put Smith on the defensive and he could only provide the following argument in the closing verses he had penned—verses supposedly in the mouth of the castigating Layton:

Dare they deny us, Dudek, you and I,  
The laurels of the privy and plaudits of the sty,  
Bold rebels for the right to shout out sh-t  
And lard our poets with it 'stead of wit?

Smith's classical lines reinforce Dudek's and Layton's contention that it is elegance and wit which are the touchstones to Smith's appreciation of poetry, and a limited appreciation at that. But it would be unfair to Smith not to observe that he was balancing himself between a serious answer and a satirical polemic. For the conclusion of his letter reveals the latter intent:

However, Layton and Dudek are rapidly making themselves the ideal objects of classical satire, and I hope they will be round for a long time to provide fit subjects for the muse of comedy.
Smith in his next polemic was to resort to the "muse of comedy," possibly because Layton's response to this last letter may have given him the realization that his prose did not have the capacity to stop the "bulldozer." Smith's offensive then becomes satire and wit in the classical form of the heroic couplet. He skits about the Laytonic cannon with a fencing rapier, and is more caught up in the motions of his mannered dance than in putting up an effective and creditable opposition.

Layton's response to the letter and verses of Smith appeared in the March 1957 issue of the *Forum*. In this response Layton combines argument with wit, and demonstrates how formidable and creditable a polemicist he is. Nor is he averse to joining in on the mockery, for as he bulldozes his opposition flat he still takes one hand from the wheel, so to speak, to parry backhandedly with a skillfully handled rapier of his own:

Since Mr. A. J. M. Smith now never reads anything but the proofs of his endlessly proliferating anthologies and the nasty things that people write about him, he cannot have known my case against the inartistic Anglo-Saxon has been advanced by Englishmen themselves: notably and vehemently by Sir Herbert Read in his *Anarchism and Poetry*. And moreover since his ear is attuned chiefly to the refined and regulated thump-thump of Augustan verse he finds it insuperably difficult to respond to contemporary rhythmical nuances which mock the literal meaning of the words; thereby he does those excellent men, Messrs. Frye, Wilson, MacLure, and not least himself, an injustice I never intended. More lamentable than all that, he perverts racial difference to mean inferiority, and then proceeds to reproach me with his own error. And so unctuously, too. It is the usual gambit of an ineffectual Laodiceanism to impute humorless self-righteousness to anyone who in any field struggles for some improving change. On that score history affords numerous examples, and Mr. Smith is merely bringing us up to date. To my knowledge, he has never associated himself with any cause, and never fought any battles, unless shadow-boxing in any ivory tower be called such, which neither I nor Mr. Dudek are willing
to do. I may be mistaken, but Canadian poetry is a whole lot less inhibited than it used to be, both in expression and content, for which we may not immodestly take some credit; if not for initiating the change then at least in being prepared to go along with it. Look at Smith's own poemlet sandwiched like a fragrant slice of ham between the two slabs of his letter. And though a certain lingering shyness prevented him from spelling out a key word in his opus, more courage and candour at some future date may yet persuade him to insert the missing "i"...

By May of 1957, Smith had penned his "On Reading Certain Poems and Epistles of Irving Layton and Louis Dudek," in the issue of the month of the Forum. It added a spirit of wit again but it essentially failed to answer the charges Layton and Dudek had laid bare in their letters and article.

Hail Coprophilia, muse of Layton, hail!
Doxy of Dudek, skoal! who drop'st in pail
Thick steaming words and brownish lumps of rhyme—
Manure essential in this barren clime,
Where Saxon critics without guts or gall
Praise these thy sons but little, if at all.
Yet these are they who vindicate thy cause,
Who preach thy gospel and affirm thy laws.
Blest pair of poets, put on earth by thee
To sweat and strain and groan to set us free
From Anglo-philistine hypocrisy.
What shovelfuls of praise we ought to pay
These swart forerunners of an Augean day
Let us with candour, clangour, and no taste,
Make haste to proffer, O make haste, make haste!
Layton shall how to flatter Layton teach,
And modest Dudek Dudek's glories preach;
Layton shall tingle in Canadian air,
And echo answer Dudek everywhere.
In ev'ry quarterly and magazine
Their linked names in squibs and puffs be seen;
Letters to editors be filled with them,
And gratitude replace each critic's phlegm:
Repentant Wilson, Dobbs, MacLure, and Frye
Shall who can praise them loudest longest, try.
Layton in a later letter to the Forum would wittily remark how his own poetry eventually added fertiliser to the spent inspiration of the not overly prolific Smith, and in reply to Smith's mock modesty, Dudek penned, "Reply to Envious Arthur," first published in Dudek's Delta and collected in 1958 in Laughing Stalks. Dudek followed Smith's example and attack, and directed his mockery at Smith's reputation as a poet, and in the manner of the satire turned all the facts of Smith's history of publication into the farce that Dudek purported it to be.

It's little cause, Arthur, you have to complain
That I, or that my friend, may sometimes gain
A cough, or even applause, when we appear
To shout into the thick Canadian ear.
The nation being deaf to poetry, you know,
We're heard in London or Lansing, but not in Sault.
But you lack recognition for your pains
In whispering over the last cold remains
Of your own talent, or for Scott and Klein,
So naturally you resent our doing fine.
Remember there were times when you yourself
Were not above impacting critic's pelf.
Before your first, best, gifts forsook you
Before you'd published any book you
Had old Professor Collin sing hosannas
To you, in his windy White Savannahs.
Some six years later, bringing out your thin
First volume—how you took the critics in!
Almost posthumously, it might be said,
Since as a poet you were good as dead:
News of the Phoenix—as if any news
You brought was ever novel to the Muse!
You 'scape the country after this affair;
Then from a cloud, or from a college chair,
You wrote, in ignorance, of "traditions," "trends,"
At last, anthologizing others' wares,
Your own name grew on theirs, so it appears,
Till forc'd to publish or renounce your fame
You brought A Sort of Ecstasy out—a sort of lame
Last book, stuffed with discarded rhymes
That even our critics could not praise this time.
(Some of the poems were so little new
They came out of a 1928 Review;
And not a poem but was cribbed, 'tis said,
From Yeats, Pound, Auden, or the greater dead.)
The critics shook their heads, admired your skill. 
Ah well, you've always aimed at verse, we know.
So fine, by dint of labour labour would not show;
But in your own smooth lines, for lack of pith.
Only the labour shines—no genius, Smith!
Give over, then; and give up envy, man;
Let others win applause, or steal renown.
There's little glory, even for men like us,
Who've genius without labour, without fuss.

Three months after Smith's poem on Layton and Dudek appeared, Kildare Dobbs reviewed Layton's second "selected poems," *The Improved Binoculars*. Speaking of this second edition of this book in the August 1957 issue of the *Forum*, Dobbs takes pains to attack Layton's erotic verse and his anti-Puritan stand. Dobbs was also well aware of the controversy that was raging in the *Forum* for two years. Dobbs in the manner of his renowned light essays, first finds fault with the photograph of the poet on the cover of the book: "It bears on its cover a photograph of Mr. Layton looking suitably fierce and sleepless, displaying impressively hairy forearms..." Dobbs continues to generalize about Layton's book thereby confusing the already established public image of the poet, and the real poet who should have been examined in his verse:

Mr. Layton isn't a controversial poet, though in the interests of publicity he naturally likes to give that impression. There is more or less unanimous agreement that when his verse is good it's very good and when it's bad it's horrid. As for his bawdiness, there is nothing about it that need seem strange to latter day puritans, for it is the bawdiness of a puritan standing on his head. That is to say, it isn't the sweet-singing natural bawdiness of popular ballads, but a rather forced, almost smug, salaciousness that owes a good deal (as Mr. Layton generously acknowledges) to D. H. Lawrence. Lawrence, unfortunately, was a prig about sex. The bad poems are those which represent the poet slobbering over girls or tapping out poems on their hips and so on, or those in which he 'swears by the gods,' or roars, or names the authors of Great Books, or more simply says 'Ah!'.

In connecting Lawrence to Layton, in the manner he did, Dobbs proved himself on shaky ground. Layton was not going to let him get away with it, and in the September 1957 issue contributed a letter which blasted Dobbs' sloppy reviewing. Layton's letter suggests that the poet was getting tired of facing the same obtuse attitude to his work; and in this case, probably, the most obtuse of all his critics to date. For Dobbs seemed to see Lawrence's influence as the source for Layton's supposed bawdiness and smug salaciousness. In attributing smugness to Lawrence's attitude to sex, and then connecting that smugness with salaciousness, he misread the tenor of Lawrence's concerns. And Layton was not going to let him off easily:

Yet perhaps Mr. Dobbs knows how to write intelligible prose and is one of those notorious Johnnies we've heard much about lately who do not know how to read. I am all the more ready to think this must be the case when he has me acknowledging ("generously," mind you) Lawrence's baleful influence on me of smugness and salacity in matters of sex. Prithhee, sweet Dobbs, where? The sentence in the book jacket reads quite plainly: "I worship D. H. Lawrence." The excitability of Mr. Dobbs in the cause of genuine poetry (preferably of the riddle-griddle variety with the scent of laundered petticoat thrown in) has rightly endeared him to a host of readers. But now that time has elapsed and his ardour somewhat lessened, surely he will concede it is possible to revere Lawrence for a multitude of reasons quite unconnected with his sex philosophy or his war against anglosaxon puritanism and dirtmindedness—these, according to my theory, the result of improper toilet training. I revere Lawrence because he was a good fighter, and because he fought for things I fight for and every artist fights for. He loved life and he fought for it. And he hated with a deadly, passionate, all-consuming hate the sterile ones: those Bloomsburyans who out of envy or embarrassment wish to eliminate the vital and creative, the living reproach to their own unproductive selves. He called them contemptuously "ball-less" and "Willie Wetlegs." My term for them is simply "castratos."
And will someone tell me, please, what I must do to halt Canadian reviewers from assuming it must always be some Englishman or American who has influenced my ways of thinking? Is this an outcropping, as ugly as it is stubborn, of our national inferiority complex? The itch to appear well-informed? Or is it perhaps our intellectuals' bi-weekly alternative to Scrabble? The psychic projection of their own imitiveness and unoriginality? But if they insist upon playing sleuthy-sleuthy, why in the name of chance don't they get it right for once? Or do I have to crack Mr. Dobbs' well-lined skull with the Song of Songs, and Mr. Duncan's also, before I get them to see the origin of my joyful sensuality: "bawdiness" to the crippled anglosaxon or angloirish mind. Unless such reviewers become more generally acquainted with Hebrew, Yiddish, and Slavic literatures they will always seem pathetic parochial jackasses or cultural imperialists. Even Dr. Northrop Frye, a truly great and creative mind—I ask his pardon for naming him among pygimies—attributes my sacramental view of nature and sex to...yup, you guessed it...D. H. Lawrence. But, really, does a Hebrew need to go to anyone for that? I always thought they were the boys who first dreamed up that notion.

Earlier in 1957 Dobbs and Dudek had skirmished on the former's review of Dudek's collection *The Transparent Sea*. Dudek had responded to the review in the February issue of the journal, along with a supporting letter from A. W. Purdy. Dobbs' rebuttal took the form of a short poem modelled on Dudek's in the March 1957 *Forum*.

Thus Layton was to add the final word to the controversy that had gone on for three years. In the February 1958 *Forum*, five months after his last letter, Layton's letter appeared in the "Correspondence" column, along with two poems for Dobbs.

I am delighted that I and my friend, Louis Dudek, have been the inspiration of the recent verse of Messrs. Dobbs and Smith—certainly, as everyone will allow, their most distinguished to date. There is so little good satirical verse in this country that I'm particularly pleased to discover Dudek's 'Dirty Stuff' and my own coprophiliac muse fertilizing their imagination and filling their waking dreams from which all genuine verse must spring.
The longer poem Layton included was to be reprinted three years later in *The Swinging Flesh* under the title, "Hierophants." Speaking of the high priests of the Canadian literary establishment, Layton directs his attack at the sterility of the criticism directed at himself and Dudek:

Here, craterlike the vacant poet gapes
And belches calumet smoke; which pleases him!
And gelded asses praise when most he seems
The dismal floundered penis on a corpse.

In this philistia of the wealthy dunce,
The evangelical hick, the boor, what
Marvel the Muses and their critics rave
Through page after page of pretentious crut?

It's the felt lack, the wanting to be filled,
The despair and fury at emptiness.
Hierophants? Ah, dummies in a white field
That toss in the wind their frozen tatters.

In many ways changes in the literary sensibility in Canada have vindicated Layton's attack. By engaging his critics he prepared the way for his own singular vision and cleared the way for those who were to follow him. His was a two-edged thrust of pugnacity and excellence which was a necessary combination for effect and influence. And excellence of another kind Layton was to present in the companion three volumes to the satirical books.
NOTES


3 Roberta Lyons, p. 60.

CHAPTER V

In the Midst of the Fever

Layton's three satirical books prepared the way for the three companion volumes, *In the Midst of My Fever*, *The Cold Green Element*, and *The Bull Calf and Other Poems*. This progression is not incidental. Each phase of Layton's poetry moves out from an initial stance and vision and then completes itself in a manner that offers a new point of departure. For the last satirical volumes, *Music on a Kazoo* completed the cycle of that phase and revealed how satire and the surreal could combine so that the music of a more serious poetry would join with the cacophonies of satire and invective. This development is prefigured in such an earlier poem as "Rembrandt" in *Cerberus*, in which the tragic and the satiric stand side by side. These six volumes demonstrate the beginning of a movement to merge both, and a reading of the poems in the three companion volumes reveals the poet at the center of the tensions that were to grow into the inclusive tragic vision of the late fifties and early sixties.

Poetry still remains as the central metaphor and concern of the poet, for the first poem of *In the Midst of My Fever*, the companion volume to *The Long Pea-Shooter*, fits in as another of Layton's poem definitions of poetry: "It's all in the Manner." For "It's all in the manner" how creatures, humans and their environment arrange themselves:
How a bold fly circles the greenleafed stalk: or the dog yawns and stretches in the sun: or my neighbour, his wife, like quiet monks, kneel before the chickpeas to weed, clean, again and again, the earth sockets and their blazing cotyledons

The landscape is actually a suburban one, and the second of the poem's stanzas focuses on the poet himself, in what "manner" he moves in this suburban world, much like the "bold fly:"

And it's how I dance my shanks, here, in the fields, reply to a question, tell some one off, piss open-legged, wake the dead with a yawp, B--, make love (One hand tied behind my back

Layton, then, is describing the antics of his poet persona in the three satirical books. He is out there in the fields, in the uncultivated areas outside the suburbs of the Canadian philistine. Here he seems to be doing everything, yet the others seem to be off on their lawns. Even the woman who may be his mate does not figure in his brusque ballet. His behaviour, no doubt, may "wake / the dead with a yawp." Yet that activity is not enough, and the refrain is repeated with an added statement: "It's all in the manner of the done." The manner of the done is the manner of art as distinguished from the manner of life, or of the manner of the irreverent poet. Layton's last stanza, then, proclaims the further dimension of his themes, of his view of art:
Manner redeemeth everything: redeemeth man, sets him up among, over, the other worms, puts a crown on him, yes, size of a mountain lake, dazzling more dazzling! than a slice of sun

Reverting to an archaic word, Layton suggests that the redemption of the "done," the poem, will be a process in which the poet may move back in time from the banality of modern living described in stanza one. This modern living is a pantomime of the earlier agricultural life man may have led. But if Layton will espouse the redemptive capacity of art, he will do so, perhaps, by going back to a dignity and authority which may be lent from the past. And if it will be lent from the past, it will be, for example, the Nietzschean voice of "The Birth of Tragedy." If he will turn to the past, it will be to the oracular and aristocratic role of the poet which the suburban world has reduced in its conformity and technological democracy.

Art then puts man above nature, for only he can articulate his worth and significance. His "manner" will even be more dazzling than nature itself. And this is the conceit and bravado of the demiurge poet creating worlds of his own, and crowning himself with the forms of his own self-aggrandizement. In this sense, Layton is proclaiming that this book and the subsequent poems will mark a departure from the scope and manner of the satirical books. Layton has gone one step further than asking to "Love the Conqueror Worm." Poetry will set man us, "over, the other worms."

Layton is also heralding a new phase in his creativity in the title to this book. He is now in the "midst" of his "fever."

Buoyed up by the last three collections, and his gathering audience re-
flected in the magazines he was associated with in Canada and the U.S., he sensed his own creative assurance.

In the title poem of the collection, the contradictions, the forms of the world and history are embraced by the poet and are contained within him; his creative frenzy is the medium for all connections and forces. The poem has three strophes, and is a poem about Layton's vision of poetry at this point. In the first, in the midst of his fever, "large as Europe's pain," all the cruelties, murders, and political intrigues transpire. Birds are electrocuted, perhaps, because they are projections of the poet, and must be gotten rid of first when chaos and destruction are let loose. Bull-forgs follow "to the sound of their own innocent thrummings," for they may be projections of the more naive and virtuous aspects of the "swimmer" poet. The courtly whores are next to leave, and the metaphysicians sniff the thoughts of those who can but observe and not participate in this strange phenomenon, "In the midst of this rich confusion."

In all this some miracle occurs; someone has "quietly performed a good deed."

And the grey imperial lions, growling, carried the news in their jaws.
I heard them. So did Androcles.

Who is the voice speaking—the poet emperor whose inner fever is being matched by confusion in the realm of his own court? And is he, the poet emperor, then, but another aspect of a conglomerate figure who encompasses Androcles as well?

In the second strophe, the poet is apostrophizing from the next stage of his position:
0 from the height of my fever, the sweat
ran down my hairless limbs
Like the blood from the condemned patron
of specially unluckily slaves. Then, O then
Great Caesar's legions halted before my troubled ear,
Jacobean in Time's double exposure.

From this height of vision of "Time's double exposure," he has become
the body of the world containing the contradictions of human existence,
especially the spectacle of master and slave. For in a political
and historical perspective, the master and slave relationship not
only contains within it the paradox of human need and exploitation, but
also represents the connecting fulcrum which moves the human world. It
also represents the relation between poet and emperor in the persona
of the speaker. And "in Time's double exposure," death falls upon
all, and even the mighty "discover the exhaustible flesh." But the
will to power of the Emperor and his domination over his empire still
inspire the poet to glorify them:

...my lips
White with prophecy aver before him
But the conqueror's lips are like pearls,
and he hurls his javelin at the target sky.

Death may be the "conqueror worm," yet the great men are conquerors
in their own right, before which the poet is spellbound. The will to
power of emperors and rulers draws the creative mind, for there are
connections between their almost similar energies.

In the third strophe the poet is declaring his vision
"In the depth of my gay fever." The fever is joyous and affirmative,
and it encompasses the complementary dimensions of "height" and "depth."
In the second strophe the poet was declaring his vision from the "height"
of his fever, from a position of detachment from his own body, to
what he saw before him in man's struggle with death and his embattled will to triumph in the face of death. Now in the "depth," yet "gay," he turns to the roots of his own identity, and to a vision in which his body becomes the expression of language itself:

...I saw my limbs
like Hebrew letters
Twisted with too much learning. I was
Seer, sensualist, or fake ambassador; the tyrant
who never lied
And cried like an infant after he'd had to
to succour his people.

Like the "Newsboy," the poet contains within himself the personas of other human archetypes. And in his Hebrew or Jewish character he contains within himself all the disparate phases of the human.

In this capacity he embodies the redemptive in art and poetry, in history and the panorama of European civilization referred to in the first strophe, in the Roman era in the second, and in the Hebrew in the third.

Then I disengaging my arm to bless,
In an eyeblink became the benediction
dropped from the Roman's fingers;
Nudes, nodes, nodules, became all one,
existence seamless and I
Crawling solitary upon the globe of marble
waited for the football which never came.

Disengaging himself, he becomes the "benediction," and in fact a Christ figure (for the Jewish and Roman allusions suggest this point of time, the meeting of both ancient worlds which produced the near apocalyptic "Fever" world of that era). In this benediction all aspects of reality become unified in the poet; the disparate multiplicities become one. "Nudes, nodes, nodules," suggest that they move around the word "no." The negations of contradictions are unified as well. Yet
the Christ poet alone upon his altar world, "the globe of marble," waits for a presence which never actualizes. For this Christ poet waits for another saviour, a saviour of his own to redeem the human vulnerability that still is lodged within himself. "The footfall which never came" is the perfection or death which would be the ultimate benediction, the final blessing. For in the last three lines, Time and mutability intrude once more "in the midst" of this "fever." Poetry, then, cannot ultimately suspend suffering:

And I thought of Time's wretches and of some dear ones not yet dead
And of Coleridge taking laudanum.

The footfall may have been the Angel of Death, whose very anticipation in the poet recalled him back to the human world, "large / as Europe's pain." Art, then, and poetry, in the final analysis may be like Coleridge's addiction—poetry is the opium of the poet, and the fever is not a natural or altogether healthy state of being, though it is desirable because it heightens awareness and seemingly, in its illusoriness, encompasses "Time's double exposure."

The poems, then, in this collection spring from the midst of the poet's fever, from the height of that creative fever, and finally turn to the depths of his possession. And the poems can easily fit into one or the other of the strophes of this poem which is a map of Layton's poetry at this phase. The almost feverish pitch of the rhetoric also informs other poems in this collection which revolve around the poet and poetry. Another elaboration of the theme of poetry appears in the celebrated, "The Birth of Tragedy." The poem is composed of three eleven-lined stanzas, shorter versions of the three strophes
of "In the Midst of My Fever." The poem begins with a declaration by the poet, "And me happiest when I composed poems." Creativity and joy meet in the creative frenzy, and the poet serves as the "core" of the world. He unifies the opposites and he is as he declares, "I am their mouth; as a mouth I serve."

In the second strophe the poet focuses his attention on "the sensual moths," cousins of the butterflies at the opening of the narrative, "The Dwarf." The moths, "nature's divided things," or rather, creatures, are "big with odour and sunshine," and full of life and affirmation as they disappear into the darkness and death of nature's cycle, "into the perilous shrubbery." These moths also "drop their visiting shadows / upon the garden," the poet

...one year made
of flowering stone to be a footstool
for the perfect gods
who, friends to the ascending orders,
will sustain this passionate meditation
and call down pardons
for the insurgent blood.

The poet's garden is his poetry, and the gods of poetry will forgive him for transforming it into the altar he has made as an offering to them. The "perfect gods" will forgive his changing nature into the perfection and death of art. Poetry ultimately "pardons" those destructive acts which are needed to create it in the first place. Eli Mandel's reading of this poem connects the allusiveness of the poem to the figure of the poet:

As the Nietzschean title suggests, the poem tells of Dionysius who dreamed the mad dream of perfections and so was slain and became Apollo. Poetry appears, then, as a kind of death because, just as "living things arrange their death," "seasonably," or in the
"fruition" of poet, so poetry too "composes" its own death. Its creation, "flowering stone," "a footstool for the perfect gods," is the product of "a quiet madman" who is slain by the perfection of his created forms, his death a birthday for the burning world.

It is difficult to accept the conclusion of the final image of the poem, which Mandel suggests. The poet, "A quiet madman, never far from tears," lies "slain" but it is that part of him which is joined to nature that is slain, and that part of him which has been sacrificed upon the "footstool" of his art. All of nature takes on the aspects of a sacrifice, a fire--the symbol of mutual creativity and destructiveness as in those two poems in *Music on a Kazoo*, "By Ecstasies Perplexed" and "Esthetique." For the air, on one hand, seems at first to be "green," and living; and on the other hand, seen from the vantage point of the chair, "the inflammable air / tumbles on many robins' wings." The air itself may be "inflammable," but it represents that element of passing time and change in which "leaf and blossom uncurl." Yet is "living creatures arrange their death" much the way the poet may arrange experience and flux into art, "someone from afar off / blows birthday candles for the world."

"Someone" may be that part of the poet that is detached from this tragic vision of art and life, poetry and death, and who in the same spirit, can celebrate in the face of the transitoriness of all things. He can still celebrate before a dying world, and in fact, is probably the self-same poet making "a footstool / for the perfect gods." In this image, his altar garden has become a festive cake; his poetry borne from the tragic vision provides some kind of sus-
tainment and joy. And those "birthday candles" are none other than the tapering flames of his poems. For in the first stanza, "nature's divided things," "like a flame swerve," and the poet's mouth which serves them by naming them and uttering them into poetry, is actually the mouth of a fire-eater. The image of fire being surrounded or swallowed by darkness closes the first stanza as it does the final stanza; and this is in keeping with the elegiac note in the poem.

The time setting of many of the images seems to be the close of an autumn day when the transitoriness of nature suggests the themes to the poet. "The sensual moths" who are "big" with the daytime's "odour and sunshine" also "drop their visiting shadows" in the second stanza. It is definitely evening, for otherwise these moths would have been the daytime "butterflies" of "The Dwarf." On the other hand, Layton may have chosen the word "moths", instead of the latter word, for the effectiveness of its sound in conjunction with "sensual." "The Birth of Tragedy" is set just a little while after the "late afternoon" of "The Swimmer." It is the time when the poet most often actualizes his vision.

In "Seven O'Clock Lecture," the poet teacher proclaiming poetry to his night school class, realizes the ineffectuality of poetry, the inability to take his adult students out of the banal and yet fiercely horrific modern world.

Filling their ears
With the immortal claptrap of poetry,
These singular lies with the power
to get themselves believed...

But which poetry is the poet referring too—the saccharin poetry of the poetasters, or the poetry of the greats, which in its own manner
will not be able to speak or address itself to the students:

...their heads sway at the seven o'clock lecture;
I imagine they forget the hungers, the desperate fears
in the hollow parts of their bodies,
The physiological smells, the sardine cans, the flitch of bacon,
The chicken bones gathered neatly
to one side of the plate;

And in the face of the banal, the horrifying rears up:

Life is horrifying, said Cezanne,
but this is not
what he meant who picked flowers blooming
in the slaughterhouse; he meant the slit throats,
The bear traps smeared with blood, the iron goads, the frightened
servant-girl's Caesarian...

But in the meantime, as in the close to "The Birth of Tragedy,"

the earth moves like the possessed poet:

And this planet dancing about Apollo,
the blood drying and shining in the sun,
Turning to Titians, beauty, the Arts...

The banal is horrifying because in the face of the dionysian frenzy
of art, the class remains impassive as if that element, that dionysian
possession, has once and for all time left the students, representatives
of twentieth century conformist life:

My heart is parted like the Red Sea.
It cracks!
And where the cleft is formed
The BARBARI carrying their chromium gods
  on their sunburnt arms and shoulders
Ride on my nightmares, a hot desert wind
  pushing them swiftly toward these faces
  washed clean of Death and Agony.

These students, then, are the corollary of the "perfect gods," but
their perfection is a spiritual and psychic death. The poet like a
deliverer cannot bring them to an understanding of their condition.
Great poetry means nothing to them ultimately. They are out of touch
with the central life force, the sun. "Flammonde, Light of the World,
in this well-lit / fluorescent age you a failure, lacking savvy."
For what can the agonizing metamorphosis of Kafka's Gregor mean
"to those who nightly / bed down on well-aired sheets?"
The poet has been carried off in his impassioned vision, and then the
hour bell marking the end of the lecture brings him down to reality,
while his last words are still addressed to the "greats," whose "mouth"
he has become in the "Seven O'clock Lecture:"

At last the bell goes, Lear lamenting Cordelia, the wall's
piercing cry...

You may grieve now, gentleman.
The tragedy has come to its close; the "Cordelia" in human beings, in
the students, is to be grieved, for all that was innocent and noble
has now irrevocably died in those who cannot transcend their urban,
contemporary hells.

In "Early Morning in Cote St. Luc," the same holds true
in the phenomenon of the growing suburbs. A nearby construction sight
provides the metaphor for the mushrooming North American urban world:

...the grey steam shovel,
an immense praying mantis,
poised
for thrust.

Soon in action
it will fling itself
against the gravelled road
with the violence
of a sex pervert.

Cumilinctus. Infertility.

Frantically it lanes the earth for sewers.
It prepares an accommodation
and an easy way out
for excrement.
The inhabitants of Cote St. Luc are unaware of the perversion of environment and nature they are living in, and these Cote St. Lucers include: the "professor," the ivory tower intellectual; "A plumber," the ironic unionist "heir of the Fr. Revolution," who is a "true egalitarian" for he provides toilet bowls for all; the housewife whose domesticity breeds "lavish poisons;" and the children, already showing signs of incipient human cruelty in their dreams. Addressing the invisible company of the great minds and artists, the poet asks rhetorically:

How to make room
in my mind for these
and the black bitter men--
my kin--
the inconsolable, the far seeing?

Layton wrote an article about these "inconsolable, the far seeing" men in the last issue of CIV/n in 1954. In "Shaw, Pound and Poetry," he demonstrates how his own views of the artist had focused and sharpened since he had written the two essays, "Politics and Poetry" and "Let's Win the Peace" for First Statement. In contrast, to those two essays, this short article is pithy and epigrammatic, and is more specifically concerned with the artist's vision of power and his social awareness, and to the necessary awareness of power for any writer living in the twentieth century. "Shaw, Pound and Poetry" also underlines Layton's own objections to the limitations of the Canadian poets he attacked in his satirical books and his published polemics. This short essay reveals the background to Layton's own uncompromising position in such a poem as "The Dwarf" (Music on a Kazoo), in "Seven O'clock Lecture," and in such poems as

Layton's essay is declarative and sure as the Preface to *Cerberus*, and as the later Prefaces would also prove to be.

Whoever wishes to address himself to the ear of the 20th century must study the structure and meaning of power. I mean political power, the authority to order humans about and arrange their time schedules and destinations. It's our time's polite fiction that such command is exercised by uniformed bullies called dictators, or prime ministers and governmental cabals of various sorts. It's also a useful fiction for some. It enables the actual wielders of power—the money men and machine owners, the real governors in contemporary society—to escape surveillance and criticism. From this central fiction stem the major perversions of art and morals at the present hour.

For in "The Dwarf" he had underlined the following: "Poet turned manufacturer. The times breed them. / The real killers."

Layton singles out two writers whose awareness was not "perverted" in the sense that they saw this connection between economic and political power, and focused their attentions on what they deemed to be the "perversions" of their day:

The two writers in this era who couldn't be fooled were Shaw and Pound. With a single cold look, with an almost aristocratic contempt, they took the measure of the offence. Sovereignty rests on money. The artist-thinker of the one, the poet-politician of the other are incarnations of the same person: one who knows that the basis of any state and any civilization is economic.
Though Marx had said this before them, they assimilated these insights into their creative vision:

Artists have their own, and probably acuter, way of tackling the problem of Appearance and Reality. I mean artists, not dope-peddlers, vendors of teethache powders, liars, and clowns. Since your genuine artist has a passion for truth (not Beauty, 0 maiden aunts and professoria) governments fear him like the plague, bankers and industrialists silence him by locking him up or hiring a claque to drown out his voice.

An artist with a passion for economic justice develops into a saint i.e. a hater of human piggishness. Consider, I say, the characters and careers of these two extraordinary men. A realism and fundamental sanity in both springing, as I have said, from their awareness of money's role in contemporary life; in both, a demonic restlessness and irritability, artists to the fingertips. Why, even the gripes against them are the same. You've heard it before, that they spoiled their writings by talking at much length about profits and usury, art and economics don't mix, und zo veiter. Shaw and Pound both embraced Mussolini because they were fed up to the gills with liberal pluto democracies that put forward shekel-chasing as the noblest purpose of man. Inevitably, too, the same narrowing intensity because the strategy for them was to outflank the money men and the ignoble culture they created and push both headlong into the purifying sea. I suggest that poets in our time have much to learn from these masters. Forget their temporary love-affair with Mussolini and Italian Fascism; that's not the essential things about either of them though fools and/or blackguards might have you think so. Their essential insight is that a money culture has its swollen blackened roots set in a swamp. ...

What I want to say is that there will be no good in people, no health in them until power is divorced from money and put to the service of human culture.... Their service to us was to point at the real perverters of language, morals, art; at the real debasers of thought and perception. Their audacity and good spirits are a tonic to a generation which has forgotten the excellence of anger and pugnacity in the service of human values.

One side of Layton's "excellence of anger and pugnacity in the service of human values" is apparent in the satirical works. In more imaginative form it informs the poems of the more serious, three
companion books and such poems in *In the Midst of My Fever* as "Early Morning in Cote St. Luc" and "Paraclete." In the latter poem, the "narrowing intensity" focuses on man's irrational cruelty and hatred of life:

It is life itself offends this queer beast
And fills him with mysterious unease;
Consequently only half-movements
Delight him--writhings, tortured spasms...

It is as if, killing, he looked for answers
To his discontent among severed veins
And in the hot blood of the slain
Sought to inundate forever his self-horror

Or like a sodden idiot who plucks
A thrust from a willow, grief in her green hair,
Throttles it to uncover the root of its song.

Let the gods who made him, pity him.

These gods are "perfect gods" of another kind--the Furies, the gods that lead man to blind destructiveness. The gods of poetry and the gods of destructiveness lead poet and men to frenzy--but whereas the former "call down pardons / for the insurgent blood," the latter lead to the anarchy of "infertility." Creativity and destructiveness in man are opposites in the tragic tension. And this apprehension lies at the center of the poet's "fever."

"Mr. Ther-Apis" reads like a companion piece to the Cote St. Luc poem. The ritual of castration takes place in an "ugly middle-class parlour." After a meal, the poet-guest witnesses the castration of the male which could only take place in the setting of suburbia. It is such a world that castrates a man, and makes him into another of the shoddy knick-knacks:
And there before my horrorstruck eyes
They snipped off his balls
And plated them with chromium
Into a pair of handrails.

Now when they go up and down
They fell his touch, and kiss,
And love the world with the tested vigour
Of Mr. Ther-Apis.

Mr. Ther-Apis is a version of the poet lying "like a slain thing."
He has given up part of his own vitality and virility to ironically
give a finish and veneer to the middle-class world. And the wife,
upon whose face "the hard lines / Of pride like lesions," is "A
middle-class harpy," and so she fits in as a type in this almost
mythological, ritual tale. Another suburbia, "Lachine, Que."

In these three poems, sexual perversion is associated with middle-
class life and North American consumer society. If Shaw and Pound
looked to the economic roots of the malaise, Layton singles out the
psychological sickness at the heart of bourgeois Christian western
society. The life forces have gone awry; instead of a creative social
order, an insidious disease has befallen the urban world, represented
in this case by aspects of Montreal's suburbs. And the female
principle—woman—figures as some kind of avenging Fury upon the male;
the latter, by extension, another persona for Layton's central poet figure.

Looking upon a "Lacquered Westmout Doll," Layton sees another version of the middle-class harpy:

For saying this
curse me to see seven Canadian winters
but your emptied stare
is the death of all poets.

Though this kind of woman makes poetry and the imagination superfluous, Layton still returns to the more creative features of his poetic vision. Whereas "The Birth of Tragedy" is set in autumn, "Composition in Late Spring" conjoins the poet's new found poetic creativity and the change in seasons. And it is that other side of woman which leads the poet into song and poetry:

When Love ensnares my mind unbidden
I am lost in the usual way
On a crowded street or avenue
Where I am lord of all the marquees,
And the traffic cop moving his lips
Like a poet composing
Whistles a discovery of sparrows
About my head.

The world of spring suggests a poetry of reality and creative flux. And it all transpires around the poet. It is as if his subjective world set the outside world going. What has been frozen and dead in the frozen forms of winter comes to life. The winged creatures, projections of the imagination and the poet's flights, bring on the change:

The sparrows' golden plummeting
From fearful rooftop
Shows the flesh dying into sunshine.
Fled to the green suburbs, Death
Lies scared to death under a heap of bones.  
Beauty buds from mire  
And I, a singer in season, observe  
Death is a name for beauty not in use.

The poet is indeed a singer in season, moving with the seasons and the themes suggested by the seasons. As a definition of unread poetry—
"Death is a name for beauty not in use"—the flowering stone garden and its still footstool lies unused by the gods in "The Birth of Tragedy."
And in this late spring mood, the poet reaches heights of power ("Doge"), but in the end becomes an anticipating animal quavering with sensuousness:

No one is more happy, none can do more tricks.  
The sun melts like butter  
Over my sweetcorn thoughts;  
And, at last, both famous and good  
I'm a Doge, a dog  
At the end of a terrace  
Where poems like angels like flakes of powder  
Quaver above my prickling skin.

In another season, the "terrace" may become the "flowering stone" garden or the "garden walk" in "The Cold Green Element." As the poet has announced, "It's all in the manner," and in the seasons.  

In this blessed mood, a child and a mother in the slums provide the scene for "The Madonna of the Magnificat." And in "How Poems Get Written," love-making with the poet's partner provides the poem they write "together." In the other portraits of women in this volume, woman is not wholly embraced or celebrated in the same manner as the poet's unstinting enjoyment and joy in poetry as in "Composition in Late Spring." "Mildred," in the poem of that title, looks upon the world with "still derisive eyes." In "For Priscilla," the poet sees this woman
tight and impervious
as a pebble
and prototype
of your unmagnanimous sex,
a female hyena
of the spirit
who sniffed the delicious foetor
from my rotting psyche;

The woman in "Portrait of Aileen" suffers from a psychological or spiritual correlative to the "incredible wound in the air." A bowl of apples before the poet and "Aileen" becomes "the architecture of sanity," in contrast to this woman speaking and weaving "the air with charred fingers." Something of her health has been sacrificed for her to be what she is. In fact, all these portraits suggest an ambiguous and ambivalent vision of the female principle.

Though woman seems to be the closest human archetype to the poet, the latter cannot fully embrace the female, nor be taken in by her. She stimulates his art, his poetry. Woman herself may be the archetypal Muse, yet she is also a "harpy" and the poet must be on his guard or he will find himself castrated or damaged. At best, the poet male can keep his balance by suspending that tension, by being the observer and the portrait artist. His job is to relate what is transpiring before him as the narrator in "The Dwarf." It is his means of detachment and defence.

And before the fact of mutability and human vulnerability, man and woman, poet and muse, poet and poetry, can hope for the reconciliation projected in "The Longest Journey." Here, man and wife are quarreling, and so are both facets of Layton's vision in the midst of his fever: the creative and the destructive, and the other
opposites of love and hate, art and death, man and woman. "The Longest Journey" presents that movement in time in which a balance can be achieved, and it speaks as well of the journey of the poet through is own vision "in the midst" of his "fever:"

In the end seeing
That they were finite as the rusting canisters
They solved the monstrous riddle of time and self
And forgave the hour and the changed weather.

For the point of view, they saw, was everything,
Though necessarily final. Yet the good life holds:
Like great art, is unsensational; and there time
Does not rush upon us but unfolds.

For "they" are also the opposites, the personas of his own tension.

In the "hour" and "changed weather" of "The Birth of Tragedy" and "Composition in Late Spring" an organic unfolding order balances and reveals itself. And that is the measure and movement carried over to the next two books.

In Origin XIV (Autumn 1954), one of Layton's few published statements on the techniques of verse appears along with many of the poems from The Cold Green Element (1955). The letter is dated August 5, 1954, and it is the letter Layton wrote accompanying the poems he submitted to Corman. The letter was written just a week after the last poem of this book was composed, and so provides insights into the nature of Layton's self-awareness of the poetry he was writing.

...In all these poems I've tried to express the idea 'in the image,' for although as a rule I leave theorizing about poetry to others, there are one or two work-a-day rules I try to govern myself by when writing verse. For me, rhythm and imagery usually tell the story; I'm not much interested in any poet's ideas unless he can make them dance for me, that is embody them in a rhythmic pattern of visual images, which is only another way
of saying the same thing in different words. If I want sociology, economics, uplift, or metaphysics; or that generalized state of despairing benevolence concerning the prospects of the human race which seems to characterize much of present-day poetic effort, I know my way around a library as well as the next man. Catalogues are no mystery to me. I regard the writing of verse as a serious craft, the most serious there is, demanding from a man everything he's got. Moreover, it's a craft in which good intentions count for nil. It's how much a man has absorbed into his being that counts, how he opens up continuously to experience, and then with talent and luck communicates to others without fuss or fanfare or affection, but sincerely, honestly, simply...

Perhaps, Layton attempted to minimally "theorize" about his writing of poetry because he was addressing these poems and this letter to Cid Corman. Corman's Origin and Creeley's The Black Mountain Review were the chief organs for the many writers who had gathered about Black Mountain College and the poetic theorizing of Pound and Williams. In the above letter, it is as if Layton were explaining himself in spite of himself. And it may have been in response to Corman's urging, or a begrudging explanation on Layton's part in order to give some coherent guidance to the American poet and editor. Nonetheless, it lacks the critical jargon and pretentiousness Layton may have read in Olson's statements, and in a way, the letter can be read as a critique of the kind of rambling, digressive generalized poetry that Olson was writing and later publishing as his Maximum Poems. It can also be read as a critique of the very poets Corman was publishing besides Layton's in Origin. Its hard-headedness, its poetic pragmatism may have appealed to Corman that he published it with Layton's recent poems.
The two touchstones for Layton are "rhythm and imagery," and these he may have picked up by way of Pound. In any case, two of the major tenets of Imagism revolved about rhythm and imagery; and any serious poet who was aware and reading in the forties would have assimilated this. Certainly Pound's three terms, "Melopoeia," "Phanopoeia," and "Logopoeia," are echoed in Layton's letter:

If we chuck out the classifications which apply to the outer shape of the work, or to its occasion, and if we look at what actually happens, in, let us say, poetry, we will find that the language is charged or energized in various manners.

**MELOPOEIA**, wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning.

**PHANOPOEIA**, which is a casting of images upon the visual imagination.

**LOGOPOEIA**, 'the dance of the intellect among words', that is to say, it employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word, its usual concomitants, of its known acceptances, and of ironical play. It holds the aesthetic content which is peculiarly the domain of verbal manifestation, and cannot possibly be contained in plastic or in music. It is the latest come, and perhaps most tricky and undependable mode.²

And in the group of early essays and notes which appeared under the title "A Retrospect," Pound provides the earlier analogue to the above:

In the spring or early summer of 1921, 'H.D.', Richard Aldington and myself decided that we were agreed upon the three principles following:

1. Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.³
Layton's letter really expresses workable rules and principles rather than theory. Layton's poetic theory is expressed explicitly in his verse, at times, and it is most evident in the examples of his own practice. Many of his central poems concern themselves with poetry—literal and symbolic—and with the figure of the poet, and that is why it was quite unnecessary for the poet to explicate himself in prose. In "The Poetic Process" in the 1955 volume, Layton succinctly applies another dimension to what he has said in his letter to Corman:

To make a distinction, I think
Then that the poet transfigures
Reality, but the traffic cop
Transcribes it into his notebook.

In "Composition in Late Spring" in the former volume, Layton had described "the traffic cop moving his lips / Like a poet composing."

But that was in a moment of poetic effulgence. For ultimately, only the poet can change and transform reality by forming it into language. And in The Cold Green Element, the transfiguration begun "In the Midst of My Fever" moves into another phase.

In this volume, the title speaks as a complement to the heat and fever of the last book. On the whole, the second collection is cooler, more collected, and the poems are shaped with a subtler poetic intelligence that is more classical and less pitched.

The epigraph to the book if from Nietzsche's Thus Spake Zarathustra:

There is in the world much filth: so much is true! But the world is not therefore: a filthy monster!
--All the swarming vermin of the 'cultured', that--feast on the seat of every hero!

The epigraph speaks well for the poems in the companion satirical volume, The Blue Propeller, in which many of "the swarming vermin of the "cultured"
are caricaturised and made the object of the poet's anger and mockery. But the "hero" is also the poet of "The Cold Green Element," named as "Orpheus" in another poem of that title.

In the title poem, the poet is the tragic protagonist who moves through various scenes of an apocalyptic landscape. "At the end of the garden walk"—that garden in which the poet may have set up the "footstool / for the perfect gods"—"the wind and its satellite," death, wait for the poet. Only in the going will he discover and know "their meaning." Everyone else is going there, including the "black-hatted undertaker," who has already noted the poet's "heart beating in the grass," his empathetic mortality. A poet "now hangs from the city's gates." An Hiroshima, "a great squall in the Pacific" blew this poet into his public prominence. For that is the condition of the poet in the nuclear fifties. The crowds who have gathered as if at a spectacle stare at the dead poet "with grimaces and incomprehension." For that hanging Christ figure's significance escapes the multitudes. The speaker of the poem is the alter ego of that same hanging poet. The speaker poet can but embrace the stunted correlative of nature, a lightning struck tree, which in itself is another image of the contemporary poet for it has sprouted and is "a brilliant / hunchback with a crown of leaves." Another "squall" has maimed it into its own majesty. Sickness prevails, and the poet's own growth and death are mirrored.

...in the eyes of old women, spent streams mourning my manhood
in whose old pupils the sun became
a bloodsmear on broad catalpa leaves
and hanging from ancient twigs,
      my murdered selves
sparked the air like the muted collisions
of fruit.

The poet's "murdered selves" are all victims of a mythic ritual—the poet's crucifixion in society and nature. But the crucifixion of the poet and the life forces he represents are capable of a resurrection in the face of nature's cruelty and beauty:

But the furies clear a path for me to worm
who sang for an hour in the throat of a robin,
and misled by the cries of young boys
    I am again
a breathless swimmer in that cold green element.

The speaker has returned to the element of life where he will swim and fight the waves and rejoice in them only to begin the cycle again, and to be returned to hang "from the city's gates." This return to the beginning of the cycle parallels the pattern of Layton's own development which encompasses a beginning, a passage, and a return which in itself contains a new direction and thus avoids the perfection of stasis. At that point of return and recapitulation the poet invariably contains all the previous phases he has traversed. This presents a difficulty in a critical examination of his work, for it suggests the pitfalls of repetition. This sense of repetition can be misleading if a careful reading is not given to the key poems written by the poet at each phase of his career. As "The Cold Green Element" contains and yet is a departure from "In the Midst of My Fever," it points backward, and yet forward to the poems Layton was to compose in the late fifties. This demonstrates the complexity of the Janus-like quality of much of Layton's significant work, and of the peculiar
spiral pattern of his growth as a poet.

The ability to carry off this compact poem "The Cold Green Element," lies in Layton's own statement that he has embodied his ideas "in a rhythmic pattern of visual images." He moves in and out of the visual scenes and follows them in a parallel order so that he can return to the beginning in the final stanza which encapsulates the imagery and statements of the whole poem. The stanza of five lines with the fourth indented gives a definite, almost neat pattern to the poem. And the run-on sentences carried over in three stanzas help to create a unifying rhythm of voice, which in turn reinforces the pattern of imagery. It is a more subtle and complex, yet compact, poetic practice—one which finds its progression and beginning in such poems as "Love the Conqueror Worm," "Vexata Quaestio," "The Birth of Tragedy," and even the early "The Swimmer." Layton's mature and skillful mastery of this form is no more evident than in the revision and change of the poem, "Enemies." The poem first appeared in The Black Mountain Review, No. 4 (Winter 1954) in the following shape:

The young carpenter works on his house, Building. He has no definition for me.

I am for him a book. A face in a book. Finally a face. He knows only his hammer.

I am embroiled
In the echoing sound of his implement

As it slides and fixes nails
Into the resistant wood from whose doors
Later, later, coffins will emerge
As if by some monstrous parturition.

Is it any wonder he so mistakes me
Seeing his handiwork thus robed in black?

Seeing I so shatter his artifact of space
With that which rabbis call time

...............forever dislodging
The framework for its own apprehension?

Over the wall of sound he structures
Into the air we face each other as enemies;

His brutal grin of victory, however,
Made incomplete by the white sunlit paper

I hold --a warrant, a pardon? --
On my knee. He has no gauge to take in

A man with a book, yet his shadow
Falls on each page. We are both implicated

In each other's presence by the sun,
The third party, itself unimplicated,

And only for a moment are reconciled
To each other's necessary existence

By the sight of our neighbour's excited boy
Who some God, I conjecture, bounces for His joy.

The final version of the poem that appears in *The Cold Green Element*
moves into three-lined stanzas with lines that move and are
indented and come back to the margin again. This plot represents the
shift and connexion between the poet and carpenter, the tension between
the "enemies."

The young carpenter
who works on his house
has no definition for me.

I am for him
Finally a face.

The sunlight
on the white paper
The sunlight on the easy
Summer chair
    is the same sunlight
which glints rosily

From his hammer
    He is aware suddenly
of connections: I

Am embroiled
    in the echoing sound
of his implement

As it slides nails
    into the resistant wood
from which later, later

Coffins will emerge
    as if by some monstrous
parturition. Is it any wonder

He so mislikes me
    seeing his handiwork
robed in black?

Seeing I shatter
    his artifact of space
with that which is

Forever dislodging
    the framework for
its own apprehension?

Over the wall
    of sound I see
his brutal grin of victory

Made incomplete
    by the white sunlit
paper I hold on my knee.

He has no metal
    gauge to take in
a man with a book

And yet this
    awkward shadow
falls on each page.
We are implicated,
in each other's presence
by the sun, the third party

(Itsself unimplicated)
and only for a moment
reconciled to each other's

Necessary existence
by the sight
of our neighbour's

Excited boy
whom some God, I conjecture,
bounces for His joy.

In the first version of the poem, the two lined stanzas do not provide the rhythmic flow to the poem's progression. As well, the poet figure is actually in the center of awareness, while in the final version, it is the carpenter who "is aware suddenly / of connections," for he realizes that the poet is intent on watching him. Who contains whom? It is the poet who has the "definition," for he has built the construct of his poem on his awareness of the tension between builder and poet, between him who shapes and works in reality, and him who "transfigures" reality into poetry. But the poet's "subject," the carpenter, does not easily comply with the poet's invisible power and ordering awareness. And in another facet of this complex poem's statement and images, the carpenter is but another aspect of the poet, the poet who constructs the "footstool for the perfect gods." . For he is a constructor of limitations, deaths, and "coffins." The sun, whose sunlight fell on both protagonists, reconciles both to "each other's /
Necessary existence," for creativity holds the opposites, the enemies together, and also provides the final affirmative image of the "Excited boy," the living embodiment of the innocent and joyful poem for whom the carpenter may be building a home and poet supplying "a book."
There is a suggestion of Christian themes in "Enemies." The carpenter may be the boy's father, and the boy himself a Christ figure, now merely young and unaware of the paradox of human relations suggested by the tension between carpenter and poet, between matter and spirit, body and soul. The subtle and complex yet seemingly simple and clear presentation of this poem is proof of Layton's own comment in the letter to Corman: "It's how much a man has absorbed into his being that counts, how he opens up continuously to experience, and then with talent and luck communicates to others without fuss or fanfare or affectation, but sincerely, honestly, simply..."

There are more arresting apprehensions of the threats and divisions and tensions of the poetic consciousness in this book. And the "Enemies" are not reconciled but suspended in the construct of the poems. In "Orpheus" the poet projects the more didactic theme:

And with your dying spasm
Sing loose their gates of prison
Yet this transforming song
Engender bitter wrong

Saw they could demolish
With love love's foliage
And that the poet's heart
Has nowhere counterpart

Which can celebrate
Love equally with Death
Yet by its pulsing bring
A music into everything

Orpheus as a guise for the poet appears in "The Executioner" in which the speaker poet can still speak of his death after the fact. He has re-appeared to tell his story, and it is similar in fact to "The Dwarf." This poem reads like the monologue of the poet-dwarf who
found himself in the hands of the "Poet turned manufacturer. The times breed them. / The real killers."

But the poet's vision is informed by the following:

Knowing that the blade dies
Makes our kind unkind or wise
And writhe in the white fear
Of the death-knowing terror,
Of the flukes that tunnel in
The human imagination.
("Saratoga Beach")

And in the title poem of his second "selected poems," "The Improved Binoculars," the "improved" visual aid affords the poet an apocalyptic nuclear vision of society. These improved binoculars may be the refocused antinomies of his dialectical vision; they are also the improved instruments of the technological age. Even in death and destruction human beings persist in their petty and selfish behaviour. Even catastrophe and destruction do not sober or change people for the better. In fact, illumination of catastrophe affords the perennial perverse enjoyment of watching others suffer:

And the rest of the populace, their mouths distorted by an unusual gladness, bawled thanks to this comely and ravaging ally, asking only for more light with which to see their neighbour's destruction.

All this I saw through my improved binoculars.

This is the same rabble that flocked to see the hanged poet in the title poem of the collection:

Crowds depart daily to see it, and return with grimaces and incomprehension; if its limbs twitched in the air they would sit at its feet peeling their oranges.
In "The Cold Green Element" the poet's "murdered selves" did not afford a spectacle large enough to distort the mass into "an unusual gladness."
The death and the dying of the poet find their counterparts throughout The Cold Green Element in most of the poems, for the living element of water contains death within all its forms, in the cities and in the hell of the metropolis:

At the explosion of Peel to St. Catherine
0 under the green neon signs I saw
the ruined corpses of corpulent singers
arise from their tight mounds, sigh and
stumble upon each other dragging
their tattered shadows in their arms
("Winter Fantasy")

In the fantastical narrative, "Me, the P.M., and the Stars," the death of God announced by Nietzsche spells the death of the religious and the miraculous in the suburban present:

I met a sage, I said, I met a sage
lying on his face
under a despoiled berry tree who said
God was slowly decomposing
decomposing year by year, leaking away.
Little remains of him now
except a faint odour that might be found
in the better churches of the city.

But the poet speaker finds it an "eventful night," for in his revelation of the death of God, he has, paradoxically discovered the miraculous element. That may be why he is given to this surrealist and fantastical mode.

But the poet's closest complement, woman, also represents a threat and a dying or destructive force in this suburban world:
God, when you speak, out of your mouth
drop the great hungry cities
whose firetrucks menace my dreams;
where Love, abandoned woman, hatless and void,
snares me with her thousand pities;
ambulances pick up my limbs.

The Orphic persona is devoured or dismembered by the harpies. Yet the opening and closing poems of this volume concern two of the closest women in the life of the poet, his daughter in "Song for Naomi," and his wife in "La Minerve."

In the poem to his "lovely daughter," the poet finds his own flesh and blood like the "Excited boy / whom some God... / bounces for his joy." Time but "attends and befriends" the daughter, and her growth throughout the summer has even outdistanced the grasses and nature. She is growing on the edge of the river, so to speak, with Time, and not another victim of mortality--she is blessed, and is a blessed creature in an otherwise tragic world. It is as if the swimmer poet were observing his daughter, not from the vantage of a position on the land but from his station in that "cold green element." The dancer who has swept "All other dancers / From the center / Of the naked ballroom," is almost a living embodiment of language and poetry in "The Dancers." Transported in her dance, she is another version of the poet's self; and in "Poet and Dancer," the pair are directly connected for they are two of a kind. Another blessed and beautiful woman whom the poet is drawn to is the beauty of "For Louise, Age 17." Like the poet's daughter, Naomi, Louise and her beauty are seen in the background of time:
She came to us recommended  
By the golden minutes and by nothing else;  
Her skin glowed, sang with the compliments  
Which these same minutes paid her.

But her beauty burns like a beautiful sacrificial fire which illuminates the lives and world of those who behold her. Her beauty is like a drowned poet's for it survives and surpasses time, and moves into the immortality of art:

But all our thoughts were caught in the compass  
Of her royal arms and we sank down  
Into the dark where the blood sings after dark,  
Into the light because it was the light,  
Into the clear valley where her body was made,  
Her beauty had lain, now resurrected  
Raised by the minutes which start, slay,  
Their ivory hafts fiery with sun-motes  
Which, crying, we seized to make an immortal ring  
For beauty which is its own excuse and never dies.

The pairing of the poet and the woman is not always one of joy and uncomplicated celebration. In "Poem," the poet speaker finds himself uneasy and battling against the more docile and quiet woman:

I would for your sake be gentle  
Be, believe me, other than I am:  
What, what madness is it that hurls me  
Sundays against your Sunday calm?

There is a death of a kind in the woman's disposition against which the poet's more unruly nature must fight. The tension is needed, otherwise he may lose that ferment and restlessness which keeps him changing and reacting to experience. Yet, this is the paradox of love between the poet and the woman:
I swear I'm damned to so hate and rage.
But your fair innocence is my guilt;
And the stream that you make clear
I must, to fog my image, fill with silt.

The "gift" of her "goodness" and its calm is what he struggles against—
Yet as he realizes it...

Is what I hold to when madness comes.
It is the soft night against which I flare
Rocketwise, and when I fall
See my way back by my own embers.

The madness that hurls him against the calm is the aggressive thrust
of his creativity, phallic in its shape. The woman is the "Poem,"
the Apollonian calm of the finished poem; and the poet must shatter that
form and do so continuously and thereby make new poems in the process.
When he comes back down from the intensity of the illumination, he
can see his way by the light of his own cooling embers. This is the
poetry that comes after the initial feverish pitch of inspiration, and
the paradox lies in the fact that he finds his way back to the "calm"
of the poem after the noise and shatter of the "flare." Woman and
poem, woman and poet are seen in terms of each other.

Unlike "Rain at La Minerve" (The Long Pea-Shooter), "La
Minerve" takes the poet speaker outside himself, outside of the
roaring lion he may have seen as a hallucination within his own
consciousness. La Minerve is the setting for a discovery of Eden,
and is the closing poem of the book. Layton opened the book with a
poem to his daughter; he closes it with a poem to his wife. In this
poem the poet speaker moves from the first three stanzas, which
represent the expressions of his poetic vision and imagination, to the
more miraculous rediscovery of his woman's nakedness. In the first
three stanzas the poet speaks as if he were Klein's...

nth Adam taking a green inventory
in world but scarcely uttered, naming, praising,
the flowering flats in the meadow, the
syllabled fur...
("Portrait of the Poet as Landscape")

For he repeats himself, beginning the stanzas, "And if I say..."

But the real "fable" which occurs between man and woman takes place

...when you stand at night before me
Like the genius of this place, naked,
All my ribs most unpaganlike ache
With foolstruck Adam in his first wonder.

But the poet is not Adam. Adam is his alter ego with whom he can
identify with in that "first wonder." The speaker cannot lose his
double or give up his identity, and thus he is "unpaganlike". He does
not lose the consciousness of seeing part of himself as a "foolstruck
Adam." Before even "the genius of this place" which is his woman,
he must save some part of himself and keep it apart for the poem and
the woman are made from his ribs and thus are contained and yet
separate from him. This creative tension is a balance that must be
maintained, otherwise the destruction of the poet figure ensues.
And that sense of destruction informs the title of the next book of
poems in this phase.

The epigraph to The Bull Calf and Other Poems strikes an
affirmative note, and contains the tension of Layton's dialectical
vision (also expressed in the epigraph to the companion volume, Music
on a Kazoo):
Praise is the Practice of Art.  
The outward ceremony is Antichrist.  
William Blake.

The tender tone of the last stanza of the title poem, "The Bull Calf," calls to mind the poem, "For My Detractors," in The Blue Propeller:

I have that more space  
for myself, and for quiet,  
and for the poems  
which I gather  
with a tenderness  
you could never  
imagine or intuit.

In "The Bull Calf," "The black knot of men" cannot imagine or intuit the mood and feeling of the speaker at the spectacle and scene of the bull calf's death. Though young and hardly able to stand, the bull calf impresses "with his pride," and "with the promise of sovereignty" in his demeanor. For "He was too young for all that pride," and his strength and majesty would be usurped by the death he would be dealt with by the men who decided he was expendable. The speaker describes each movement of the bull calf's dying after he had been struck. There is no sentimentality but clear description in a sequence and empathy that it seems as if the calf were an extension of the speaker. The pivot of the poem lies in the last few lines:

Settled, the bull calf lay as if asleep,  
one foreleg over the other,  
bereft of pride and so beautiful now,  
without movement, perfectly still in the cool pit,  
I turned away and wept.  

"Bereft of pride," the dead bull calf becomes beautiful, transformed from the aggressiveness of life to the passivity of death. That beauty, "without movement," makes the poet turn away and weep. He weeps not only at the loss, but in the fact that the bull calf's deathly beauty
is possible only at the expense of life—and that insight leads him into paradoxical weeping—a weeping from a sense of beauty and a weeping from a sense of loss, and both go hand in hand.

The poem may be read then as a parable about the inhumanity of man, and his destruction of the "sovereignty" of life and the male principle represented in the young bull calf. That kind of sovereignty and aristocracy is not needed in the modern world and is expendable for there is "No money in bull calves," while the Church and official bourgeois Western culture can only snuffle "pathetically at the windless day" in a modern sceptical world. Yet the bull calf may be the embodiment of the poem, and the poem, "The Bull Calf", a parable of the creative process. For if the poet weeps at the close, he is weeping because beauty and death intersect. The poet madman in "The Birth of Tragedy," "never far from tears", lay "like a slain thing / under the green air the trees / inhabit..."

Part of the poet that had to die in order to create the poem to becomes "like a slain thing," like a bull calf, for that matter. The poet weeps at the sight of the poem that represents something beautiful, and at the same time, the poet's loss.

The title of this book does not indicate that the title poem may be read as a lead and unifying poem to the collection. For it is a collection as the poet meant it, "The Bull Calf and Other Poems," and the other poems do not suggest the same pattern of theme or forms. In effect, the epigraph suggests that Layton was stressing the celebration. After the "fever" and the "cold green," the poet embraces his new synthesis: praise is the practice of art. When
he celebrates he sings also of "the female element" (Thoughts in the Water"); and when he does "the antinomies for a moment balance / and all excesses cancelled out" ("Sutherland: Portrait of A.C."). The vision now holds the poet and the woman in balance, though they are held in the tragic perspective that the theme of the title poem suggests.

Water, "The Cold Green Element," becomes multi-faceted in "Thoughts in the Water," in which the poet speaker has become a swimmer again. The first thoughts that come to mind for the speaker are...

Not of drowning. But of the female element that swaddles my limbs thrashing.
   I roll, a careless animal,
   in the green ointment;
   face down, my forehead bringing intelligence into this featureless waste.

He can be "made one/ with the waves' enterprise," and the river can become "an Asian goddess," almost a mother water goddess "who slides her fat cheeks over my elbows, / her green buttocks." Yet though he is embraced and contained by the element, he must separate himself:

I fall from her clasp, shuddering, a senseless interloper, afraid;
   see I shall rise on the water drowned, and dismally rise;
   remember the face of my child, Adrian on the hill
   and all his hens that were laying like mad.

Like the swimmer in the early poem, he ends up having to "rise on the water," for he cannot completely remain in that element. And like the swimmer in the cold green element, his submersion can lead to a drowning, to a loss. But in this poem the poet rises "dismally," for he does so in the face of the overwhelming fertility that the water suggests itself for him. He is reminded of his fertility, his own child, and of
the hens on the hill who embody the overwhelming, almost Asian indiscriminate procreativeness of nature and of the female element. In such an element, the poet must define himself and separate himself lest he be swallowed up whole. Otherwise he may become like the technological disemobdied phallic symbol, "a seaplane" that has "plunged his ruinous shadow / like a sword through her coiling body." The poet at first was "a careless animal," but through the process of identifications discovers in the sexual climax of his revelation that he must ultimately remain "a senseless interloper, afraid," that he must make raids on the female element; otherwise "the green ointment" will change from being a salve, a balm. It will swallow his "intelligence," and make him disappear into "this featureless waste." The masculine poetic intelligence cannot totally give himself up to nature, otherwise he loses that masculine assertion and thrust which allow him to shape nature into poetry.

Other forms of life may also be sacrificed for art. In "Chokecherries," "the leaves' sacrifice," allows for the berries to grow, for them to be "The sun's gift."

I think of them, the leaves, as hoplites or as anything ingloriously useful, suffering, dying...

They are sacrificed for the chokecherries, "clusters of red jewels," for "perfection of form" ("Red Chokecherries"). The poet is not always threatened by the female element. If she appears in the shape of the woman, he can praise her and join with her in the "Sacrament by the Water."
How shall I sing the accomplished waters
Whose teeming cells make green my hopes
How shall the Sun at daybreak marry us
Twirling these waters like a hoop.

There is unity. By the water, cycles complete themselves: the "teeming cells" give the speaker a sense of life, and the larger cell of the sun will marry the pair bringing the multiplicities of the waters to a hoop. The cyclical images lead up to the final image of the poem and suggest the embrace of the opposites in the imagery of the second stanza.

Gift of the waters that sing
Their eternal passion for the sky,
Your exact beauty in a wave of tumult
Drops an Eden about your thighs.

Eden arrives when sky and water embrace, and Eden lies in the garden of the body. The marriage of the elements, and the marriage of the woman and the poet having been consecrated, all give voice to celebration:

Green is the singing singing water
And green is every joyous leaf
White myrtle's in your hand and in the other
The hairy apple bringing life.

The phallic "hairy apple" uprears itself as the last image of this book, and as another correlative for "the bull calf."

The female element as water and woman connects about half the poems in the book. But it is a twofold vision. Paired with "Sacrament by the Water," is "The Dark Nest," which reveals the ambiguous nature of woman and sex. The woman's tongue, "a red root," caresses the poet speaker's in a tongue kiss. And it is almost phallic in the way that "bright member twined / Once about my mind." In the poet's mind, "that dark nest," that tongue, root of speech and sex, becomes "A dark bisected poet." The poet's mind becomes a mental vagina in which the
woman's tongue reaches down where "Impurity's duff / For strength, guilts engender." The woman plucks from the poet's face and reveals "Shiny on its nib / Hell's puerperal bead." That bead is the opposite of "the hairy apple bringing life." From the guilts that have been engendered, a hellchild, so to speak, has been born; and it is the woman's aggressive, almost masculine action that has borne this in its wake.

In "Letter from a Straw Man," the speaker writes to his loved one, Bobbo, whose betrayal has consisted in giving away the straw man's straw and substance to everyone, and revealing his weakness to all. The woman has a perverse pleasure in picking at the man's weakness:

I love you, Bobbo, even when you knuckled me And pulled the straw out of my breast, Pretending to weep yet secretly glad to note How yellow and summer-dry the stuff was....

But why did you give great handfuls To the visiting firemen? And when the mayor Asked for some to decorate his fireplace, Why did you not refuse? No, rather, Plunging your green delicate fingers Into my gaping breast you drew Out for him the longest stalk Which he snatched with a cough and a compelling eye.

In that last stanza the action is similar to the image in the closing stanza of "The Dark Nest." The woman has taken what she has intimately known of the man and freely let everyone else know of it, and let everyone else in on the man's secrets and weakness. From Bobbo, the speaker has gone on to another:

Who wears black panties and is as crazy as the birds; But when the straw comes away in her hands She is careful to burn it immediately afterwards.
This new woman channels her perversity into the blackness of "panties," and is simple and sexy. When she gets the straw, it is sexual and "comes away in her hands," and she is also careful to take it only for herself and not indiscriminately dispose of it to whomever wants it.

The women the speakers in these poems can come near are those who can be married "by the water." "Undine," water nymph, contains within her all the wetness of nature and sex; and she can possess the poet with her body that--

So possessed, so broken's my entire self  
No rosy whipcord, love, can bind my halves  
When queen you squat; you moisten  
My parched nipples into a blazing garden.

And I your paramour-Paracelsus  
Fish a soul for you from between my loins;  
You shudder in my embrace  
And all your wetness takes the form of tears.

The tears are joyous and orgasmic. Marilyn Monroe becomes a water goddess, rather than the "Earth Goddess" she is referred to in the title of the poem to her:

I adore you, Marilyn,  
You teach sex is no sin  
Nor that anguishing fire  
To which the saints aspire...

Bounce me like the ocean  
On each surprising limb;  
Then let your kisses fall  
Like summer rain on all;  
Teach us the happiness,  
The carnal blessedness,  
The warmth, love, sanity  
Of your redeeming energy:  
Blest of women, earth goddess,  
Teach us to delight and praise.
But if there are water nymphs and earth goddesses, there are still "Rose Lemays":

Poor ignorant lass whom evil priests like incubi from a foetid ditch have sucked dry and left your very nipples mis-shaped, and black as the hat of a witch.

Sexuality is sacramental, but sensual, as well. Most human beings "are degenerate / or senseless," and "saints" are few. Thus, the speaker in the Roman "The Way of the World," speaks to his friend, Lygdamus, and sees only the erotic as that final activity one turns to in the face of human degeneracy and senselessness:

Therefore give me only lovers.  
Come, my latest: one, sloe-eyed, your firm breasts whirling like astonished globes before my eyes cross-eyed with lust; though my legs are bandy the heart's stout and this provocative member smooth and unwrinkled. Till the morning parts us, I'll lie beside you your nipple at my tired mouth and one hand of mine on your black curling fleece.

But water, as the female element, is not always the source for sacrament or praise. It also contains the deaths by drowning, and the element that can swallow up and consume life as well as being the source of life. It is "this neutral water" in "One View of Dead Fish," where the dead rotting fish

...mattered to no one nor the white of its decomposing beauty.

Ludicrous its solemnity on the throbbing water.
For it is as if it were one of the inglorious "hoplites," the sacrificed leaves in "Chokecherries." But this fish does not bear any meaning in its death—it has been swallowed by the neutrality of death, decomposing back into the element that gave it life.

Yet the larger sun, symbol of the life force, takes on a larger significance, being the fire force, opposite to the element of water. In "Boys Bathing," the outdoor scene—as the backdrop of most of these poems—shifts to the dusk with boys swimming in the approaching dark, and each symbolic:

each as the philosophers would remind us
a compendium of history.

The boys are alive as human life is meaningful. "The dead bass," the speaker sees, has no "history" or significance until the speaker's "eye" or human awareness notices it. Of the two boys, one "bounces like a porpoise," and if full of "squeals, unselfconsciousness," much like the fish. The other is a prototype for the poet, for narcissus-like he "smiles at himself vaguely" in the water, and in his imaginings anthropomorphizes or sees inert inorganic nature "below the surface, the boulders / breathing like fish." However, the adult poet speaker notes that:

The sun is bleeding to death,
covering the lake
with its luxuriant blood:
the sun is dying on their shoulders.

It is dying as the boys, swimmers themselves in the play of water, have begun to foray into that element. The sun's death marks its abdication in favour of these boy swimmers, youthful poets. The sun's death, significantly, is by the loss of the vital fluid—a death by water. The cyclical pattern of the dialectical vision informs the
imagery as well.

But in "Halos at Lac Marie Louise," the landscape contains the imminence of evil and death. The crows, birds of death, flying in their formation become "Like a black plume" in the sky. One, like "a detached feather," falls upon a dead tree, which is like a "white skeleton." The other crows fly down, "and around the singular crow /
The stark crows whirled." The crows may be anticipating the rain that soon falls "on the circling hills." All is cyclical, and the rain falls as "thick gouts," which in turn become "like melting skulls." From the sky, from the encircling hills, the focus has closed in upon the boat, that falling with the waves, disappears "Into a still opening." And then, "The halo of green hills became / A black pronged ring." The boat that was able to swim and stay above the elements sinks into a death and submersion of its own. And it is then that evil becomes triumphant in the landscape, and the sign of the devil uprears itself like an emblem. Death is the only event which breaks the halos of the landscape, the cycles and unities of birds, hills and encircled lake. And water is the element that brings on the disruption, which in turn leads to the drowning in that self-same element. In this deathly landscape there is no human and no swimmer save the boat, the artifact of human construction, extension of man's ability to swim in the element. The imagery holds together by the correspondence of the pattern of the circle. And that pattern in the imagery, in turn, finds a unity in the symbolic associations of water and nature. And when death comes, it does so accompanied by a storm, but in itself it is a "still opening," the channel which opens
up from these halos or encirclements. And when the cycles of nature are
destroyed—by the upthrusting dead tree, the plume of the bird formation—
evil can raise its triumphant sign. These, then, are "halos" for the poems;
these are the extraordinary illuminations of the landscape and nature.

There has been a development and progression in the use of
the landscape from the poems of *In the Midst of My Fever* and *The Cold
Green Element* to this book. In the former book, there was a tension
between the poet's state of mind and vision. In the midst of his creative
ferment he chose to see himself in terms of history and the dialectics
of the opposites. But it was his fever as the central subject which
preoccupied him. In the second book, as in the title poem and in
"The Improved Binoculars," the focus shifted from the preoccupation
of his subjective world being the objective world. He swam again in
that cold green element, and his subjective world began to interact
with larger forces outside of himself, in the phenomenon of history,
nature, and myth. In the third book, the objective world in such poems
as "The Bull Calf," and "Halos at Lac Marie Louise," leads into the
apprehensions of vision. The poet is not absent. He is there as
the ubiquitous speaker or poetic intelligence, yet looks around and
finds meanings, statements and symbolic patterns in others, in the
landscape. The world then is not totally contained in him, for as
in "Thoughts in the Water," the poet figure is something of an
"interloper." The scheme of things does not fit totally into him
and into his tensions. He is a protagonist in a larger backdrop.
And this progression lends a wider scope to the themes of the poems.
The themes are not novel. They grow out of the poet's earlier
pre-occupations, but his focus has widened to include a larger, more complex and multifaceted vision. This measure of growth finds its expression in such poems as "The Fertile Muck," "Boardwalk at Verdun," and "Spikes." And the metaphor of the creative process in the first book, the metaphor of the poet in the second, are encompassed in the metaphor of the water in this book.

From the boardwalk, the water is seen as a passage symbolizing the flux and expanse of reality, in "Boardwalk at Verdun." The various journey into reality and across it (not drowning in it) are suggested by the movements of birds, diver, citizens, gull, and insects. Who do each of these represent, and what do they symbolize? At the head of the list are the "Birds" who can "fly far out / over the water; and return." They may not know where they have been, in the sense that human beings have a consciousness of significance. They are the unselfconscious "O Immortals," gods without the pain and knowledge of being human. They are neutral, and they end up perching "on discoloured rails." A diver appears next, a prototype "of the Nietzschean Ubermensch." He is "like a god," for he is the swimmer again, demiurge, poet, who becomes "an exotic water flower" upon the water in his shape and poise, and then with courage and super human power "plunges knifelike to sever his roots." He can become one with the water, with reality, with the fecund element, but he has the strength to separate himself, and become a god by severing his roots. The mass of the population "seat themselves in the ferry," and employ what technology and culture offer them to cross the deep. But they are essentially "faithless," and do not
really have deep seated myths. They can but "invent new grimaces," new attitudes, "for the water's stretch." They are "hot" in the summer's heart, and they are uncomfortable going across the water and are ill-at-ease in living. But set against them is the gull, prototype for the artist. The gull "gives form and arrangement," and curves "solitary in the grey distance." Art in the shape of the gull's flying "arcs" is but the form of "unstable parentheses, / holding a waste of air."

Motion and pattern preoccupy this artist figure; but meaning and content are not supplied. Finally the lowest, microcosmic forms of life, Myriads of insects," are merely the embodiments of the fecundity of life forms. "A white swarm, a milk of wings." The speaker addresses himself to the "World," and in the final two lines encapsulates what he has seen from the boardwalk: "World, you are a brilliant madman / and these your fevered notions." The world has become the larger creative spirit, whose manifestations, in the forms of the protagonists of the poem, reveal the poetic vision of its own self. The world is a brilliant madman, recalling the "quiet madman" of "The Birth of Tragedy," and the fevered notions recall the strophes of "In the Midst of My Fever." All these fevered notions which the world projects are forms of life, and modes of passage. The world contains them all, as the poem, in each of these stanzas, contains the poetic statements Layton has made in the various kinds of poems in these three books. All these perspectives or angles of vision—the Nietzschean artist, the discomforted citizens, the flying gull, the insect swarm—have correspondences in the subjects of these poems. And Layton provides yet another self-image as "a brilliant madman" with his own "fevered
notions" and poems, coming around almost full circle from "In the Midst of My Fever."

In "The Fertile Muck," the poet speaker is a "fabulist," recalling fabulous and fable. He gives "significance / or what other legends" to reality, the fertile muck from which his poems and fables arise. This poem declares that unity of purpose which combines the two themes of eros and poetry, or love and imagination which have preoccupied Layton in these books:

How to dominate reality? Love is one way; imagination another. Sit here beside me, sweet; take my hard hand in yours. We'll mark the butterflies disappearing over the hedge with tiny wristwatches on their wings: our fingers touching the earth, like two Buddhas.

The poet and the woman can sit together, join together: love and imagination can mutually co-exist in meditation and contact "like two Buddhas." The antinomies meet and are joined as time and reality passes by them in the flux and pattern that have been signified and made into signs--into the surrealistic butterflies. This last stanza is an apt figure for Layton's articulated vision at this phase of his writing.

To have reached this satori, he has had to suffer the spikes of the "City," the spikes that have bruised him in experiences.

I've advanced upon you, City, from different stations: poverty, the humiliation of sex, my first marriage; one day in winter I vaulted over my father's grave to detain his retreating shadow--somebody plucked the jacinths from my stiff fingers!

Now your catholic gaze blinded by too many lights, or like a magnifico averting his face
from the bent petitioner
you've showered me, City, with lore sagacity
divers ingenious friends. Even my darling
hangs from my neck, estranged, without understanding me.

And my son, fronting the calendar
with the level glance of a gardener's
plucks days unwrinkling on his open palm.
Is it, O City,
sullen and arbitrary,
because I, his forerunner, was bruised by spikes,
the spikes of flowers;
or that so often with white face I have wept
in your great empty pall-black squares?

The speaker had to go through his own stations of his crucifixion
in order to progress beyond them, to grow into the "fabulist,"
capable of praise and celebration yet he turns away and weeps when
death and beauty intersect as in "The Bull Calf." Suffering and
experience are the "Spikes" that transform the poet into the
"brilliant madman" with his "fevered notions." But the antimonies
meet and are balanced in the embrace of love and imagination.

Layton's formal signature on his poems are apparent in his
revision of "Enemies," and in "The Cold Green Element." On the page,
his stanzaic patterns are indelibly his own. "The Fertile Muck,"
"Boardwalk at Verdun," "Undine," and "Halos at Lac Marie Louise,"
are shaped into the indented stanzas and quatrains which he had
developed from "Love the Conqueror Worm." The indented lines are
in keeping with the dialectical flow of the imagery, and the
usual correspondences that make those images resonate against each
other. The pattern in these poems correspond to the basic shape
suggested by the imagery; as the circle in "Halos at Lac Marie Louise,"
and the arc between two points of another circle in "Boardwalk at Verdun." What has not been examined or noted in Layton's work has been the devices of sound that he has employed in the service of his corresponding imagery and the shaping patterns of the imagery. In the early poem, "Newsboy," the end rhymes are arranged in the almost inconspicuous pattern of abcdabcd. In another early poem, "Compliments of the Season," rhymes are scattered at the end of the lines, and half-rhymes and vowel tone leading are random but still set up an organic shifting correspondence between sound and meaning and imagery. In "Halos at Lac Marie Louise," the end rhymes are all half-rhymes or tone leading between syllables: stir, came, sky, plume; feather, stranded, tree, dead; skeleton, gnarled, crow, whirled; rain, hills, oars, skulls; waves, opening, became, ring. These end words alternate between nouns and verbs, and contribute subtly to the dialectical pattern in the imagery, and in the movement of the imagery between action and actualities. These may be taken for granted, yet they are examples of a similar craftsmanship at work in the major poems of this phase. This is also a mature development of what was apparent and incipient in the early poems of the two books of the forties. These are not technical innovations, for as Layton's letter to Corman declared, technique (imagery and rhythm) must be used organically. These poems come into shape in the "rhythmic pattern of visual images", a rhythm of images whose pace and accents are dictated particularly in each poem.

Another predominant form for the poems on the page is that of "On Seeing the Statuettes of Ezekiel and Jeremiah in the Church
of Notre Dame" and "The Way of the World." These are staggered poems with indented lines whose caesuras can lead to a drop to a new line or enjambments in the middle of the line. This pattern suits poems in which the poet speaker is addressing some person close to himself, and helps to provide a notation for the speaking voice:

They have given you French names
and made you captive, my rugged
troublesome compatriots;
your splendid beards, here, are epicene,
plaster white
and your angers
unclothed with Palestinian hills quite lost
in this immense and ugly edifice.
("On Seeing the Statuettes....")

And finally in such poems as "The Bull Calf," "Fiat Lux," and "After the Chinese," the lines are not indented at all. Each stanza is like a block of sound and meaning. In these poems the perceptions move not with asides or shifts of tone or voice. The movement of these poems is different than that of the above two forms:

The dull metallic click he heard
was like a small bone that had snapped
perhaps in his skull
or somewhere below his perspiring neck;
and though the room, reeling with vertigo, filled
with a salt light that all but blinded him,
God has yet not struck or killed.
("Fiat Lux")

The lines of the poems in The Bull Calf are longer than in the two previous books. And as the poems have demonstrated, Layton's own poetic line reveals an extension and elaboration of his visual imagination with a growing maturity of vision. These developments cannot but fail to reveal themselves in the detail of the poems -- in the lines, in the patterns of imagery, in the correspondence of
sound—where the practice is most apparent at that basic and particular level.

The more complex poems—meditations or surreal landscapes—are usually composed in the indented set stanzaic forms as "The Birth of Tragedy," "The Cold Green Element," and "Thoughts in the Water." The quatrains in poems like "Sacrament by the Water" are a more set version of these stanzaic forms, and are usually the sign of serious and complex poems resonating with a landscape of symbols. Thus it may have been no surprise that Layton titled his second "selected poems," The Improved Binoculars. It bespeaks not only a focused vision, but an instrument of poetic vision that indeed has been "improved." To improve it, Layton needed to recapitulate. His favourite method was to reselect the body of his work as if a new arrangement and publication order would strengthen his achievement and suggest and point to new directions. The book is an instrument with which to order the intent and scope of his poetry, and arrange the poems in a significant order. As such, these various selections indicate Layton's own measure of his work, and indicate his artistic intentions. They were also means for reshaping his own self-image as poet, and the device of the persona of the poet figure.
NOTES

1Eli Mandel, p. 25.


3Ezra Pound, quoted in Karl Shapiro, p. 105.
CHAPTER VI

The Red Carpet: the Late Fifties

In 1956 Layton's second "selected poems" was published by Jonathan Williams in the United States. The Improved Binoculars contained eighty-seven poems selected by the poet from his previous eleven collections, and also contained an "Introduction" by William Carlos Williams. Williams was aware of Layton's work well before this book was being prepared. In a letter to Raymond Souster on June 28, 1952, the American poet had reservations about Layton:

I had a letter from Louis Dudek along with which he sent me a copy, the current copy of Cerberus. He is a tremendously competent poet, his verses make enjoyable reading....I read Irving Layton but, try as I may, it doesn't come off. Maybe the age is at fault. But somehow when I read you I am moved. I am moved by your subject matter and I am moved by the way that has induced you to conform to it as the very fountain head of your heart.

It is the way that the man speaks that we wait for. A poet does not talk about what is in him, he talks a double language, it is the presence in him that speaks. It is his possession by that presence that speaks. For the moment he is lost in that identity. And each age is marked by the presences that possess it as its poets are seized by them also, in the flesh, strut about among us unknown. Poor powerless ghosts, their only life is that which they gain from the poets who lend them a life now and then.

We identify ourselves today by our technique, unaffected, with those presences [sic] which live defeated about us. For, to what we may [sic] it is a technique which we have to understand and to master[.] Try to broaden the treatment of the line. You have to know what a line is, what it has to include, when to expand, when to move rapidly, trippingly and when to .plod heavily along. I was happy to see you refer to Olson. But never forget that you are definitely you....
The criticism of Layton's performance in *Cerberus* is implicit in Williams' praise of Souster's poetry. The tone of Layton's poems in that book put off the older American poet. Many of the poems were satirical, and others like "Rembrandt" were composed in a traditional stanzaic form. Besides, Layton's overt rhetorical voice did not conform to Williams' "treatment of the line," and his search for an "American idiom." And the "presences" in Layton's poems did not spring from the same sources as Williams' or Souster's verse. Layton was not merely content with writing about what he saw in the here and now. As in "The Poetic Process," his 'ars poetica' included transfiguring reality by means of metaphoric language and symbols.

But within three years Williams' attitudes changed. The course of this change is revealed in a number of letters to be found in the Layton papers collected in the Murray Memorial Library, University of Saskatchewan. On January 14, 1955, Williams wrote to Layton a propos, probably, of *In The Midst of My Fever* published by Robert Creeley's The Divers Press in 1954:

> You have opened up the whole northern sky for us! Your abandon, without restraint, to printed pages amounts to genius! Keep it up, and never fear though our schools of poetry may differ, nuts to that. We learn from each other, I am much in debt to you.

Williams' openness and generosity of spirit is apparent in his change of heart. Poems such as "The Birth of Tragedy," "Seven O'Clock Lecture," and "In the Midst of My Fever," revealed a mature fruition of Layton's talent.
In the last three letters, Williams focuses on Layton's technical resources, and criticizes them from the point of view of his own ideas. On March 21, 1956 he directed the following letter to Layton; and it was at the same time that he was writing his "Introduction" to The Improved Binoculars.

In this letter I'm going to give you hell. I'll be brief. You have one of the major talents of the age, I only wish I I [sic]were half as good, but you spoil many of your poems, more than half of them by your perfectly horrible inversions of the normal phrase. Get over it. You must go over all your poems with the keenest eye you can muster, with a view to eliminating every one of such poems that you cannot alter to read more normally. It goes without saying that in some of them you will fail. Cut them from your mind and forget them.

P.S. It is nothing more than a bad habit that you have acquired from your studies of past verse. Forget it. Stick to the contours of the modern idiom.

In "A Note on Layton," which serves as the introduction to The Improved Binoculars, Williams' extravagant praise of Layton is balanced by the same reservations he had expressed to the poet in his letters. When he describes the figure of the poet, he uncannily has employed Layton's own projection of the poet as swimmer, as one who rises above the element, and makes poetry out of his engagement with it:

When I first clapped eyes on the poems of Irving Layton, two years ago, I let out a yell of joy. He was bawdy but that wasn't why I gave him my recognition. But for the way he greeted the world he was celebrating, head up, eyes propped wide, his gaze roving round a wide perimeter—which merely happened to see some sights that had never been disclosed to me so nakedly or so well. In writing of a good new poet for the first time the words come crowding to my mind, jostling together in their
eagerness to be put down: He inhabits the medium and is at home in it, passionately; luxurious freedom, as of a huge creature immersed in an ocean that he knows he will never plumb and never fear to reach the bottom of. This is poetry in which he lives unchecked.... He has an unrivaled choice of words; an unusual vocabulary and the ability to use it. As far as deftness in the craft of a poet, I think he can do anything he wants to—except confuse himself with the mere sound of his own mouthings or delicate mincing or weighty sounding apostrophies.... He uses as much slang as suits his fancy or his need, and no more. He is not bound by the twentieth century if he does not find its language fitting to his purpose, and defies anyone who would bind him to that use. His structure of the poetic phrase is eclectic; that is to say, he does what he pleases with it, and there he possibly goes wrong. But what difference does it make, if he writes well? He has a quick and dogged wit which does not shun to soil its hands; in other words, he can be downright dirty if the occasion calls for it.... There will, if I am not mistaken, be a battle: Layton against the rest of the world. With his vigor and abilities who shall not say that Canada will not have produced one of the west's most famous poets?

Williams focuses his objections in a letter on December 3, 1958. The letter probably grew out of an exchange between both poets, one in which Layton probably objected to Williams' sole growing concern with the sound of poetry, the conforming of poetry to the natural voice of the poet, and to the "variable foot," Williams' own measure practised by him in his later work:

I have my reasons for writing as I have for the last 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 8 or more years. And a man and his theories are hard to part. You may side with Ciardi but I think you are all wrong [sic]. You are conventional save in the subjects of your poems. More power to you but the future of the art belongs to me. I love you but I don't approve of the way your poems are made.

It is in the making that the differences arise. Williams' ear was attuned to the poetry—that was his first sense. Layton's eye was his
first sense, and Williams was quick to notice "his gaze roving round a wide perimeter." Besides, Williams' concerns grew out of his particularist American bias. He acknowledged Layton's eclecticism when it came to the forms and patterns of Layton's poems on the page, but he failed to go one step further and articulate the insight that Layton's innovations and technical strength lay in his visual imagination, and with his growing and complex vision and themes. Williams is erroneous in his statement on the conventionality of Layton's poetry. Layton's treatment of the "subjects" of his verse are not conventional in such poems as "The Cold Green Element."

In the latter poem, the verse may be patterned on the page, yet the poem's visual and surrealistic techniques demonstrate that Layton was in the vanguard of North American poetry, before the Beatniks and such poets as Robert Bly began to compose in the light of the developments in poetry and art which began with Dadaism and Surrealism in the second and subsequent decades of the century.

The last letter in this collection is dated February 19, 1960. Williams had received a copy of an article written about Layton in the *Star Weekly Magazine*, and it was one of the articles written about the poet after *A Red Carpet for the Sun* had appeared with much acclaim. In this letter, Williams is commenting on the later poems of that book—poems which first appeared in the two editions of *A Laughter in the Mind* (1958, 1959).

I'm particularly thrilled to see how your verse has improved during the last 2 years, the form of it I mean. You have broken away from a too slavish adherence to the stanzaic form at the same time adhering to a minimal of regularity, not completely breaking down to a formlessness [sic] as has happened with some of our so called "beatnics."
The "stanzaic form" Layton was supposedly slavishly adhering to was a natural form for the poet's poems, and especially those poems written between 1953 and 1956. They were the means to create some shaping form and pattern to those poems. And if on examination the poems of the selected poems of 1956 and 1957 do not exhibit the preponderance of one or another of Layton's stanzaic forms, they demonstrate how he used all of them for the necessary and inevitable organic effects. What Williams was trying to impose on Layton was the looser and easier poetic temperament that was his own. In this course, he does provide a useful perspective on Layton's practice; and it is a perspective others have followed with, namely, a criticism of Layton's imposing will to organize and pattern his poems in forms that become recognizable, and hence, characteristic of the poet. These characteristics suggest a too rigid practice at times—a practice that is in keeping with Layton's rage for order and significance. For that is the nature of his poetic temperament: to form and to crystallize.

The real measure of his growth and practice, however, lies not only in what Williams chose to note. Dudek, for example, constantly harped on the inversions in Layton's poems. These are allied to the archaic syntactical practices of Klein, which Miriam Waddington in her book on the latter poet, fails to adequately deal with in her discussion of archaism in that poet's work.¹ Waddington discusses all but the inversions and the arachic syntax of some of Klein's poems. In Klein's case it is true that "Deviation from conventional uses of language, whether syntactical or otherwise, is never just ornamental...."² There is either a stylistic or a thematic reason for
such usage. In Layton's case however it is incidental. Layton's own speaking voice in the poems employs inversions, often because the rhetorical nature of the voice can easily assume such a posture. In some ways, these inversions may find their source in the Jewish Canadian speech patterns which may have molded Layton's own emphatic use of language. In Klein's poetry this takes a more varied and exceptional form. Layton's inversions, more a habit of writing and speech, are used particularly for emphasis.

The first edition of The Improved Binoculars opens with "The Birth of Tragedy," and it is given a focal place in Layton's body of work at this point. In January 1963 in a reading the poet gave in Ottawa he singled out this poem with the following introduction: "...It does express my philosophy of living, in so far as I have one." The closing poem is "The Improved Binoculars." In the second edition published the next year, the poet added thirty poems including, "Black, Black," "Anti-Romantic," "Obit," and "The Windows." These four poems were later collected in Layton's next volume, A Laughter in the Mind which also appeared in two editions. Two of these four poems, the first and the last, appear in the first edition of the new volume, and the other two are included in the second edition. Thus the two collections and their two editions curiously overlap.

The first edition of A Laughter in the Mind appeared in 1958 from Jonathan Williams, as well, and Layton's American audience was growing. The two editions of The Improved Binoculars proved exceptional because of Williams' introduction, yet the arrangement of the poems do not provide a very novel perspective on Layton, simply
because many of the shorter poems from the three satirical books are not included, and the bulk of the selection consists of Layton's more ambitious and significant poems, for which "The Birth of Tragedy" sets the tone. Rather it is a selection which includes his more substantial poems, and places "The Birth of Tragedy" as the opening poem as if to underline the central creative tension of this phase and to emphasize the level of achievement Layton had reached in the last volumes. The revelation comes in Layton's choice of a title for this volume of selected poems and the confession of his own growth reflected in his choice. And since the poems of The Improved Binoculars and A Laughter in the Mind interlap, it suggests how the former provided him with the assurance of continuity and achievement.

The first edition of A Laughter in the Mind consists of thirty-four poems. Layton had reached a degree of assurance that he was fully aware of for he comments on the book-jacket, "If I'm not mistaken the book is my best to date. There are more than a dozen beast-type sockdolagers included...." The assurance is also reflected in the declaration and bravado of the epigraph from Thus Spake Zarathustra: "Cast but your pure eyes into the well of my delight, my friends! How could it become turbid thereby! It laughs back at you with its purity." The title finds its source in the poem, "Parting," in which the poet addresses and speaks to his wife after their inevitable separation and parting:

What's the use if we should walk
Arm-about-the-waist and talk
Our married foolish hearts out;
Nor you rage, nor I shout
Out of grief, vexation
For the dusty road taken,
And that wound that's worst of all
Because unintelligible—
The passionate will to hurt...

The laughter in the mind is the affirmation which still can spring
after necessary destruction and parting—the affirmation of choosing
to change, even painfully, for growth and life:

Enough to know the human
As a mixed constitution
Imploring and fallible,
Choosing and despising ill;
Enough that we two can find
A laughter in the mind
For the interlocking grass
The winds part as they pass;
Or fallen on each other,
Leaf and uprooted flower.

The creative laughter in Layton's poetry moves through all the "interlocking" forms and themes of the poetry of the six books of the middle fifties, and selected in The Improved Binoculars. A Laughter in the Mind is the culmination of these phases. And its poems are a compendium of the themes and forms that were growing and coming to fruition.
The book is a redefinition and re-expression of his major concerns, but with added power and assurance so that he begins again opening a new cycle of growth with an ever widening reach.

In the opening poem, "Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom,"
Layton provides a map which prefigures the other poems of this collection. It is another major statement by him on poetry, the poet, and death. All the elements of the poem are introduced in the first stanza: the declarative definition of poetry, the landscape and the setting, and the poets.
Whatever else poetry is freedom.
Forget the rhetoric, the trick of lying
All poets pick up sooner or later. From the river,
Rising like the thin voice of gray castratos—the mist;
Poplars and pines grow straight but oaks are gnarled;
Old codgers must speak of death, boys break windows;
Women lie honestly by their men at last.

The poem begins with the declaration, yet in the course of the poem that "freedom" will be explored. There is no freedom to lie for the mist of mortality rises "from the river." There are no men in this world but the poet, for the others are "castratos," "old codgers," "boys," and finally women. The men and the male principle are finally contained in the speaker poet who takes on a number of guises in the subsequent stanzas. The poet is the last male type in "a technological civilization that has rendered the male's creative role of revelation superfluous..." ("Foreword," A Red Carpet for the Sun). Masculinity is spirit, and the poet embodies all the other male facets in their highest form. From the "blackened eye" of the poet's woman, Kate, the poet makes "up an incredible musical scale."
The scale parallels the colours of the flesh, changing and healing. The artist's impulse is aggressive and thrives on suffering and pain; and on the interaction of the poet and his woman--in short, from experience which at first, may seem as insignificant and willful as the blackening of the "eye." The poet balances "on wooden stilts" and dances to his "incredible musical scale." It is not only a pattern but a measure and a judgment. But the clowning poet figure needs "Space for these stilts! More space or I fail!"

The "buffoon's head" of the poet demands a "crown". The poet balancing on the stilts is "no more fool...than King Canute." The
latter persona for the poet tried to hold back reality with his voice, and stop the tide from coming in to drown his courtiers. The king-jester who was on the stilts of his own entertainment:

...who scanned and scorned;
Who half-deceived, believed; and, poet, missed
The first white waves come nuzzling at his feet;
Then damned the courtiers and the foolish trial
With a most bewildering and unkingly jest.

But it is the mist, "the odour of mortality" that "lies inside one like a destiny." In itself, it provides its own rhetoric, like Canute's and like all the other guises of the poet. For by remaining in the poet, being part of him, lying inside him, it also "lies" and commits him to an engagement with the paradoxes of life and death, of poetry and freedom. In terms of the images and language of the poem the play on the word "lie" suggests the paradoxes that proliferate, and the shifting movement in syntax and imagery correspond to this balancing poet figure.

The poet has brought the "incredible musical scale" into being, a scale of the opposites or the antinomies. If poetry and the poet take up the first three stanzas, the following three stanzas take up the theme of the "mist," the "odour of mortality," and "Time."

The mist drives the poet to identify himself with a "huge toad," prostrate or lying on the road. And this toad is a correlative for the mortal amphibian swimmer, the poet who is being consumed by the "flames" of "Time." There is a shift in imagery to the mechanical in these latter stanzas, in which the poet finds mirrors and equivalents for the various deaths in the immediate modern world he finds himself in:
And Time flames like a paraffin stove
And what it burns are the minutes I live.
At certain middays I have watched the cars
Bring me from afar their windshield suns;
What lay to my hand were blue fenders,
The suns extinguished, the drivers wearing sunglasses.
And it made me think I had touched a hearse.

Life and death move together in a tension of opposites. Eli Mandel gives the most lucid interpretation to this recurring pattern.

His comprehension of the opposites is in terms of "the Dionysian-Apollonian tensions," and it is a view which comprehends Layton's polarities in terms of the poetic process as the source of this universal dialectic:

...the Dionysian-Apollonian tensions tend to be "projected" into all Layton's work; all other oppositions or tensions, however variously expressed, look like metaphors of this primary opposition. Layton works by way of polarities, sometimes holding them in suspension, frequently seeking to reconcile them in a complicated dialectic. The method borrows from Nietzsche, Heraclitus, Hegel, and Marx, but those sources provide footnotes, not insight. A unified imagination implies something more than profusion of detail and comprehensiveness of intellect. It assimilates everything to itself, repeating always the same story of birth and death. So it is with the polarities of Layton's poetry. The tension of male and female, literature and prophecy, father and mother, goddess and witch, eros and thanatos, love and hate, Hebrew and pagan, thought and instinct—all are versions of the god's birth, his death either in perfection or castration, his rebirth:

So whatever else poetry is freedom. Let
Far off the impatient cadences reveal
A padding for my breathless stilts. Swivel,
O hero, in the fleshy groves, skin and glycerine,
And sing of lust, the sun's accompanying shadow
Like a vampire's wing, the stillness in dead feet—
Your stave brings resurrection, O aggrieved king.
That final stanza was added to the first version of the poem which was published in the February 1958 issue of *The Canadian Forum*. The poem had ended with the repetition of the first line. Similar to the phases of Layton's development, the poem had to be completed with an added final, yet new assertion. The final stanza encapsulates the whole poem, and adds to it the recapitulating stilted poet whom poetry brings back to life. The "stilts" have become "breathless," both from too much activity and from the breathlessness of a kind of death. The poet has danced his way through the theme of mortality and death, but he himself has not been totally consumed. And until then the dance must resume, balancing between the opposites. And this balancing presents the real freedom—the freedom that redeems—for the poet has balanced his way through the themes of the poem, to return to where he began: for that is the only way he can go, the only dance that preoccupies him. There are still the "fleshy groves", and "the stillness of dead feet": feet of the poem's rhythm, feet of the poem that has been written, and the feet of those who have died. The king has put grief behind him, and his stave is the sexual ballast that allows him passage. In the end, then, the clown poet addresses his alter ego king. But it is the stilted poet who speaks and give direction to the king, the poet of the *polis* who may try to dominate reality with the real poet's vision.

While for Mandel these oppositions are contained in the Dionysian-Apollonian tension, the poem's title and declaration extend further into a vision of the human condition, in the terms that have grown from such poems as "The Swimmer," "Love the Conqueror Worm," "In
the Midst of My Fever," and "The Birth of Tragedy." As Layton himself states in two passages of his "Foreword" to A Red Carpet for the Sun:

Mercifully all poetry, in the final analysis, is about poetry itself; creating through its myriad forms a world in which the elements of reality are sundered; are, as it were, preserved for a time in suspension.... Art also finally crumbles and falls back into life as the water-lily's brightness crumbles into the pondscum that surrounds it....

Layton provides both perspectives on "Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom."

Both these statements do not negate each other, but are different angles on Layton's vision of life and poetry. They are the opposites in his dialectic view, and provide, each in its way, a different emphasis. The poetry and the poet comprehend both.

It is a mark of Layton's complexity that he expresses his dialectical complexity both in his poems, and in his own perspective of his poetry. The ability to contain this dialectical vision of poetry and reality leads Mandel, for example, to write the chapter in his book on Layton, "The Stilts of Poetry." The shifts of Layton's dialectical vision lure the critic in an attempt to define the poet's poetics and his image of the poet. The definition eludes Mandel, and he finally must come back to Layton's most lucid comments on his own poetry in the "Foreword" quoted above. There is a sense of resignation in Mandel's closing words to that chapter, a resignation which suggests that the poet eludes final categorizing:

At every point, Layton defines freedom by means of its opposite. The apocalypse of freedom, then, is the vision that includes everything, which could only mean the manifestation of a god. It is by no means easy to maintain vision at this pitch, nor to live by its lights, and even a greater poet than Layton might be excused if occasionally he nodded. One can stretch
oneself only so far—in agony or joy. The remarkable thing in Layton's poetry is surely not that he allows himself to lapse into easy versions of the need for including everything, but that, knowing there is no end, he continues to write. It would be easier to close the circle once and for all.\(^6\)

But the cycle must begin again, as the creative process must never complete itself.

Buffoon, clown, King Canute—all are guises for the poet figure. But death presents itself as the perfection of art in "Côte Des Neiges Cemetery," another poem written in about the same stanzaic pattern as "Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom:"

As if it were a faultless poem, the odour Is both sensuous and intellectual, And of faded onion peel its colour; For here the wasting mausoleums brawl With Time, heedless and mute; their voice Kept down, polite yet querulous— Assuredly courtesy must at last prevail.

If the opening poem of the book concerned itself with the poet, this poem concerns itself with the poem, the artifact of art. The cemetery contains the opposites: sensuous and intellectual, fade and colour, brawl and mute, mausoleums and Time. But death's "courtesy" at the end prevails. The irony lies in the etiquette that finished form or art presents. The "markings of the poor" and the vain statuary of the richer graves both find their final resting place here in this "Warner set / Unreal and two-dimensional, a facade..." The opposites suggest other pairs: the two classes of society, the two dimensions of art which is timeless. The cemetery as an expression of man's understanding and as a ironic mirror upon the human condition becomes "a formal scene," a kind of poem, "a kind of poetry." But it is a
"ghost city", finally, for those poor and rich, and birds and squirrels continue to "flit" and "dart," for they are alive but unconscious of the "formal scene" they are set in. Life feeds on death, and death itself has its own vitality. This is expressed in the paradoxes of "the drainage pipes inanimate and looped," which the viewer "may conceive as monstrous worms." The "undying paradox" also includes love, which has allowed the Chinese nuns to let their sensual lives die, as it were, for the love of Christ. And finally, family life itself and procreation do not present a unity in the face of death:

---and this, dear girl,
Is the family plot of Père Loisel and his wife
Whose jumbled loins in amorous sweat
Spawned these five neat graves in a semicircle.

Love creates life, and thereby death. But the circle does not complete itself though all are finally contained in the fully realized unity of the "faultless poem," death's perfect human expression. In the final poem of the cemetery the circle of life is not completed, for art contains the image of its own incompleteness.

Layton's cemetery and funeral poems provide a perspective of their own on the growth of the poet, from the early "Halifax Cemetery" published in 1940, the "Epitaphs" of Here and Now, "Love the Conqueror Worm," "Street Funeral," "Cemetery in August," "Death of Moishe Lazarovitch", "The Bull Calf," "One View of Dead Fish," to the later poems of the sixties in which Layton was to write of the cemeteries encountered in the course of his travels. But it is this poem in A Laughter in the Mind which is the epitome of the cemetery poems written to that date. Close to these poems, then, are such
poems on death and dying as the poem to his father, "The Bull Calf," and other poems on the various deaths of animals.

The animals abound in this book. The poet's bestiary includes widows who are "like gray spiders" in "The Widows," and the woman who is like "a turtle" in "Victory." Some animals in the course of the poems take on the significance of totems. Two sheep in their fold take on the characteristics of human types. In "Sheep," the portrait of the two animals skillfully anthropomorphizes the subjects, and Layton makes his statement on the common lot of human beings:

And there's also this: they're practical, prudent. Or they seem so, yet they also somehow contrive to appear gullible and vacant. Here again is that unsatisfactory, disdain-making quality: that of the half-and-half, the in-between....

But Christ, the whole world moves in on this fold. All, all, have become mixtures: alloys, neither pure tin nor gold.

The rooster in "Individualists" directly opposite to the type depicted in "Sheep," becomes a kind of Superman amongst the domestic animals:

It did my heart good to see it, like the white leghorn I watched crossing the wet field, small and arrogant, his comb a red taunt at the vicious weather --artillerist!

These two representations find their analogue in poems written to the poet's son, and in "Paging Mr. Superman."

In "Autumn Lines for My Son," the poet presents a testament:
Like a rag, an immense sleeve on which
Eternity wipes its nose— the crowds!

Inflamed imbeciles whom pleasure torments;
Soiled dust and bits of straw the wind
Pounds murderously against the walls of cities.

Turn from these. Turn, my son, from their hideous
Warts, their welts: fate keeps an especial whip
For them.

The speaker would "have poets / Hard as munition-makers, pitiless," and
his son a poet amongst them. In "Climbing," father and son are hiking
up a hill on a hike, and the son, "This poet, lover, frail Balboa,"
gets to the top before his father. The son becomes another figure
for the poet, though the subtle lesson does not escape the poet-
father who is concerned with the symbolic overtones of his son's
overtaking him. Perhaps, he, the father, in this instance, is too
"frail" a poet to caper "on his hill of sand!" as if he were an artillerist.

A gloss on "Paging Mr. Superman" is provided in the last
poem of the collection, "Poem for the Next Century:"

The saints and lovers are dead
And all is common as bread.
Now none believe in greatness,
The dwarfs possess the bridges.

In the narrative poem, the speaker makes the remarkable request.
Mr. Superman is both a Nietzschean and comic-book figure. These
two dimensions inform the tone and theme of the poem. For a moment
in the hotel lobby something remarkable happens, but it quickly
disappears in the ordinary marketplace world. And "the unusual name"
is finally "Lost under the carpet where it was found / The next day
badly deteriorated." The commonplace response of the hotel staff
takes on larger significance:
"He has not yet arrived," he said. "Perhaps
You'll return later. "For a split second
I thought he was making game of me
But his eyes were steady as if fixed
On a T.V. serial. I thanked him
And smiling amiably in all
Directions of the bell-shaped womb, I walked
Out into the ordinary sunshine.

The speaker almost expected as much, for in a way he is Mr. Superman himself, asking for or searching for the recognition of himself in the present technological age. The natal and birth imagery reinforce the idea that a new age is at hand, a new world, so to speak, while at the same time this event in the hotel lobby is another ironic version of the birth of Christ. Very few in the hotel seem to understand what is happening. The speaker is trying to have Mr. Superman paged in the Sheraton which becomes a correlative for the contemporary world form which he must ultimately return to the "ordinary sunshine." For in that hotel "Crushed is the light, yet chromium / Neither shines nor warms as sun," ("Poem for the Next Century").

The poet has become an even more alienated figure in the modern landscape, and he not merely passive but active in evil. So as a speaking persona he is a participant in the general evil and destruction of the times. Even more obstrusive than the speaker in "The Bull Calf," the "Cain" in the poem of that title shoots another amphibian version of the self-same "huge toad" the poet compared himself to in "Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom." This becomes another identification for the poet and his involvement with death, and with his own self-destructiveness. In one of the poems of The Bull Calf and Other Poems, Cain is but one half, one persona of the divided nature of man:
Down the rattling fire escapes
He stalks them with poison and gun;
Is killed; reading his own epitaph
Learns his sister dubbed him Abel Cain.

And there's your decent citizen.
He shows interest in how machines work;
He likes to pat an infant's head; he
Owns the common fears of height and dark.

("Abel Cain")

In "Cain" the speaker fully delineates himself as he prepared to shoot:

Taking the air rifle from my son's hand,
I measured back five paces, the Hebrew
In me, narcissist, father of children,
Laid to rest. From there I took aim and fired.

"There" is the station where the speaker has resolved himself before
shooting. As "Hebrew," "narcissist, father of children," he takes
on the persona of Cain. All these three aspects are mirrors upon
each other, and define the moral identity of the poet figure. As
Hebrew, narcissist and father, he should abhor killing; yet the
inevitable ordinary act follows. The frog is another image of the
"narcissist." He is destroying part of himself, and becomes another
"Abel Cain." The frog's dying antics are seen in theatrical terms,
and he is compared to a dwarf (another poet image) and a "helpless
child." Finally the submersion of the frog makes up "an incredible
musical scale," like that of the poet on stilts and the various
swimmer self-images of the poet:

The lin's surface at once became closing
Eyelids and bubbles like notes of music
Liquid, luminous, dropping from the page
White, white-bearded, a rapid crescendo
Of inaudible sounds and a crones' whispering
Backstage among the reeds and bullrushes
As for an expiring Lear or Oedipus.
Because "Death makes us all look ridiculous," the speaker "wanted to kill / At the mockery of it, kill and kill / Again..." For "Anything with the stir of life in it," dead, becomes tragically comic, "Chaplin-footed," and even pathetic. Lear and Oedipus have given way to the modern version, Chaplin. But the hole in the dead frog's back as a microcosmic wound suggests a larger dimension of suffering that runs like a theme through the history of civilizations, which did not outlast the Hebrew:

O Egypt, marbled Greece, resplendent Rome,
Did you finally perish from a small bore
In your back you could not scratch? And would
Your mouths open ghostily, gasping out
Among the murky reeds, the hidden frogs,
We climb with crushed spines towards the heavens?

The small bore in the back becomes that consuming self-destructiveness.

But with the passage of time and "the next morning" the frog takes on a theatrical formality and appearance:

The frog was on his back, one delicate
Hand on his belly, and his white shirt front
Spotless. He looked as if he might have been
A comic; tapdancer apologizing
For a fall, or an Emcee, his wide grin
Coaxing a laugh from us for an aside
Or perhaps a joke we didn't quite hear.

The dead frog uncannily resembles the clown figure in "Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom," and the joke is on the speaker and all Cains, that death will finally get them, and they too will have their ridiculousness. The "aside" is the poem's last stanza which returns to the matter-of-fact tone of the opening lines after the apostrophe to History. The apostrophes abound in this collection of poems to the number of twenty "O"s in half that many poems. Layton addresses himself to larger themes, as in "Poem for the Next Century," and so
speaks from a fullness and expansiveness of spirit. The prevalent apostrophic "0" also accompanies an intensity and a pitch which was apparent in *In the Midst of My Fever*. The poetic fever has grown into a laughter, a command over art and themes, and a new mastery and possession which demonstrate a largeness of voice. Thus the peak of this "laughter" indicates a reaching out beyond and an enlarging reflected in this rhetorical device. But this expansiveness has its drawbacks reflected in its exaggerations. Layton's voice in this respect is indeed that of a poet on stilts. The gestures are grand, and the lapses correspond to those wide and risky movements.

The frog's "wide grin / Coaxing a laugh," another of the laughers in the poet's mind, may be the irony of death's mask, or a confirmation of some consciousness in the face of death, something still held when all is gone and lost. It is the same incipient gesture of laughter at the end of "Cat Dying in Autumn," a more elegiac poem in which the agent is not the human. The speaker notes the final scene of the dying domestic animal (and because domestic and tamed by man thereby not the same threat as frogs, snakes, or toads: varieties of the mis-shaped, freakish amphibian or reptile):

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Letting me see
From my house
The twisted petal
That fell
Between the ruined paws
To hold or play with,
And the tight smile
Cats have for meeting death.
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The fascination with being the observer in these death scenes is underlined in this poem, as in "Cain" and "Cote Des Neiges Cemetery."
The poet has undergone his own deaths and transformations in "Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom"; and his deaths contain the others, both animal and human, for as "In the Midst of My Fever," he is, by identification, the body of the world.

But the laughters in this collection are varied and include the absurd in "Victory" and "Love Dream of W.P. Turner English Poet"; the sexual in "A Roman Jew to Ovid", the literary and satirical in "E.P. On His Critics," "Chatters," "The Myth of Smith"; and the reductive in "Family Portrait." The laughter operates on all levels, in the strange joy of the narrative, "Paging Mr. Superman," and the healthy assertion of "Captives:"

And sing, my little one, sing
Let the loonies hear your voice;
Under their gold-leafed ceiling
Their crazy eyes rejoice.

Into song shall turn their shrilling
Into music turn their grunts;
Then sing, my pretty one, sing
Then dance, my little one, dance.

The balancing poet dances on his wooden stilts as the woman in "Captives." Laughter in the mind creates balance through joy and celebration. It is the detachment of joy, and it reflects itself as the sign and action of creative power asserted in the Nietzschean epigraph.

In the preface to the second edition of the book, "Note," Layton provides a prose poem which is a gloss on the poems—and especially the opening poem, within whose movement, themes and images are contained almost all the directions of the other poems of this collection. "Note" projects a vision of the embrace of the antinomies
in the flux of Becoming; the laughter and delight that the creative force wrests from life and death, and from the ever-changing forms of those opposites. And the themes of "Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom" are echoed throughout this neglected preface:

Each day the world must be created anew. Otherwise the symbolic volcano is forgotten and people build their lives out of slag. More, they spread the heresy that the universe is composed only of slag, the more impudent among them--the so-called "cultured"--displaying proudly the ash flecks on the lapels of their grey flannel suits. When I meet someone for the first time, I ask: "Does he know he is a burning taper?" For if he does, he burns evenly and there is a sweet light in his countenance; otherwise his eyes gutter and his skin and hair have a rancid smell. Those whom the vanity of religion or megalomania has persuaded to a belief in their immortality are capable of every sort of cruelty. They will disembowel, castrate, torture; no form of mutilation or viciousness is too exquisite for them, the weak among them having to be contented with mere malice and backbiting. Because the thought of their perishability alone makes living among them endurable my favourite image is Fire; my favourite word, Blaze. A Hebrew, I worship the Divine in extraordinary men, know that all flesh is grass, and that everything ripens into decay and oblivion. Ever since boyhood the pathos of cenotaphs, solemn memorials, and the humbler inscriptions on obscure tombstones has always moved me to tears. The poetry is in the pathos. The genitals of a Casanova, the brain cells of an Einstein--the eternal flux atomizes them with the same grand indifference. It seems to me now I have always known this. Laughter-provoking therefore appear to me all Christian revivalisms (whether of the Eliotic or Billy Graham stripe), rabid nationalisms, civic respectability, psychoanalysis--those pitiful dodges of the aging, the weak-kneed and hysterical.

From the various deaths and destructions that this flux engenders, the poet creates his new vision:

Undoubtedly these matters are important, but they are the works of man; my sensitive nose smells their decay even before the first blueprint is drawn, my imagination already sees the hand blessing the cornerstone as a plate of worms. More to the point, more immediate, I smell the demise of our bourgeois-Christian civilization,
its escaping gases concealed by flowery poetic wreaths and lifting some of the poets themselves gaily into the air. What a mouldy coffinsmell, all the same. There will be new modes of feeling, new modes of thought, undreamed-of sensations. Only the ash collectors in their slag museums and parliaments and those with stuffed-up ears and noses are unaware of this. Do you suppose a thousand years from now there will be even such emotions as loving and hating or such attitudes as praising and blaming? Consider...science...the scientific outlook...objectivity...control...understanding in place of ignorant fear. The words of our most grandiloquent poets will appear like the meaningless shrieks of a tape played backwards. Still, it does not matter. There will be new verses for the bloom-become-coffinsmell, for the never-resting, every-changing world of Becoming, a new laughter in the mind...

This "Note" marks the end of a phase which saw the publication of the volumes from *Love the Conqueror Worm*. But like *The Black Huntsmen*, it does not only bring to fruition the poet's newly charged themes and forms, but also heralds the beginning of the next phase. This prefatory "Note" is the first preface since *Cerberus*. With the assurance of having a larger audience through his new publisher, Layton openly addressed himself to the age, and was not reticent about reflecting on the scope and intent of his own work. Neither did he have to divide his poems into the satirical books and the serious books. Both were integrated into *A Laughter in the Mind*, the title of which indicated that the creative laughter could encompass the spectrum of satire, fantasy, philosophical postures, meditation, among other facets. In that sense, as well, this book marks a new integration and command. The second edition of the book appeared a year later from a Montreal French-Canadian publisher and contained twenty additional poems, most of which were satirical. It is as if Layton added these poems because his audience now was more exclusively
Canadian, and therefore, such poems as "Anti-Romantic," and "For the More Devotional" could be included in his series of attacks on the accepted literary sensibility. It is curious that among these satirical poems Layton should include poems previously published in *The Blue Propeller* and *Music on a Kazoo*. After his exchange with Smith and others in the *Forum*, he was more inclined not to give up his battle with what he considered to be Canadian literary and intellectual gentility, and to integrate these poems with the rest of his writing.

This second edition with its prefatory "Note," and with some of these additional poems, provides a link with the first "collected poems," *A Red Carpet For the Sun*, which appeared the next year and consolidated Layton's reputation that had been growing in the middle and late fifties. Some of the poems, Layton says he added to the latter collection, were in fact first published in the second edition of *A Laughter in the Mind*. But he glosses over this fact in the "Foreword":

This volume contains all the poems I wrote between 1942 and 1958 that I wish to preserve. They are taken from twelve collections I have published during this period; except for retouching lightly two or three poems I have left them stand as they were. To these I had added the following poems: "The Warm Afterdark," which I wrote in the summer of 1957, and "Divinity," "A Bonnet for Bessie," "Love Is an Irrefutable Fire," "Young Girls Dancing at Camp Lajoie," "For Mao Tse-Tung: A Meditation on Flies and Kings," and "My Flesh Comfortless," which I wrote the summer following, after the publication of my last volume, *A Laughter in the Mind*.

These poems overlap both volumes. They are very ambitious poems, the gloss to which is provided in the "Note" to the second edition of the earlier book. "Young Girls Dancing at Camp Lajoie," "For Mao Tse-Tung: A Meditation on Flies and Kings," "Love Is An Irrefutable Fire,"
and "My Flesh Comfortless," are poems written with inter-related imagery and themes. The poet's favourite image, fire, is set against another favourite image, flies. The solar body and the insects are set against each other in the second and fourth poems, the former of which provides the title image to the collected poems, and the latter expresses the tension and themes Layton had been evolving and which were to point to the poet's directions in the prolific sixties.

The speaker at Camp Lajoie (the joy) lunges out at "The flies, trite and noxious as humans," as he watches the young girls prepare their gramophone. The speaking observer winds his own tune, so to speak. His own exasperation at the flies brings him to realization that "a buzz of soiling laughter / Lies mined behind each docile eye." There is a noxiousness in humans. In the manuscript version to the poem, "mind" and "mine" were played off against each other and linked to the imagery of the gold in the final stanza. This realization about human nature is echoed in "Nietzsche's No More great events," that the new age, outlined at the end of the "Note" to A Laughter in the Mind, will level out "emotions such as loving and hating." But it is the Dionysian dance which will spell the end of one era and give rise to another "ever-changing world of Becoming..."

Not gold, not gold, Lord Timon,
But medallions swivelling with heated breasts
Shall level old and splendorous kingdoms
And fell two thousands years of Christ.
The ambiguity of this last stanza's "clairvoyance" lies in the gold—of the mine and of the mind. It will not be rarity or brilliance, the "great events", that will level "bourgeois-Christian civilization," but the trite adolescent Dionysianism represented in the cheap medallions and the girls dancing to popular tunes. Yet the dancing itself signals a new, if not ambiguous laughter in the mind, a new kind of levelling Eros which does not equal the paganism from which Christianity itself partly found its origins. The "Timon" in the poet, who noted that humans can be "trite" and "noxious," can now rejoice that an age is passing before him, and that he may yet find, or transform his misanthropy into, a new laughter in the mind.

The opening four lines of "For Mao Tse-Tung: A Meditation on Flies and Kings" introduce the fly again as the source of the poetic meditation.

So, circling about my head, a fly.  
Haloes of frantic monotone.  
Then a smudge of blood smoking  
On my fingers, let Jesus and Buddha cry.

The poem is for Mao Tse-Tung, a poet and a Canute himself. Kings have the power to destroy and use the lives of "flies" in the pursuit of their visions. Poetry and power spring from the same creative source—the will to shape and to form and to appropriate what is necessary for the realization of that vision. Christianity and Buddhism, in their pity for the weak and all forms of the living, are not the way for the speaker in this meditation. The speaker is "burning flesh and bone, / An indifferent creature between / Cloud and a stone." The image brings to mind "The Birth of Tragedy" and
"Boardwalk at Verdun." Since the insects call to mind the human world, and since "None may re-create them who are / Lowly and universal as the moss," the speaker can identify himself with the modern Chinese leader whose vision of power may also place him in the same position as the artist: "Poet and dictator, you are as alien as I."

The poet in his very nature is a dictator, one who orders and dictates, and one who in affirming life's power and joy must go beyond the constrictions which entrap the masses and majority of humans. But in this aristocratic order of life the poet finds himself alien. Yet turning to the summer outdoor scene around him, he finds a cosmic vision in the landscape, a symbolic landscape against which the ordinary vacationers and what they stand for, fade:

On this remote and classic lake
Only the lapsing of the water can I hear
And the cold wind through the sumac.
The moneyed and their sunburnt children
Swarm other shores. Here is ecstasy,
The sun's outline made lucid
By each lacustral cloud
And man naked with mystery.
They dance best who dance with desire,
Who lifting feet of fire from fire
Weave before they lie down
A red carpet for the sun.

The great ones then, the free ones, dance with desire and with a consuming urge to live and take what they need to themselves. And in their living, they not only partake in the every-changing world of Becoming, but recreate it into a carpet, into a celebration of the life force and creativity. Life and art celebrate in the flux of the universe; and life, in its movements, in its dancing and balancing of opposites, creates the poetry and the poetry of life—and a symbolic
vehicle for transformation and transcendence, the red carpet. In these compact four lines, Layton has encapsulated his own movement and growth, and as he says of these poems in the "Foreword": "They belong to a period of my life that is now behind me: a period of testing, confusion, ecstasy." Characteristically, the book begins with "The Swimmer," and closes with the images of this poem and the sun of "My Flesh Comfortless." The swimmer has become the dancer; the poet figure has submerged himself and emerged. The celebration in the world of Becoming was foreshadowed in the final lines of that early poem, and so was the sun and the dancing movements:

...The sun that empties itself upon the water,  
And the last wave romping in  
To throw its boyhood on the marble sand.  

Yet the meditation does not end with "A red carpet for the sun." In the declaration of his creative vision, the speaker must dismiss the "joy-haters," the "joy-destroyers," the haters of life and the creative force. The universal organic landscape reveals the sacramental and sacrificial vision already suggested in the fire dance. In the blaze of becoming and the flux of life and death, a ritual religious eternal drama unfolds. As in "Death of Moishe Lazarovitch," the organic and the inorganic, life and death, become the opposites in a transforming tension. And the organic and life are sacrificed continually to recreate themselves, as the fly, which became a "smudge of blood smoking" at the beginning of the poem, set off this meditation and the meditation between the various visions attempting to comprehend the mystery of sacrifice. Life, art, power are encompassed in this sacrificial dance in which the fire is the central symbol.
Yet if the dancers are the joyous, celebrating ones, the poem must include the complement of the poet, that is, images or prefigurations of the dictator. At the end, the speaker observes the sign of another vision as he moves into the "tragic forest" through which the sun's light is passing—

And mark the dark pines farther on,
The sun's fires touching them at will,
Motionless like silent khans
Mourning serene and terrible
Their Lord entombed in the blazing hill.

It is the end of a sacrifice, a death. The "Lord" and the sun are aspects of the same creative divinity that charges the universe. The dignity of the trees—reminding one of the great men in contrast to the noxious flies—arises from the aristocracy and power of life, or those dimensions in nature and man. They are "naked" with another "mystery"—the mystery of redemptive death that does not mark an end but another beginning.

Greatness and the divinity of life do not simply lie entombed in this transformed landscape. The creative continues before and in the face of death. The "silent khans," lords of power and life, embody tragic affirmation in keeping with the dancers who are joyous and burn with creative fulfillment. The different strophes of this poem, then—meditation, tragic affirmation and joy, the put-down of nay-sayers—contain the three major motives for Layton's poetry of the fifties. The poem is another compendium of his poetry to date. The poet grows upon himself ever reaching out for wider grasp. And the vision of this poem is indeed more "terrible" and "serene" than one of the earlier prototypes for this poem, "Death of Moishe Lazarovitch."
The poet is sure of his own voice and direction, for as he says in the "Foreword," "I too have seen the footprint in the cloud, though somewhat gorier than my father saw it. When all is said, I have no choice but to walk after it."

The penultimate poem which follows "For Mao Tse-Tung" is part of this group, and helps to complete the thematic inclusiveness. "Love is an Irrefutable Fire," reinforces the epigraphic four lines of *A Red Carpet for the Sun*. They who dance in the fire of desire and love. Love like the poetic force gives shape and meaning to the flux and the fire:

And only love is truly perfect, a fire still,
And though partial from excess of joy
nevertheless, like genius, irrefutable.

Genius and love are like the paradoxical "fire still." They flow and contain at one and the same time, and thus are irrefutable. And both being "partial from excess of joy" are opposite to the "motionless khans," themselves outside the flux, held in their 'Mourning.'

The dancers and the poets are the protagonists of love and genius. The "Mourning" khans are at the beginning of a new solar morning, so to speak, and are situated upon the tragic "blazing hill." The flux bestows both joy and mourning, both part of the tragic affirmation.

The poem which closes *A Red Carpet for the Sun*, "My Flesh Comfortless," brings to mind the earlier "Vexata Quaestio." Again the body of the poet is "comfortless with insect bites, sweat..." Nature and the universe of animals and landscape about the poet make him ill-at-ease. The movement and shape and colour of fire recurs, and the
poem contains the imagery already made apparent in the above poems.
"My Flesh Comfortless" is another meditation encompassing the previous ones. Its emphasis, however, is not on the "tragic forest," and the sacrificial significance of creativity, power and life. It is a poem which moves through the different visions of meaning and unmeaning in much the same manner as "Boardwalk at Verdun," or "For Mao Tse-Tung," that is, it considers the alternative philosophies of life as suggested in the symbolic landscape.

On his "couch of grass," the position of his own mortality, the speaker is comfortless because the flesh alone does not reveal the meaning of existence. He notes the quick movements of chipmunks, the epiphanies of animal activity that "break like flames from the bleak earth." The earth is bleak and the gradations of living creatures each suggest another level of consciousness or awareness. The scarabs which also mirror or reflect the sun's "golden" light are aimless, nameless. They are forms without significance, the "Myriads of insects" ("Boardwalk at Verdun"), suggesting the teeming fecundity of life. "But the frog sits / And stares at my writing hand"-- the toad poet, the Chaplin frog notes the poet's "writing." He may be a reflection of the poet's own state of mind, at this point. But the frog is inarticulate and represents that part of the poet that would sink into silence and would give up speaking and writing. For the eyes of that frog are "desolation's self-mockery, / Its golden silence!" And that is the perspective gained from such a vision. That "vile emptiness" may enclose the poet who now has become its student, its own seeing organ, "its rapt pupil." At this pond at the side of
nowhere, literally and figuratively, the imagery is not simply visual, but also includes images of the poet's own self-awareness and sight. The poem declares itself as a poem on vision, on the informing vision that is a philosophy of life and considers alternatives.

The poet then wonders whether this frog will suggest or reinforce the Christian world view in the figure of Christ, "the universal lover, my Jack / Of hearts." Or will an opposing vision take over—the raving of "a royal maniac," Lear's vision of the beastliness of man? Or the excremental and misanthropic vision of "mansoul" as "world's wrong, dung"? The tension and paradox of these visions of man do not yield the answer, plain and loud, that the poet asks to speak to him. The answer is a paradox, "a cry heard and unheard," for it is heard as the rhetorical questions that the poet has posed with these alternative visions. The cry that will speak and name, that will answer and give meaning, is the "merest bubble / Under the legs of sallow beetles?" From the necessary dung and wastes of this pool some answer may be forthcoming. The beetle is the totemic figure in this poem alongside the frog. The scarab is his opposite. They are forms of life that spring from the wastes, from the dung of other forms of life. And as the imagery suggests, they were gods in ancient Egyptian cultures at the dawn of civilization. Finally, then, there can be no answer to this desolation that lies at the heart of nature and reality, that the poet senses as he tries to write of it. For this desolation even defies language and poetry, though both may transform reality into apparent but empty alternative visions. If the "universal lover" cannot redeem this "desolation's self-
mockery" the poet may become the "Whirlwind's tongue, desolation's lung," an obsessed Lear or Timon. The only alternative for the comfortless flesh--body and mind wracked with the ambiguities and perversities of nature--is the Hebraic vision. But it is declared with a plea, not as a certainty:

O, Love, enclose me in your cold bead
O lift me like a vine-leaf on the vine;
In community of soil and sun
Let me not taste this desolation
But hear roar and pour of waters unseen
In mountains that parallel my road--
Sun vaulting gold against their brightest green!

In this "community" man and nature are joined and work in unison. The sun will give sustenance to the vine-leaf, and also vault gold--the gold of real human value--on the landscape the poet will traverse. But this community may be just a communion springing from the individual's attempt to culture nature (hence agriculture). The community seems to involve only the individual poet, and does not extend to encompass the larger community of men. Yet, the "road" will be blessed with significance and growth--natural growth which is intended to include spiritual and psychic growth. This image of the road ends _A Red Carpet for the Sun_ and echoes the final lines in the "Foreword," in which the poet declares that he will continue to walk the road of his life and poetry, following the "gorier" "footprint" in the cloud. The books of the sixties, then, and the next two phases of Layton's poetry, may be seen as the continuation of this journey. The "waters unseen" will spring from the same source as the "water element the poet swimmer has immersed himself in, and emerged from, but the course
will be wider with an intenser flow. The plea in this last section of "My Flesh Comfortless" emerges after the poet has in the course of the poem gone through "a period of testing, confusion, ecstasy." ("Foreword"). The final lines read as if the new redemptive vision has almost come forth. It is as if by imagining and calling it forth he has attained it. Layton has projected that vision in the final poem, and the course of the next three books will reinforce his own prediction: "Now there is only the ecstasy of an angry middle-aged man growing into courage and truth" ("Foreword"). That will inform the next phase of the poet figure and the character of his persona.

Layton's critical reception from the early forties to the publication of A Red Carpet for the Sun reveals how difficult literary critics and reviewers found the task of appreciating, understanding and criticizing his growing body of work. The course of Layton's reception by his fellow poets is more interesting and rewarding in revealing the singularity of his literary image and the real nature of his contribution to Canadian letters, both by the example of his poems and the controversies he engaged in in defence and explanation of his writing. Perhaps, no other Canadian poet has had the singular honour of having so many poems by other Canadian poets addressed to him, and many addressed in a spirit of literary homage. This, in a way, demonstrates how strongly his writing affected his contemporaries and how they saw him filtered through their own vision. As the central figure in the Montreal School, Layton found many poems addressed to him by representatives from all the generations of Montreal
poets—from the generation of the McGill Movement to the poets who emerged in the sixties. These poets provide a running commentary on the man and the poet. In their changing attitudes to him can be found perspectives on his growth and development.

A.J.M. Smith's recognition of the poet was belated. Smith, with his anthologies of Canadian poetry, was in the position of being the leading arbiter of taste and literary judgment in the two decades that saw Layton begin to write and to flourish. Yet Smith hardly took note of Layton, as Gnarowski has pointed out in the case of

The Book of Canadian Poetry:

Irving Layton was not included and he had to wait until the third edition of 1957 before gaining Smith's recognition. It may be pointed out that this seems to have followed closely on favourable critical appraisal by Northrop Frye in 1955; enthusiastic response by William Carlos Williams to The Improved Binoculars; and a debate in print on Irving Layton between Smith and Dudek which appeared in Queen's Quarterly in 1956. If Smith had not recognized Layton until then, he made up for it in the following years. He was engaged by Layton in a controversy that raged in The Canadian Forum, and he and Layton exchanged satirical poems on each other on later occasions. Smith provided an ample target, for he set himself up as the arbiter. In his poem on the Keewaydin Poetry Conference, "Astraea Redux," he refers to himself as the returning monarch of Canadian poetry coming back from his exile in the United States. His "people" then include the "lordly ones / the Duke of Dudek His Grace of Layton." But his preoccupation with Layton was to grow, as if some quality in the younger poet held him in tow.

The prevailing occasion for Smith's other verses was the erotic bent in Layton's poetry. He pens "A Little Eclogue for Irving and Aviva"
entitled "The Country Lovers," and he both chides and gently derides the supposed love antics of the poet and his woman. And in another poem, also included in the Poems New & Collected, "The Devil Take Her--And Them," Smith turns his attention again to "the lyrical feats / Of poets in Montreal between the sheets," and the occasion for this poem was Layton's anthology of love poetry published in 1962, *Love Where the Nights Are Long*. The reason for the supposed envy underlining Smith's poems to Layton seems to lie in the former's poem, "Pagan,"

> Were I the Great God Pan  
> I'd pipe so wild a note  
> That every sober man,  
> Were I the Great God Pan,  
> Would laugh at Parson's ban,  
> And caper like a goat,  
> Were I the Great God Pan--  
> I'd pipe so wild a note.

Smith is expressing his desire to be the kind of poet that could "pipe so wild a note," that is, a poet very much like Layton, celebrating and sensual. Another older poet from Quebec, and an anthologist, as well, Ralph Gustafson, also addressed a few poems to Layton. In "For Arthur Smith and Irving Layton: As If They Were All Dead," Gustafson sets off both poets as representing opposite creative tendencies, and underlines the rivalry and tension between them:

> Diomysus and Apollo,  
> Who had the most fun  
> In sheets? The shroud's unwound  
> Now--one collected, one  
> With his fathers long ago,  
> One with bay crowned,  
> One with bones. Love  
> Is the thing, is it not?
To rage and sing, to thrust  
The grinning skull and grave  
And know the singing lust.  
Drooped on the ear askew  
Or polished nimbus wrought  
To keep the rain off, who  
Wears the laurel best?  
It's what they served. He,  
The death, and he, the act.

But neither poet really comes off best in Gustafson's view. Of course, he asks for a balance which he himself will assume, and in his own poem Gustafson has the last work, for "He who knows the double bed, / Is singular, not dead." Gustafson addresses another poem to Layton on the publication of "your collected poem." Referring to Housman's test of poetry--feeling one's bristles rise on the face--Gustafson provides a punning image variation on the British poet's test. "The Parabola in the Mirror" is the risen phallus--Layton's test for poetry, according to Gustafson. But Gustafson is mild in comparison to Smith. He gingerly enters the poetic jousts and is content to clap and mildly mock from the stands. Not so is Louis Dudek.

Louis Dudek was probably the closest poet to Layton from 1940 when they met to the late fifties. Except for a few years in the last forties when Dudek was in New York, the two were closely allied in a number of ventures and presses including First Statement, CIV/n and Contact Press. Both living in the same city, their exchange was not merely limited to literary work. They were close friends and comrades-in-arms, as Layton was to relate in his "Open Letter to Louis Dudek" in the second issue of Cataract (Winter 1962). Dudek began writing articles on Canadian poetry early in the days of First Statement, but
by the middle and late fifties, and with the founding of Delta, he began to write continuously on Canadian poetry. In The Transparent Sea, a collection published in 1956, Dudek directed a poem to Layton in which he seems to be answering the poet in "The Fertile Muck": "How to dominate reality? Love is one way; / imagination another."

Layton's stress in the volumes of the mid-fifties was on imaginative transformation in poetry. Dudek is arguing for a more down-to-earth poetry, concerned with the here and now, and in a manner consistent with the particular. The figure for poetry is the boat making its passage over the water. Dudek's poetic boat floating on the 'transparent sea' of reality does not simply correspond to the submerging and emerging swimmer, one of the predominant self-images for Layton's poet. The boat is more of a vehicle than a persona, and herein lies the distinction in poetic practice. Dudek is not so much arguing with his comrade, as emphasizing his own poetics:

       Yes, yes, imagination, if you like
               but to steer the log boat, keep it level
               plumb with the real thing
               after all...
               "For I.P.L." 12

And it is in this poem that Dudek's later strident objections to Layton first find expression. In the same year Dudek engaged A.J.M. Smith in a controversy over his article, "The Recent Poetry of Irving Layton: A Major Voice." Dudek had also joined Layton in the polemics that raged in The Canadian Forum. In fact, he had become Layton's chief apologist, and was quick to point out the inconsistent belated acceptance and recognition that were now accorded his friend. Yet Dudek's attitudes were to change about-face in the next three years.
What began as a defence of Layton's poetry seemed to have soured into nastiness. In 1958 Dudek published the first two articles in which he singles out his objections to Layton. In "Patterns of Recent Canadian Poetry," Dudek remarks of Layton and himself and the poetry of the forties:

Of the First Statement group, the three principle poets—Layton, Dudek, Souster—who were characteristically rooted in Canadian life and speech, have continued to grow and write books...13

Dudek defines what are for him the chief qualities of the poets of the forties, and in turn contrasts these qualities with those of the younger poets writing in the late fifties:

These attitudes of social idealism, of anger, and of pity, were sometimes damaging, when they led to ideological theses and dogmatizing in poetry; but more important, they channeled the ideal striving which is natural to poets, and they provided a moral and emotional coherence to their poetical expression. They created a spirit of confidence and a drive for discovery and for knowledge. They provided motive for the perfection of technique (the true technique that consists in skill in achieving a real end, not just in making a poem); and established the test of poetry as its total effect, even its pragmatic effect, a criterion that like "popular appeal," can never be a bad test to go by. These characteristics may be found in all the poets of the forties, not only in the Montreal groups but in varying extent in Anderson, Wreford, Hambleton, Layton, Souster, Dorothy Livesay. The loss of these assurances (and that is a familiar story) prepared the predicament of the 1950s. Les Jeunes of Today are the inheritors of a period of political and moral disillusionment; their effort to solve that predicament is the clue to the varieties of imagination they display.

With this in mind Dudek berates the younger poets—Hine, Mandel, Cohen, Purdy—in terms that suggest that Dudek is projecting his own psychological complexes upon so varied a group of poets and he makes an unexplained comment on the nature of Layton's then recent verse:
The tragic sense in these poets—paralleled by Layton's recent well-nigh demented poetry—is accompanied in Canada by actual comforts and complacencies that result from a high standard of living and an economy of accelerated efficiency.... Yet in these poets, an intellectual disorder (not only in politics, but in morality and in religion) leads to a primitive mythological effort to organize chaos. This, when it is not only a game, proceeds from a state of mind fundamentally disturbed, and bordering on the deeply neurotic, or worse. Poets like Hine, Ellenbogen, Mandel, Cohen, and Purdy, grasp at a confusion of symbolic images, often a rag-bag of classical mythology, in the effort to organize a chaos too large for them to deal with in the light of reason. At the same time, an irresponsibility encouraged by actual comforts and surrounding abundance introduces an element of aimless enervation, sometimes a perverse exhibitionism, which is the psychological compensation for a sense of guilt and inadequacy.

Dudek nowhere defines the key categories and terms that he uses to denounce the tendencies in these poets, and his aside on Layton is unexplained and irresponsible in such a critical article. It suggests, perhaps, that more than mere literary considerations were at play in his opinion of Layton's work. The date of this article is December 1958, and one can only conclude that Dudek is ascribing his remarks to A Laughter in the Mind. In an article published the next year in Culture, his objections to Layton are not directed to the specifics of Layton's poetry, but to the purported philosophies of the poet and his literary and intellectual antecedents:

After Scott, Smith, and Birney, the impulse of Canadian poets has been to break through the zero point of negation (the prickly pear of the Hollow Men) toward some passionate rediscovery of a visionary, or a rational, or a sensuous affirmation of larger life. This project of course demands a new metaphysic, something that no poet has yet provided, either here or abroad. The best is confusion and pseudo-metaphysics, as we have it in Layton's...
With his consciousness of new status after 1953, Layton has attempted actually to write the new tables conforming to his Promethean role. Cutting his poems from the cloth of Nietzsche, he has written out of the conviction of possessing a unique impassioned vision, a dynamic conception of reality, ruthless, eternally recurrent, that challenges all soft humanitarian illusions. This vision, however, which like Nietzsche's presumes to stand upon a more thorough annihilation of existing values than anyone has yet dared, is both self-contradictory and nebulous in the extreme. Northrop Frye has recently discovered the key to it in the idea that for Layton the body has greater wisdom than the mind, and Layton has acknowledged this as the secret spring of his labours.... Layton is significant—like Hart Crane, Dylan Thomas, and Richard Eberhart—as an example of the explosive and hyperbolic visionary, the force-fed version of the poet we need but cannot find. There is simply no heaven for him to enter, and he is no superman.

It is difficult to apply Dudek's insights without specific guides to the poems. This is the kind of general, panoramic criticism which Dudek could not continue to practice and so in the review of the collected poems of 1959, "Layton on the Carpet," he turned his attention to the poems. But his confessions about reading Layton are perhaps the most striking incongruities in Canadian literary reviewing:

I must confess that for the past three or four years I've been unable to read anything by Irving Layton, at any rate not without a certain feeling of sour taste and acid indigestion. Whether this comes of prejudice as Layton himself tells me, or of something in the poetry, I cannot be sure.... Not having read the poetry for some years, I cannot be very specific.

According to the last article published in Culture, Layton had gone awry in 1953. Thus it is strange to see that Dudek rose to Layton's defence in 1956 when in fact he had begun to disapprove of his work. Dudek maintains in this Delta review that "The turning-point came
about 1955," and thus contradicts the 1953 date which he had set forth in an article published that same year, in 1959. And when Dudek turns to the poems, he singles out one short poem for his attack, and generalizes from that poem to the conclusion that there is little craftsmanship at all in Layton's poetry. It also seems that the various personas in Layton's poetry continue to dog Dudek, and mistakenly he confuses the masks for the poet, a habit many reviewers continued to fall into. Dudek's most useful and cogent criticism finally emerges when he gets down to Layton's poems, and to the specifics of Layton's use of language. In another review article, "Three Major Canadian Poets—Three Major Forms of Archaism," he points to some of Layton's archaisms and "barbarities" of expression, his inversions of the natural phrase—in sort, some of the very same points that Williams had raised in relation to Layton's work. Possibly, Dudek's finest criticism emerges from his parody of Layton. In this parody he mirrors and distorts some of the expansiveness exhibited in the poems of the middle fifties in which the speaking persona spoke of himself as the poet. In this witty distortion of the poet figure in Layton's poems, Dudek's objections exaggerate the tone and themes of the poetry and the somewhat exotic diction:

IRVING LAYTON'S POEM IN EARLY SPRING

My friends, the people are devouring each other. They will finish me off soon with a gorgeous icepick.

They are mephitic as fly dung on cherry-stones.

But these pregnant buds opening like your genitals, Are beautiful, dear, and swollen with greatness Like my poems.17
Dudek's various later reviews of Layton's poetry in the Montreal Gazette, and his comments in such articles as "Poetry in English: The Writing of the Decade," in Canadian Literature, no. 41, include a running commentary on Layton. Dudek's writing on Layton from the early articles in First Statement to the present, constitutes a critical anthology of its own, but a critical perspective that is eccentric, that is, off the center, but valuable, nonetheless, as a reflection of the problem Layton has presented to Canadian critics, and as an example of the creative and destructive tensions that arise between closely allied artists.

The other Montreal poet who was close to Layton was Leonard Cohen. The two were often paired together as in the poem D. G. Jones dedicated to Ken McRobbie in which he says he is...

Jealous of your nights in Montreal
with Layton, Cohen, et al
spouting verse in smoky clubs,
my eyes
wander from the letter's page
across the rotted lawn,
the twisted drive....
("Standing in the April Noon")

In Cohen's first book, Let Us Compare Mythologies, Layton appears as the Nietzschean poet with his "delightful / zarahtusrian tales," who comes into "the streets and alleys of heaven," and "more furious than any Canadian poet," finds "Him" (God, bourgeois Christian morality):

...gaspng against a cloud,
His back already broken by some rebel band,
and not hesitating you finished up the job
while He mumbled tired curses
and a chorus of invalid angels
rattled their fists
and chanted odes to you.
("For I.P.L."
The image of Layton is exaggerated and facetious in somewhat the same manner as Dudek's parody. Cohen's image of Layton changes in his next book, *The Spice Box of Earth*. Layton and Cohen join together to dance a "freilach" in "Last Dance at the Four Penny." Cohen has joined the senior poet, but in this poem the playful tone includes them both. They have both been transformed into the two Hasids of Canadian poetry:

Layton, my friend Lazarovitch,
no Jew was ever lost
while we two dance joyously
in this French province...

Reb Israel Lazarovitch,
you no-good Roumanian, you're right!
Who cares whether or not
the Messiah is a Litvak?
As for the cynical,
such as were yesterday,
let them step with us or rot
in their logical shrouds.
We've raised a bright white flag,
and here's our battered fathers' cup of wine,
and now is music
until morning and the morning prayers
lay us down again,
we who dance so beautifully
though we know that freilachs end.

Cohen seems to be suggesting that their dance will recharge their tradition, but it is the more picturesque fervent dance that Cohen uses as a metaphor for the Jewish heritage. Those that "dance so beautifully," those dancers in Layton's poems, know the transience of all things; and that tinge of awareness and pathos is also Jewish in its tragic celebration and joy in the face of death and impermanence. But this poem is in keeping with the somewhat exotic tone of Cohen's second book. In his third, *Flowers for Hitler*, Cohen declares that he has moved "from the world of the golden-boy poet into
the dung pile of the front-line writer." And that is where he sees the older poet in "For My Old Layton." It is a vision of Layton that is a development from "For I.P.L." Layton has become a Zarathustrian emerging from his lair:

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.

It is a picture of the poet on the outside of society prepared to do battle and to foray on his own—a loner. Layton's literary and public reception in the late fifties and early sixties, is the subject of the second stanza which echoes the imagery and the image of the poet in Layton's "Me, the P.M., and the Stars," "The Cold Green Element," and "The Fertile Muck:

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.

Cohen's interpretation veers off into his own vision of Layton, from the poet who once "envied" the "gentle-folk" their placidity, to the changed poet who "with a happy / screech" bounds "from monument to monument / in their most consacrated plots." It is strange to note that Layton "envied" the philistine Canadians against whom he directed so many of his satirical barbs. The poet, as if following Baudelaire's dictum to be intoxicated and possessed, is "drunk / to know how close he lived to the breathless / in the ground." The poet in his intensity
comes close to death, comes close to the rapid flux of living: "the breathless."

Until at last, like Timon, tired
of human smell, resenting even
his own shoe-steps in the wilderness,
he chased animals, wore live snakes, weeds
for bracelets. When the sea
pulled back the tide like a blanket
he slept on stone-cribs, heavy,
dreamless, the salt-bright atmosphere
like an automatic laboratory
building crystals in his hair.

The animal imagery reminds one of the poems in *A Laughter in the Mind*, and Layton's finest single volume, *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler*. The "old Layton" has now removed himself from even "The town" for he moves back to his favourite element, there to sleep and renew himself as if he were returning to a childhood and a radical vision of innocence. He also becomes part of the natural order which yields the "crystals"—he is part of the poetic laboratory of the world. In a way, he has died, and the "old" aspects have died in him. That final image suggests his return to the eternal molecular processes, the patterns of which are the forms of a poetic "building" architecture. Uncannily, in "For My 'Old' Layton," Cohen has appropriated Layton's characteristic stanzaic patterns and the syntax of such poems as "The Fertile Muck," "Fiat Lux," and "Spikes."

Cohen's predictions hold to some degree. For Layton grew "tired / of human smell," and in the books of the late sixties grew out of his own quarrels with the world and its politics, to a personal vision of freedom in such poems in *The Whole Bloody Bird* as "Climbing Hills," and "Silent Joy."
But Cohen's Layton is a more Romantic figure than the image of the poet that appears before other younger Montreal poets. Another Jewish poet, Malcolm Miller, turns from the supposed exotic erotica of Cohen, and the lascivious erotica of Layton, to debunk both poets' more romantic subjects:

croon Cohen
of breathless ladies in beautiful gardens
yawp Layton
at the frustrated rears of faculty wives

I sing of the fat old Jewish woman
squeezing chickens at the Rachel st. market
I sing of that wise and gauging eye
I sing of those stout kitchen legs
and of those oven-steamed dropping breasts.
I sing of her inexorable bear-like tread
and of her lumpy pinching fingers
yellowed by years of chicken soup

This proverbial Jewish mother figures is a more gross and reductive complement to the stereotypes Miller finds in Layton's and Cohen's erotic poems.

Layton's leadership of the group of poets writing in Montreal in the middle and late fifties is underlined in the poems written to him by two other poets who appeared in Dudek's McGill Poetry Series. In *The Carnal and the Crane*, Daryl Hine pens "Aere Perennius" to Layton. In this poem, Layton is not the lone figure of Cohen's poems, but the leader of poets who sing "with perennial lust."

My poor villain, chief of a band of angels,
fortune it is that with unleaving gust
will shake your winter stalk in amorous rage,
Sing to your mistress when you see her next
that she has chosen such a one as age
can never thieve from, nor a wilderness disgust....
but you are one of many sleepy birds
who twitter to each other of their loves,
before night lays the poison for them all
and finch and robin go into the dark
aviary, where no bird sings.
Hark! The amorous rustling of their wings!

Lust and Eros are more lasting than bronze or brass, and that,
according to Hine, is the measure of the poet who writes in the face
of inevitable death. The going "into the dark" at the close of the
poem echoes Layton. In *Winds of Unreason* by George Ellenbogen, the next
book in the Series after Hine's volume, there are two poems concerned
with Layton. As in Miller's and Hine's poems, Layton's love poetry
is the subject again; and the image of the poet that emerges from the
love poems that are included in the six books of the middle fifties.
The first poem, "The Archbishop to Irving Layton," is a reproach to
the poet for lying "on lily white breasts," and for "a Lent /
ill spent." Layton's purported reply is stronger than the reproach
and is voiced almost as a parody of Layton's poems. Ellenbogen,
Hine, and even Cohen, confuse the poet for the poem, and identify
Layton with the various personas and masks of his poetry.

But since mountains will fall
on grass lined plains
to mock the eyes that did them grace
I'll reflect on my energy
and undefined chastity,
which over the branches and the scythes
of your blossoming scriptures—
these defined lies,
strove to a cloud
beyond your reach
with a divine lust
which only I can teach
I taught not lust to stay your staves
but love the fuel for feeble lays
which will elude you evermore
while you envy me
from the undershore
("Layton's Reply")
If Layton's presence and poetry were not so pervading, he would not have commanded such response. For Layton is being defended in these poems. The younger poets are his apologists, yet at the same time they have drawn some distance between themselves and the "chief of a band of angels." They had to disaffiliate themselves from him, to some degree, for their own individuality. And it is Cohen who can dance with the senior poet and not feel threatened or emit the kind of strident rejection that Dudek saw fit to express in his articles. What emerges from this mini-anthology of poems written to Layton, is that the figure of the poet in his poems and the man himself seem to merge for the younger poets. The man was a living embodiment of his poems. If that was not the case, then the poems projected a militant fearlessness and joyous celebration of life and creativity that spurred the young to address poems to him. There is a definite homage in all these poems, no matter their degree of criticism or disaffiliation from Layton or the vision of his poems.

Two other poets who emerged in Montreal in the early sixties write versions of rejection. Kenneth Hertz, one of the editors of *Cataract*, addresses "No Prophet" to Layton. It is a poem that echoes some of the salient imagery of Layton's poems in *A Laughter in the Mind* and *A Red Carpet for the Sun*. The imagery in the poem is confused, and the poem reads more like a pastiche:

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No prophet, you--
but a man in a land where men
are sheep
struck silly at the altar-place.
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Crusty these lambs!
they wait their gloomy burning
their mugs muttoned with jeers for the lusty ram
who, mid the fever
of his dying Spring
dances more wildly
on the red carpet
leading from the temple's crooked vault
to the glowing sun.

Layton, "the lusty ram" is compared to the "seer"—perhaps a projection of Hertz himself—who could not rejoice in the ritual slaughter of life around him. This seer is more pacific and passive in the face of the sacrifice of men in society. He does not rejoice in the flames of destruction and change. For the true prophet, in Hertz's view, mourns.

No prophet, you—
but a man in a land where
men are sizzling sheep. The true seer
cannot waggle a tongue
so spry as yours.
For, sensing a cord of bleating smoke
that gropes across the blinded sky
he must lower his tools
and softly lie
beside the body
of the buried sun.

But Hertz has set apart these two qualities of Layton's poet figure. He has personified Layton as the "lusty ram," and set the "true seer" as his critical opposite, when in face, the "true seer" is also an integrated aspect of Layton's poet figure. Layton is not merely arrogant towards the "sheep" of the world; he is also taken with the pathos of existence as the "Note" of A Laughter in the Mind reveals, and such poems as "For Mao Tse-Tung: A Meditation for Flies and Kings." To isolate the contemptuous tone in Layton's poetry to the exclusion of other feelings and attitudes is to distort the complexity.
And this partial apprehension of Layton's many facets informs the poems of Hine and Ellenbogen, as well.

Milton Acorn in "The Lost Leader" seems to be implicitly comparing Layton's change of political attitudes—from his early socialist point of view of the forties—and the real human warmth Layton the man and poet extended to him on first reading his poems. It is a tribute to Layton's continuing support and encouragement of the younger poets in Montreal, including Acorn and Purdy who came to Montreal in the early sixties:

I remember me, young prol
in a short haircut, ignorant
and proud of it,
going to his house

where he read my arrogant rhymes,
, not critical, joyous
as if to share
my florid romance:
and what words I had for him
were grudging. If

I could go back now
and kiss him on both cheeks!
but I had my own concepts
;knew nothing
of the winds that cut
lonely rocks:

and I suppose imagined
each of us
always 21
strong.

The contact is human, and goes beyond ideological considerations. This is not a grudging tribute to the man. Acorn is his own man, an individual poet who does not sense the kind of threat or competition that the other poets may have felt.
There are a host of other poems written to Layton, many occasioned by his readings, which appear in many literary magazines. Souster addressed a poem to Layton in one of his early books, "City Hall Street," in a book of the same title. It is Souster's confirmation of Layton's vision of the Montreal slums, except that in Souster's vision the slum takes on an archetypal form— one that would be too one-dimensional for Layton to subscribe to:

O this courtyard never changes,
it's still the same dirt, same rot, same smell,
same squirming, crawling tenement, tin-roofed sweat-box
on the lower slopes of Hell,
open sore on the face of God.

Souster also provides nostalgic passages on the poetic ferment and activity in Montreal in the late forties in his poem for "John Sutherland 1919-1956," and the even more active fifties in "Night Train Leaving Montreal:"

...Montreal back there
alive in the night;
city to take
along in sleep tonight
and walk down its streets
arm-in-arm again
with a hundred poets! 21

Poets outside the East and Montreal also responded to Layton. Robert Creeley penned "For Irving" in CIV/n No. 5. And inevitably Layton's strength and presence impressed themselves on other young poets. "Irving Layton (an epitaph for the walking dead)", and "Irving Layton (Two-fold tribute for the prodigal son)" by Red Lane, in his Collected Poems attest to that response. But the exchange was never one way, merely. There has been a dialogue between Layton and four generations of poets in Canada. He has addressed not only many of his
poems on poetry and the poet to the poets of his time, but has also
written individual poems to all those who had addressed themselves
to his commanding presence and body of work. The list includes
poems to Souster and Dudek, satirical poems to Smith and Scott and
many other Canadian literary figures, and parodies on fellow poets
as Leonard Cohen and Margaret Atwood in his latest volume, *Nail Polish.*
The intent of these poems was to keep the dialogue going, and to
effect a change in sensibility and awareness in the writers around
him. In fact, much of Layton's literary criticism of his contem­
poraries is expressed in the form of such poems as "Mexico as Seen
"Advice for Two Young Poets," "Whom I Write For," "The Sparks Fly"
and "For My Friend Who Teaches Literature"—just a sample to be found
in three volumes the poet published after *A Red Carpet for the Sun.*
This has been a continuing feature in Layton's work—not only a
dialogue with himself, but a critical dialogue with his fellow
poets on the nature of poetry and the poet. In this sense,
a selection can be made from the body of his work which would constitute
his own literary history and criticism of Canadian poetry, and also would
provide a good number of significant poems that would act as a kind
of 'ars poetica,' or manual for survival and growth, for aspiring and
practicing poets. No other Canadian poet has taken on the full
measure of this task. And no other Canadian poet could expect so
varied a dialogue, which in itself is a hallmark of literary
achievement and stature. And as always, Layton remains undiminished
and continues to have the last word.
Two years after the Collected Poems of 1965, there were still only three significant articles which attempted to come to grip with Layton's opus. Smith's "The Recent Poetry of Irving Layton: A Major Voice," appeared at the peak of Layton's creativity in the middle fifties which culminated in the selected poems, The Improved Binoculars. Smith praised Layton's "high order of excellence shown by In the Midst of My Fever and The Cold Green Element..." But he went on to make several critical and factual errors about Layton's poetic development (i.e. that Layton had written nothing significant before 1954), and that "there was much in the earlier books (as there is a little in the later) which seemed arrogant, puerile, or deliberately offensive." Louis Dudek's response to Smith's article pointed out the discrepancies in Smith's article and went on to point out, what now seems obvious, that the critical reception to Layton was greatly influenced by limitation and gentility of taste:

The reasons for the long neglect of Mr. Layton and for the present acclaim on the wrong terms are not far to seek. I read in the Toronto Quarterly, in the issue of January, 1956, the opinion that in Canada "cultural devotion to the mother country has been central. Certainly no challenge has come...from non-Anglo-Saxon sources." What in fact has happened, within the last decade and a half, is that this tradition has been challenged on the best literary grounds. The terms of approval from the prestige-conferring culture (the key to the Loyalist-derived and genteel tradition in Canada) are elegance, a well-tailored look, an apparent complexity (that conceals a real poverty of ideas), much verbal and scholarly show, a hightone, serenity, etc. etc.: art with the mystery concealed in its bosom—"one of us." The test of the new poetry is its relevance to life, not to the art museums; its energy, not its static impressiveness. The
break with the old tradition can come as well from those of Anglo-Saxon descent (Souster, Sutherland) as from others—it is not a racial issue, though it may temporarily be a class one. Mr. Layton, however, is an intruder on both counts. The acceptance of his poetry, therefore, on the ground of the old stolid virtues, denying as it does his real significance, will be a source of obfuscation for another decade unless the ironies of the situation are clarified.24

The subsequent developments have borne out Dudek's analysis. The literary polemics and battles between Layton and Dudek on one hand, and Smith and others on the other hand, have not vindicated either in simple conclusive changes. But the emerging sensibility and values in Canada in the sixties came far closer to Layton's stance than to Smith's more closed and genteel attitude.

The other two articles also demonstrate how difficult it was for writers to come to terms with all the facets of Layton's work. It would have been more open and flexible to accept the wide range of Layton's work than to harp continuously on his invective and satire. In this sense, Layton's attack did hit at the sore spots in the Canadian literary community. If gentility had not had such a strong hold, the clash would never have taken the course it did.

George Woodcock in "A Grab at Proteus"25 underlined the very problem which he attempted to solve. Under the disguise of the argument of good literary taste he also falls in with Smith in his dislike of the more barbed and prickly aspects to Layton's work. Yet as he notes:

...no critic has submitted a complete and satisfactory study of Layton as poet, mainly because no critic has so far relished the task of considering a body of work by
a notoriously irascible writer which varies so remarkably from the atrocious to the excellent, and which shows a failure of self-evaluation as monstrous as that displayed by D.H. Lawrence, who in so many ways resembled, anticipated and influenced Layton. To grasp Layton is rather like trying to grasp Proteus. But Proteus was grasped, and so must Layton be, for behind the many disguises an exceptionally fine poet lurks in hiding.

Woodcock's lurking condescension and patronising becomes apparent in the last line. As well, he does not note that these "many disguises" are all masks of the poet figure. Woodcock's attempt to "grasp" Layton forces him into critical patterns that seem to miss the point. The flaw in this approach lies in the apprehension of the various "disguises." Woodcock takes each for concrete aspects of Layton the poet. He almost confuses the persona for the poet and the poetry, and does not remind us that each of these is but a partial poetical guise for the central poet figure. It is all too neat and easy to see Layton in any one of these "disguises." For as Woodcock himself concedes, Layton does not fit any "grasp." But the critic by his nature must attempt to harness the energy he has before him, and in the process sets up his own confining "disguise." Woodcock suggests a few, but also takes each of these as touchstones of Layton's own achievement. As such the article really remains a grab, an attempt, with many fine insights, but incomplete, and at times, quite prissy and even as genteel as Smith. Woodcock hesitates between the fastidious and the vibrant. Since the poetry does not fit any molds but the shapes of its own making, Layton provides little room for such certainties as Woodcock's. Woodcock strives for simplicity and apparent consistency, and his attempt fails mainly because it tries to put Layton into a nutshell, and to
contain him with the apparent finalities of the critic. And this arrogance becomes evident in Woodcock's constant reference to the overview of Layton's work.

Wynne Francis' article suffers mainly from the fact that it is a panoramic view of the poet, and so, even more than Woodcock's suffers from trying to put the poet and the poetry into a few critical slots. Francis' article also suffers from some all-too-easy uninsightful generalizations on Layton and his poetry, on the confusion between the public image and the real poet. She does, however, note Layton's position in relation to the poets discussed above, and how they regarded his central position in Canadian poetry:

Among those who did appreciate the vitality and variety of Layton's poetry were the young poets of the forties and fifties. What appeared to their elders to be vulgar and boorish struck them as courageous and truthful. Many who sought him in person were not disappointed. They found a burly, virile man with shaggy hair, a broken nose, fierce eyes and a resonant voice whose poems obviously sprang not from literature (something read) but from life intensely lived.26

This demonstrates the strengths and limitations of her article, and the confusion between the poet and the poetry that has posed such difficulties to his critics.

Unfortunately, little attention has been focused on Layton's poems as such, which has been the central concern of this dissertation. Mandel in his monograph, Irving Layton, tends to compress all of Layton's work into one pithy study whose emphasis lies on the ideas and themes. A study of the poems reveals what Layton attempted to make and write. The poems are the measure of the poet's art, and the patterns these poems bring to light reveal his real achievement.
NOTES


4. Irving Layton at Le Hibou, with a jacket note by Roy MacSkimming, (Ottawa, 1963), Side One of the record.


7. Earlier manuscript version of "Young Girls Dancing at Camp Lajoie," in the Layton Collection at Sir George Williams University Library, Montreal.


CHAPTER VII

The Perfect Form of a Serpent: the Early Sixties

In the decade 1961 to 1971, Layton published another nine books. One of these was a volume of collected poems and another was one of selected poems. From the publication of A Red Carpet for the Sun to the publication of Collected Poems in 1965, Layton published one hundred ninety-nine poems in the three collections, The Swinging Flesh (1961), Balls for a One-Armed Juggler (1963), and The Laughing Rooster (1964). And of this number, one hundred thirty-two were selected to appear in the Collected Poems. Those latter poems represent a little more than a third of the poems in the Collected Poems and demonstrate that these five years were intense and productive for the poet—as intense and productive as the years 1953 to 1956. Layton included all the varieties of his poetry in these three volumes. The need to publish satirical and serious collections separately was superceded by this consolidated arrangement of poems. Besides, Layton was now publishing his books with a large commercial publisher, and his reading public was used to seeing all of his work between the same covers.

From the publication of the Collected Poems to the appearance of Nail Polish (1971), Layton wrote four new collections,
and the number of poems he published in these six years exceeded the selection of almost twenty years' writing contained in *A Red Carpet for the Sun*. Two hundred and eighty-five poems are collected in these four later volumes, making the total publication of the last decade in seven volumes, four hundred eighty-four poems. In ten years he wrote almost twice as many poems as the twenty-five active years from the mid-thirties to 1959. Also included in these seven new collections are the statements of five forewords, the collected stories of twenty years, and the prose essays, observations and aphorisms of *The Whole Bloody Bird*. Prolificity, it may be argued, does not spell excellence. However, Layton is the kind of poet who thrives and grows as he writes more. And as his other prolific phases demonstrate, when he writes much, he also writes his best. His poetic energies have always been large and generous in nature. Periods of intense activity always accompany a growth in the poet. The middle years of the last decade represent the most intense and realized phase of writing and growth for the poet which is mirrored in the titles of his volumes. Moving from one phase of growth and articulation to another in an accumulating process, the poet built on his body of work, drew from what he had written before and extended and intensified it before the new possibilities that presented themselves.

The roots and sources for the later writing naturally lie in the work of the twenty years before. Layton was 49 in 1961. The vision and the patterns of his poetry were readily apparent. He was not to change radically, but the next decade was to reveal the mastery
that maturity can provide. If the three volumes of the early
sixties mark the poet's most prolific phase, the volumes of the
late sixties are not merely throwbacks, but move into a consolidating
and relatively stiller period of poetic activity. Both these two
phases represent another two cycles in Layton's spiral movement.
The poet takes off from a point of development that has roots in
his previous work, goes on to develop a new strain, and returns to
a point of consolidation.

The titles of the three collections published in the early
sixties are prefigured in *A Laughter in the Mind* and *A Red Carpet for
the Sun*. As well, there are definite links between the prefatory "Note"
and the "Foreword" of the respective earlier volumes and the "Forewords"
of *The Swinging Flesh*, *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* and the "Preface"
of *The Laughing Rooster*. The assertion and affirmation of the early
two volumes are carried over into *The Swinging Flesh*, carried forward
with irony into *Balls*, and falls off in the last of the three volumes.

The "Foreword" to *The Swinging Flesh* underlines Layton's
Jewish identification but in the context of his affirmation of life:

One cannot love life as much as I do, its thrust
and colour and gladness, without abominating the
pompous fools, the frustrated busybodies, the
money-lusting acquisitive dull clods and lobotomized
ideologues who make it difficult for the high spirited
to live joyously. Philistine senselessness made
self-assured by swimming pools and a string of lackeys
I find repulsive. And pathetic. The philistine
Jew is as depressing as the philistine Arab or the
philistine Russian. I do not like his acquisitiveness, his love of show, his moneytheism. Or his hypocrisy and smugness. Or his stuffy, buttoned-up, timorous respectability. My place is beside the Jewish visionaries, scholars, poets, and rebels who were no less contemptuous than I am of the wealthy exploiter, the affluent boor, the moralizing fraud.

This concern with his Jewish roots brings the poet back to the forties, and is the beginning of a full circle return to that central aspect of his vision. In the late sixties he was to take it up more fully, and develop it further in the light of new experiences and a distillation of his own attitudes. Many of the satirical poems are directed at various members of the Montreal Jewish community, especially those who were involved with the Jewish educational system, which employed Layton for many years, and then unceremoniously fired him in 1960 on the dubious grounds of his unsuitability as a teacher of the young. This confrontation with the philistines of his community extends to include a savage attack on the academic literati of the country, and includes Layton's declaration of the role of the poet—an uncompromising and intrepid "Alpinist:"

Ultimately its secret is forever beyond them, for their intensive education in letters unfit them for its apprehension: not so much by dulling their sensibility or warping it to the measure of the conventional and familiar as by making them incapable of living in the glorious commonplace world from which all vital poetry must come. The poet roams; the professor ruminates. The one experiences; the other expatiates. The one is a peasant, a vulgarian; the other must permit his training and association to turn him into a gentleman. How can these two very different sets of temperament and activity be reconciled? The answer is, they can't. For a number of reasons, but chiefly because the citizenry of this country are completely unresponsive to art, those who can respond to it have developed a bias in favour of the academic
and genteel as their surest defence against a national experience they consider brutish, coarse. Each generation of prissy Anglo-Saxon academics in this country makes the same mistake, for the even tenor of their lives prevents them from understanding the tempestuous world in which the poet must have his being.

The vision of Layton's poet as "prophet and critic" springs from the "Note" of *A Laughter in the Mind*. Layton's manifesto for himself—and the image of the poet he projects—prepares the way for his social and political poetry of the sixties, and a renewal of his larger awareness. He moves from one circumference to another—from the parochial Montreal Jewish community to the dilemmas and problems of the age. And the poet is both peripheral and central to the world looming up around him and before him. Being peripheral and central—like the Jewish visionary in Western society—provides the tension for his angle of vision. And this is a more concrete elaboration of the role of the poet as Layton suggested in the "Note" to *A Laughter in the Mind*.

The contemporary poet should fulfil his role as prophet and critic, should exalt and pull down. To hell with moaning and whining, and with all the unlovely rhetoric of impotence. The dedicated poet can be a power in the land. If he did his work well, evil and arrogant men, knowing there was one about, would sleep less soundly in their beds. So would everyone else. For the poet can feel the future on his skin and can speak of things to come. He celebrates the world of Becoming and delights in his vision of creeds and civilizations dissolving one after the other in its eternal blaze. It's the fire he is always running to, waiting breathlessly for the moment to declare which imposing cadaver must topple into it next. With fire borrowed from it, he illumines for a moment the hostile darkness; tempering his chisel in its flames, he cuts out his epitaph for epoch and individual. The last word is always the poet's.
And "As our bourgeois-Christian civilization joins its shade to those of other vanished epochs," a new radical problem looms up for the poet.

It is that for the first time in the history of the world man's reason is abolishing the law of historical development through strife and opposition. The Promethean idea of the twentieth century is that men, collectively, can control their destiny. But— and here's the rub—they can do so only at the sacrifice of the Dionysian element which is the beginning and assurance of all creativity. The rational and the demonic cannot live side by side, and it is the latter that must be henceforth suppressed.

Layton does not think he has put up or invented "a nonexistent dichotomy between Reason and Dionysius," and that in the future the Dionysian element will almost altogether disappear in tranquilized mass societies. Layton's vision in the "Note" suggested that another oppositional process would arise in human consciousness, "a new laughter in the mind." In this "Foreword" he sees the end of the dialectical struggle in human affairs.

As the tragic drama unfolds, these groups must play the assassins of whatever is passionate and unpredictable in human experience—that is, of art. The poet, in the inert, collectivist world order looming up before him, can choose suicide of silence. Essenin and Mayakovsky chose the first; Pasternak, the second. He can also curse: curse long and loud and unceasing. Curse like the incomparable Timon of Athens.

But if the poet can curse, he can still affirm. The Dionysian element need not disappear, for as in "Note," "There will be new verses for the bloom—become—coffinsmell..."
With Homer and Li Po, the poet, the true innocent and green child, flings his poems between the dark bars and leaps from one area of brightness to another....So laughter without end; and so, forever, the swinging flesh. Everything swings. Everything that's got life in it swings. Once our hairy red-assed forebears swung from bough to bough. We swing through time and space; soon, from star to star. The hanged man also swings. The lynched Negro. Cordelia. A lacerated clown has said it for all of us: "Man is the only animal that laughs because he alone suffers so much." Has anyone ever put the tragic vision neater...more wittily?

The swinging is the movement of opposites and their interplay.

Nietzsche, the "lacerated clown," saw the link between suffering and laughter, between cursing and blessing. Layton takes the title of the book from the poem, "Maria Poidinger":

"Affirm life," I said, "affirm
The triumphant grass that covers the worm;
And the flesh, the swinging flesh
That burns on its stick of bone...."

The grass is but one manifestation of that "cold green element," and the worm, one of the perversities of nature and life, recalling the "Love the Conqueror Worm." In this quatrain, Layton has contained some of his key images and signature symbols; and among others these include the sacrificial burning of the flesh, and the stick as another phallic and creative version of the poet-king's stave in "Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom." The echoes rebound back into many of the poet's major poems. But the affirmation here is unmistakable, and lends weight to the almost pagan celebration in such poems as "Dance with a Watermelon," (a poem that the poet unfortunately chose to omit from his Collected Poems). The allusions may be Jewish and Hebraic, but the tenor of the poem is almost hedonistic. It reads like a song pastiche of a latter day King David dancing before the ark of the
body, or a Solomon gone bawdy in a new version of the Song of Songs.

Cool; moist and fresh; belly of my beloved.

Wild music from a tightskin drum
(Hear the obscene fife!)
And my forsaken neighbours not in, gathering
Fallen stars washed-out moons and withered leaves.

Before I split open the green melon
I shall do the dance of the erect phallus
I shall do a Simchas Torah dance, naked
I shall do a Temple dance, making my summer buttocks
quiver like chocolate jelly.

The melon is held "aloft like a sheathed Torah," and the scroll is a
phallic talisman, like the "stick of bone," the phallic body itself.
Woman is celebrated in the witty "The Day Aviva Came to Paris,"
probably the most inventive poem in which Layton's wit and visual
imagination come off together. The poet's woman is "an undraped
Jewish Venus," in keeping with Layton's projection of a Dionysian
Jewishness and healthy celebration of the body.

This sense of the body and the flesh informs the majority
of the serious poems. "The Wooden Spoon" is a surrealistic account
of the poet's phallicity, while in "Dans le Jardin" the poet finds
himself addressing himself to an unattainable young woman in an
unconsummated Eden. The tone of the epigraphic quatrain permeates
the whole collection. The flesh burns and is being consumed. Death
and sexuality, consuming and consummation, Eros and Thanatos are aspects
of the one process of flux and becoming. The ease is unmistakable.
It is as if the personas have been granted that "love" and communion
asked for in "My Flesh Comfortless." Yet, as in that latter poem, there
is a corresponding darker aspect to the Dionysian element.

"Sagebrush Classic," one of Layton's rare sonnets, is set in the American "desert's lush casinos." The poem projects an excremental and sexual vision, suggested by the metaphor of gambling and a deft usage of gambling slang and lingo. Saying, "All life's a gamble," the speaker tries all the games: "craps, blackjack, and even keno."

Swift slung it: civilization is faecal. 
So take a flyer. Which I did. 'Fickle
Or foolish one's luck; though I'd poems to show,
Was tanned-handsome, my movement deft and slow,
Some bunko artist raked my dimes and nickels.

Though the speaker swiftly swings it, he sees the faecal dimensions of gambling. The play of words moves around the consonant "f", and the predominant other consonants are the fast moving "s", "r" and "l." The movement reverberates in the sounds, as well as the metaphors. Yet the speaker is another poet figure. His own poems do not help him win before the "bunko artist." The vision of Swift is alluded to in the play on the advert "swift." Gambling, faeces, poetry—all are variations on the game of life. The closing sestet provides the summing up, the stock taking:

All's shit. Luther protesting from a can,
Down-to-earth dealer dealing twenty-one,
Who clued me into a richer idiom;
Result? I can curse better. Caliban,
Roll those bones. At the end comes fuckface death—
Shows a pair of goose eyes on a green cloth.
Clued into the "richer idiom" of gambling, the speaker can "curse better," and can play the faecal game. Poetry, art, money, language are all excremental. But the excremental and sexual seem to move from the same source. History and art are telescoped in the "Sage-brush" scene: Luther and the protestant capitalistic (and excremental) ethic of money and work, and Shakespeare's Caliban, symbol of the lower man. Both characters suggest the Renaissance era and an earthy vision of man, almost Flemish, reminiscent of Bruegel and Bosch. Death has the face of sex--Caliban with a penis or scrotum face. Or death is the glans head of the "goose", whose eyes are the tossed deuce, the two--the number suggestive of the opposites, the antimonies of death and sex, anus and penis. Death shows itself in the final throw when it takes away all one has gambled. 

But death is also the undignifying "goose", that prods us from behind, so to speak, and startles us when we least expect to be touched so intimately. The result is that the poet "can curse better," far better than the poet figure in "Rembrandt" (Cerberus). Man curses as part of the tragic affirmation, and it is his attempt to dignify himself by standing up to death. The curse is the poet's utterance in the face of the reductive attraction of death. The poet must go on rolling the dice and his poems knowing the "richer idiom" as he loses at the hands of "Some bunko artist." Art is "fickle" and "faecal", as well, a game that is to be played with everything at stake.
The richer idiom of the curse the poet also inherits from his mother. In "Keine Lazarovitch 1870-1959," the curse is man's answer to suffering:

I thought, quietly circling my grief, of how
She had loved God but cursed extravagantly his creatures.

For her final mouth was not water but a curse,
A small black hole, a black rent in the universe,
Which damned the green earth, stars and trees in its stillness
And the inescapable lousiness of growing old.

Her "final mouth" and last statement on the universe resembles that "small bore" in the frog's back in "Cain." Her "final mouth", her final vision, is a small circle or unity of its own which disrupts the larger unities or cycles in nature and the universe. (The imagery in the poem abounds in circles and cyclical movement, so that in the final stanza death itself is the completion of the living cycle and the beginning of another cyclical cosmic pattern, which parallels the pattern of Layton's own poetic development:

O fierce she was, mean and unaccommodating;
But I think now of the toss of her gold earrings,
Their proud carnal assertion, and her youngest sings
While all the rivers of her red veins move into the sea.

The poet, "her youngest," sings and still affirms. His singing or poetry is a kind of death which will also flow back into life. All ultimately returns to the sea, to the element which is the source of life and creativity and flux. Life is affirmed in death, and death affirms life. There is an almost religious apprehension of beauty in that moment's terror and loss of control, as in "Divine Image," a short poem whose apprehension of destructiveness makes
Swiftly darting in the setting light,
The doomed sparrow feels the falcon's wings.
How beautiful are they both in flight.

Though the "Foreword" speaks explicitly of the dilemmas
of the age, the poems implicitly refer to the problems Layton addresses
in that introduction. The poems celebrate or affirm with the curse
in mind. The affirmation and the curse correspond to the sexual
and the excremental. They are the tension of the tragic vision
Layton refers to that Nietzsche articulated. The "Foreword," in
fact, speaks of the poet's calling. Yet Layton includes such a
poem as "Because My Calling Is Such" in which the theme of the
contradictions of the poet's calling grows out of, and relate to "What­
ever Else Poetry is Freedom."

"Because My Calling is Such" begins with the image of
the poet in the ditch, an echo from Horace's _Ars Poetica_. It is
the gutter poet speaking, lost "in some foul cistern or ditch." "For
the sake of that craze/Made blind Homer dance" he must venture into
the hell of experience. And how can "mere woman's love reach/Across
the lampless silence." The poet's creative "craze" puts him into a
different dimension. The poet is so "bowed" by his experience,
"choking in the dust," in the infertility of his commonplace existence,
that he is drawn to the image of the woman. He wants to reach out
for her "fabulous face/Beyond all error and lust/In all that dark
place." In this creative dark—the commonplace world where the poet
must continuously find himself in—he does not "curse the bright phrase,"
the poems that illuminate it for him, the illuminations that take
him outside of his condition and become the "Coronal of my eclipse."
The woman is both woman and muse—yet the "bright phrase" has driven
the poet to "The dark that's piled with refuse," the necessary garbage
from which poems are made.

The prince and the frog are both aspects of the poet's
condition. A prince of a kind with the "Coronal" of his "eclipse," he
is also the freak, the frog who can be "Made mock of and rejected."
The poet is he who can transform his craze and freakishness into
something rare and valuable. And the whole story is a fairy tale
of its own kind, as if the poet and the woman were two human arche-
types in a mythic pairing. The woman and the muse, alternately, can
change poet into frog or prince, or vice versa. Yet poetry allows
surrender and ecstasy that the poet can become "A prince on your bed."
The poet's curse, then, is his blessing. He can not have it
either way, but both ways at once—the alternate masks contained in one
face, in one vision.

The pair of poet and woman are the two central personas in
the poems of this book and grow out of Layton's earlier preoccupations
with both. In "Librarian at Ashville", the librarian's infatuation
with the works of a long dead author become so intense and mockingly
pathetic that it resembles a kind of "Spiritual fellatio." The
women of Rome command the poet's inspiration and attention. The
beautiful women of that city will never disappear even with the
backdrop of
...the Via Ostiense where
Perched on a pyramid Death, the arch-romantic,
Holds court among tombs and sarcophagi
Conferring on prince and pastyface alike a tragic air.
("Women of Rome")

Beauty can not be cancelled out, nor sensual and sensuous loveliness.
Even if the world were to go awry, the palace of the poet's haunted
--and woman and muse haunted--mind would still receive the presence
of her "fabulous face" and figure:

Among ruins and travellers' cheques
Stay always lovely, my Italian lady;
Though tomorrow the heart of Jesus
Bleeds into a garish night
Where St. Peter's keys blink green and red
And the mad bicyclists are everywhere.
In the pale palazzos of my mind
Dance on a marble terrace floor
Lie down on my ghostly mental bed.

The mental bed is the place his poetry lodges him: watching the
forms of beautiful women pass by him in the rites of beauty, history,
and decay. Poetry is the final resting place where all forms must
return to mate and transform themselves. For the poet's awareness
and vision will always be there as a presence (and presumably preserved
forever in the immortality of verse), and as the ever recurrent mask
of affirmation whose prefiguration will be divined in all phenomena and
occurrences:

Estranged my wife, my daughter estranged;
Like a rare thought, like love, they are gone.
But my lipless smile, that has not changed.

Can you not see it beneath the skin?
A thousand years from now from the grass,
From the dust I'll flash you the same grin.
For the sun and moon, for maids and men;
For those who labour and those who stare;
For the death in each resurrection.

Let ghosts riot in a wicked brain
When lust shrivels like a cut foreskin.
I laugh, and my eyes are wide open.
("My Eyes Are Wide Open")

The poet figure assumes other masks, as the ironic seducer
in "The Convertible," Women may be the "bored young wives of Hampstead,"
of the "landlady" in "A Prayer." The poet's complement, double, and
opposite is woman. But each woman is a different persona of the
female principle. In "Magda," the poet is a reversed Christ enjoying
sex almost frivolously. The woman is "the more wise" for she
speaks from a double knowledge and awareness in contrast to the
male's frivolity. She is a complex of opposites, suggested by the
"x" sounds themselves:

Corrupt is your soul, complex.
Your body knows many tricks.
In both there's ecstasy.

She is like the perfect poem combining excellence and execution.

But woman can drive man to distraction and aristocratic
disdain for anything but abandonment and ecstasy. In "With the
Money I Spend" the poet is represented as the doomed Czarist
aristocrat more in love with the absolute beauty of his mistress
than with the impending revolution. The speaker is complex, refined
and sophisticated. The costly and extravagant life he has led—a
form of living poetry—may be coming to an end and he is devising
some strategy to elude those for whom the Dionysian element, Eros,
or Beauty mean nothing—even in the flesh. It is a manifesto for
personal liberation and sensual affirmation in the face of the "inert, collective world order looming up" that Layton referred to in the "Foreword." Poetry is a kind of decadence, or extravagance—a way of life, a way of saying no to the forces around us, an extravagant version of the "curse", its "richer idiom."

But more apparently the poet addresses himself to the female sex in "Prizes." The laurels of poetry were achieved by "Praising your thighs." But "Immortal fame" would have been the prize won had the poet "but praised/What lies between." The final thrust would have yielded the ultimate reward. The tongue-in-cheek poems include "Why I Don't Make Love to the First Lady," in which even poets subscribe to some sense of honour, waiting for "the international situation" to clear before "it's every poet for himself," out to seduce one of the loveliest ladies of the world. But this is a poem by "An arrogant magician", as the speaker confesses about himself. Poetry is a means of seduction. It is as if woman were the last human type whom the poet could reach, while all the varieties of men have become technocrats or emasculated automatons in a "collectivist world order." A sexual history is provided in "The Wooden Spoon" in which woman is also seen in a more sinister and threatening light. Woman can be "subtle/And innocent," a combination which can ensnare or deprive man. But the poet has a new lover, a woman "child" for whom he recounts the gory and weird stories of his liaisons—the different muses of his life, each with a different revelation of her life and sexual proclivities. But the woman, addressed in
this poem, has not grown up to threaten the speaker male poet, or to project upon him the dimensions of her own eccentricity or perverse behaviour. The speaker is luring her close to him by confessing the bizarre yet at the same time attractive and fascinating history of his own previous lovers. He seems to be saying that he has directed his own destructiveness at himself. He has diverted that force and energy into his own poetry and the various self-images he has made of himself:

Nevertheless, child, do not be frightened.
I am no Bluebeard.
Murdered poems are what you will find
Behind that locked door, my dear.

The vision of some form of unity that informs "Keine Lazarovitch 1870-1959" may have been possible because the "carnal assertion" of that woman in the poet's consciousness did not involve him only as a lover but as a son, as well, though the poet, in a way, is the lover to each and every woman in his life. Poetry, love, and sexuality spring from the common source as the opposite forces of division and death. Another mythopoetic version of the pairing of male poet and woman, "I Know the Dark and Hovering Moth," parallels "The Wooden Spoon" in that it begins with the supposedly biographical elements of the poet's life. The moth is "vilest emissary of death," a flying ambiguous creature whose aspects are Blakean and dark. Repressed or unhealthy sexuality--"a fat black moth was my first wife"--diverts or perverts the life force. Yet that
form of anti-force or unhealthiness is transformed by poetry and art from a toxin to an innoculation. Poison is transformed into effective potion:

For sun throbs with sexual energy
The meadows bathe in it, each tall tree.
The sweet dark graves give up their dead.
Love buries the stale fish in their stead.

From crows we'll brew a cunning leaven;
From harsh nettles: lock them in a poem.

But in the Blakean natural landscape of pond and minnows, a vision of heaven and hell projects the resurrection in each death.

And from Lethean pond beneath a scarp
There rush the vigorous hunting carp
At whose gorping jaws and obscene mouths
Flit the vulnerable black-winged moths;

Poets, each the resurrected Christ,
Move like red butterflies through the mist
To where the shafts, the sloping shafts of Hell,
The globed sun enclose like a genital.

The carp, symbolizing voracious and indiscriminate life, feeds on other forms of life. The complements of these moths are the butterfly poets—winged beautiful creatures who move through the mist ("odour of mortality") and tragically towards the larger and ambiguous mouth-genital of nature. The mythic landscape of this poem puts it beside such poems as "Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom," "For Mao Tse-Tung: A Meditation on Flies and Kings," "The Cold Green Element," and the later, "A Tall Man Executes a Jig." It is another poem with an imaginative vision in which Layton's major preoccupations find expression. But each of these poems picks up on another mode, such that these signature poems overlap and move in and out of each other—
a kind of visionary kaleidoscope. Layton is not content with but one mode. He tries them all—each being a different vision, from another angle of poetic insight and construction.

Poets in this ambiguous landscape of nature and hell—throbbing with a cosmic sexual energy—move through a ritual sacrifice in their rites of passage. "I Know the Dark and Hovering Moth" comes round to the image of the poet presented in the "Foreword." Butterfly and swimmer, two images of the poet respectively presented in those two early poems of the forties "The Swimmer" and "DeBullion Street," merge in this poem. The transformation in the symbols point to the poems of _Balls for a One-Armed Juggler_, in which the stave of poetry, the single phallic arm tosses and balances and plays with the opposites and antimonies. _The Swinging Flesh_ points to joy and affirmation, complemented in the ease and flow of the poem.

The title of this next collection suggests that the poet had gone one step forward, only in that he could fully affirm the tensions of his poetry, and play them with the assurance of the "arrogant magician of words"—fully assured of his power and his mastery.

There was once a one-armed juggler
who had two eyes, two ears, two feet,
and two huge balls which he tossed into
the air and called the antinomies...

As the above epigraph to the book suggests, the antinomies the poet may see outside of himself and contain in his poetry, are to be found in the body of his own self. As "In the Midst of My Fever," the body of the poet is the body of the world, and is also the body of his work,
his poems. Each is contained in the other. The body is inclusive and central. The epigraph also reinforces the poetics Layton outlined in his letter to Cid Corman, published in Origin XIV. Eyes signify imagery; ears, rhythm; feet, dance of the intellect. The balls signify the dialectical movement which informs the poetic, and finds correspondences in all three aspects of poetic practice. This dialectic is reinforced by the opening poem to this book, "There Were No Signs." Dialectics ultimately negate and cancel each other out so that the process must continuously begin again, and finds its renewal in this manner, and this is another variation of Layton's spiral poetic development. And it is also the same pattern in the closing poem, "A Tall Man Executes a Jig," such that this book begins and returns to where the poet "started from." But it is not a total return, of course, to the same point of beginning. And the passage of this dialectical journey is particular and individual, so that one must examine its various courses.

The "Foreword" to Balls baldly states what was implicit in the "Foreword" to The Swinging Flesh. There is a clarity and force to this preface, and an insistent urgency that Layton has come to crystallize his vision. The "Foreword" prepares for the poems, and the poet figure is at the center.

Today, poets must teach themselves to imagine the worst. To apprehend the enormity of the filth, irrationality, and evil that washes in on us from the four corners of the earth, they must have the severity to descend from one level of foulness to another and learn what the greatest of them had always known: there is, of course, no bottom, no end.
The descent into the Hell of modern times is the journey of the "juggler." He is "one-armed" in that he apprehends and holds in suspension the various angles of his vision. In preparing his readers for what lies ahead in this collection, Layton does not spare his contemporaries:

Because he has not done this the modern poet has been contumaciously pushed aside by novelists, playwrights, and film-makers looking for the terrible meanings imbedded in the human ash of death-factories. Where, then, have the poets been? Where are they now? Asleep? No, they are not asleep; they are still muttering their favourite incantations before nature, death, love, pleased if someone overhears them and recommends them for a travelling fellowship or a university post....

What insight does the modern poet give us into the absolute evil of our times? Where is the poet who can make clear for us Belsen? Vorkuta? Hiroshima? The utter wickedness of Nazism and National-Communism? There is no poet in the English speaking world who gives me the feeling that into his lines have entered the misery and crucifixion of our age.

The poets "have refused the crown of thorns," and do not write out of an awareness of "the exceptionally heinous nature of twentieth-century evil." Layton openly states how he sees his own role, for his poet is himself, as well as every other poet. But whereas in The Swinging Flesh the poet both cursed and blessed, Layton has now moved further. Cursing and blessing are not enough. His poet must descend, and it is this image of descent which marks the "Foreword" as well as the key poems of this collection:

Three is a new, dark knowledge waiting to be assimilated into the minds and consciences of those who are his contemporaries. To make this self-awareness available to them, the poet will have to crawl out of the universities and academies
to roam the streets and alleyways of the megalopis....
In silent anguish he will absorb the evil of his
times, himself place the crown of thorns on his
head. He needs no other adornment. Forging ever
subtler tools, he cannot permit himself to forget
he addresses mankind at large, not small coteries of
the sensitive and frightened.

Two poems that fall into place behind this "Foreword" are
"The Sparks Fly" and "Whom I Write For." The first poem concerns itself
with the poet's impulse in writing the satirical and occasional
poems that used to be solely collected in the satirical books. Poems
spring from conflict, from going against the grain of accepted
values and attitudes. Poems also spring from the poet's contrary
nature—his tendency to disrupt and disturb, his contradictions
and his dialectics.

I go about making trouble for myself.
The sparks fly.
I gather each one
and start a poem.

The sparks fly also because he is whetting the sharp edge of his
satirical implements. Women and "the sunless presbyterians of this
country" are the poet's trouble spots. The poet must also be a
destroyer of those forces in his experience that drain him, and
he makes poems not only out of "trouble" but out of the "crushed
limbs" of "the dung-bettles that want my blood." But making trouble
may be the measure of his poems on Canada and Canadian life and manners.
In "Whom I Write For" the speaking persona—for the poet—declares how
he has taken within himself the evil of his times, and how he imagines
his readers absorbing that knowledge into themselves. He addresses
his poetry to the dimensions of twentieth-century evil.
I write for the young man, demented,
who dropped the bomb on Hiroshima;
I write for Nasser and Ben Gurion;
For Kruschev and President Kennedy;
for the Defence 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-Tung, the only poets
I ever learned anything from;
I write for Adolph Eichmann, compliant clerk
to that madman, the human race;
For his devoted wife and loyal son.

If he is writing for, he is writing to them, but also because of them;
because the antinomies and contradictions are contained in them,
contained in the opposite paris of Nasser and Ben Gurion, and the
complementary pair of Castro and tse-Tung, whose poetry is really
the power they wield at the service of a political or ideological vision.
The dark knowledge is "Man, without a soul; man, robotized; man, tortured,
humiliated, and crucified; man, driven into slave camps and death
factories by devils and perverts; man, the dirtiest predator of all."
The poet assimilates this knowledge so that he asks for "words fierce
and jagged enough/ to tear your skin like shrapnel." Language and
poetry become weapons in the hand of the speaker poet. Caught up
in the movement of his age, he too becomes destructive, but only
out of a profound rage and anger, only to attack and transform that
kind of consciousness that refuses to see the contrary and maddening process
taking place in the world. Poetry must contain "that madman, the human
race," and the "devoted wife and loyal son," as well.
"The Cage" and "The Architect" are two other antinomies in the body of the poetry. Both are about the poet again. The poet speaker of the former poem watches the construction of the human world about him with a terror at the terrible ironies and contradictions of human behaviour:

I turn away to hide my terror
Lest my unmanliness displease them
And maim for all a half-holiday
Begun so well, so auspiciously.
They are building the mythical cage
Whose slow rise allows janitors, whores,
And bank presidents to display love
To one another like a curious
Wound: the Elect to undertake feats
Of unusual virtue.

Everyone seems to be getting into the act, working with more application as if it were a display of "Altruism." There is a frightening irony in the scene for the speaker, for he notes how this construct is going up with such dedication and a feeling for community, as if it were for the first time that such a manifestation of love were apparent. There are two cages here: the cage of civilization, and the cage of the speaker's vision. For when the work is all up, the workers leave "The square littered with balloons and me/ Blinded and raging in this human cage." The poet is trapped by what he sees, and by the paradox of his rage and blindness. Poetry is at the same time a kind of blindness, rage and a huge cage. Vision breeds blindness, love leads to rage, construction implies entrapment.

In the complementary poem, "The Architect," the poet planner, however, is the raiser of structures. The architect puts his hand "through a hedge," his one arm like a phallic wand. As soon as he
touches the landscape with his one arm, it changes colour. There is
death in the natural order, and all kinds of birds fall at his feet
"like coloured snowflakes." From the birds' "beautiful bones" he
"raised a city where the first bird had fallen." It is the death
of that first bird—the poetic and imaginative—that allows for the
raising of structures. And the city, if this architect be another
figure of the poet, is the poetic world created by the onearmed
juggler. This architect builds his constructions from the deaths
of rare and beautiful and free creatures. It is an art built on
death, a creative process that destroys in its making.

The one literary allusion in this poem is curious. The
smile of the "mayor's wife, resembling Alice B. Toklas," is used to
adorn the flag of the tallest building of this city. At night, it
seems as if her dentures were "to snap at the moon or a moon man
descending." She is toothless and ugly, and sexless to boot. She
makes the perfect companion to this artist figure, and if she is compared
to Gertrude Stein's friend, it is also suggestive of her perverse infer-
tility, her hatred of imaginative men (moon man descending)—in
short, she is a sexless lesbian. And she complements the architect
who himself finds that his arm has been transformed once he tries to put
it through a hedge again so that he can "squeeze" more "silver" or wealth
from the natural world. He is sterile also, incapable of healthy,
procreative sexuality, for his phallic arm has become "queer," that is
strange and homosexual. He is the artist who has sublimated or channelled
his manliness into art, and the death inducing patterns that structures
and forms impose on life. Such a woman as "the toothless wife of the
mayor" will not let him amputate his arm, that is, get rid of his
deformity. Together they are an "intriguing pair," another pair of poet and woman.

Another persona for the poet is the Shakespearean fool in "The Fool's Song." This fool is bidden to sing by a woman—the muse. And she bids him to "sing, but sing of hell"—that hell into which the poet must descend. Another poem in Layton's growing "manual" for poets is "Advice for Two Young Poets," written for two of the editors of the Montreal poetry magazine, Cataract. "The idea's to drive them to madeness and drink/—not yourselves." For the "main thing" is "survival" in a world where political brutes like Stalin silence poets like Mayakovsky, "who played Russian roulette/with his genius." The poet has "the choicest weapons—words," and he can use them as outlined in "Whom I Write For." Yet the poet must also have spice, life and juice in him, as such poets as Cavafy, Tuvim, Mayakovsky had. "No Shish Kebab" is a critique of those poets—mostly English—who lack this colour and vitality in them. Very few of them had it—Keats, Shelley, Milton—yet it is a mark of the European and Slavic poets. For the poet must still celebrate and assimilate into himself the psychic complements of shish kebab—a certain flair, spice and complexity of rareness and taste.

The opening poem, "There Were No Signs", maps out again the themes of movement and growth. "By walking I found out/where I was going." Direction and passage are central concerns of the poet figure. He will face love and hate—he will have to know what to value, what to reject; what to celebrate, what to curse. But each experience
proceeds in a dialectical movement, as "By grieving, how to laugh from the belly." The poet moves through infirmity to strength, from untruth to truth, from hypocrisy to directness. This is not only a directive for survival, but also for growth. And the "going" will lead to self-knowledge and realization, such that through this passage of opposites he will come to know who he is, and who he may be bold enough to be. But the circle does not complete itself. Completion would be death, a stasis, and an end to growth which is poetry. For at this last point of realization the poet will be "where I started from." The cycle of dialectics and change must begin again in a wider circle, in order to break the perfection that has been achieved.

In the realm of language, silence is a perfection and a poetry beyond mere words. In the poem written after the death of Ernest Hemingway, "Silence," language yields and dissolves into reality and life.

The word betrays the act;
The act alone is pure.
The rest is literature:
Fishbait for fools and pedants.

The act is a purer poetry—it is being and becoming in one. The landscape of the mind is composed of a "mountain back/Knife-edge poised against the sky." A single bird, like a thought or a poem or a poet, flies over that height, poised like a weapon—the ultimate weapon, the word. But above that height, above language, "nothing dies." All is unyielding at that height and eternal for it simply is. And below, the "unsacrificed birds", who can not pass over the world
of language and accepted forms and structures, can only cry with the desire to go beyond themselves, or with the fear of the highest sacrifice of death. The speaker can "imagine the only music" he hears, soundless and unchangeable. It is silence, the "hardness of silence," which in itself is like the mountain and the sky. The speaker and his consciousness—and his need to speak—become

Like that stone
Through whose single cleft
Flows the stillest water.

From the inorganic stone flows the silent speech of flux. In the landscape, in the world, being and becoming are part and parcel of the same whole. And no living things participate in this final eternal process. As language is one antinomy, silence is the other. Yet the natural world contains "the only music," and it is lodged there like an absolute. In a further sense, the poem itself is "the stillest water"—it is a flow of its own kind, and the poem "Silence" betrays the act of silence by its own words.

Stillness spells a death of sorts. The stillness of "Still Life" is the ironic counter-point of the hardness of "Silence". One of the two men in the poem speaking of modern art, kills a bird with a stone as he converses. The act is transposed next to the man's statement that "The human's no longer interesting" as a subject of art. His art and words betray each other, and the still life is the stillness of the death of the living and "hopping bird:"

Then stillness: stone on wing: both partially in shadow.
There was a sweet smell of earth.
The ironic perversity of man's cruelty and destructiveness still is at the center of the poetic vision. But the silence in this poem is of death, whereas the silence in the former was cosmic and creative, and corresponded to the ferment in the poet's mind which brought forth water, so to speak, from the stone, the unchanging rockbed of reality.

A "little fox" lying in a pool of its blood provides the motive for "The Predator," and a crystallized poem on the theme ironically understated in "Still Life." It is a more blunt and searing statement, and contains the same central metaphor and figure as the poem on the poet, "The Cage." The caging and entrapment contain those who build it as well:

But this fox was;  
there's no place in the world any more  
for free and gallant predators like him.

Eagle, lion,  
fox and falcon: their freedom is their death.  
Man, animal tamed and tainted, wishes to forget.

He prefers bears  
in cages: delights to see them pace  
back and forth, swatting their bars despondently.

Yet hates himself,  
knowing he's somehow contemptible:  
with knives and libraries the dirtiest predator of all.

Ghost of small fox,  
hear me, if you're hovering close  
and watching this slow trickle of your blood:

Man sets even  
more terrible traps for his own kind.  
Be at peace; your gnawed leg will be well-revenged.

The two opposites of mountain and water find their complements in rock and butterfly in "Butterfly on Rock." The conceit and illusion of the poem's speaker urges him to become a metaphysical predator himself.
A butterfly on a rock becomes "the rock's grace,/its most obstinate and secret desire/to be a thing alive made manifest." It is as if the "stillest water" flowing through the "single cleft" had become the tongue of nature made manifest. But the human speaker must test his proposition and becomes another version of the "stranger" of "Still Life":

Forgot were the two shattered porcupines I had seen die in the bleak forest. Pain is unreal; death, an illusion: There is no death in all the land, I heard my voice cry; And brought my hand down on the butterfly And felt the rock move beneath my hand.

There is no death, ironically, for the rock still remains alive, whether the rock shook beneath the man, or whether something in the man made him shake that he thought the rock had shook. The rock's significance and the rock's movement are contained in the nature of the man, and by extension, all human life. Only man can deny death, and with that arrogance wreak death and havoc on other forms, organic and inorganic. This whole exaggerated denial is almost the act of poetry itself. And thus "Silence" falls into this poem, for "The word betrays the act" once more. Man's consciousness and realizations--"I heard my voice cry"--as expressed in language, poetry and philosophy, hypnotize him so that he can come down hard and crush the butterfly, "the soul of a dead person"--the presence of what is alive and rare. Words may be the choicest weapons, but they are ambiguous. They condone perversity and cruelty; in fact, language fosters them by separating man from nature and giving him the tools to turn against and destroy other forms of life. Yet ultimately, for the poet, language is the final ambiguous weapon; he must use language to combat that which language has itself produced in man: systems, structures that
impose themselves destructively on the human and other universes.

This knowledge of the poet's dilemma and the two-way nature of language provides the fierce tension of "If I Lie Still." Can the poet's vision be fixed in stillness and resolution? Can he resolve the warring antinomies as he sees them in himself and in the world around him? For if he lies dead, his consciousness will be born again? For he may find the ambiguous and ambivalent stillness of poetry coming to life in the other forms of "a single verse" (another form of the "single cleft") or in the already omnipresent symbolic "shallow/stone", though finally the tension finds no resolution.

For a thousand years
I shall lie like this
with my head toward the sun

Till knowledge and power
have become one;
then I shall write a single verse,
achieve one flawless deed

Then lie down again
to become like this shallow
stone under my hand,
and let my face
be covered with grass

To be pulled out by the roots
by what raging hermit,
his breast torn apart as mine now?

Rage will always spring up in living beings--the rage of being alive, caught between words and act, stone and water, being and becoming, life and death: the antinomies that tear man apart and give him the measure of his mortality. That is the perennial condition of the poet, for he inhabits a mental space between two stillnesses, the creative
and the destructive. Ultimately, the "raging hermit" poet returns to one verity: his vision, his awareness. As "The Hag," in the poem of that title, he is another version of that "hermit" persona. The poem, as others in *The Swinging Flesh*, encapsulates the crystallized vision that emerges from a whole lifetime of living and observation. Ultimately, the speaker can only remain creatively passive, a spectator, an observer. For only from that situation can he get the perspective that will translate itself into the vision of art:

I've seen a dead Algerian child;  
And a crushed grass-snake curse the sun,  
And a defenceless hare on the heath

Pray to the moon to sheathe its light,  
Its terrible and beautiful light.  
Farmers, workers, and all good people:

My eyes are open; I am waiting.

The last line echoes the poem in the previous collection: "My Eyes Are Wide Open." The poetic or artistic awareness survives. Though he is "a monstrosity ripped/Out of the night," he ends up "in this timeless square," the self same square of "The Cage." It is the square of the world, and the square of poetry. Both are held together in a suspension in the poet's mind. Each contains the others, and both antinomies seem separated from the gaze and vision of the poet. He is "open" in that he is aware of the opposites; and he is forever waiting in the anticipation that is poised and suspended between the antinomies of his vision, and the antinomies he sees in the human and animal universe about him.
The first poem, "There Were No Signs", encapsulated the poet's vision of direction and passage in his life and art. As there were seven stages to the journey in this latter poem, the last poem in the collection, "A Tall Man Executes a Jig," finds its counterpart in seven stanzas. It is a major statement that contains within it the whole progress of poems from "There Were No Signs," and is actually a series of seven unrhymed sonnets, or sonnet measured stanzas. The first four stanzas function as an octave might, and the last three as the closing sestet which resolves the themes of the octave. Layton himself chose it as his favourite poem in the anthology edited by Paul Engle and Joseph Langland, Poet's Choice. It is a central poem, and is included as the final poem, as well, in the Collected Poems, in which "There Were No Signs" is placed as the opening poem. Both poems complement each other and suggest that in this volume, Balls for a One-Armed Juggler, Layton had come to the acme of his vision. For him, this long poem is the central poem—the signature poem that seems to encapsulate and contain the statements made in the other major poems. Layton underlines its significance:

Eschews the usual consolations, religious or poetic. No rhetorical huff-puff, no sterterous whine, so beloved by some of my contemporaries. Puts a gutted grass-snake at the centre of things and says to the lapis lazuli boys—"What's that you said about Art? Louder, the squirming creature can't hear you." Everything I ever knew about life and poetry, and some things that were revealed to me only at the last moment, has gone into its making. More than any other poem of mine, this one fuses feeling and thought in an intense moment of perception. Of truth. Truth for me, of course. That's the way I feel about gnats, and hills, and Christian renunciation, the pride of life and crushed grass-snakes writhing on the King's Highway.
I like poems that are subtle and circular—the perfect form of a serpent swallowing its own tail and rolling towards Eternity. A meditative music, the feelings open as the sky. Formless poems give me the pips. If ideas, I want to see them dance. Otherwise it's historico-politico-econimico uplift and braggadocio concealing a sad poverty of feeling. Worse, a poverty of imagination. The vulgar stance of the talentless mediocrity. The ambiguities of existence? Of course, of course. I think my poem reflects them, but NOT "Let's play Ambiguities, Empson and Brooks are watching, an ironical smile on their civilized faces." For all the big talk and big words and the big noises, only the genuine finally endures. The words that redeem us: justify the millions of slaughtered Xmas turkeys.¹

The different stages and changes the "tall man" or poet figure undergoes is aptly explained in terms of the themes of death and transformation in Patricia Keeney Smith's "Irving Layton and the Theme of Death."² The poem is adequately explained and explored in that article, and also provides itself as the encapsulating poem of Layton's body of work. Yet it is Mandel who focuses the poem in the context of Layton's poet figure:

We can read these changes as symbolizing the way of the poet: backwards through time, through madness, to redeeming power; not through feigning or evasion. We can read them as desire transformed or the power of the image to take into oneself, without negating them, all opposites. We can read the changes as a symbolic exalting of sexual desire: the demonic snake of the underground in the heavens; hell as man's crown and glory.³

With that last final image the poem comes round to the notion of descent suggested in the "Foreword." And the almost circular pattern of living and realization stated in the opening poem, "There Were No Signs."

A sign finally reveals itself in the last strophe: the final vision of the snake and man transformed into the night dragon. The ouroboros—the serpent with its tail in its mouth, and
the one arm of the juggler contain the opposites and also unite beginning and end, conscious and unconscious, suffering and celebration, cursing and blessing. The serpent is the symbol for the creative transformation, that by feeding upon itself, like all life forms and dogmas and philosophies, returns back into itself. Head and tail meet in the mouth—consciousness and sexuality in that orifice from which language and poetry emerge. The circle completes itself, beginning in poetry and ending in poetry. Yet the completion, the end, represents a stage further than the beginning, where the tall man "spread his blanket on the field" and opened up before himself those alternative of vision. At the close he is weary, but beholds a new perfection born of passage and change.

There are a number of sources for the central images in this poem—and its pattern as well—in earlier poems, which read like analogues to "A Tall Man Executes A Jig." The execution moves in two directions, like the ouroboros, yet contains both in an ambiguity. Execution is both dance and death, for the pivot of the vision of suffering lies in "Executes." That is the measure of the activity of life and art: execution, containing within itself the connotative opposites. The suggestion of a pattern that is "subtle and circular" is rampant throughout Layton's work, from the earliest poem, "The Swimmer," in which the amphibian poet figure is set against a certain circular or returning pattern in nature. The "Note" to A Laughter in the Mind suggests the overall imaginative cycle and pattern, while the snake is also prefigured in the volume in "Garter Snake." The suffering and
transformed snake of the later poem seems to be the same one referred
to in the earlier poem and both are poems written in the peak of a
phase. In "Garter Snake" the "signs" suggested in the summer land­
scape become "a volley of red tongues": the speech suggested in the
events transpiring particularly and symbolically in the summer
scene. In the later poem the "violated grass snake" in its suffering
could not become "earth's vivid tongue that flicked in praise of
earth." In "Garter Snake" the real significance of the snake in
the symbolic landscape is obscured in the reductive image of the
snake as a parody of the dragon emblem, and in the rhetorical
questions at the end of the poem which suggest the conundrum
of the symbolic figures of the poem:

Return, return in a week.
The grass snake, a strip of hide,
makes in its last contortion
upon the road
a calligraphic S: the fine print
of a Chinese dragon: parody of one.

Now gaze up at the sky
and at the innumerable Rorschachs;
no specialist shuffles those clouds.
Riven like the garter snake
what do they mean? what do they signify?

The signification is made apparent in the long poem. Yet many of the
images are also apparent in "For Mao Tse-Tung: A Meditation on Flies
and Kings." In the latter poem, the crucifixion in the landscape is the
final encapsulating image of that poem. At that point, the sacrificial
vision of life and nature did not go beyond itself. And that vision
is echoed in the fourth and pivotal stanza of "A Tall Man Executes a
Jig." Whereas in the former, the final image is the crystallization
of the poem, in the latter poem, that image is incorporated in the poem
as one stage in the changes that would yield the final transformation of snake into ouroborous. The juxtaposition of both passages suggests the poet's growth of vision and passage:

And mark the dark pines farther one,
The sun's fires touching them at will,
Motionless like silent khans
Mourning serene and terrible
Their Lord en bombed in the blazing hill.
("For Mao Tse-Tung: A Meditation on Flies and Kings")

He doffed his aureole of gnats and moved
Out of the field as the sun sank down,
A dying god upon the blood-red hills.
Ambition, pride, the ecstasy of sex,
And all circumstance of delight and grief,
That blood upon the mountain's side, that flood
Washed into a clear incredible pool
Below the ruddied peaks that pierced the sun.
He stood still and waited....
("A Tall Man Executes a Jig")

All vistas make him stand still and wait in anticipation of the "hour of revelation." And the revelation of the ouroborous contains all the others--as the snake poem contains itself. For as at the beginning of the poem the man had spread his blanket on the field--his protective mat so he may lie down at the centre of his universe--by the end his blanket is gone and is transformed into the spread image of the "mailed coat" of the snake. The blanket itself was a kind of serpent. Thus by way of its images the poem returns upon itself. All the blankets or protections upon which the tall man may lie or may discover as philosophies of life, are transformed from blankets into transforming serpents. The blanket itself is a carpet of sorts, a "mat of nails" which makes the tall man a parallel figure to the violated grass snake
lugging "Its intestine like a red valise." There are other parallels and correspondences to the central image of blanket and snake, but the pattern suggests that subtle circular body, which Layton characteristically appropriates for the tall man's vision—the poet figures.

This circular and cyclical pattern is applied to the last volume of this phase, The Laughing Rooster. For as the setting of the final stanza of "A Tall Man Executes a Jig" is the "night bright," the opening poem of the next volume is set at night, as well. And that same latter volume ends with a poem also set at night—the circular pattern is carried over from Balls for a One-Armed Juggler, and the juggling is an unbroken circle of opposites held and suspended by the poetic play of mind. This pattern is reinforced in the "Preface" to The Laughing Rooster, which is really an essay on the creative and poetic process, and in a previous version in the anthology, English Poetry in Quebec, appeared under the title, "The Creative Process."

"A Tall Man Executes a Jig" has led Layton back to the circular snake of poetry and art. The "Preface" also reveals the mysterious process of transformation which occurred in the latter poem. For Layton, speaking of the creative process, is really "dealing with mysteries," at least, in the sense that the inspired moment, the creative ferment defies full explanation or analysis. When Layton speaks of his experience of inspiration, he throws light upon the psychic sources which are represented by "the perfect form of a serpent swallowing its own tail:"


The switch: that's what I mean by inspiration; the psychic phenomenon of passive, expectant concentration that obliterates the division between past and present, subject and object, internal and external, and by intensely vivifying and cohering every part of the creator at once--his mind, senses, and emotions--seems so to magnetize his consciousness that polarities are reconciled and patterns of meaning formed out of memories, impressions, desires, and thoughts find their perfect release in word and rhythm. If it's a good poem, he has put all of his living up to that point into it. And if it's a great poet who is writing it, what he wants to say and what he has to say become miraculously fused in the heat of composition. At that moment instinct becomes intelligence; memory, imagination; craft, creativity. The poet becomes the poem.

Uncannily, this passage in the "Preface" to The Laughing Rooster began with the comparison between the poet and a locomotive, The switch, the impetus is the spark of inspiration. The locomotive is an image resembling that emblem of the snake. And in the description of the creative ferment, Layton provides an accurate parallel to the process of realization in "A Tall Man Executes a Jig."

The title of this third collection of this phase suggests that Layton had come full circle himself. The Latin saying which suggests this title, "Omne animal post coitum triste praeter mulierem gallumque," points to the poet's assertion and joy even after he has reached the acme of Balls For a One-Armed Juggler. The title poem projects another image of the poet. The rooster-poet will not make his song any different even though he has come to a climax of sorts:
When his comb
was visibly reddening
in the early light
of the morning,
the solitary rooster
began to crow,
scattering the hills
in all directions.

When he saw
what he had done;
when he saw the crowds
of anxious people
on the roads
leading to the hills,
the rooster
--I alone heard him--
began to laugh.

To crow
would have been
out of place;
and besides
this rooster
wanted to be different.

The hills are the self same hills of "A Tall Man Executes a Jig," that is, positions of vision. He scattered them, dispensed with them, and will now move on. But before doing so, laughter is his respite. And so the mood returns to the affirmations of The Swinging Flesh, and the phase moves back to its beginning, returns to where he stood before in "There Were No Signs." And in the spirit of the "Preface", and the last poems of the previous book, crowing would be out of place. Thus The Laughing Rooster is another book that moves from a center of fullness, of laughter, another "laughter in the mind."

Even in the opening poem, "Plaza de Toros," the speaker stands on the hill and watches the bull sun disappearing under the black cape of the "Triumphant matador, night." The speaker may be "sucked into a whirlpool of earth," but he is fully drawn in and does not hold back.
As the laughing rooster, he is also aware of the dark and perilous themes. But he is not partially aware, or escaping into some easy thematizing or the obliquity of satire. The opening poem suggests that Layton is still concerned with the vision outlined in the "Foreword" to *Balls For a One-Armed Juggler*. He is imagining the worst—the "black cape" appears in other shapes and sizes throughout this volume. And thus the affirmation and laughter of the title poem is but an attempt to affirm again in the face of the darker themes.

The other poet figures in the collection appear in "Portrait of a Genius," "The Tragic Poet," "I Saw a Faun," "In Memory of Stephen Ward," and "The Daimon." All of them are flawed versions of the laughing rooster. In the first poem, a portrait of Leonard Cohen, the poet who "gives himself real scars/with imaginary razors," finally has his "boyhood smile" wiped away from him—his final mask. Then he discovers "only the blank terror staring from the wall." That is his final vision: the terror and hallucination mirroring what the poet finds in himself. In "The Tragic Poet," perhaps written for Randall Jarrell, the affirming poet who flings himself "thoughtfully" before a car, still affirms in the face of the fact that his affirmation leads him to step before the technology and mechanization of the contemporary world. He becomes the martyrs he has praised—to affirm them he must put his life before and under the wheels of the machine. But there is an almost critical irony in the poem, suggesting that the tragic poet in
our times—Mayakovsky, Crane—gets caught up in the role he has
projected. He affirms "the brave toilers," and the "martyrs/whose
burning flesh/sizzled hosannahs," namely, those caught in the
totalitarian collectivist orders. But realizing how caught up
they are and...

In despair
of ever equalling the courage
he had himself endowed them with
he stepped thoughtfully
before a chauffeur-driven car.

"I Saw a Faun" presents the theme of the disappearing Dionysius in
our times. The faun is another persona of the speaker, the poet
figure. And as "The Daimon," he finally has to disappear in the
face of the banal and joy destroying world. Each of these figures
resembles the demons Layton refers to in the "Preface." For as
he says, inside the poet "there's a demon will not let him rest,
will not let him live a life of normal usefulness." Even the
Canadian poet F. R. Scott struggles with his own demon, in Layton's
other portrait, "F. R. Scott." As in the case of the poem for
Cohen, the portrait is a composite picture of the man and the
poet who also emerges from the poems. Layton's Scott is the persona
of "Lakeshore," someone on the edge of things, someone who can not
let go and give himself to an ecstasy or dance, a dance of the
whole man, of the antinomies of body and mind. For Layton, he
epitomizes the Anglo-Canadian sensibility, namely, an inability to
live fully and celebrate with all the facets of the total man:
For all that
weary of his too clear sight,
his icy brain,
would rather be
an ignorant Italian
grinding his hurdy-gurdy
for coppers
under a lady's balcony.

Even if, friskily,
he lifts high
his long, tailored legs,
and higher...so...so...
making one wonder
what tormenting ghost
has got him by the ankle
and won't let go.

Stephen Ward is another poet in Layton's ranks. He is
"England's last poet/asking: "What's wrong with fornication?" He, like
the worm in "El Gusano," makes "class distinction disappear" in
his management of his clients' sexual proclivities. He is no
"blubbering liar," for in his perfect management"--poète maudit!/ironist!"--he unhinges "the fatal door," and reveals the "print of goat's
foot" in everyone, and under the veneer of his English culture and
society--"under the still, black bowler/horns of a distressed satyr."
The irony and decadence of his management makes him another of the
dammed poets of the times.

Layton, in contrast, produces a series of poems on woman
which are not of the same coinage as Ward's. They are bitter poems
about betrayal and desire. The "Coal" of loathing explains the
nature of the inspiration for these poems, how loathing and sexual
disgust, by the negative attachment they give rise to, move the poet
into a surprising prolixity. Love and fullness make the poet "inarticulate," whereas loathing, its opposite, fires (paradoxically) his heart and imagination. On the one hand it is as if desire and love made the poet moan "like a swollen filthy stream;" and on the other hand, it is as if his revulsion led his thoughts to "flow endlessly" so that he "cannot stop writing for her/poem after poem." The speaker has given himself up to the "black coal" of his own emotions—the balance of opposites has shifted and the fire of inspiration burns, upon the deposited and crystallized blackness of the coal of sexual revulsion. Sexuality, in the second stanza, shows "like a swollen filthy stream," for that is the speaker's response to the woman's "amorous fingers." On another level, "Coal" is a poem on the poet's relationship to his muse, his more passive female self. Revulsion and hate provide the kind of detachment and perspective from which poems can be written. Desire makes the poet into a stream, an inarticulate merging with his experience. But separation and disillusionment with the nature of mere experience give the impetus for the other flow of poetry.

In such poems as "Man and Wife," "My Queen, My Queen," "Lust," "Courtesies of Love," "Aftermath," "The Seduction," "Portrait of Nolady," and "The Worm," the theme is explored in terms of lust and desire, and the human tendency to debase itself through unbalanced sexuality, or the confusions that sexuality and desire can engender. The poems are crystallized statements that are unique in the body of Layton's work. The beginning of "Lust" has an epigrammatic quality that states the basic reductive element behind these poems:
Desire
without reverence
is lust.
And reverence for life, when it is gone, leads to the "piddling" acts of baseness with which these poems grapple. Thus the transforming serpent of the last book is changed or reversed into the revealing worm images in "The Worm" and "El Gusano." The change in this image, from the previous collection, reveals the shift of vision apparent in The Laughing Rooster and provides a critical insight into the pattern of Layton's poetry in this phase. The poet and the woman—the archetypal human pair in Layton's poems—take on the new twist revealed in "Coal." The stave of the Canute poet-king, the violated grass snake turned into the transforming ouroborous—all these phallic wands take on their reductive opposite in the worm:

The filthy rain
blackens the street

Knowing that you lie
this afternoon
whimpering in another man's arms

I picture you stretched out,
a stiffened corpse

And your cold vagina
extruding
a solitary pink worm.

This "fellowship of death" is death-like and anti-life. It is the other vision of life—without reverence or affirmation—its active negation. This is the worm that comes between the poet and the woman, so to speak, and separates them.
By extension, the worm in "El Gusano" becomes the representation of death that unites all human beings in the true and ironic "fellowship of death." The worm in this apostrophic poem is "strange, never-before-seen." The speaker is "most in love" with worms of "all humped and skin-crinkled creatures." The creatures—worms—in Franco's Spain take on both political and metaphysical dimensions, for death provides the ultimate ironic democratic solution:

Bless the subversive, crawling dears
Who here are the sole underground
And keep alive in the country
The idea of democracy.

The actual worm that the speaker has noted disappears. And the poem shifts again from the actual to the imaginary:

This worm shall knit the scattered plots
Of your traduced, dismembered land;
And co-worker of wave and wind,
Proud, untiring apostle to
The fragrant and enduring dust,
Carry its political news
To Castile and to Aragon.

This worm is but another version of "the worm" that "the triumphant grass covers" in the epigraph quatrain to The Swinging Flesh. That emblem has come around full circle, an ouroborous of Layton's own thematic development. Awareness of that "worm", the other reductive parallel to the transforming serpent, will inform the next phase of Layton's development, already prefigured in these poems.

That the vision of "The Tall Man Executes a Jig" has been almost reversed, in a reversal of return, is apparent in another poem on Spain, "Fornalutx." The rhymed quatrains—abab—reinforce the
theme of the reversed antinomies, or the opposites turned upside
down. The last stanza is rhetorical, for the poem has built itself
up like a conundrum. Fornalutx, the place the speakers announce
they were going to for a holiday, was to be "A fabulous realm, Oven
of Light." Instead, it turns out to be the opposite of the name
given to it.

The terraced hills made one think of hell:
I have in mind Dante's famous rungs;
Excrement, not brimstone, was the smell
When the foul air entered our lungs.

It is another place without reverence or affirmation. It is a place
of decay, rot and foulness. If there was light to be expected it
is "More like the dark perhaps." And the speakers almost choke in
this Oven of Light, which they dreamed may have been a wonderful,
sun-drenched mediterranean Eden.

Yet was it by chance that we came there,
And crossed oceans for a misspent day?
Or putting its foul breath to my ear,
What truth did Fornalutx wish to say?

Thus the poem must reveal itself, and the clue lies in the title.
The first line of this last quatrain above suggests that the poem
also works as a parable. The Oven of Light may be the world itself,
to which we come, and which we approach with the idealism of dreams,
the "fabulous realm." But "fabulous" also suggests fable. And this
event, and this discovery the speaker makes, suggest that he is in an
archetypal experience—the experience of the world as both a hell
and an eden. Yet it is language which leads the speaker to his false
expectations. Fornalutx is Oven of Light, and "the name was right."
The naming, the calling of the place was the coining of an ironic poet. And the poet figure is actually the place itself, for Fornalutx puts "its foul breath to my ear." For the name itself, Oven of Light, already contains the paradox. It is a place of too much light, in one sense; and its surfeit of light is darkness. It is the place which embodies the antinomies of darkness and light, but it is the dire opposite of the "fabulous realm" that the naming has attached to it. Language may give a place a name which is directly opposite to its actual sense. Fornalutx is a kind of matrix locus of the world where the sun is "vile," where creativity and light have moved beyond their measure to produce a hell of a place. This is a momentary vision of Layton's world--throbbing with sun and sexual energy--gone awry and negative. And it is a fitting correlative for Spain, for the poem "El Gusano," and the dark themes surfacing from Balls For a One-Armed Juggler, to the opening, tone-setting poem, "Plaza de Toros." Spain is a land of darkness, where death throws all the shadows that make up the charades of life projected in "On Spanish Soil," "El Caudillo," and "Stone-Splitters in Alicante."

Thus, the dark lady poems in this collection are not merely anomalous, but fit, as well, into the poet's darker phase.

The last line of the penultimate poem interprets these poems once again. The death of "our noble prince" in "On the Assassination of President Kennedy," "has but given the age its wanting symbol: a Greek tragedy without catharsis." And that is a statement, as well,
upon Layton's own statement: "to imagine the worst." As in "Fornalutx," a descent has been made and that is what the poems deal with. The previous book ended with the vision of the transforming serpent; this one ends with "A Dedication," in which Layton pens another poem to the poet—to himself, in fact, at this point of poetic growth. It parallels "A Tall Man Executes a Jig," for the poet is ultimately "alone," and blankness and irrelevance are mirrored everywhere around him. Literature, art and language have "already declared bankruptcy." The ideals, the visions of life, be it religion or the ideologies of the modern technological world, have no more meaning for the "modern" man. That is the predicament of his world. But in the face of this and his own individual death represented in the snowflake, a particle of dying light, he can still affirm, for its death—as all deaths—signifies its opposite: life and creativity. One begets the other, and as long as the juggle continues, poetry lives; and the rooster may still be "different" and find uniqueness:

He only knows, this strange man,
that through dense Nothingness somehow he must open a path to power and insight—to freedom
though he and his brief azure soon afterwards he [sic] swallowed up in the night air for ever.
When all the lights are put out, the buildings darkened,
he blesses a snowflake—a solitary particle of light expiring on the black fire escape
and dying gladly in its death, lives.

Therefore I've written this poem for him.

The poem, written by the poet to himself, ends a phase, but also foreshadows the last phase—the books and poetry of the late sixties. The direction is now towards the individual. The vision comes back to the man "alone"—the poet figure who at this time in Layton's
development must be left with himself and his immediate perceptions, which in themselves also contain the whole gamut of the poet's world. "Through dense Nothingness", through the Fornalutx, he must find the "solitary particle of light," and a sense of his own individual, though mutable, condition. The "path" is to power and insight—that is, the poetry of perception and vision that must be found by each poem or man alone.

The Spanish poems suggest that Layton's gaze has now turned away from the Canadian and North American world. He can imagine the worst and find it confirmed outside of the immediate world he inhabited for three decades. The first foreshadowings of other horizons occurred in The Swinging Flesh, with poems set in France and Spain. In the next few years Layton was to travel widely, and leave behind the poetic and real world he had inhabited, yet that is not altogether correct, for he brought his previous worlds with him, and let them intersect with the new (actually Old World) he was now discovering.

This phase has ended with a darker apprehension, one that was partly foreshadowed in the only story collected in The Swinging Flesh that was written in the hiatus of two years between that book and A Red Carpet for the Sun. The story reveals Layton's attitudes to the philistinism in the Jewish community of which he was a member. In "Osmeck," first published in The Canadian Forum in February 1961, Layton presents the extreme example of the philistine. The name of the chief protagonist, Osmeck, is revealing for in Yiddish it echoes the verb that signifies "to erase," "to rub out." And in the present world of that story (and by implication, the North American world) the
philistine rubs out all distinctions, values, and meaningfulness, and culture. Osmeck embodies that philistine whom Layton refers to in the "Foreword" to *The Swinging Flesh*: "I do not like his acquisitiveness, his love of show, his moneytheism." Yet the ironies lie in the fact that Osmeck, just released from a mental institution where he was treated for an illness or breakdown, does not want any help, and manages to somehow get the upper hand and his own way. He will not give in to any other vision than his own limited one, and will not accept any help or cultural or spiritual enrichment. The story reveals, then, how Layton's fiction goes hand in hand with the poems, and how each sheds light on the other. By the end of the decade Layton would shift his perspective on his Jewishness, and leave behind the Osmecks, and would identify himself more positively with a new Jewish identification. This would be the position of the Jew as critic and prophet, at once at the center and periphery of the Western World. And he would find the most approximate identification in Osip Mandelshtam, the great Jewish poet of the early Soviet era—a fitting poet figure.
NOTES


3 Eli Mandel, p. 47.
CHAPTER VIII
Completion and the Haunting

The "Preface" to The Laughing Rooster and the poems written in Spain prefigure two of Layton's main concerns in the subsequent books he wrote in the middle and late sixties. The "foreword" of the next two books also concern themselves with the creative process and the poet, and also suggest the links between these essays and Layton's central collection of this phase, The Whole Bloody Bird. The "Foreword" to the Collected Poems does not contain the same crystallizations as that of A Red Carpet for the Sun. It is a recapitulative: "Foreword," most memorable for its aphoristic comments on poetry and poets. In a way both "Foreword" and poems are enlargements and rearrangements of the earlier volume of collected poems of 1959. There is a sense of finality and definition which is reinforced by using "There Were No Signs" as the prologue poem and "A Tall Man Executes a Jig" as the epilogue poem. The pattern of achievement of the three books of the early sixties then dominates the new rearrangement of this Collected Poems, and this book does not refocus anew the arrangement of Layton's body of work. The aphorisms and insights of that "Foreword" have a sense of finality and completeness to them. In such an aphorism as the following it is evident that Layton had a sense of completion at this point: "A poet is someone who has a strong sense of self and feels his life to be
meaningful." Layton had always exhibited this "strong sense" which revealed itself in a rage for order and completion, epitomized in the final emblematic image of "A Tall Man Executes a Jig." And the sense of the "meaningful" was always reiterated in the insistence of his prefaces and forewords, and the assertion of much of his poetry. Yet these two facets of "strong sense" and "meaningful" also explain the elaborations of Layton's poetry in this last phase. The poem on Spain carried over to be the dominant mode of the travel poems of this last phase. From the publication of *Periods of the Moon* to *Nail Polish*, Layton's preoccupations found confirmation in his observation of human beings, societies and landscapes outside of Canada. The signs were there in *The Swinging Flesh* and *The Laughing Rooster*. Layton needed to change his circumferences, widen them. And considering the wider awareness of the political and social dilemmas of the age, it would have been natural for him to go to the very countries where events transpired that informed his vision before. But if he explored himself by way of an enlarging of his horizons, he also had the "improved binoculars" of his own body of work with which to focus his vision upon these new landscapes and happenings. As he remarks in the "Foreword" to *Collected Poems*:

> In a world where emotion has become as thin as cellophane and is in danger of sinking into a state of anomie, I must insist that the poet explores himself through his poems and that if he fails to discover himself—as fail he must—it is because he is both more and less than his poems, at once both better and worse.

And this tension between the process and the product, between becoming and actualization, is characteristic of Layton of this
final phase. It also suggests the direction of Layton's last phase—Layton's continual preoccupation with discovering himself through his poems and through the elements of his poems. And this impetus moves him to range into unfamiliar territory while he finds corollaries for himself everywhere he looks. There are two moods to this exploration—the first is central:

Blake was right; praise is the practice of art. 
Joy, fullness of feeling, is the core of the creative mystery. My dominant mood is that of ecstasy and gratitude.

But if that is the core of the poet's creativity, he also realizes that having reached a degree of authority as a poet of stature, he must constantly fight against the current that would fossilize him, both by his literary public, but also more insidiously by the forces in himself:

Literature is the revenge society takes on the poet, its muted polite hosannah over the fact that it has blunted his shafts and rendered them harmless.

And Layton's later poems become part of an attempt to halt this process in himself—a desire to write from that "glorious commonplace world" from which poetry springs. Thus it is not insignificant that the "Foreword" to *Periods of the Moon* should be directed against the contemporary "ferment" of poetry in Canada, much of it due to Layton's own poetry and his efforts in providing an audience for poetry both through his readings and public appearances, and the editorial and literary activity that he had been engaged in since the days of *First Statement*. For these three prefaces suggest a central
preoccupation of the poet in this last phase: the sources of his own poetry, that is, as he puts it, "the core of the creative mystery."

With the foreshadowing suggested in "A Tall Man Executes a Jig," Layton would be giving up on earlier poetic baggage and be moving to a less inflated, less rhetorical pitch. The insistence is now taken for granted, and a detachment and irony achieved by many years of writing becomes apparent as the predominant poetic stance. Without fanfare, it is his way of reaching the essentials of what he sees. The assuredness expressed in the "Foreword" to the *Collected Poems* will be carried over:

> To have written even one poem that speaks with rhythmic authority about matters that are enduringly important is something to be immensely, reverently thankful for—and I am intoxicated enough to think that I have written more than one.

"Rhythmic authority" speaks for Layton's voice in the late sixties. The "rhythmic authority" also includes the patterns of his themes and the rhythm of their arrangement. And if he speaks with authority, it is the seasoned and mature poet's sense of himself and his world that gives him the power and the insight.

Of all four titles of the collections of the late sixties, the third collection, *The Whole Bloody Bird*, seems to contain within itself the metaphor for inclusiveness. That collection's subtitle reads: "Obs, Aphs & Poems." The book purports to contain observations, aphorisms, and poems. Or as Layton describes it in the "Foreword," "One way of regarding this book is to think of my 1968 journal as exploding into observations, aphorisms, and poems." And "it was the distiller's art I attempted to practice." On one hand, the process of writing was explosive—experience generating poems and writing. And
on the other hand, counterpointing it, is the crystallization, the distillation. Both directions produce that dynamic tension that give the book scope. Yet as the first aphorism quoted from the Collected Poems, he notes "the drawback in taking a journey", for "we meet ourselves wherever we go." But if there is a sense of the unfinished to this 1968 journal book--"From my experiences, the pressures and counterpressures, I have attempted to condense some meanings and to discover some directions useful to myself..."--it is not really the case. As a slice of writing, it contains within it, as a compendium, all the various modes that Layton attempted, and his main preoccupations. "During the present year, I felt brush against me the mad, bad, sad, glad world--the whole bloody bird!" he says in the "Foreword." But it is the whole bloody bird of the poet figure himself. And as such, the two earlier collections, Periods of the Moon and The Shattered Plinths, seem to prepare for this collection. And the subsequent collection, Nail Polish, is but an extension of this central collection. A good number of the poems of these three other collections would fit the description of being observations or aphorisms, that is, poems arising from the poet's visual awareness or short pithy poems on the ironies and absurdities of life and manners.

Periods of the Moon, as a title that reflects the poet's own frame of mind, suggests both the period as an end stop, and the period that prepares for a new cycle. It looks back and forward, at once. These are the periods, or phases of completions and unities--the faces, so to speak, of a matured vision. But it is also the moon or phases of the female principles in Layton's poetic world. The title
springs from the poem, "Clochards," those beggars of Paris—for the poet, the beggar poets of life. The metaphor of birds opens and closes the poem, for the clochards in the evenings are "Like wounded birds that fall from a height/in ever-decreasing circles." They fall upon the benches, into the gutters, and lie down for the night in their wretched clothes and condition. They are the ultimate losers of life who "lie in the unwanted/intimacy of misfortune," and their "sordid rags," are their "fluttering banners." Yet if they are wounded creatures of the air—vulnerable as the birds in the winds of fate and chance—their sleep transforms them into another image of vulnerable and wretched innocence.

They sleep like flowers in the crevices of streets whose ragged edges abrade and pain, making them raise their innocent grizzled heads through all the periods of the moon; who like themselves outcast, a poor clochard, owns the waning night which no one wants.

The "ragged edges" of the city—the outcast places—are dimensionally opposite to the "periods of the moon." The moon herself, though on a higher plane, is abraded and pained in her own condition. There is an outcast fellowship between these clochards. And the cycle that is "ever-decreasing" holds little hope when the morning comes. The clochards then will "move like birds towards the unwelcoming street/silent and unnoticed as death itself." The ever-decreasing circles of such life lead to another anonymity. Even as if they would beg for life, the condition they find themselves in offers nothing but an extension of the living death they already are and represent. Nature herself has her own "ever-decreasing circles," her own "periods." That
imaginative element represented by the moon holds little promise. Clochards, birds, moon—they are all wretched and unwanted in this world. Their "silent and unnoticed" figures are identified with the image of the poet figure.

As the lead poem in this collection, "Clochards" signals a more grim apprehension. The pathos and the pathetic are merged so that there is little affirmative relief. The poem also reveals that the directness Layton had come to express himself with in the three earlier collections of the decade, would be reinforced and unabated. That directness informs "Mahogany Red." The waning of "genital electricity" informs the tone of this poem, and thus the speaker can consciously acknowledge that he would not have wanted "to write/this bitter, inaccurate poem." The inaccuracy lies in the bitterness, a tone that does not contain a suspension of opposites—that is, a tension of mood and theme. But this apologetic note is not totally self-effacing. It may be a defensive aside that the poet speaker uses to disarm his possible critics, and that kind of critical insight that would note the limitations in this new phase in the poetry. It also suggests that the poet is aware of the limitations of his new vision. But he has no other alternative than to express what he feels and sees at first hand, even though it may go against his own grain. By means of these shifts in the voice of the poet figure, Layton thus prepares the way for the poems and insights of this book, and the poems that would follow in the subsequent collections.

"This bitter, inaccurate poem" writes itself into a variety of expressions of Layton's characteristic themes and preoccupations. In terms of the verse, the lines become tighter and matter-of-fact, in
the sense of being close to detail and observation. And these observations tend to take on the tightness of aphorisms, or the laconics of irony and reductiveness. Fixed and set stanzaic patterns become less omnipresent, for the poet's impulse is to statement and comment. And so each poem takes on a shape and form peculiar to itself. Travel suggests the multifarious and different shapes one comes upon in varied and peculiarly different places. In fact, a good half of the poems in the first three collections of this later phase, are composed in short lines, as if to suggest that the poetic insight tends to the essentials. The expansiveness of *The Swinging Flesh* or of the poems selected for *The Improved Binoculars* and *A Laughter in the Mind* tends to be deflated, as the poem, "Wrong End of Telescope," already prefigured in *The Laughing Rooster*. The characteristic Laytonic rhetorical openness finds little room in the new poems. The poetic telescope has replaced the improved binoculars. The vision is more single-minded, and it makes small that which is near at hand by means of those devices at the poet's command. These devices were apparent in the satirical collections of the fifties, but were not applied to serious and satirical poems alike. It is as if that figure of the telescope became an almost rigid and still and unrelenting transformation of the serpent of art in "A Tall Man Executes a Jig."

The telescope does not come round full circle. It extends from the eye to the scene and becomes the detached tool of an ironist.

As in "North and South," the Eden of Nice" is indeed a paradise for pagans"—but pagans without reverence, caught up in the ennui of their vacuous sun worship. Tourism undercut the Mediterranean,
and the landscape and the human scene are a far cry from the almost mythic deathliness of Spain. The poet has moved into another landscape, both objectively and in his poems; and each reflects the other, as form and content complement each other. In "Ruins," the situation repeats itself everywhere—which also explains some of the reasons for Layton's verbal repetitiveness and circularity in many of the poems:

Money money money money money money money
and pleasure, Philebus,
making men and women weak as piss
the Acropolis in ruins
Delphi in ruins
Olympia in ruins
Knossus in ruins
the Greeks, every sharp-trading one of them,
in ruins
the English visitors in ruins
bringing with them the unmistakable smell of decay
so familiar to the left nostril of history
and the French, Italians, Germans, and blond Dutch ruins, all ruins, coming to look at ruins,
coming to stare at the hole in the ground
where it all began

The Spanish are missing in this list for Spain, at least, provided the poet with the poetry of death, that favourite source for inspiration. Europe under reductive scrutiny is summed up in the refrain of "Westminster Abbey," "And there was a stink." And it is not mere shock tactics that are employed to reiterate a persistent fact of civilization and culture. As in the "Clochards," death provides the significance that is the backdrop to the human scene:
And there was a stink

and for the first time in my life
I saw clearly what was meant by the English Tradition
how it is a slice taken out of Death
and made homey and negotiable like currency
a way of increasing real estate values
by squeezing caskets, urns, busts, memorials
into every last available inch of space
and I also saw that this can go on for ever
as long as the supply of famous corpses doesn't run out

And there was a stink

The poem reads like an extended version of the apocalyptic, "The Improved Binoculars." But the speaker is no observer merely; his sense of smell brings in a more immediate consideration—the all-pervasive smell of decay and death which is indelibly part of the human condition. But if the vision is of the "ever-decreasing circles", the last poem redeems some mitigated affirmation. Death and aging will not spoil the woman the poet has loved. Her "lovely grace" will be preserved in language by the poet—the poem is written "For Musia's Grandchildren." The poet's partner, woman, is the source for his poetry, even in "this world of mournful beasts/that are almost human." Desire and play are the ways of praise. We may be all beggar birds but some are as the woman the poet sees,"--beautiful as the first bird at dawn." The image may seem part of a poetic cliche, but it functions as the affirmative image throughout all the phases of the moon.

Yet that is one woman. The dark lady of The Laughing Rooster seems to have become the prototype for woman in such poems as "The Air is Sultry," "Fidelity," and the cyclical, almost gnomic "A Song About
Woman." The bitter inaccuracy is two-pronged for by commenting partially, the poem implies a total statement. And Canada, another female figure represented in the ludicrous image of "an old nervous and eager cow," becomes the subject of the savagely satirical "Confederation Ode." Layton's irony could only become so reductive at this phase. His range has been transformed; and the development could be expected in a seasoned poet. And that process has made him more trenchant and unrelenting.

The Shattered Plinths completed in less than a year is a continuation of the same. Commenting on the general tendencies of these two volumes, Mandel notes:

If, in fact, there is change at all, it is simply in an intensification of earlier approaches, a growing impatience that manifests itself first, in a more violent, more brutally direct expression, and second, in a growing awareness that society is the image of the self.  

The intensification is not merely accumulative; it is also a real shift. Intensification is, for Layton, a gauge of poetic change and development. Mandel argues further that the surprise "is that Layton finds Europe's myth not in its past but in its present." That would seem to suggest a dichotomy between past and present, or conversely, that the past is contained in the present, that "The 'daily reality' provides a language that is the moral and psychological landscape of the poet's mind, just as it is the index of Europe's murderousness." It is not identification which is surprising but the degree of
Layton's intense re-vision—an uncompromising directness foreshadowed in such poems as "For Whom I Write." Mandel quotes the last stanza of "The Graveyard," the epilogue to The Shattered Plinths. But that poem is not the gauge for Layton's development—it is a poem constructed out of Layton's dialectical poetic argument. It reads like a constructed poetic theorem and does not have the immediate force of "Mahogany Red," which is a more fitting gauge for the real change in the poet's vision and poetic.

The backdrop and the precedent for the "Foreword" to The Shattered Plinths is to be found in the "Foreword" of Balls For a One-Armed Juggler and in the "Note" of A Laughter in the Mind. In the latter the poet already significantly smelled "the demise of our bourgeois-Christian civilization." The "stink" of "Westminster Abbey" is a more reductive vision of that civilization's "escaping gases."

"Poets must teach themselves to imagine the worse," Layton had said in Balls for a One-Armed Juggler. In the "Foreword" to the 1968 volume he speaks of the "new element[that] was ushered into the human situation with World War II, with the slave camps of Communist Russia and the extermination camps of Nazi Germany." These "monstrous acts" signal "the complete collapse of the traditional christian and humanistic values which hitherto Western man had pretended to allow himself to be governed by." What Layton is now saying is a more direct statement of what he has posited in the past, and that without the affirmative celebration of "a new laughter in the mind." Thus the poems will follow from this "sterner mood," for "the shattered plinths of christianity and humanism" are the ruins of present day Europe. To
recapitulate, he can declare that: "As a poet I've claimed the right
to enter imaginatively into the seminal tensions and dilemmas of our
age." But it would be altogether limiting for the poet to turn his
gaze upon ruins alone. There is a new mythology that must be
absorbed, and it is the mythology of power and politics of the age
that the poet announces as his developing theme:

Increasingly I have come to think that the leading
political figures of today have replaced the gods
of the past, that the words and deeds of the larger-than-life De Gaulles and Titos exercise the same
sort of fascination on the minds of bored overcrowded
urbanities as in earlier ages was exercised by the
arbitrary gods. Their parthenon is the daily newspaper which, frankly, I find more exciting to think
about than Ovid's Metamorphoses or Homer's Iliad. A
new mythology has been created which, replacing the
older ones of classical Greece and Rome or of
Christianity, provides the poet with those universal
emblems he needs if he is to speak to men separated
by walls of nationality and culture. The new myths
inspire a common language, if not a common way of
looking at things, and no poet who desires to be
truly of his own time can afford any longer to
ignore or neglect them.

This last phase is reached by an emphasis on history as a source of
poetry and the central process of the imagination. History and
the imagination are but aspects of the other, and it is the emphasis
which has shifted—if we are to accept Mandel's point of view.

The first poem, "One Last Try at a Final Solution," like
many others in this collection, springs from the subject of the
Six Day War in the Middle East. The Russian and Eastern Bloc support for
the Arabs was another instance of a long history of political oppression
against the Jews. Except that this time Russian arms would be used
towards the "final solution," as the last line in the above poem would have it, "To finish the job." This is one of the "universal emblems" that the poet employs to reveal "the general disorder of our age." In "For My Two Sons, Max and David," Layton provides a sterner version of Cohen's "The Genius."4 The poem consists of a list of what the Jew as an archetype has called to mind. All the Jews Layton refers to are the Jews of the Diaspora, the universal victim of Western society:

The wandering Jew: the suffering Jew
The despoiled Jew: the beaten Jew
The Jew to burn: the Jew to gas
The Jew to humiliate
The cultured Jew: the sensitized exile
gentiles with literary ambitions aspire to be
The alienated Jew cultivating his alienation
like a rare flower: no gentile garden is complete without one of these rare hibisc

But as an advice to his sons, the speaker speaks for the new Jew, the Israeli, no longer at the mercy of other nations, and dispossessed. The sons should "Be none of these," but instead should "Be gunners in the Israeli Air Force." Unfortunately this poem and others have been all too easily mis-read. As if to anticipate this, Layton had pointed out in the "Foreword," "On no account should any of my poems be construed as an apology for acts of nihilistic violence." The final statement to the poet's sons is not an invitation to murder or to war. But it is a declaration not to accept the various roles and positions the Jew has had to accept for two thousand years. The Jew must be able to assert himself in the face of the murderous modern world that has claimed a heavy toll of his people already. The fact that Layton's poem is not simply propaganda is reinforced by the poem,
"Arabs." They too like the figure of the Jew are poets:

The world's last poets
in love with hyperbole and disaster:
eloquent romantics...

The 20th century
ticks in all the ominous corners
of your unswept courtyards:
"you are not contemporary, go away"
and in your defeat
I see my own
as destiny picks you up
still muttering to the indifferent air
"Inshallah, malesh, bukra"
and like...one of Omar's chessmen
puts you one by one silently away.

Another commentary on Layton's poem for his sons is provided by the short, "The Best Proof":

Love your neighbour
and labour daily
at proving
how much you love him

By making yourself
so powerful
nothing can ever
tempt him to injure you

This is a version of poetic politik which sees the forces in the world, temporarily or permanently, in a reductive light, so that the poet can only speak with irony in "The Sweet Light Strikes My Eyes:"

Surely a piece of Eden broke off and floated here
and I must look for the scratched names of Adam and Eve
under that girl's thighs or use her fanned legs for compass;
surely suffering and evil are merest illusion
when such colour and sounds overflow into eye and ear.

The waves push the long afternoon shadows before them;
wind, sun work against each other for my maximum pleasure,
and the sails holding the serene fullness of a good poem are blue and white. God, the sweet light strikes my eyes;
I am transfigured and once again the world, the world is fair.
The dichotomy of "desolation's self-mockery" and love's "community of soil and sun" in "My Flesh Comfortless", the final poem of A Red Carpet for the Sun, finds a parallel in the above poem. But the pivot of transfiguration is the speaker, "I," the poet finding the new vision that is located but in himself, and his perception of it. It is not to the "community" that the speaker looks. It is as if the speaker were finally the realized poetic persona Layton referred to as the "free individual" in the "Foreword" to the collected poems of 1959. That "free individual is none other than the poet:

The free individual--independent and gay--is farther from realization than he ever was. Still, in a world where corruption is the norm and enslavement universal, all art celebrates him, prepares the way for his coming.

The poet prepares the way for his own coming, his own self-realization.

"Queer Hate Poem" parallels the earlier "There Were No Signs." It is a poem that is circular as well—a poem of searches that ends in the poet finding himself after the reduction of illusion and ideals. And these illusions all center around other types of the "free individual." One always expects more, but what one finds is the ironical opposite of what one began to look for:

I went out looking for philosophers
    and found only prudent men

For poets:
    and found only romantic cripples

For teachers:
    and found only egotists

For saints:
    and found only sheared wolves

For heroes:
    and found only discriminating murderers
I went out looking for you, woman, and found only myself.

Each of these types turns out to be opposite images—reductive inversions of what the seeker intended to find. Looking for the opposite to his own persona the poet can only find himself—that self-image that he ultimately must come back to. Whereas "There Were No Signs" could have been sub-titled, "Queer Love Poem," this latter poem springs from negation. And the negation reveals the narcissist who can come back upon the one certainty from which his vision springs. This final phase, then, is wrested from negative contraries in a way no other phase parallels but the books of the forties. This is the first sign of Layton coming full circle back to his beginnings as a poet, a movement which he himself would suggest by the nature of his retrospection in the "Foreword" to The Collected Poems of 1971.

"He Saw Them, At First", at first sight is set up on the page in the same manner as "Westminster Abbey." It is a more general version of the same, yet here the setting is an undifferentiated excremental hell. The excremental in "Sagebrush Classic" was not as reductive and detailed. Yet this detail marks the emphasis of this last phase, as well as the accumulation of detail and imagery. This is preferred by Layton in most instances to the exaggeration of figures of speech that would narrow the possibilities of observation and detail. The observer tends to note in the first instance, and creates a pattern of detail and imagery that make their statement by means of their own particulars. The product is the same as before; the emphasis has shifted, though, in keeping with the poet's reductive and ironical vision.
In this instance the poet figure is referred to in the third person singular: "He saw..." And again it is a vision of the human world that is being observed: "He saw them at first, from a distance...," "He saw commissars, fatbellies, asslickers, frontmen...,
"He saw groups whose members pelted one another/with shit...," "He approached and saw one that appeared to be female." The poet figure's opposite, and complement, the woman, is retrieved by him from "the circle of excrement-covered figures." And he becomes engrossed in her image; and by declaring his own poetic intent he reveals the nature of his poetry:

He said: let me trace your feature on the hot sands with this glowing splinter I detached from a burning prison wall. As he bent down to begin his self-appointed task she threw herself on him and cried joyously: 'I love you!' Without looking up he muttered to the crackling sand, 'And I, you.'

The poet figure and the woman move into an Eden where they engage in the sexual sacrament of their union. Eros becomes the only escape from the excremental circles of this inferno; it transforms the vision:

...man and woman were lifted like crazy petals the wind puts down in a field where magisterial leaf-laden trees give shade. I saw them stretch out on the grass, embrace, and let the flowers curl around their wrists, marrying them. A cooling stream ran past their feet.

That other awareness of the poet, "my eyes are wide open," watches man and woman in the joyous yet "crazy" joining of the antinomies of male and female. The embrace of both cancels out the inferno and brings the only unity possible. In a way, the poem parallels "A Tall Man Executes a Jig," yet in this instance the transformation is erotic and physical.
The excremental vision is not really transformed—an alternative is offered to it in joyous, celebrating experience. As in "My Flesh Comfortless," a negative and positive vision are poised against each other. But in this later poem, the speaker actually sees the "community of soil and sun" realized, though it is no longer the subject, but the community of the pair. As in the final poem, "The Graveyard," only death silences and completes the activity of both opposite visions expressed above:

There is no pain in the graveyard or the voice Whispering in the tombstones: "Rejoice, rejoice."

The book of the following year, The Whole Bloody Bird, contains observations and journal selections, aphorisms and poems. Outwardly, Layton's writing of 1967-69, curiously parallels his two years of contributions to First Statement. In that early phase, he contributed articles, reviews, stories, and poems to the magazine. The only other short period that corresponds to this phase is 1954-56, when the poet collected six original collections, wrote two short articles for CIV/n, and contributed two stories to Origin. And Layton sensed that 1967-8 might perhaps yield the kind of intensity that would give scope to his writing, for as he says in the "Foreword":

Before beginning my travels, I resolved to keep a journal. I knew that 1968 was going to be a year different from all the previous ones I had lived through, that I was going to see and hear things never seen and heard by me before.

As Layton expresses it, he was determined to record the year he was to live through and "it was the distiller's art" he was going to practice. The prose selections are in the main composed of the poet's
observations of people he met on the way, each containing for him the revelation of their particular uniqueness. This search for uniqueness and authenticity follows on the poem, "Queer Hate Poem."

Included, as well, are Layton's observations on the political developments of the year, and a few acute comments on some Canadian writers, and an interpretation of "Othello." It is really an extended "Foreword," as Layton was wont to write, and in another way, an insistent series of insights that move around the poet as the aware observer. By including these prose testimonies, Layton was narrowing the distance between himself and the persona of the poet figure.

But it is in the aphorisms that he distills many of his attitudes into choice, and often barbed, crystallized statements, and they are statements that crystallize a lifetime of concerns. They range across all of the poet's preoccupations, and the most revealing are those which directly refer to the poet, poetry and art. They provide insights into Layton's writing, and collected together they reveal what Layton was doing and hoping to accomplish. The fourth aphorism of this series of two hundred and thirty-nine perhaps explains Layton's persistent singularity of point of view (Vietnam, for one): "A poet/ generates/ the electricity/ he needs/ by/ swimming/ against/ the current." In another aphorism he states: "I never grew up and became a poet," thus providing an incisive gloss to the poem in Music on a Kazoo, "By Ecstasies Perplexed." Many of these aphorisms read like pithy glosses on the poems found in the body of the poet's work, and suggest how the persona of the poet figure mirrored Layton's own sense of himself. A few of the aphorisms are
printed in large bold type, as if to make them more salient and conspicuous. If they are to be taken by the measure of their presentation, three of these eight, are literary in intent. "Literary greatness is genius/ in search of character." The lines are broken as if they were poems, and the enjambments add emphasis and nuance to the statements. This "search for character" is twofold: it is a search for realization through growth and opening up to experience; and it is a search for individual uniqueness and authenticity and character as in the form of written characters and script. These two searches inform the earlier "Queer Hate Poem," and the main intent of this book and its threefold expressions. Yet the next aphorism provides the reason for Layton's attempt to put down his thoughts and insights in the more readily available form of the prose article. "I want/ to write poems/ that can be read/ by/ butchers/ and/ bankers." Not only are these two types far removed from the literati the poet keeps meeting in Europe and Asia, but they seem to represent two ways of life, two visions of action. The butcher and the banker representing the unsentimental vocations tie in with Layton's tough, realistic, and sometimes reductive vision of human affairs and politics. Thus the final bold aphorism puts the poet's vocation in the perspective of the twentieth century Layton addresses himself to in the observations and in the "Foreword" of the last book:

The inevitable business of killing has produced three stereotypes:
the hero who accepts,
the saint who rejects,
the poet who relates.
In the course of the search, the poet's changing vision will "relate" the two visions, the accepting and the rejecting. The relating will join both visions in a balance and will also record as testimony what is transpiring in the world around him. The poet can not flinch from what he sees and can not help—and must—relate the "worst." Or as he relates in the second section of "Obs:"

Not to allow the evil in the world makes one embittered or frightened. Not to flop down on one's knees and pray. To whom? Not to become evil in turn. Not to look for an easy way out; or for security by running after fanatics and demagogues. This is modern devil-worshipping. To celebrate human greatness in whatever form it appears. To be a man, unafraid of gods and men, bowing to no one. Open-eyed, courageous, truthful. And humane.

Yet whatever the poet has to say demands a fearlessness and clear awareness—"The Whole Bloody Bird," all aspects of the contemporary human condition impinge on the poet with an urgency and insistence:

Who has the courage to say loud and clear that the fevered masses of Tokyo, London, New York, Marseilles, Cairo, Leningrad and New Delhi have become superfluous, that the ills they suffer from are beyond reform or cure, their appetites mean and grotesque, their condition becoming more and more hopeless with each day that brings an increase in their numbers.

For the truth that must be told can be overcoming to those who see and must declare it.

Even after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, men and women want fairy tales told about themselves and their condition. Or entertainments to distract them. The few in whom the truth burns like a raging fever must be locked up in loony bins—away with them, they have the Evil Eye!
The first of the "Pomes" carries on from the last poem, "The Graveyard," in The Shattered Plinths. It is another terse expression of the "distiller's art:"

I want to write poems
as clean and dry
and as impatient
as this skull

Found by me
outside the small boneyard
at Mythmyna

That perched on a cliffedge
stares
and grins at the sea

It is not only a declaration of intent, but describes what the poet effectively brings off in the best of the "Pomes." The "skull" poem retains a character and face of its own—it is the ironic distillation of the speaker's "wrecked marriages/ disappointments with friends/ the rime time depositions/ on heart, imagination." And on the cliffedge of the book, the poem looks out upon the flux and change and provides its own ironic affirmation. For the two poems that close this collection concern two other deaths. "Silent Joy" springs also from the "distiller's art" and is a distillation of accumulated experience as "Remembering" is. The silent joys of the past return to the speaker and move to possess him in the present such that he moves into the eternal awareness, the undying moment of vision and completion that paradoxically approximates death:

I am so utterly filled
with joyful peace and wonder,
my heart stops beating

Friends, I stare at everything
with wide, with sightless eyes
like one who has just died
But if this is a kind of climactic death, "Leavetaking" encompasses a farewell, an end to a period of joy, of travel and residence.

Good-bye
fields, waves, hills, trees
and fairweather birds whose blasts
woke me each morning at dawn

So that I might see
the early sun

Good-bye, Sun

I am growing older
I must instruct myself to love you all
with moderation

But the poet had already instructed himself in this collection with the moderation of maturity.

Layton's growing preoccupation with the condition of the Jew was to become more intensive in 1968 when he spent a number of months "in the land of my ancestors." It is as if Layton were returning fullface to his own Jewishness. At the beginning of the sixties he rejected the Philistine North American Jewish world. By the end of the decade his Jewishness has moved on to find a fuller, though still partial, identification with the new Jew, the Israeli. Layton's residence and involvement in Israel provides for most of the prose in "Obs I." But it is in the poem, "Israelis," that he distills his attitude to Israel and his vision of the Jew already becoming clear in "For My Two Sons, Max and David." It is a vision of the new risen people strengthening themselves with a secular philosophy of life tempered in the tragedies of the twentieth century. The Israelis are a new breed of Jew, resurrected so to speak from the ashes of those types Layton
had listed in the poem for his sons. In the face of the brutality that Jews have constantly faced, Israelis "trust" themselves and "no one else." They must build their own strength in a murderous contemporary world. They have had to transform the weaker legacies of European Jewry:

Where is the Almighty if murder thrives?
He's dead as mutton and they buried him
Decades ago, covered him with their own
Limp bodies in Belsen and Babi Yar.

The new people, the Israelis, "are done with him now and forever"—done with the religiosity that bred impotence and weakness. And from the holocaust and their own weakness, they have learned the lessons of history, that the only way Jews can survive is to maintain their own strength and power and not remain at the mercy of the whims of other nations:

The pillar of fire: Their flesh made it;
It burned briefly and died—you all know where.
Now in their own blood they temper the steel,
God being dead and their enemies not.

This sense of definition to a poetic argument informs the other central poem, "Climbing Hills." From the amphibian persona in "The Swimmer" the poet figure has become the land creature, more set on the firm ground of his poetic world. The change in position had begun earlier, and was given its most complex expression in the change of position and the movement from station to station in "A Tall Man Executes a Jig." There is the same pattern of disengagement in this latter poem and in "Climbing Hills," as in "He Saw Them, At First," in the previous book. But in "Climbing Hills" the disengagement
is more intensely individual than in "He Saw Them, At First," and touched with a kind of exhibitionism, as if to say, the poet now moves himself away from the petty and absurd world of men to the cleaner and saner world of his own awareness and joy:

Dictatorship, oppression, fear
what have they to do with me
who sit on a Greek stone by the roadside
staring at the hills ahead and to come,
at the almond and fig trees on both sides
and sometimes straight at the sun
that pins my shadow to the ground
like a burly and invincible wrestler?
Here is peace, the sounds of birds
and insects, sometimes of the wind
but none for too long or too loud;
I am as free as an anarchist
canceling his self-imposed regulations,
as a nudist when I take down my pants
to ease myself behind a hedge.

It is a form of relief from the all-too-intense concerns of the "Obs" and some of the poems, and provides that other speaking persons so characteristic of the poet. The hills represent a dimension of experience that is not tainted by the human, by what transformed that scene into the excremental vision in "He Saw Them, At First." And climbing and moving over them provides an ascension and mounting which corresponds to the speaker's own removal from the omnipresent "Dictatorship, oppression, fear" which Greece contains as a microcosm or example of the universal condition.

Still, as long as I can mount them
walking alone with the lantern show
of good and evil only dumb shadows
in my head I don't mind how many they are
Hills are so sane, so honourable
with the sunlight straddling them
and won't suddenly rear up to throw you into a ditch; hills don't set traps either, are not treacherous and will not accept bribes to tell lies;
I've never known one of them ever
try to deceive me or to menace my welfare:
a neighbour threatened to kill my child.

The hills are divorced from the universal murderousness which has so preoccupied Layton in this last phase. Ambiguities are also cancelled out in this bright and lucid world, for in the past, landscape suggested ambiguities as in the earlier "The Dwarf", also composed in the same matter-of-fact narrative manner as "Climbing Hills." The position in the landscape has changed, and along with the change has come a shifting of the angle of vision. For the "roads" and the "hills" seem made for each other, like some old couples one meets up with...

The climbing provides a renewal so that the poet can return to "think of Kosygin and Brezhnev again" for they were "left way back/ several turns and hedges ago." The climbing is also sexual, for it is as if the poet has renewed himself through that ever present figure of the body of the world:

...of a world as tranquil and lovely
as the hours when together with the sun
I mounted these radiant hills.

The search is cyclic. The poem returns back upon itself, upon the action of climbing and mounting and submerging those other hills of "Dictatorship, oppression, fear." And so the figure of the poet's climbing resembles the pattern of the perfect serpent—action as poetry, and poetry as action, which will also inform the central poem of the next volume, "Osip Mandelshtam (1891-1940)." The poet figure becomes less obtrusive a device in this last phase. Layton puts him almost aside as if to face the world without the overt masks that he developed from the forties to the early sixties. As the observer he lays himself bare to what lies nakedly revealed before him.
Without these former masks, his poems become more incisive, detailed and radical in the sense of reaching into his very own roots as man and poet. This informs his "Foreword" to *The Collected Poems* in which he returns to the sources of his poetry revealed in his childhood.

That matter-of-fact tone, carried over from "Obs," informs the method and theme of the poem Layton chose as his favourite for Colombo's anthology, *How Do I Love Thee*. Speaking of "Elephant", a poem written during the poet's travels in Nepal, Layton provides a gloss for the poem as well as a commentary on the relationship between the facts and the poetry of this book, and the insight on how his own imagination informed itself in the four books of the late sixties:

> I always wanted to write a poem that would express what I feel is the true relationship between art and reality along with my unmad view concerning the nature of the poet. In fact, an *ars poetica* sans fuss, sans didactic eye-poking or ear-bashing. The vision of an elephant, one rainy afternoon when I found shelter in a deserted wayside shrine, scraping himself against a dark Nepalese tree, offered me the necessary symbol; enabled me to pack into living and magnificent literal flesh, which is how I like to see my symbols march out of my brain into the marketplace.

As if to underline the theme of poetry, the poem begins with an allusion to Lawrence's poem on elephants. The elephant is suggestive of huge, almost circular bigness. And so in turn in this poem, the circles contain each other. The poet who observes the elephant finds the elephant engrossing; that elephant becomes the subject of the poem, and in fact provides the poem. The elephant is both poet and poem, yet his own movements against a tree bespeaks an *ars poetica* (with a pun intended by Layton on that first word). The tree against which the elephant rubs himself is "of a similar grayness/ and toughness: as
the elephant. The poet figure and reality are of the same texture and element—they are both in the here and now, and the poet contains the world by being of it himself, which is Layton's way of presenting the "unmad view concerning the nature of the poet." The movement of the elephant suggests the shifting of opposites, the juggling of the antinomies. But the antinomies are less "mad" or possessed—the movement is more natural and organic:

... forward and back,
forward and back, as if bent on sawing down the tree with one side of his belly;
keeping somehow as much of a clown's sad,
self-conscious dignity
as humiliating circumstance might allow,
yet his bull posture
plaintly spelling it out: blows, ridicule, men's displeasure are wind beneath his ears;
nothing will drive him from this ecstasy, rotundity and gratuitous weight
make proportionate to his itch, this rapturous blare under his vast hide unwrinkling like a flower.

And this elephant is not too far removed, in the symbolic implications of his action, from the speaker poet in "Climbing Hills." He is none other than the poet with his "self-conscious dignity"—that of a "clown's"—with the creative itch in him, in his very skin and senses which unwrinkle into the form of a flower. The itch, the flower, the tree—they are all, as Layton calls it in that passage quoted above, "sensual vitality." This is the organic nature of creativity which springs from a simple need, yet in its very nature seems to suggest the ill-at-ease that living beings (and more especially poets) feel in being alive and aware, and in trying to balance the opposites of existence. Yet though the elephant's movement seems to suggest that
it is an image of the poet, it does not give voice or utterance. That is left to the tree, its leaves "like multiple green tongues." For reality seems to mirror itself and nature seems to provide its own song, or poetry, intelligence, or commentary on the scene of the elephant's flank rubbing. For the elephant rubbing against the tree unlooses the birds, unsettles those poet figures so that they take up the moving sound of the tree and leaves and "take it up and translate it into song...Nature strives for that consciousness and expression which is art. Nature provides its own artistic intelligence in the form of other species, which are expressions of its need, "its most obstinate and secret desire/ to be a thing alive made manifest" ("Butterfly on Rock").

More concretely, then, the elephant becomes the "big, gray globe of the world," a more matter-of-fact version of "The Whole Bloody Bird." For the poet speaker reads the character of himself into the elephant whose "ironic/and quietly exultant smile" suggests that it is "someone who has learned/ the necessary art/ of converting irritation into pleasure." And these characteristics also become the poet figure's, for "the necessary art" is all art, Layton's art in this book, of turning his irritation with the world into the pleasure of poetry. And that is the "unmad" creativity.

_Nail Polish_, published in early 1971, complements this last book as _The Shattered Plinths_ complements and is an extension of _Periods of the Moon_. This correspondence is further reinforced, for _Nail Polish_
is the only book in this last phase that does not have a prefatory "Foreword." It is not a separate and growing step forward, but can be seen as an outgrowth of the last volume. And there are many parallels that suggest that this was in fact Layton's implicit motive. As the central country to *The Whole Bloody Bird* was Israel, Ireland becomes the setting for many of the poems in *Nail Polish*. Israel and Ireland have a curious connection in Layton's scheme, for as he said in one of the "Aphs" of that former book: "Ireland is the Israel that failed." Moving from the former to the latter is taking a downward step in the opposite direction. The distillation of Ireland is to be found on those forlorn Western Islands, the "Aran Islands," In that latter poem, a sequence of three poem portraits of those islands, Layton presents a stark and bleak landscape. Ultimately, as in "Kilmurvey," the scene is the imaginative place where all can be seen and yet there is really nothing to be seen. For in "Dun Aengus" there is "Nothing here:/ only mist/ and blue-grey stones." And in the former poem, the stone fences of Kilmurvey leave but the patterns of barren rocks in which man becomes the only salient intruder:

Stand anywhere and you can trace
touch lines with your new-found eyes
of stone fences delicate as lace:
Stand anywhere and you can be seen.

In the middle poem, "Cliffs of Moher," the mainland cliffs suggest a landscape of hell, and the place itself an infernal perch:
At last, as in a dream
I've come to the cliffs
from where God hurls down
His enemies, every one.

Rat-faced cunning mercers
with a rat's delight;
all, all who are dead of soul,
male and female.

See, their polls open like flowers
on the black rocks below;
their brains dance with the foam
on a green wave's tow.

That is the dream place which the poet finds between the historical emptiness of "Dun Aengus," and the aesthetic blankness of "Kilmurvey." Thus, history and art, finding emblems in those two islands, yield but the speaking poet. In all three poems, he is the only figure, even one more shade removed from all but himself than in "Climbing Hills." And this is significant of the position of the poet figure in Layton's last phase—his centrality, and his closest identification with Layton, the poet and the man, himself.

Yet both tendencies of engagement and disengagement must intersect for the poet to achieve a wholeness of voice and vision. That intersection yields scope and vision, and the poet himself can be identified in "The Straight Man:"

In the doom
of his freedom
man
vertical man wars
with the horizontal.

For what? A nearer
look at sunspots?
To be all stiff
with rectitude,
the upright man?
At best, patch...botch...
Christ on a crotch.
Ah, for fantasies
time distills
out of the slime;
bubbles, nothing else,
the intellect looses
from our genitals
and death proves
foam or scum.

The final vision is uncompromising as the vision from the "Cliffs of Moher."

So what follows are two identifications for the poet in which Layton figures literally as the poet figure, and which bring him almost full circle around as "The Swimmer." His "boyhood" now is his son in "Shakespeare." In this latter poem, Shakespeare's overpowering immortal genius finds its hopeful challenge in the poet's son, a budding poet himself and a younger poet himself. It is the full circle of poethood—the genes of genius handed down to the son, and a personal affirmation of Layton's celebration of the poet in all human beings. It is probably the most personal of Layton's identifications of the image of the poet, and it also informs the other major poem in that last collection. In the poem written for the Soviet poet who perished in Stalin's concentration camp, Layton fuses the complements of his chief persona and the setting for the poems of this phase: the poet and the Jew, Canada and Europe.

Under a sour and birdless heaven
TV crosses stretch across a flat Calvary
and plaza storewindows give me
the blank and expressionless stare of imbeciles:
this is Toronto, not St. Petersburg on the Neva;
though seas death and silent decades separate us
we yet speak to each other, brother to brother;
your forgotten martyrdom has taught me scorn
for hassidic world-savers without guns and tanks:
they are mankind's gold and ivory toilet bowls
where brute or dictator relieves himself
when reading their grave messages to posterity
This is a tougher identification than in the earlier, "On Seeing the Statuettes of Ezekiel and Jeremiah..." Layton's vision is uncompromising, as in the title poem in which he plainly states that "what men call good and evil/is but nail polish on their claws."
The poet must call the real tunes, the clear hard message that has taken decades to forge clearly and defiantly. For as he declares finally and speaks to the Osip Mandelshtam in himself—the "Hellenic" hebraic poet of the fifties and early sixties—the poet and his vision must be at the very center of the upheavals of the age:

--let us be the rapturous eye of the hurricane
flashing the Jew's will, his mocking contempt for slaves

As always with Layton, it flashes back to what he has seen, and suggests the possibility of the next phase, rapturous, flashing and mocking.

The Collected Poems of 1971 includes some 634 poems. That arrangement does not strictly follow the chronological order of the poems' publication in previous collections. The reasons for this may be textual and practical. For the book's typography reveals that the type was not set anew. It seems that the 385 poems of the Collected Poems of 1965 were reproduced from that volume, and the other poems seem to be reproduced, in the main, from the subsequent collections. Layton also added some poems to the original 385 from the body of work he drew on to the date of Collected Poems. Thus, he gathered some 200 poems of the 285 poems he included in the
four collections published since 1965. Those last six years almost represent a third of his work, and suggest that Layton still remains closest to that which he has just written. Since the order of the poems does not follow a chronological sequence, this last volume in its arrangement resembles the selected poems, *The Improved Binoculars*. The latter also marked the end of a fertile period, and came right in the middle of the thirty years of creativity (1941-1971) when it appeared in 1956. In 1956 and 1971 Layton was willing to erase the divisions between his creative phases, and give some cohesive homogeneity to his work.

The "Foreword" to *The Collected Poems* marks a quieter and stiller revelation of the sources of Layton's poetry. In the retrospection, Layton returns to his childhood, to the time and background depicted in two of his stories written early in the forties: "Piety" and "A Death in the Family." He describes the world he lived in then with his family, in a flat behind the grocery store his mother operated which was situated below the "semi-brothel run by a husband-and-wife team" upstairs. In this world lie the sources for Layton's poetry, and the early emergence of himself as the poet figure in a varied and teeming slum world.

Since Layton was the youngest, it was his mission to try to let the neighbours upstairs know that their revelry was too loud and disturbing. With a broomstick in his hand he would climb onto a dresser to prod his point home:
It was then a miracle took place. The loud cursings and clatterings would stop suddenly, and silence like some mysterious night flower would blossom from the tip of my broomstick. I sensed it spreading out with swift amazing luxuriance until it filled the whole bedroom. It was uncanny, and in my child's imagination I saw myself a boy Moses parting the filthy noise-filled blackness so that long-suffering Israelites might pass safely into a region of peace and slumber.

Of course in less than fifteen minutes the noise, the tumult, would start up again, requiring another grumbling appreciation of the broomstick. Yet each time the mysterious flower of silence opened its invisible blossoms over my head I felt the same thrill of power, of exulting joy. The cold, the freezings and shiverings were forgotten, obliterated. I, I alone, had punched a rectangular space of quiet into the filthy drunken chaos and presented it to those older and stronger than myself.

This broom stick is no other than the first form of the stave of the clown-king-poet in "Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom," and the flower of silence none other than an earlier version of the ouroborus in "A Tall Man Executes a Jig." That broomstick takes on many different shapes in the key poems, and marks itself as the peculiar correlative for the poetic impulse, the thrusting pen, the amazing want, sexual and spiritual.

These episodes also reveal the earthy and realistic bent in Layton's vision, for that world acted like a broomstick on the poet, as well:

Elsewhere I've said the poet is someone whom life knocks on the head and makes ring like a tuning fork. The knocking begins very early.

The broomstick as literal symbol uncannily contains all facets of Layton's poetic personality:
So the world was not only cock-and-cunt. It was also battle. You broke someone's skull, anyway made a profound philosophical dent in it, or he broke yours. People were so made they hated one another at first sight and sought their injury. They conceptualized and tortured; out of the same taproot grew their creativity and evil...

And Death, hadn't he also flowered from my extraordinary, miracle-working broomstick?...

Am I a Canadian poet? Let others use abstractions and thick evasive words; they are welcome to them. With the other end of my broomstick I sweep them all generously towards their corner...My country is wherever I can use my broomstick to bring a momentary grace, a blessed peace and stillness, into my life.

And finally the metaphor becomes larger and magnifies itself, and becomes more vital in the form of the tree, none other than the "trunk of a tree" in "The Cold Green Element," and the tree of language in "Elephant":

My country has been an immense tree on the summit of a sunswept hill from which I plucked hundreds of poems or waited confidently under its boughs for them to fall like heavy fruit into my open lap. When I think of my life under that tree I am filled with an immeasurable thankfulness that extends beyond the coasts of this land to encircle the entire globe.

But if Layton has sensed a completion at this point, he has arranged the prologue and epilogue to this volume so that he has not put himself into final shape. The first poem, "There Were No Signs," is the same opening poem as the Collected Poems of 1965. Yet the closing poem is "The Haunting," which served as the opening poem to Nail
Polish. The poem is in a long succession of poems on the poet which include, since the late fifties, "Paging Mr. Superman," "I Saw a Faun," "A Dedication," "The Daimon." These poems all concern themselves with poet figures whom the speaker in the poem is looking or searching for in one way or another. These figures ultimately disappear and can not be held, grasped, or kept close at hand. The speaker poet of these poems always speaks of them in the past tense. And they are figures of the poet that somehow are unattainable, unable to be realized, or as the last line of "There Were No Signs" suggests that the poet does not complete himself. Completion is fulfilment, and the end of the flux of creativity in the stasis of perfection.

In "The Haunting" the poet figure is the form of "a bold youth" who only reveals himself momentarily. He is an ideal figure that the poet strives to become. He is the poet, alive, youthful, full of the promise of fulfilment. Yet, the speaking poet never fully realizes him:

Why don't I ever meet him face to face?  
sometimes I've seen him stepping off a bus  
but when I've caught up with him he's changed  
into a bourgeois giving the two-fingered peace sign  
or a poet shouting love as if it were a bomb  
on damp days into an office clerk smelling of papers  
is he somebody's doppelganger? an emanation or shadow I see taking shape near a plateglass window?  
who is he? he haunts me like an embodied absence  
as if I had lived all my life in arrears

He is that part of the poet who remains full of the potentiality of creativity and realization, and by inclusion, is the poet in all people.
But the speaker, as the poet who has written this and other poems, feels he has lived his life "in arrears," and like the "office clerk smelling of papers." The "arrears" suggests, as well, the movement back in time and the continual return to the sources, and that one is always in arrears, never fully meeting the debt to potentiality. The completion of this _The Collected Poems_ still leaves a haunting, a sense that the poet never realizes the "bold youth" in himself. The process never ends—nor must it. The spiral then has moved up, but does not complete the cycle. The speaker has actualized himself through many guises, but the creative potential will always remain to be fulfilled. The haunting is at the source of the creative impulse.

The nature of the dialectic remains. As in the "Foreword", Layton returns to the "bold" child of his own life. He can but realize the "bold youth" by being haunted by him—that is, the dialectics of the poet and his poet figures. The search and movement revolve around the self-images of the poet. The self-image is the source and dialectic for poetic realization. The making of these images moves as if in full circle, but life and process break the forms of perfection. The self-image that has been made remains unsatisfying for the living man; hence the sense of pathos and haunting. Ultimately the poetic dialectic is one of completion and haunting, poetry and poet. And in a further sense, the dialectic reflects itself as sound and meaning in the act of poetry as language.

The pathos of "The Haunting" moves back to the pathos and haunting at the end of "The Swimmer". In this first key poem of the
forties, the poet returns to the image of himself:

Stunned by the memory of lost gills
He frames gestures of self-absorption
Upon the skull-like beach
Obseives with instigated eyes
The sun that empties itself upon the water,
And the last wave romping in
To throw its boyhood on the marble sand.

The close of both these poems above, move back to Layton's first poem, "Vigil," written forty years before The Collected Poems.

Dawn. A crayon held in a master's fingers
Pencilling in soft outlines the earth.
The hills. Humps that tell laconically
The labouring age of earth;
And suns that turn the wayside streams
To moving panes of light.

That flux and promise in these last lines suggest how from the beginning the affirmative vision moved with life and process. That creative potentiality seeking forms and images, has been the central source and poetic for Layton. The returns have never been totally complete, but continuous, changing and growing.
NOTES

1 Eli Mandel, p. 65.

2 Ibid., p. 66.

3 Ibid., p. 66.

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A. Books
   I. Poetry
   II. Poetry and Prose
   III. Editions
   IV. Edited Material

B. Individual Items
   I. Poems
   II. Short Stories
   III. Selected Articles and Essays
   IV. Selected Published Correspondence
   V. Miscellaneous

C. Writings about Irving Layton
   I. Selected Articles, Reviews and Other Writing
   II. Biographical Information

D. Secondary Sources
   I. Canadian Literary Background
   II. Other Poets
   III. General Literary Background
NOTE

This bibliography attempts to present the range and variety of Layton's writings from 1931-1971 (a few recent items of 1972 are also included). Section A includes the books, editions and edited material. Section B includes the various other individual items Layton has written. The "Poems" (B.I.) are limited to those poems that Layton did not collect in any of his published volumes, or to poems that appeared in different form than in the collected versions. The "Short Stories" (B. II.) are included with the date of their first publication since this reveals at what phase they were written. With the exception of "Silhouette of a Man" all these stories were collected, with only minor changes, in The Swinging Flesh. "A Parasite" is re-titled "Unemployed" in this latter collection. "Selected Articles and Essays" (B. III.) includes most of the significant prefaces, articles, reviews, and notes. Some of the early essays Layton wrote at MacDonald College (but not included here) have still to be verified and checked against a full file of Failt-Ye Times, which, unfortunately, is not available at the moment. Layton engaged in many polemics and literary controversies, and contributed poetry and prose indefatigably to periodicals, little magazines and newspapers. "Selected Published Correspondence" includes the most engaging of his correspondence (B. IV.).

The "Writing on Layton" include significant reviews of his books which reflect the changes in the critical reception he received. These include literary articles, some more public articles, and various poems written to him or about him which also illuminate how the circle of poets about him received the man and his writings.

"Secondary Sources" includes books of the Canadian literary background pertinent to this dissertation. Also included is a bibliography of those poets who have been closely involved with Layton or have been influenced by him at some point in their careers. In the main these are poets of the "Montreal School"—poets who span four generations of the modern movement in Montreal.


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