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Abstract

In the «Forewords» to his books of poetry, in his public correspondence in The Canadian Forum, The Montreal Star, The Globe and Mail and elsewhere, and in lectures, poems, reviews and interviews, Layton has carried on a dialogue with his contemporaries, both poets and critics, on the major issues affecting the nature and function of poetry. This thesis argues that his writings on poetry over a period of four decades constitute a coherent and important body of criticism, and provide a valuable record of the development of poetry in Canada since World War II. The focus of the argument is upon Layton's criticism in direct relation to current controversies and literary movements, both in Canada and abroad. It demonstrates that Layton has maintained a consistent didactic emphasis in his criticism; that he has compellingly asserted the vital role of poetry in both private and public life; that he astutely discerned what was crucial and what was trivial among a throng of movements, counter-movements, innovations and shifts in sensibility or the temper of the age; and that he has been the main spokesman for the prophetic and realist tradition in Canadian poetry.

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Introduction

Over the past four decades a substantial body of Layton's criticism has been accumulating, but unlike the criticism of poets like A.J.M. Smith and Louis Dudek, relatively little of it has appeared in the form of critical articles and reviews in the literary journals. The core of his criticism is found in the many «Forewords» to his books of poems. These contain his major critical statements on the nature and function of poetry. His public correspondence, in the Canadian Forum, The Montreal Star, and The Globe and Mail, contains criticism of a more topical nature, occasioned by specific issues or events. Other sources of his criticism are the published lectures and interviews, his private correspondence, and his poems. The «Forewords» from 1952 to 1972, occasional polemics, and a selection of the public correspondence have been collected in Engagements: The Prose of Irving Layton. Since 1972, Layton has published nine books of new poems, seven selections of his own poetry, and edited two others; ten of these books have a «Foreword». Other literary essays, reviews, lectures, and «ruminations» are collected in Taking Sides: The Collected Social and Political Writings. The correspondence with Dorothy

Rath, An Unlikely Affair, was published in 1980. There is also a great deal of unpublished correspondence with poets and critics in both the United States and Canada. This thesis is based primarily on the published criticism: however, I have had the privilege of examining the unpublished correspondence with Desmond Pacey, which consists of 531 letters from Layton to Pacey and 270 letters from Pacey to Layton, written over a period of nineteen years, 1954 to 1973. This correspondence alone is probably one of the most important sources documenting the development of poetry and criticism in Canada since World War II.¹

Layton's method has not been one of systematic analysis. Much of his criticism has been written in the heat of controversy and consists of scurrilous abuse, direct attacks, witty parodies, subtle insights, and moving tributes. Either implicitly or directly, it responds to the work of his Canadian contemporaries, both poets and critics. It also touches upon the major modern writers in England and the United States, upon Eastern European writers, upon «masters» like Shakespeare, Blake and Byron, upon the influence of modern philosophy, psychology, and politics on contemporary poetry, and it chronicles the public reception of his own poetry. However, because the criticism is scattered among works on a range of subjects, because it is often discharged in aphorisms and polemics, and because much of it is

directly related to a particular occasion -- the publication of a book, an unfavourable review of his poems, or an argument with a friend -- it may appear as individual flashes rather than a coherent body of criticism. The apparent exaggerations and reckless generalisations often brilliantly illuminate a controversy but their significance or reliability in a wider context is not always immediately clear. To read Engagements or Taking Sides from cover to cover can be a bewildering experience. The reader is confronted with a throng of paradoxes, polarities, even contradictions, which seem to express deeply held convictions, but they often seem to be the convictions of the moment, inspired by the immediate demands of the occasion.

According to certain academic criteria, Layton's 'criticism' hardly qualifies as such. For Wellek and Warren, criticism, «if not precisely a science, is a species of knowledge or of learning.» It assimilates literary experience to a coherent scheme «which must be rational if it is to be knowledge.»² Similarly Frye, in the «Polemical Introduction» to Anatomy of Criticism, demands that criticism must develop into a «unified structure of knowledge.» By Frye's criteria, Layton provides merely examples of «the aberrations of the history of taste.» In Layton's comments on literature there is abundant evidence of what Frye calls «the application of a social attitude,» to the point where

literary and social criticism often become inseparable; there are emphatic value-judgments; there is ranking of poets, Byron above Keats and Shelley, Cohen above Reaney and Jay Macpherson; there is a strong and explicit moral thrust; and there is a passionate concern with what poets ought to do, not just with what they have done. For all these reasons, Frye would have to exclude Layton's work as criticism proper. At best, he could allow Layton a certain status as a «public critic» whose function is «to exemplify how a man of taste uses and evaluates literature, and thus show how literature is to be absorbed into society.» This does describe accurately an important function of Layton's 'criticism': the term «man of taste» is clearly intended disparagingly, but one of Layton's main purposes is certainly to «show how literature is to be absorbed into society.» For Layton, this is a much worthier function than scholarly commentary or the illustration and development of a critical system, but for Frye «public criticism» is rather an exercise in «appreciation» and cannot «become anything better than a monument of contemporary taste, with all its limitations and prejudices.»³

Francis Sparshott's criteria for criticism are much more permissive. He rejects the idea that criticism either can or should be purely descriptive, systematic, and free of value-judgments; or that there is a fundamental difference between «criticism» and «appreciation»:

Criticism of art cannot be merely and independently descriptive. Even if it were not true that every description must be made from the point of view of some interest or set of interests, it would remain true that the description of an object of appreciation as such must describe what there is about it to be appreciated. Thus the idea of a value-free discussion of works of art as such is chimerical. It may thus appear that criticism as we have described it is simply the form of discourse appropriate to works of art as such.

«The ultimate basis of criticism in literature,» Sparshott maintains, «is that some people have things they want to say, and others have things they want to know.» What Frye sees as either «leisure-class gossip» or a contribution to «a unified body of knowledge,» is all «criticism» to Sparshott: «Criticism may be identified either as a technique, a type of skilled activity with its own concerns, or as an institution defined by its social relations.» For Sparshott, «critics are all going to heaven.» However, this literary ecumenicism seems useful only where 'belief' has been eroded to the point of nominal adherence. Sparshott does make the important point that criticism functions in relation to social, economic and institutional structures, but his view of literature and criticism as «performance» poses its own problems, particularly with regard to the sense of urgency that marks much of Layton's criticism.⁴

If an attempt to define criticism is problematic, the problems seem to become even more complex in the case of the poet-critic. While poet-critics seem more

abundant than ever before, there also seems to be more resistance to them than ever before. The «intentional fallacy» has become a current literary term, hardly any longer a matter of contention for several «schools» of criticism. For Frye, «the notion that the poet necessarily is or could be the definitive interpreter of himself or of the theory of literature belongs to the conception of the critic as a parasite or jackal.»⁵ This seems to be a bit of a red herring since the contrary view is rarely argued in such absolute terms. Another common charge against the poet-critic is that his criticism is merely a polemic for his own work; as Anden puts it, «Read me! Don't read the other fellows!»⁶ Frye claims that «it is hardly possible for the critical poet to avoid expanding his own tastes, which are intimately linked to his own practice, into a general law of literature.» Similarly, René Wellek finds that poet-critics have a tendency to «surrender to subjectivism,» a tendency that supposedly is much less apparent in academic critics.⁷ A more fundamental criticism of the poet-critic is that he is mentally, or at least temperamentally, unsuited for criticism. Poetry, the argument goes, is the product of blind instinct or intuition, criticism of disinterested reason. Thus, Wellek concludes «that a poet is creating a concrete work of art and that he does not necessarily either know or care about the nature of his activity and certainly may not be

able to formulate it in intellectual terms.» He relates with approval a story of a «famous poet» whose proposed appointment to a professorship at Harvard was rejected «when a witty opponent argued that one would not make an elephant Professor of Zoology.» A similar image of the poet-critic as a mute specimen is evident in Frye's argument that «the poet speaking as critic produces, not criticism, but documents to be examined by critics.»⁸

In effect, Frye and Wellek seem to argue that the 'criticism' of poets cannot be criticism because it is literature. Eli Mandel, in his essay, «The Poet as Critic,» argues the opposite point: «I am not sure how or whether it follows that when the poet or writer is critic, his criticism will necessarily be literature or even literature.» Mandel is clearly approaching the issue from another direction. He is not arguing directly against Frye and Wellek but against George Steiner's judgment that «the critic lives at second hand. He writes about. The poem, the novel or the play must be given to him; criticism exists by the grace of other men's genius.» For Steiner, the criticism written by a poet is not less worthy than that of a non-poet, but it is secondary to, and less worthy than, the poet's «creative» work, unless, by virtue of its style and personal intensity, his criticism itself becomes literature. Mandel maintains that criticism by poets is properly regarded as criticism, whatever else it may be -- propaganda,

literature, or whatever. He reminds his reader that «there is a long tradition of critical writing by poets; one thinks of Sydney, Dryden, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, in his letters certainly, Blake throughout his work, Wilde and Yeats, Pound, Eliot -- Charles Olson, Creeley, and Duncan.» When Mandel mentions specifically Keat's letters, Blake's «extravagant fancies,» and Wilde's The Decay of Lying, it is clear that he is using the term «criticism» in a much wider sense than either Steiner, Frye, or Wellek ascribe to it. Thus, Mandel's point is, first of all, that given this long tradition of criticism by poets, it is fatuous to regard their critical activity as standing in opposition to their «creative» work, and secondly, even if their criticism acquires the status of «literature», or even if it virtually ceases to be «criticism about,» «it has always seemed to me peculiar to exclude from criticism in this way a large part of what has traditionally been thought of as criticism.»⁹

Mandel readily acknowledges that criticism by poets is often very different from criticism by scholars, but he maintains that their critical activity is a necessary and enriching feature of criticism. George Woodcock also acknowledges that criticism by poets contributes a special and important element to critical understanding, but he does not seem to regard their contribution as radically different from the criticism written by

scholars. In his «Introduction» to Poets and Critics, he observes that «the times when poet-critics make an important appearance in the world of letters are usually times when literatures are taking form or undergoing profound changes which amount to a kind of cultural rebirth.» Such a «time» occurred in Canada after 1920 «when our first definably Canadian writing began to appear.» This dismisses Canadian writing before 1920 a little too quickly, but the point Woodcock makes is apt. He draws a distinction, similar to Frye's and Wellek's, between the faculties required for poetry and those required for criticism, between intuition and intellect, but allows for a mutually enriching relationship between the two. He argues that when «serious» criticism of Canadian poetry appeared after 1920,

the best of it was criticism that used the faculties needed in poetry, but in changed proportions, for while in poetry it is the intelligence that shapes the gifts of intuition, in criticism it is intuition that illuminates the action of intelligence. Where poets are critics, criticism can never be a mere academic exercise or a routine of higher journalism. It will carry its own creative element and, in ways that are often arcane, help to shape the literature it examines and of which, by virtue of its imaginativeness, it is part. And poet-critics, by their very presence, raise the sensitivity level of criticism as a whole.¹⁰

This account does give proper credit to the poet-critics in Canada; the point that criticism by poets helps «to shape the literature it examines» seems particularly apt.

However, all of the criticism in Woodcock's collection is «criticism about,» and none of it is strikingly different from academic criticism.

Layton has been charged with all the faults that poet-critics are allegedly susceptible to. Moreover, even a critic as hospitable to poet-critics as Woodcock has difficulty taking Layton's criticism seriously. He includes the criticism of ten poet-critics in Poets and Critics, and cites D.G. Jones, Eli Mandel, and Louis Dudek as «only three examples» of the many good poet-critics whose criticism is not represented here. But Layton, along with Earle Birney, is specifically excluded. These two poets, says Woodcock, stand out because they have not been critics; instead, they «have reacted in a romantic manner against criticism and raged against those who are mythically supposed to have been the killers of Keats and other frail versifiers.» Yet both poets have been influential as critics, and it could be argued that Layton's criticism alone has generated more and livelier critical discussion than the combined output of all the poet-critics in Woodcock's anthology.

Eli Mandel's more inclusive and traditional view of criticism by poets, one that includes, as criticism proper, personal testimony, parody, and wide-ranging speculations on the nature and function of poetry, allows him to be more appreciative of Layton's critical

contribution. While critics like Frye and Woodcock seem reluctant to take Layton's criticism seriously, as an important contribution to our knowledge of poetry in general, and Canadian poetry in particular, Mandel regards Layton's «Forewords» to his books of poetry as «the single most important body of criticism of its kind in Canada.»¹¹ Clearly, an understanding of criticism quite different from any offered by Frye, Wellek, Sparshott, or Woodcock, among others, is required to comprehend the quality and range of Layton's contribution. In the following passage, D.H. Lawrence demands an understanding of criticism that is fundamentally opposed to either a scientific system or a leisure-time recreation, and, in contrast to Frye, he asserts virtually an identity between the experience and criticism of literature:

Literary criticism can be no more than a reasoned account of the feeling produced upon the critic by the book he is criticizing. Criticism can never be a science: it is, in the first place, much too personal, and in the second, it is concerned with values that science ignores. The touch-stone is emotion, not reason. We judge a work of art by its effect on our sincere and vital emotion, and nothing else. All the critical twiddle-twaddle about style and form, all this pseudo-scientific classifying and analysing of books in an imitation-botanical fashion, is mere impertinence and most dull jargon.

A critic must be able to feel the impact of a work in all its complexity and its force. To do so, he must be a man of force and complexity himself, which few critics are. A man with a paltry, impudent nature will never write anything but paltry, impudent

criticism. And a man who is emotionally educated is rare as a phoenix. The more scholastically educated a man is generally, the more he is an emotional boor.

A critic must have the courage to admit what he feels, as well as the flexibility to know what he feels A man like Macaulay, brilliant as he is, is unsatisfactory, because he is not honest. He is emotionally very alive, but he juggles his feelings A critic must be emotionally alive in every fibre, intellectually capable and skilful in essential logic, and then morally very honest.¹²

However inadequate this is as a formal definition, it is immediately apparent that it illustrates an understanding of criticism that corresponds closely to Layton's. It demands a level of involvement and personal insight that could never be held as a norm in scholarly criticism or reviewing, but when it does occur, it seems perverse to regard it as something less than criticism. In reaction to T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis maintained that Lawrence was «the finest literary critic of our time -- a great literary critic if ever there was one.» Lawrence gives the impression «of going straight to the centre with a masterful economy, the sureness of touch of one who sees exactly what is in front of him, and knows exactly what he thinks of it.» Leavis concludes that «if Lawrence's criticism is sound that seems to me to be because of the measure in which his criteria are sound, and because they and their application represent, if not what we ordinarily call thinking', an extraordinarily penetrating, persistent

and vital kind of thinking.»¹³

Whatever claims can be made for Layton's criticism, the claim that it reveals a similarly «penetrating, persistent and vital kind of thinking» is perhaps the most important. If his language is rather highly charged, and if the immediate context of his criticism is controversy and personal vindication, there is a wider context that includes a long tradition of 'defenses' of the 'authority' and 'knowledge' of the poet against rival claims, and of the centrality of art in human affairs.

The arguments against the reliability of the poet-critic tend to assume that the primary function of criticism is to reveal or ascribe some kind of order to a variety of literary experiences. An abstract description and analysis of what literature empirically is becomes the basis of criticism. Detachment and disinterestedness are consequently desirable qualities in the critic. The poet-critic is not necessarily excluded from this process, but he may be more absorbed in what literature is becoming, not only what it is. Philip Rahv proposes a distinction between two types of criticism, «prospective» and «retrospective»:

An excellent though somewhat one-sided example of the prospective attitude is Wordsworth's famous Preface. It is an attitude that asserts itself whenever the critic conceives of literature as something actual and alive in his own time and relates himself to it by

trying to affect its course of development here and now This quality of absorption in the present problems of literary art, this sense of it as continuous and open to the incursions of the sensibility in its dynamic changes and responses to new experience is missing in the retrospective critic, who tends to take literature as something given once and for all, secure in its pastness and unopen toward the future. . . . It is always marked by taking for granted that what matters are not the potentialities of literature but its norms.

Rahv is quick to point out that «prospective» criticism, although it is preoccupied with the present, is not limited to contemporary work; but when it deals with the past it does so with the intention of «mobilizing the masterpieces of the past as a means of reactivating the creative imagination of its own time.» Rahv allows that this may be «criticism only in the broadest sense of the term, . . . as much a criticism of the larger context of literature as of its specific texts,» but that does not «belittle» it.¹⁴

A good deal of Layton's criticism is «prospective» in this sense. Moreover, Rahv emphasizes the «educative and preparative» function of this kind of criticism. This conforms to a most important feature of Layton's criticism: its strong didactic thrust. Its most crucial function is to muster an audience responsive to the full impact of poetry. One of its immediate tasks is to attack anything that would undermine the social and psychological effect of poetry. Eli Mandel reminds the reader of the importance of teaching in Layton's

life and work: «One remembers that for 25 years Layton has been a devoted teacher, finding jobs wherever he could, sometimes holding as many as five appointments at one time.» Mandel maintains that, «whatever else he might be, Layton is, both in the Prefaces and in the poems, a teacher.» The relations between poetry and society are complex, but basically the didactic poet-critic believes that poetry has «less to do with metaphysics than with society, particularly with the question of social evil.»¹⁵ The basic terms of Layton's criticism have remained remarkably constant throughout his career: passion, creativity, and truth are opposed to formalism, «triviality» and «gentility.» Gentility includes almost everything that Layton dislikes, but its characteristic manifestations are «culture» and «academicism.» These terms indicate something of the close alignment between his literary criticism and his social criticism. They also indicate that matters of form are subordinate to matters of substance. This means that «craft» has primarily a rhetorical function, but definitely not merely a rhetorical function.

Furthermore, there is a strong anti-intellectual element in Layton's criticism. Expressions of contempt for professors, academic critics, and scholars can be found almost everywhere in his work. He quickly becomes impatient with theories, detailed analyses, formal classifications, and subtle philosophical distinctions.

This impatience is consistent with his didactic emphasis. If it appears anomalous that a teacher should be anti-intellectual, it is, as Eli Mandel says, because of our «unfamiliarity with a didactic tradition.» Anti-intellectualism implies neither a lack of nor a disregard for intelligence. It does imply that intelligence is directly responsive to experience; that reason is informed by instinct, intuition and imagination; and it implies that erudition for its own sake, or in a social vacuum, is a travesty. Mandel again reminds his reader that, like Layton, Swift and Orwell «were anti-intellectuals, but didactic writers, teachers.»¹⁶

Certain critical principles follow from this position. The first is that poetry must function at the centre of both public and personal life. Layton has always insisted that the poet «speaks to all men, not only the cultivated and the sensitive!» In poems like «Whom I Write For,» the brutal language and imagery demonstrate clearly enough the impact Layton demands of poetry, and the kind of audience he addresses. Accordingly, throughout his career he has been quick to attack anything that tends to blunt the force of poetry, or divert it to some academic or cultural periphery. He is contemptuous of any attitude toward poetry that tends to reduce it to a cultured accomplishment or an advertisement for 'class' or 'good taste'. He places himself «on the side of the great vulgarians, beginning with

Homer and including Shakespeare and Mayakovský,» and against the «culture peddlers.» And therefore he rages against «gentility, propriety, respectability -- give the thing any name you will.»¹⁷ He denounces «literature» and «literary sensibility» and «all the academic palavering and head-shaking that goes on in the name of 'culture' and 'poetry'.»¹⁸ He insists that poets write «poems,» not «literature»: «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.» In the «Foreword» to The Tightrope Dancer he declares that «culture, never to be confused with Art, is the big lie of our epoch, the lie that makes it easier to swallow all the others.»¹⁹

To this point, I have emphasized Layton's didactic purpose and his claims for the «authority» of the poet. These are central to his criticism. However, a consistent purpose and a willingness to engage in literary controversy do not constitute a coherent body of criticism. As I mentioned at the beginning of this Introduction, polarities, paradoxes, and apparent contradictions occur almost everywhere in Layton's work. They virtually constitute a 'method'. Layton has said that «the poet must insist on a complex imaginative awareness and remain the sworn enemy of all dogmas and dogmatists.» Often it seems that as soon as any view of poetry is articulated, Layton finds it stifling and

restrictive - - even if he himself articulated it. Consequently he often seems to shift his position, sometimes dramatically, often resorting to some artful dodges. For example, Layton will argue, with a nod toward Blake, that the poet is a romantic visionary; but he is also a tough-minded realist with a firm grasp of politics and economics. But if this should restrict his role to a particularly astute observer and critic, Layton reminds his reader that «the poet transfigures / Reality, but the traffic cop / Transcribes it into his notebook.» If this sounds as though the creative imagination is a law unto itself, Layton insists that poetry is rooted in personal experience. But the poet does not simply explore his private neuroses, he is «the interpreter of the age.» However, he is not simply the age's mouthpiece, he is its adversary: «Poetry is the most subversive force in the world.» But then «there isn't a ghost / of a chance people will be changed by poems.» The poet has «the gift of praise» but he rubs his nose in evil and human cruelty. Then Layton trumps it all with: «Mercifully all poetry, in the final analysis, is about poetry itself.»²⁰

No individual position necessarily negates the validity of any of the others, but their cumulative effect can be bewildering, and the relations between them seem rather labyrinthine.²¹ The consistency of Layton's rhetorical purpose is evident enough, but it may

even seem too evident. It may appear that his shifting positions amount to little more than a kind of 'situational aesthetics.' Moreover, to see only the consistency of his purpose tends to rob individual statements of their referential significance; what they explicitly say about poetry too easily becomes a secondary matter. The problem, as Eli Mandel has said, is that «as appropriately oracular gestures, these seem to say everything; too much in fact.» He suggests that the profusion of paradoxes indicates that for Layton «poetic vision or metaphor is not only a fusing or identifying power which reconciles discordant elements, . . . but an ironic balancing of tensions.»²²

Mandel explores Layton's poetics in considerable detail in the first two chapters of his book, Irving Layton, 1969, and if he does not finally resolve all the polarities and paradoxes, he does reveal something of the range and depth of Layton's insights. To begin with, he assumes that Layton's «attempt to defend poetry from the forces that lead it into triviality is meant seriously.» Furthermore, he maintains that «a unified imagination implies something more than profusion of detail and comprehensiveness of intellect,» and that such a unified imagination is revealed in Layton's work. Mandel underscores the point that the polarities can be funnelled into a primary opposition between Dionysus and Apollo, as these terms are used by Nietzsche in

The Birth of Tragedy and other works:

The point is worth labouring: 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.

But then Mandel quickly adds that for Layton «the polarities are 'really there' -- in society, in history -- and are not simply projections of the poet's psyche or of the poetic process.»²³

Seymour Mayne argues that «Mandel delineates an almost static pattern, and in so doing ignores the unique organic evolution which is so central to Layton's development.» Layton did not «change radically» but «moved from one phase and articulation to another» in an «accumulating process,» where each phase of his poetry «moves out from an initial stance and vision, and then completes itself in a manner that offers a new point of departure.» Mandel's search for «thematic unities and vision,» his attempt «to compress all of Layton's work into the patterns of ideas and themes,» Mayne argues, was doomed to fall short of a comprehensive resolution:

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 own phrases.²⁴

In this thesis, I will take into account some of the aspects of Layton's development that Mayne has identified. However, because I am primarily concerned with the prose criticism, I will regroup the major stages accordingly. Moreover, the prose criticism is directly related to specific controversies and contemporary developments in literature and criticism. The following chapters will focus upon Layton's criticism in relation to those developments. Layton has always been acutely aware of shifts and nuances in the «sensitivity of the age,» and his career as a poet and critic spans several such shifts. When he began publishing poetry and criticism in the 1940s, there was a «ferment» of poetic activity in Canada, the more volatile, perhaps, because it recognized no one model. The McGill Movement of the 1920s and 1930s seemed to find authoritative models among the early modernists and imagists, particularly in Eliot, Pound, and Yeats. However, by the mid-1940s, literary modernism had begun to fall into disrepute among many of the younger poets, in England and the United States as well as in Canada. The left-wing Auden-Spender-McNeice group of the 1930s might have become as influential as the early modernists had been, but by the end of the War it too was in disarray. The following decades saw the rise and fall of the Movement in England, of American formalism, the New Criticism, Black Mountain, the Beats, and post-

modernism. Layton has responded critically to all of them, and his polemics and criticism are best understood against this background.

Contemporary developments in Canada occupy the foreground. The rivalry between First Statement and Preview, the literary legacy of Lampman and Klein, Contact Press, Pacey and Social realism, the emergence of poets like Cohen, Purdy and Mandel, the Tish poets and critics, the quarrel with Dudek, and the formidable presence of Northrop Frye represent the main features in the development of Canadian poetry and criticism, regarded from the perspective of Layton's own development. When Layton's criticism is placed in this context, it no longer appears so anarchic and contradictory. Among a profusion of competing schools, movements, doctrines, regional rivalries, technical breakthroughs, and retrenchments, he seems to follow a course that keeps certain enduring, fundamental principles clearly before him, while remaining responsive to uniquely contemporary conditions.

I divide Layton's criticism into four periods. The first chapter, «Social Realism,» covers the period from 1941 to 1953, from the appearance of his first literary reviews to the «Introductory Note» to Canadian Poems 1850-1952. This is the period of his association with First Statement, the rivalry with Preview, and his subsequent affiliation with Contact Press. The second

chapter, «Against Gentility,» deals primarily with the period from Love the Conqueror Worm, 1953, to the correspondence in The Canadian Forum, 1957-58, where Layton attacked the reviews of his own and Dudek's work by A.J.M. Smith and Kildare Dobbs. This is a short but very productive period when many of the principles that would remain central to his criticism were formulated. I will discuss the social and literary contexts of his attack upon gentility, and his relation to contemporary American developments. The third, fourth, and fifth chapters will focus on the late 1950s and the 1960s, the third stage of Layton's development as a poet-critic. During this decade, «gentility» takes on more sinister qualities, the theme of human cruelty becomes dominant, and his rhetoric becomes more «imperial.»²⁵ More and more Layton sets himself apart from his modern precursors and contemporaries, reaching back into the nineteenth century and to the Hebrew prophetic tradition for models. Chapter Three will examine some of the aspects of his quarrels with Pacey and Dudek, in relation to his apparent shift toward the right, politically, and toward romanticism poetically. The fourth chapter, «The Quarrel with Modernism,» will place the quarrel with Dudek in a wider context, and deal with Layton's ambivalent attitude toward the major figures of literary modernism. The fifth chapter, «The Quarrel with Frye and Historicism,» will examine the objections Layton had to Frye's

view of literature and criticism, particularly to the Spenglerian cultural determinism that, I maintain, runs through Frye's work. More specifically, I will discuss Layton's view of the poet as a prophet and visionary, and how this view conflicts with the main tenets of Frye's criticism. The subjects of Chapters Four and Five require that I examine in considerable detail several works that are not directly related to Layton's criticism, but they are nevertheless necessary in order to illustrate the complexity and range of the issues Layton engages. In the «Conclusion,» I will consider briefly some of Layton's work in the 1970s, the fourth stage of his development. During this period, the Jewish experience is set in judgment over the accumulated horrors of Western culture and civilization, culminating in the Holocaust and the Siberian labour camps. It is a period of summing up for Layton, of «inclusiveness, final statement, and definition.»²⁶ Finally, I will attempt to assess his contribution to Canadian criticism; that is, his importance to contemporary Canadian critics and poets. Seymour Mayne has pointed out that Layton has maintained «a critical dialogue not only with his critics but with his fellow poets on the nature of poetry and the poet,» and that «no other Canadian poet has taken on the task in such large measure, and no other poet has elicited such a wide response.»²⁷ He has been the main spokesman for

the social-prophetic tradition in Canadian poetry that goes back at least to Archibald Lampman and includes such major figures as Pratt and Klein. He has provided contemporary poets with a model of the Canadian poet aggressively engaged in shaping the sensibility and conscience of his countrymen, and he was sufficiently rich, or eclectic, in the range of his critical concerns, his poetic forms, and his personae to challenge the development of younger poets as diverse as Patrick Lane and Alden Nowlan.

Notes

¹ Layton's letters to Pacey are held by Mrs. Mary Pacey in Fredericton, New Brunswick. A copy of the collection is temporarily housed in the Harriet Irving Library, University of New Brunswick. Pacey's letters to Layton are included in the Layton Collection, Norris Library, Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec.

² René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature (London; Penguin Books, 1956), p. 15.

³ Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (New York: Atheneum, 1967), pp. 3-29.

⁴ Francis Sparshott, «Art and Criticism» (1967), in Contexts of Canadian Criticism, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 154-177. Sparshott's discussion of art as «performance» needs to be placed in the context of certain principles of post-modernist criticism. I deal with this briefly in Chapter 4.

⁵ Anatomy of Criticism, p. 6. See also I. Lipking and A. Walton Litz, eds., «Introduction» to «Poet Critics,» Part IV of Modern Literary Criticism 1900-1970 (New York: Atheneum, 1972), pp. 493-495.

⁶ W.H. Auden, The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays (New York, Random House, 1962), p. 33.

⁷ Anatomy of Criticism, p. 6; and René Wellek, «The poet as critic, the critic as poet, the poet-critic,» in Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 265.

⁸ Discriminations, pp. 255 and 263; and Anatomy of Criticism, p. 6.

⁹ Eli Mandel, «The Poet as Critic,» in Another Time (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcépic, 1977), pp. 11-14. See also George Steiner, Language and Silence (New York: Atheneum, 1967), pp. 3-11.

¹⁰ George Woodcock, ed., Poets and Critics (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. ix-x.

- 11 Eli Mandel, «Introduction,» Contexts of Canadian Criticism, p. 16.
- 12 Quoted by H. Coombes, Literature and Criticism (London: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 8.
- 13 F.R. Leavis, «The Wild Untutored Phoenix», (1937), in The Common Pursuit (London: Penguin Books, 1966), pp. 233-239. The essay deals with Lawrence's Phoenix and Studies in Classic American Literature, in response to Eliot's attack on Lawrence in After Strange Gods.
- 14 Philip Rahv, «Criticism and the Imagination of Alternatives,» in The Myth and the Powerhouse (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), pp. 75-80.
- 15 Eli Mandel, Irving Layton (Toronto: Forum House, 1969) pp. 18-20.
- 16 Mandel, p. 19.
- 17 Engagements: The Prose of Irving Layton, ed. Seymour Mayne (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), pp. 50, 71, and 96; also The Collected Poems of Irving Layton (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), p. 78.
- 18 Letter to Desmond Pacey, April 28, 1962.
- 19 Engagements, p. 121; also The Tightrope Dancer (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), p. 11.
- 20 The Collected Poems of Irving Layton, pp. 156, 84, and 68; and Engagements, pp. 95 and 84.
- 21 See Glenn Clever, «Layton on Layton,» CV II, 4, No. 4 (1980), pp. 18-19. The apparent contradictions in Layton's criticism have led Professor Glenn Clever to pose the question, «Which of these concepts of the nature of literature does he hold seriously?» He concludes that «it is no use seeking an answer to this question from Layton. On a conscious level he doesn't seem to have decided. The answer can of course be found by letting his poems tell us; for these exist as independent testimonials of the actual, rather than the rhetorical, dimensions of their author.» In the end, it is the poems that must tell us, but the poems also contain contradictory statements on the nature of poetry, and distinctions between «the actual» and the «rhetorical» are not always clear. The «Prologue» to The Long Pea Shooter can be regarded as versified rhetoric, and the «Review of Bravo Layton» is mainly a

spoof of critical rhetoric, but «The Birth of Tragedy» and «Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom» are surely deeply felt poems, even though they make rhetorical, critical statements. On the other hand, the prose «Foreword» to the 1971 Collected Poems seems to contain a fair amount of 'poetry' and reveals a good deal about the actual author.

²² Mandel, pp. 23-26.

²³ Mandel, pp. 22-28.

²⁴ Seymour Mayne, «Introduction» to Irving Layton: The Poet and his Critics (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978), pp. 2-17.

²⁵ See Eli Mandel, «Foreword» to The Unwavering Eye by Irving Layton. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), p. x.

²⁶ Seymour Mayne, «Introduction» to Irving Layton: The Poet and his Critics, p. 18.

²⁷ Seymour Mayne, «Introduction» to Irving Layton: The Poet and his Critics, p. 15.

Chapter One

Social Realism, 1941-1953

When Layton's first literary essays and reviews began to appear in the early 1940s, modern poetry in Canada had reached the point of «cell division.» This is the image used by Duděk and Gnarowski in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada to illustrate the nature of the «ferment» in the 1940s, in contrast to that of the two preceding decades. In the 1920s and 1930s, the conflict was between the modern poets, particularly the poets of the McGill Movement, and the Canadian Authors Association. The struggle of the former group was for modern poetry itself: for a greater awareness in Canada of the theories and techniques of Yeats, Eliot and Pound; for more freedom in form and rhythm; more freedom in the choice of poetic subject; for colloquial language; for a more precise intellectual content; and for a closer relationship to contemporary events. Not all of these issues were clearly resolved by the 1940s, but the conflict with the late-Victorian or Georgian-oriented Canadian Authors Association no longer generated the poetic and critical «ferment.» The front had shifted to «a conflict of generations within the modern movement and a clearly marked diversification of trends.»¹

In Montreal, the «conflict of generations» revolved around two new «little magazines,» Preview and First Statement. The poets associated with Preview were the older generation, among them, F.R. Scott, A.M. Klein, P.K. Page, Neufville Shaw, and Patrick Anderson, its editor. A.J.M. Smith was no longer in Montreal, but his poetry and criticism continued to appear in Canada, and his 'presence' is clearly evident among the Preview poets. Wynne Francis has pointed out that, by the 1940s, several of them had gained considerable recognition, had published frequently both in Canada and the United States, and they were «comfortably established» in their professions. The poets associated with First Statement were younger and much less established. John Sutherland was the editor and prime-mover, with Layton and Dudek as co-editors. By January 1946, the two groups had officially merged to produce Northern Review, with Sutherland as managing editor and an editorial board carefully selected from both camps. In the sixth issue, Sutherland published his attack on Robert Finch's Poems, and this led to the mass resignation of the Preview poets from the editorial board, leaving the magazine in the hands of the former First Statement group. Nevertheless, many of the controversies continued to the end of the decade and into the 1950s, even though the Preview front had been dispersed. According to Wynne Francis, the conflict between the two groups «generated much of the

poetic activity that went on in Montreal and made the 'Forties, Canada's most exciting literary decade.»²

One of the fundamental controversies of the period revolved around the terms «cosmopolitan» and «native:» The terms were brought into currency by A.J.M., Smith in his 1943 «Introduction» to The Book of Canadian Poetry. Explicitly, Smith defined the two traditions as follows:

The one group has attempted to describe and interpret whatever is essentially and distinctively Canadian and thus come to terms with an environment that is only now ceasing to be colonial. The other, from the very beginning, has made a heroic effort to transcend colonialism by entering into the universal, civilizing culture of ideas.³

This does seem to express a preference for the latter «cosmopolitan tradition,» but it is far from being an attack on the «native tradition.» However, Sutherland began to dispute Smith's categories and preferences in his editorials, and launched an all-out attack in his own «Introduction» to Other Canadians (1947). Smith's «Introduction» seemed to chart a course for modern Canadian poetry that would be urbane, erudite, elegant, aloof, and modelled on the work of the later Yeats, Eliot and Auden. Sutherland had a very different vision of Canadian poetry and its future development. His decided preference was for social realism, for poetry that dealt directly with the poet's own experience of

contemporary issues, and spoke clearly and forcefully to a wide audience. Such poetry would have its 'centre' in the poet's immediate social environment, not in London or Paris.

There is much in Smith's earlier criticism that would suggest that the disagreements between himself and the First Statement group were minimal. In the famous 1928 polemic, «Wanted-Canadian Criticism,» Smith stated his demands for realism in terms as extreme as any that were later to appear in First Statement:

The Canadian writer must put up a fight for freedom in the choice and treatment of his subject. Nowhere is puritanism more disastrously prohibitive than among us, and it seems, indeed, that desperate methods and dangerous remedies must be resorted to, that our condition will not improve until we have been thoroughly shocked by the appearance in our midst of a work of art that is at once successful and obscene. Of realism we are afraid - apparently because there is an impression that it wishes to discredit the picture of our great dominion as a country where all the women are chaste and the men too pure to touch them if they weren't. Irony is not understood. Cynicism is felt to be disrespectful, unmanly.

In the «Rejected Preface to New Provinces» (1936),

Smith declared:

Capitalism can hardly be expected to survive the cataclysm its most interested adherents are blindly steering towards, and the artist who is concerned with the most intense of experiences must be concerned with the world situation in which, whether he likes it or not, he finds himself. For the moment at

least he has something more important to do than to record his private emotions.

It was Smith, not Layton, who first, in 1942, attacked a «bias in favour of gentility» in Canadian poetry and criticism. In 1944, he held up «local realism» as an effective antidote to colonialism, to «a spirit that gratefully accepts a place of subordination, that looks elsewhere for its standards of excellence and is content to imitate with a modest and timid conservatism the products of a parent tradition.»⁴

Statements such as these should have made Smith an ally, not an adversary, of the First Statement group. However, there is another strain in his criticism that became increasingly dominant in the 1940s. It is already evident in «Wanted-Canadian Criticism» where he maintained that Canadian poetry «is altogether too self-conscious of its environment, of its position in space, and scarcely conscious at all of its place in time.» He continued to attack «colonialism,» particularly the «double standard» of criticism that lavished extravagant praise upon minor Canadian poets. Nevertheless, he seemed to «gratefully accept a place of subordination» when, in «Canadian Poetry - A Minority Report» (1939), he advised younger writers «to send their poems to the best literary magazines in London and New York,» and, until they were sure their work was acceptable there, to «leave the Canadian magazines alone.» He seemed

anxious «to show that our work is not unworthy to be placed beside that of poets in the United States or England.»⁵ In his later work, he virtually abandoned the native vs. cosmopolitan idea, but the modernism of Yeats, Eliot and Auden remained the standard for contemporary poetry in Canada.

In contrast to Smith, Scott, even to Klein and Dudek, Layton sensed that the moment of the 'great' modern poets had already passed. From the beginning, he seems to have had an intuitive reaction against them, a sure, if not fully articulate, sense that they had done their job when they exposed the sweetness-and-light moralism and rhetoric of the Victorians and Georgians, and the world-weary langours of the 1890s aesthetes. Beyond that, Layton seemed to think that contemporary poets could learn most from the failures of the modern poets, particularly their failure to provide effective leadership against the dominant social, political and economic forces of their age. This applies to the left-wing Auden group during the 1930s, as well as to Eliot, Yeats, and Pound. There is consequently a certain lack of militancy in Layton's anti-colonialism; for him, the attraction toward the imperial centre was simply not that strong. The tasks that challenged the contemporary poet demanded imaginative resources and responses for which the modern poets provided an inadequate model, in certain cases even an anti-model. Whatever claim London

might have had as a literary centre in the 1920s and 1930s, Layton acknowledged no such centre in the 1940s. He acknowledged the continuing influence of the modern poets of the 1920s and 1930s, but it was an influence that the contemporary poet had to struggle against. His poem «The Modern Poet» appeared in Now is the Place, 1948. It is an attack on the «fashion» set by Auden that would reduce the poet to a «tame» house pet, whose function is to «entertain / your guests after tea.» When the poem appears in Layton's later collections, it is Eliot who «set the fashion.»⁶ Either way, Layton's irreverence for the major modern poets of the 1920s and 1930s is clear.

For Sutherland, Smith's deference to Yeats, Eliot and Auden, his view that only English and American publication could confer real merit, and his view that only rigorous comparisons with English and American poetry could establish the worth of Canadian poetry, seemed to assure that Canadian poetry, whatever its merits, would remain «colonial.» Instead of Smith's comparative test, Sutherland called for «a sincere and forthright Canadianism,» «self-critical» but not self-effacing.⁷ He seemed to believe that Smith's «universal, civilizing culture of ideas» necessarily existed within a definite social context, whether it was acknowledged or not. If that context was not the poet's own, then he must necessarily speak from the periphery,

remote from the 'centre'. In an editorial entitled «A New Organization» (1943), Sutherland wrote:

The average person develops his intellectual powers by dealing with life in terms of his own country. If a Canadian focusses his attention on the history, literature and politics of Canada, he achieves a fusion of the theoretical and practical sides of his mind. He not only develops a new consciousness - a Canadian one - but he informs abstract concepts with the right measure of reality.⁸

There is certainly an immediate political thrust to Sutherland's social realism, but it is also more than that. When he speaks of fusing the «theoretical and practical sides» of the mind, or of the need to inform «abstract concepts with the right measure of reality,» there is at least a faint echo of Yeats's «unity of being.» In fact, on certain fundamentals, Sutherland is a better student of Yeats than Smith. Nothing could be more un-Yeatsian than Smith's «eclectic detachment» that enables the poet «to select and adopt what is relevant and useful.» Yeats had only contempt for «an international art, picking stories and symbols where it pleased.» He disliked «the isolation of the work of art» and was determined «to plunge it back into social life.» He complained that the arts had grown «too proud, too anxious to live alone with the perfect, and so one sees them, as I think, like charioteers standing by deserted chariots and holding broken reins in their hands.»⁹ There is very little here that the First

Statement poets would have disagreed with, except, perhaps, the exotic language.

Layton and Dudek contributed relatively little to the native-cosmopolitan controversy that directly concerned questions of literary nationalism and colonialism, but they fully participated in the attack upon what they considered the aloof formalism of the Preview group. Dudek attacked their «pedantic absorption in the second-hand universe of books, literature and erudition,» and their «falsified devotion to a special universe of ideas.»¹⁰ He insisted upon a «poetry of experience,» in «honest» reaction to contemporary events. He was more inclined to find models among American than among English poets, a preference that neither Layton nor Sutherland quarreled with, but in this regard he seemed to stand somewhat apart from the strong Canadianism of Sutherland and the more pragmatic nationalism of Layton. But in his attack upon bookish poetry Dudek clearly speaks for the First Statement group. He argued that poets who are «cloistered» in the universities acquire a marked «preference for word-patterns rather than poetry,» that their poetry is «spoiled» by their learning, that they are «cut off from real everyday contact with the main currents of contemporary life,» and furthermore, he suggested that the «problem» was directly related to the fact that universities were learning institutions developed by

«the priestly and later by the aristocratic or leisure classes of society, both of which were essentially parasitic on the economic life of the people.»¹¹

Looking back on the period in 1955, Layton wrote:

We of First Statement considered ourselves the Canadians. The Preview of Scott, Klein, and Page was looked upon as the cosmopolitan, sophisticated magazine, but somewhat alien. Between the two of us existed a healthy situation of rivalry and controversy.

In the same article, published in Prism, Layton states that the «newer poets» of the 1940s, naming Dudek, Souster, Miriam Waddington and himself, «had been formed by the depression of the thirties and the Second World War,» and that the experiences of these «years of misery and tumult» were «in the marrow of our bones and when we came to write poetry, it was tough, realistic, and critical.» The older Preview poets, Layton suggests, were formed by the First World War and the disintegration of the old moral and religious certainties. They were still troubled by certain questions that were no longer issues for the younger poets; the older poets were «still trying to decide whether this was a moral universe or not; the poets of the forties decided it was not.»¹²

Layton sounds a little more decisive in 1955 than he did in the early 1940s when he still retained the hope that the «counsels of reason» and «goodwill» would

win out in the end.¹³ His early articles in The Faith-
Ye Times during the thirties show that he kept a sharp
eye on developments in Europe. In the early 1940s he
was writing his thesis on Harold Laski, and consequently,
he seems to have been more informed about, and inter-
ested in, developments in England than either Dudek or
Sutherland, and he was quick to read the signs of the
times. One of his first contributions to First Statement
was «Politics and Poetry» (1943), an assessment of
recent developments in English poetry.¹⁴ He was
delighted to report that, «in politics and poetry the
present happenings in England are full of promise.»
England was experiencing «an intense intellectual
ferment.» He found a «well marked reaction» against
«the triumvirate of Auden, Spender, and Lewis» which
repudiated «both in theory and practice the conventions
of the older group.» Layton certainly welcomed the
reaction, but he gave generous credit to the achieve-
ments of the Auden group during the 1930s: they were
«diagnosticians and prophets; they were critical of the
prevailing institutions and temper of the people; they
strove to explain to their fellow-men the implication
of a collapsing social order.» However, with the out-
break of the war, «history took a sudden lurch forward,»
and hence, «much of their poetry is no longer relevant.»
Although their goal was worthy, and their accomplishments
significant, they failed, mainly because they wrote as

outsiders, out of «frustration,» alienated from the feelings and aspirations of their society. The crucial difference between the Auden group and the new generation of poets is that the former were «hostile to their society and rejected it» while the new generation «derives its main vigour from an identification with it.» They are still «on the side of the dispossessed,» but «for the doctrinaire Marxism of the thirties, they have substituted a willingness to observe and experiment.» Layton also welcomes the fact that under the new regime, «clearness and intelligibility have been restored to English poetry.» He announces that the «clipped, tortuous style which has held English poetry in a straightjacket for over a decade has disappeared,» to be succeeded by a «personal, free-flowing, . . . more elastic and colourful» style.

Layton's exuberance and optimism is engaging, but it is clear that to some extent he is reporting developments he would like to find. Moreover, the exuberance and optimism were not sustained. In fact, the same issue of First Statement, August, 1943, that contained «Politics and Poetry» also carried his review of a book of poems by James Edward Ward, which he described as «ladling out a thin syrup» of «reassurance» to war-torn England. He is contemptuous of Ward's «meticulous» verse, his trivial subjects, and his lack of passion, disgust, or anger. Nevertheless, «Politics and Poetry»

is important as an illustration of Layton's own critical preferences at this time, as a statement of the course Layton hoped contemporary poetry would take. But it also reveals the astuteness of Layton's observations and instincts. At this time in England a new «Movement» was in fact taking shape, and although it would soon degenerate into a rather sterile formalism, Layton seems to have identified the crucial issues very precisely.

The 1940s in England, and also in the United States, saw two opposing developments: the establishment of English literary modernism in the universities and the academic journals, and its repudiation by the new generation of poets. In The Art of the Real, a detailed survey of poetry in England and America from 1939 to 1976, Eric Homberger claims that in the late 1940s, Eliot's reputation «was at its glorious zenith.»¹⁵ A brief survey of some important titles and their publication dates seems to illustrate this. The Four Quartets was published in 1943, and Notes Toward a Definition of Culture in 1948. F.O. Matthiessen's The Achievement of T.S. Eliot had been published in 1935, and it was followed in 1947 by a second revised and enlarged edition. Cleanth Brooks published Modern Poetry and the Tradition in 1939 and The Well Wrought Urn in 1947. T.S. Eliot: A Study of his Writings by Several Hands, edited by B. Rajan, appeared in 1947. Delmore Schwartz acclaimed «T.S. Eliot as the International Hero» in

Partisan Review in the Spring of 1945. The Eliot-inspired New Criticism was not yet dominant in the universities, but the basic texts had been written. In addition to the two books by Cleanth Brooks cited above, the first edition of his and Robert Penn Warren's Understanding Poetry appeared in 1938; John Crowe Ransom's The New Criticism gave the movement its official name in 1941; and Wellek and Warren's Theory of Literature, 1949, would soon become something of a summa theologica.

Among practising poets in England, particularly the younger poets, there seems to have been quite a different mood. Reviewing Oxford Poetry 1948, an anthology of new poetry, John Wain wrote:

Not one of these thirty-five poets seems anxious to write like Mr. Eliot. I had long suspected that the echo of his voice was growing fainter, and this proves it.¹⁶

Michael Hamburger in The Truth of Poetry finds that the new mood was not confined to England, or to the United States, but pervaded also in Europe. In fact, in the change to what he regards as a more «democratic» diction and persona, British poetry «anticipated the international trend towards a closing of the gap between personal vision and public concerns.»¹⁷ In his poem «Against Romanticism,» Kingsley Amis pleaded, «Let us make at least visions that we need.»¹⁸ This poem was not published

until the early 1950s, but it illustrates the 1940s protest against the anti-social or super-social visions of the poets of the 1920s and 1930s. The reaction was against both the aloof, self-consciously 'high-brow' poetry of Yeats, Eliot and Pound, and the left-wing, salon-revolutionary poetry of Auden, MacNeice and Spender. The former group had alienated the traditional audience of poetry with its broken syntax and erudite symbolism, with its difficult avant garde experimentalism; and the latter group, for all its social realism and political engagement, had remained a «coterie.» In contrast to a writer like George Orwell, the left-wing poets were in touch neither with the bourgeoisie they despised nor the working class they wished to advance.

Moreover, the 1930s group of Auden, Spender, MacNeice and C. Day Lewis was in complete disarray. Auden's about-face, from left-wing political poetry to a more private, meditative poetry, occurred around 1939-40. In the following year, 1941, he published his New Year Letter in which he dismissed the old socialist causes as the «theory that failed» and he now seemed to confine the role of poetry to private relationships. With apparent regret, he concluded that «Art is not life and cannot be / A midwife to society.» MacNeice, Spender, and C. Day Lewis each made a similar about-face, if not quite as dramatic as Auden's, and withdrew to a life of established ease and a poetry of disenchantment. Eric

Homburger concludes that,

It would be an exaggeration to say that Auden single-handedly discredited the Audenesque. It was the age itself, the tortuous experience of the first years of the war, which overwhelmed the style; it had become 'period' seemingly overnight. Auden presided over the change of climate, the general withdrawal from a politically committed poetry.¹⁹

For the younger poets it was a signal to «close ranks,» not only among themselves, but between the poets and the public. In The Nation (18 May, 1940), Archibald MacLeish attacked the intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s as «The Irresponsibles» for their failure to perceive the threats to Western culture from both extremes, the left and the right. In Purity of Diction in English Verse (1952), Donald Davie wrote that «one cannot avoid the fact that the poet's churches are empty, and the strong suspicion that dislocation of syntax has much to do with it.» Furthermore, he declared that «the development from imagism in poetry to fascism in politics is clear and unbroken.»²⁰ Roy Fuller, who published his first book, Poems, in 1939, was another of the poets in reaction to both Eliot and Auden. Looking back on the 1940s, he recalls, in a recent lecture, that «one disapproved of the public school and university chumminess that sometimes accompanied the left-wing poetry. . . . One was searching, hopelessly it seems now, for a poetry with impeccable political orientation,

yet as rich and free as the great English poetry of the past.»²¹

Considering these developments from the perspective of the present, Layton's astuteness in «Politics and Poetry» is evident; first, in that he was so quick to sense the change in mood and the causes of discontent, and secondly, that he was equally deft at avoiding the note of complacent reassurance that soon became entrenched in the Movement. In this regard, the First Statement group, Dudek as well as Layton, seems to have been more au courant than the cosmopolitan Preview poets, or the mythopoeic poets of the 1950s.

Another issue on which Layton sensed a welcome change of mood was the importance of romanticism. In «Politics and Poetry,» he is pleased to find among the new generation of English poets an «emphasis upon personality» which «directly contradicts the arid intellectualism of the earlier poets.» Layton triumphantly declares that «the note of individualism which T.E. Hulme and Eliot thought they had banished forever has crept back into English poetry.» He compares the contemporary mood to that which produced the surge of poetic activity at the beginning of the nineteenth century: «Just as the French Revolution of 1789 produced the romantic movement of the last century so, I suggest, the resurgence of a democratic élan is creating a new romanticism.» But it is a somewhat chastened romanticism:

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, yes, but within the context of the machine age and power politics.

During the 1940s there did occur «the enthusiastic rediscovery of romanticism.»²² T.E. Hulme in Speculations (published in 1924), Eliot in the Criterion (which folded in 1939) and in After Strange Gods (1936), and Auden after his conversion to orthodoxy, were all explicitly hostile to romanticism. All seemed to identify it with demagoguery or barbarism of one sort or another. A similar hostility is evident among academic critics as various as the New Critic Cleanth Brooks, the neo-humanist Irving Babbitt, the Marxist Christopher Caudwell, and the neo-classicist Yvor Winters. This prevailing hostility was increasingly questioned during the 1940s. Already in 1936 Herbert Read had published his introduction to Surrealism, entitled «Surrealism and the Romantic Principle.» He attacked classicism as a «contradiction of the creative impulse,» aligned with «the forces of oppression,» the intellectual counterpart of political tyranny,» whereas the romantic spirit represented «a principle of life, of creation, of liberation.»²³ Richard H. Fogle, in «Romantic Bards and Metaphysical Reviewers,» 1945, demonstrated that romantic poetry could also be defended on formal grounds, provided the New Critic could shake off some of his

biases.²⁴ Alex Comfort, in «The Ideology of Romanticism», 1946, attacked the neo-classicists for their «loss of nerve,» for turning aside from the harsher aspects of reality. It was romanticism, not classicism, he argued, that confronted barbarism and held it at bay. Against the popular notion that the romantic artist pursues his personal vision in isolation from the rest of mankind and from the real world, Comfort argued that romanticism was founded on the principle of «the community of the artist with his fellow men.» It was rather classicism, founded on the principle of a literary elite, that cut the poet off from his fellow men. Romanticism provides «voices for all those who have not voices,» but it is more realistic than either Christianity or Marxism in that it promises no eventual utopia, no final triumph of the forces of light over darkness, only a continuing struggle.²⁵ Thus, romanticism was acquitted of the charge that it merely indulged in dream-world fantasies, and secondly, that it tended toward an excessive, anti-social ego-mania that must constantly be kept in check by moderate, rational norms.

For Layton, this new enthusiasm for romanticism seemed to promise a liberation of the poetic personality and a development toward a morally and politically committed poetry that would be informed by Marxism and a realistic social understanding, but also reach beyond that to draw on the authority and vision of masters like

Blake, Byron and Heine. Whether or not Layton read specifically the work of Fogle or Comfort is not the point (although he did read Herbert Read with approval).²⁶ Either by erudition or intuition, or a combination of both, Layton was acutely aware of a shift occurring in poetry and criticism in the 1940s, and instinctively attuned to it, quick to find support for his own convictions and to define his own convictions more sharply in relation to the new «ferment.»

One might expect that Layton would champion the poetry of Dylan Thomas. He was certainly no «tame» poet like Eliot or Auden. Compared to the discrete classicists, Thomas appeared as an exuberant romantic bard, celebrating the cycle of birth and death in rich, rhapsodic language. However, Layton does not mention Thomas in his criticism during the 1940s. His work was well known -- it was admired and imitated by Patrick Anderson and others of the Preview group. In fact, Sutherland counted Thomas, and also George Barker, among the unfortunate influences upon Preview. In «A Note on Metaphor,» 1944, Sutherland attacked Thomas as a «surrealist,» obsessed by the formal possibilities of metaphor to the point that all «content» was squeezed out of his poetry. Instead of illuminating reality, Thomas used metaphor «to obscure realities that he finds unpleasant.»²⁷ If Layton was at all attracted by the appearance of Thomas's ebullient romanticism, it seems

that the attraction was not strong enough to overcome the apparent lack of the essential feature of romanticism that Layton identified with Blake and Byron: a passionate, discerning involvement in social and political issues.

Another theme of «Politics and Poetry» is the importance of an audience. Layton announced that the «deseccated coteries» of the 1930s had been dissolved, and quoted with approval an essay by H.L. Senior: «We do not want any more coteries of conceited young men writing little notes to each other disguised as reviews, and calling attention to a widespread influence that reaches no further than the points of their pens.» The young poets, Layton maintained, had regained «the lost sense of community»:

They feel, rightly so, that they have an audience, and they want passionately to be understood by it. This fact of an audience, if I mistake not, is one of the chief reasons for the difference in poetic technique between the two generations. The older generation never had one, not at least, in any vital sense that mattered.

The question of an audience for poetry was a subject of continuing controversy between Preview and First Statement. In the March, 1943 editorial, Sutherland stated that the purpose of a literary magazine was to draw a «close connection . . . between the writers and the people.» In another editorial a few weeks later, Sutherland challenged the Preview group to harness their «potential energies» to produce «a magazine for

readers instead of one important chiefly to writers.»

In No. 20, the first printed issue, Sutherland explained that First Statement

is not produced exclusively by a group of writers. Apparently the danger in Canada of producing the work of a special group lies in the fact that such work will reach only a special audience. School teachers and librarians and critics are valuable readers, but the writing should not be of such a kind as to exclude the general public. In expanding First Statement we are hoping to reach a few more average citizens than has been possible hitherto.

In the following spring, in April, 1944, Sutherland insisted that «if the Canadian writer has any duty today, it is the duty of helping to secure a responsive audience in this country.»²⁸

It is clear that Layton shared with Sutherland a confident determination to cultivate, or create, an audience for Canadian poetry. Implicit in this determination is a didactic purpose, but in «Politics and Poetry» Layton conveys a view of the poet that stresses his role as a spokesman rather than an adversary.

In «Let's Win the Peace,» published a year later, 1944, Layton is less buoyant than he was in «Politics and Poetry.» He is now contemptuous of the «moral revulsion» of the «decent, virtuous people everywhere» when they are forced to contemplate their complicity in the Second World War, or the possibility of a third one:

«They mistake . . . their own shudderings for political realities.» He then concludes that «moral intuitions are futile, in fact dangerous, when unsupported by a wisdom which makes provision for their successful expression.»²⁹ This statement is not specifically applied to poets and critics, but it can be applied to both the 1920s modernists and the Auden group. The modern poets, like Eliot, were acutely perceptive of the moral disease of their age, but they seemed unable or unwilling to render their perceptions in terms amenable to social or political action -- they lacked «a wisdom which makes provision for their successful social expression.» The Auden group did attempt to deal with political and economic issues, but they wrote out of «hostility» and «frustration.»

In the latter half of the decade, Layton seems already to have become disillusioned with the developments in English poetry and politics that he had anticipated a few years before. By 1946, his criticism seems to become angrier, more rigorous, more 'realistic'. This becomes particularly evident when an early article on Harold Laski is compared to his thesis on Laski, which he submitted in 1946. In the former, «Harold Laski,» 1941, the tone is similar to «Politics and Poetry.» Layton begins the article with, «Many observers agree that out of her present harsh trials a new and nobler England is slowly emerging.» He holds some

cynicism in reserve, but the England that he sees emerging is a more socialist England in which the writings of Laski have «prepared men's minds for the inevitable changes that the march of time has rendered necessary.» He commends Laski's «forthright Marxist position,» but also his determination not to «force the facts to fit his theories.» Laski «builds his theories out of the living substance and reality around him.» «Goodwill,» rather than revolutionary change is held out as the key to a brighter future: «liberty and democracy are dependent less upon institutional mechanism than upon the resolute will of men and women to make them work.» Moreover, Layton finds a new and close alignment of the old institutions and the people: «never before in its history has the House of Commons been so instinct with the common aspirations of a people.»³⁰ Layton's thesis on Laski takes a much harder line. By 1946, he is quite out of patience with «good will»:

Not the maturity, the revolutionary temper, the patient and resourceful construction of a working-class party prepared to lead the exploited masses but the goodwill and insight of the select few; not the dictatorship of the proletariat but the benevolent dictatorship of justice; these alone, Laski believes, may establish the socialist society of the future. What is this but a restatement of the discredited utopian socialism against which Marx and Engels levelled their deadliest and most ironic attacks?

Laski is now accused of «completely emasculating and distorting» the revolutionary content of Marxism, and finally dismissed as a «liberal philistine . . . who had not yet freed himself from bourgeois prejudices and reasoning.»³¹

In «Montreal Poets of the Forties,» Wynne Francis makes the apt observation that the ideological differences between Preview and First Statement were minimal:

Both groups, for instance, were politically conscious. The Preview poets were more doctrinaire, and more markedly committed to the Left in varying degrees. Many of them displayed strong sympathies with a continental communism of the Auden-Spender-MacNeice variety. Anderson's orientation was for a time thoroughly Marxist; and Scott was committed to the less revolutionary socialist ideals of the C.C.F. Much of the poetry that appeared in Preview had a clear political intention and a strong Leftist flavour.³²

Similarly, Miriam Waddington recalls that when she first met Sutherland, he was, under the influence of Layton, «trying half-heartedly to become a Marxist.»³³ Layton seems to have been the most ardent Marxist of the group, but even he was willing, at times, to make compromises. The fundamental quarrel was, as Dudek later expressed it, between the derivative, meticulous modernism of the Preview group and the «honesty» of the First Statement group who attempted to root their work in their own working-class experience, however raw and crude the result might occasionally be.³⁴ Thus, what distinguished

the social realism of the First Statement poets was not their theme or their ideology, but their more direct syntax and language and their insistence on personal experience.

The characteristic image of the poet that emerges from Layton's criticism during the 1940s is a good deal less 'exalted' than that associated with the great moderns such as Yeats and Rilke. For Layton the contemporary poet is content to be, or rather demands to be, regarded not as a lofty sage concerned only with the eternal verities, but «as an intelligent contemporary speaking of the things that matter to us all.» In reply to an adverse review of some of the poems he had published in First Statement, Layton wrote: «My parents were both sturdy pioneers in this country and never let an occasion go by to inculcate in their children the virtues of thrift and self-reliance. . . . As for myself I pay my income taxes regularly.»³⁵ Layton's tongue is in his cheek, but this image of the poet as responsible citizen is not just an idle spoof.

Layton also contributed reviews of Canadian poetry during the 1940s. His review of Lampman's At the Long Sault and Other New Poems appeared in First Statement in 1944.³⁶ It is ungrudging in its praise for Lampman's achievement and his importance to Canadian poetry, although he is somewhat dismissive of Lampman's «secure reputation as a nature poet.» What is important to Layton

is that Lampman «was interested not only in observing Nature but also the shenanigans on Parliament Hill.»

It is useful to regard Layton's review in the context of Lampman criticism in the 1930s, and 1940s. Leo Kennedy had maintained that the modern poets had virtually nothing to learn from Lampman, and consequently they had «chucked him out, neck, crop, and rhyming dictionary.» According to Gnarowski, Kennedy is representative of a current attitude «which was aimed at cutting the older poets down to size»:

The idea - in brutal terms - seems to have been one of attacking and whittling down the overly large reputations of poets of the preceding era in order to give the emerging poets of a new generation a chance to compete.

W.E. Collin presents a more thoughtful view of Lampman, although he seems a little too determined to make of him a frustrated Arnoldian Hellenist. He does praise Lampman as a «realist», and quotes the following statement from an article by Lampman in The Globe:

The poet attaches himself to no dream. He endeavours to see life simply as it is, and to estimate everything at its true value in relation to the universal and the infinite.

However, Collin regards Lampman's «realism» primarily in relation to his evocation of landscape, not his anger at social injustice. He admits that he finds the «entanglements of allegory» in «The City of the End of Things»

confusing; Then, in a remarkably philistine statement for so ardent a student of Arnold, Collin trivializes Lampman's anger to mere «depression»:

He had been depressed, no doubt, by the struggle for existence in a city and had read something which had decided him to write the poem.

A.J.M. Smith, in his «Introduction» to The Book of Canadian Poetry, 1943, found that of the four major Confederation Poets, Lampman had «left the most completely satisfying body of work.» He rejects the notion that Lampman was an «important philosophical poet». The «greatness» of Lampman «lies in the purity and sweetness of his response to nature,» and poems like «Heat» and «Winter Evening» possess a «peculiar authenticity much more significant in its vitality than any didactic element, philosophical or social, that was or that might have been injected into his work.» In his review of E.K. Brown's On Canadian Poetry, Smith was pleased to find Brown's «bold affirmation» that the Confederation Poets «have little claim to be considered national poets.» Ralph Gustafson, writing in Northern Review, 1947, cites Layton's review as an example of a tendency in current criticism to «claim Lampman for factional reasons.» He dismisses Lampman's «Epitaph on a Rich Man» and «Liberty» as «two very mediocre poems indeed.» One of the main points that Gustafson makes

is that Lampman, «at too great a cost to his natural endowments, clung too hard to a literal interpretation of Matthew Arnold's postulation that 'poetry is a criticism of life', to his own belief that 'the greatest poets, those few who are eminent above all others for dignity and majesty of tone, have been men of affairs before they were poets'...»³⁷

For Layton, a poet cannot «cling too hard» to the principle that «poetry is a criticism of life,» or that the greatest poets have strengthened their work because they were also «men of affairs.» It is apparent that, among the criticism of his contemporaries, Layton's stands out, first of all because it takes Lampman's anger and suffering seriously, and secondly, because it places Lampman firmly in a Canadian tradition of social-realist poetry and thus conveys the authority of historical precedence upon the work of the modern social realists. In contrast to Kennedy, who thought that the modern poets had little to learn from Lampman, Layton even suggests that Lampman's poem, «Liberty,» except for its «somewhat antiquated rhetoric about Kings and Tyrants, might have been written by some aspiring poet in the New Masses or the Canadian Tribune.»³⁸ In opposition to Smith, Layton states that Canadians do have «a poet of national importance,» and implies that Lampman was engaged in precisely the kind of «important philosophical poetry» that Canada needs.

Layton's review of The Hitleriad by A.M. Klein also appeared in First Statement in 1944.³⁹ He found the poem «fresh, audacious and exciting,» a «landmark in our rapidly growing national literature.» He praises Klein's wit, «compression» of detail, and his eclectic versification. Layton's insistence upon poetry's immediate, topical relevance is evident when he commends the section on Hitler because it is as «intriguing as today's headlines.» Similarly, his view of the didactic function of wit is evident in the phrase, «devastating as only the truth can be when seasoned with wit.» There are flaws in the poem, but Layton regards them as inherent in the subject, not the poet's lack of skill.

The following spring, in 1945, Layton reviewed Klein's Poems.⁴⁰ The emphasis is on the Psalms, where Klein continues his «passionate debate with the Deity,» writing with a «full, passionate heart, out of pity and indignation.» However, in this review, Layton's reservations seem more grave. He is clearly charmed by Klein's vivid presentation of God as a «generous uncle, portly and a trifle deaf,» but he senses a failure to penetrate through the eloquent repartee to the essential truths; more specifically, a failure to grasp the full horror and subtlety of evil.

Dudek published an essay on Klein in the Canadian Forum in 1950.⁴¹ The differences in their criticism are accounted for partly by the fact that Dudek's is a

critical essay written five years after Layton's reviews, but nevertheless the differences are characteristic. Dudek cannot forgive Klein's modernist indiscretions, especially his «archaic rhetoric.» Klein's principal weakness «has always been his language.» His experimental poetry «is often below standard.» The Hitleriad has «bad rhyming and diction,» «crude satire,» and «no density or weight of thought.» In the 'radical' poems, the influence of Eliot is «obvious and poorly assimilated.» Even in The Rocking Chair he is still at «the point which Pound and Eliot reached in 1915,» and his attempt «to express 'Canadianism' . . . is certainly a program of a low order for a poet.» Layton is much less put out by Klein's rhetoric, although he does complain that some of the Psalms are «noisy and unconvincing.» Layton's main reservations about the poetry are not directly ascribed to Klein's language and technique but to a failure of experience and insight, specifically, his lack of «acquaintance» with evil: «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 may not be unrelated to Klein's rhetoric, but it is characteristic of Layton's criticism that he finds the fault beyond language. Even in The Hitleriad he is hardly troubled by the language. Instead, he finds the failure of the poem inherent in its subject. In order to be

successful, Layton argues, the object of the poem's satire must stand in implicit contrast to a sane ideal. However, to imply such an ideal in an account of the Nazi atrocities would reduce the pervasive and radical evil to something circumstantial. Layton's impatience with some of the self-inflicted obscurity of modern, experimental poetry is evident when he commends the Psalms for their simplicity, «a fact that may warn off those who will not read a poem unless they're assured beforehand they won't understand it.»

By 1951, Layton had joined Dudek and Souster at Contact Press. The persistence of the «native tradition» among the poets of the Contact group is evident in the very fact that they published the anthology, Canadian Poems 1850-1952. In the «Introductory Note,» written by Dudek and Layton,⁴² they acknowledge the «cosmopolitan» argument, that «the future points to a world community of intellect,» but they maintain that «the domestic cultivation of literature is still necessary,» that «if we are to have a literary life in Canada, we must pay attention to our own literature.» The anthology is to be «both critical and new in spirit,» and the editors frankly state their preference for poems «which show a dark grain of fact running through them.» The selection is governed by «present-day catholic standards,» and if, by these standards, much of Canadian poetry since 1850 seems weak, so does the poetry of the same period

in England and America. As a «totality,» the poetry of the 1890s is «of an exhausted romanticism» that had «reduced itself to bathos,» but individual poems or groups of poems by Lampman, Roberts and Scott «are small perfect things which deserve a place in the poetry of the English world.» Turning to modern poetry in Canada, some of the old opposition to the Preview group is still evident. The older poets absorbed the influences of Eliot and Yeats «with flair and intelligence,» but the editors cannot resist mixing a little satire with their praise. Scott «has worried in careful verse . . . about the strains and twisting dilemmas presented by a dying culture.» Smith has published «only one book . . . containing his output of thirty-nine . . . excellent articles.» P.K. Page «placed a neurotic sensibility at the service of a unique talent.»

In some of the criticism of the modern poets, in this «Introductory Note,» it is tempting to speculate where Layton's or Dudek's view predominates. For example, the comments on Pratt seem more typical of Dudek's militant modernism than of Layton. Pratt is virtually dismissed as «a lusty narrative poet of the old school, favouring the long breath, the explicit line, illustrative metaphor, and broad moral undercurrent.»⁴³ The point of his having been «dubbed» a «major poet» is a demurring reference to Sutherland's criticism. The comments on Lampman, surprisingly, make no reference to

his social criticism. The comments on Klein in the «Introductory Note» seem to be largely of Layton's contribution. He is singled out as «perhaps the most arresting new name in the New Provinces group.» He has «wit and imagination,» his best poems are «full-bodied and civilized,» and show «verve, originality, and compassion.»

Layton was certainly in agreement with Dudek, and also with Souster, on most fundamentals. They were united in their demand for a poetry rooted in personal experience, in their determination to deal with immediate social and political issues, and in the importance they ascribed to the poet's audience. They opposed the nature morte derived from Eliot, the self-conscious sophistication of the old Preview group, and their preoccupation with formal complexities. Layton seems to have differed from his colleagues in that he placed less emphasis upon purity of language and technique according to established modern standards. He freely drew upon the principles of Pound and Williams when they were useful, but they seemed to hold much less authority for him than for either Dudek or Souster. He was as quick as they were to sense new directions in poetry, or the need for new directions, but he rarely identified them as linguistic and technical developments. Secondly, he seems less wary of romanticism. Usually Layton is careful to distinguish the world-weary «exhausted» romanticism of the late nineteenth century

from that of the early nineteenth century, Thirdly, he is more interested in psychology, both the psychology of the poet and the psychology of human cruelty. In 1950, the differences are slight, but they become greater in the decades that follow.

Earlier in this chapter I stressed the conflict between Preview and First Statement, but it now seems necessary to qualify that conflict somewhat. Wynne Francis reminds her reader that «in several instances lasting friendships cut across these lines of contention.» The younger poets learned much from their more experienced elders; some of the First Statement poets had «literally gone to school to them.» Francis concludes her article with a quote from Layton:

I was lucky to have known them all -- so many exciting personalities, living poetry twenty-four hours a day, thinking, talking, analyzing, arguing, reading, and above all writing. I learned something from every one of them.⁴⁴

However, among «them all,» A.M. Klein stands out. He seems to have had a profound effect upon Layton in several ways. First of all, Klein clearly regarded himself as a spokesman for a particular people, as a lecturer, as an editor, as a political candidate, and as a poet. He celebrated the history and rituals of his people, harranged them, and interceded for them. In many of his Psalms, and in his satiric poems he confronted

the crucial moral issues of his time. For Layton, these became the very qualities of the poet that make his presence in the world essential. Secondly, much of Klein's distinctive language was adopted by Layton. It can be clearly heard in many of the early poems, like «De Bullion Street,» «Newsboy,» «Proof Reader,» «Vexata Quaestio,» and is still audible in some of the later poems like «Icarus» and «Marché Municipale.» Klein's sensuousness, his linguistic playfulness, his podium rhetoric, his delight in learned repartee, can all be found in Layton's poetry. Thirdly, Klein stands out among the early Canadian modernists in his affection for romanticism. In Layton's criticism, «romanticism» is often referred to disparagingly to describe trivial exercises in landscape rapture, but it is clear that neither Klein nor Layton had much sympathy for the laconic classicism of Smith, or of Dudek. Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, Klein's vulnerability taught Layton to be strong. Klein's tragic withdrawal from poetry, from life, in the early 1950s seems to have had a profound effect upon Layton, and determined him not to become a 'poor Johnny Keats'. In a letter to Pacey on December 12, 1956, Layton wrote:

Klein's story is a tragic one of Cariolan pride - and failure. . . . He was compelled to earn his bread in a profession which he despised, and to see men less brilliant than himself gain honours and wealth which that

society only too readily confers upon the unscrupulous, the superficial, and the aggressive. . . . The failure of Klein is the failure of a man too frightened by his environment, by fate, if you will, to be the moving poet that the charitable fairies attending his birth had intended him to be when they placed those lavish gifts of intellect, imagination, and impulse in his unpropitious cradle.

However one-sided this account may be, Klein's example seems to have resolved Layton not to be defeated, by the condescension of either moneyed or learned philistines, by domestic responsibilities, by an environment that frustrated the poet's desire for justice and compassion.

The other crucial event of the early 1950s was the quarrel with John Sutherland. According to Wynne Francis, the «souring» of Sutherland, which soon alienated most of his friends, had begun as early as 1948. Layton was «among the last to go.» She finds his name significantly absent from the masthead of the January, 1951 edition of Northern Review, the edition that contained Sutherland's article, «The Past Decade in Canadian Poetry,» retracting his Introduction to Other Canadians.⁴⁵ Writing to Pacey on August 30, 1956, Layton responded to an earlier accusation by Pacey that his public attacks on Sutherland, who was dying at that time, were in very poor taste:

It was John Sutherland who introduced me to modern poetry. He was the first in Canada to publish my verse and the first to champion that verse in article and review. The

differences that arose between us later were not personal, they were ideological. I thought at the time, and still do, that his conversion to Catholicism and his earlier defection from modern thought and sensibility were wrong and so timed and motivated as to give a blow to Canadian poetry from which it is only now beginning to recover. You will recall how the critics and anthologists five years ago were assuming that the poetic ferment of the forties had come to a sudden and dismal halt. . . . I know that Dudek, Souster, myself, Page, Anderson, etc. etc., were still writing as vigorously as ever, but that J.S. was returning their manuscripts What finally drove Sutherland to his defection, and subsequently to his conversion to Catholicism was disillusionment with himself as a poet, and that his borrowed convictions were rationalizations for something he could not face up to about himself and his lack of real poetic talent.

Layton has said much the same things elsewhere and there is little reason to question this account. However, I think it is also true that Sutherland presented a very strong case to Layton, that his «defection» posed a very real challenge to Layton's own loyalty to «modern thought and sensibility.» In fact, Layton and Sutherland had been strong allies against the despairing nature morte modernism of Eliot and his followers. In Sutherland's «A Note on Roy Campbell,» 1953, the virtues that he emphasizes are «passion, music, and imagination,» the «expression of strong feeling,» the conviction that «living is pleasure, experience is joy^o» Campbell is held up as the antidote to the modern Eliotic poet who is «broken and battered by 'his age', ready to cling for support to the first lamp-post that comes along.»⁴⁶

It is clear that as a critic Sutherland's Catholicism did not bring him into closer alignment with A.J.M. Smith and his alleged Anglicanism. The function of Sutherland's Catholicism, in relation to his literary criticism, is to provide a platform for his attack on modern decadence, the same function that Marx and Nietzsche provided for Layton.

The early 1950s can not have been an easy time for Layton. However, the illness of Klein and the disaffection of Sutherland were not the shattering experiences they might well have been for a less determined poet; instead, they seem to have braced Layton for the controversies he engaged in the following decades. For a brief period around the turn of the decade Canadian poetry seemed to suffer a set-back, but it could be argued that the controversies of the 1940s and early 1950s prepared Canadian poetry generally for the challenge of the following decades. Ken Norris has pointed out that «by the time Modernism had fully established itself in this country, literature in most European countries and even in the United States had begun what is currently being called its 'Post-Modernist' period.»⁴⁷ One of the contributions of the First Statement and Contact poets was to bring Canadian poetry up to date, not by entering into close alignments with new American, European, or British developments, although to some extent that too occurred, but by demonstrating that

Canadian poetry must and could find its own way among a variety of competing developments, and in relation to its own contexts, social, historical and literary. Moreover, Neil H. Fisher has argued that «it was the poets of First Statement who represent the second wave of modernism in Canadian poetry, a wave which has proven to be of tidal consequences. . . . The honesty of both poetic and critical experiences, the anti-intellectual element present, and the North American bias have formed the basis for the development of contemporary poetry in Canada.»⁴⁸

Notes

¹ Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski, eds., The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967), p. 45.

² Wynne Francis, «Montreal Poets of the Forties,» Canadian Literature, No. 14 (1962), pp. 24-25. This article is one of the most useful sources describing the development of little magazines in Canada. The other principal sources, aside from the little magazines themselves, are collected in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, Chapters III and VII. There is also Neil H. Fisher's «Introduction» to First Statement 1942-1945: An Assessment and an Index (Ottawa: Golden Dog Press, 1974).

³ A.J.M. Smith, «Introduction» to The Book of Canadian Poetry (1943), in On Poetry and Poets (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), pp. 20-21.

⁴ See A.J.M. Smith, Towards a View of Canadian Letters (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1971), pp. 169, 173, and 34; also, On Poetry and Poets, p. 10.

⁵ Towards a View of Canadian Letters, pp. 169, 178, 185, and 192. In fairness to Smith, it should be noted that there were not many Canadian magazines available to younger writers in 1939.

⁶ Now is the Place (Montreal: First Statement Press, 1948), p. 46; Collected Poems, p. 188.

⁷ John Sutherland, Northern Review, 2, No. 4 (1949), p. 34.

⁸ First Statement, 1, No. 13 (1943), p. 1.

⁹ W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 193; Explorations (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 300; Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1961), pp. 203-210.

¹⁰ Quoted by Wynne Francis, «Montreal Poets of the Forties,» p. 26.

- 11 Louis Dudek, «Academic Literature,» First Statement, 2, No. 8 (1944), reprinted in his Selected Essays and Criticism (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1978), pp. 1-3.
- 12 Taking Sides, pp. 48-49.
- 13 Engagements, pp. 7-8.
- 14 Engagements, pp. 9-13.
- 15 Eric Homberger, The Art of the Real (Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1977), p. 69.
- 16 John Wain, «Oxford and After,» Outposts, No. 13 (1949), pp. 21-23. Quoted by Homberger, The Art of the Real, p. 73.
- 17 Michael Hamburger, The Truth of Poetry (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p. 263. Hamburger, together with George Steiner is cited with approval in a Letter to the Canadian Forum in May, 1962. See Engagements, p. 172.
- 18 Kingsley Amis, «Against Romanticism,» in New Lines, ed. Robert Conquest (1956), Quoted by Patrick Swinden, «English Poetry,» in The Twentieth Century Mind, vol. 3, 1945-1965, eds. C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson (London: Oxford Press, 1972), p. 388.
- 19 The Art of the Real, p. 35.
- 20 Donald Davie, Purity of Diction in English Verse (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 97.
- 21 Roy Fuller, Professors and Gods: Last Oxford Lectures on Poetry (London: Andre Deutsch, 1973), p. 147. Quoted by Homberger, p. 53.
- 22 Homberger, The Art of the Real, p. 33.
- 23 Herbert Read, «Surrealism and the Romantic Principle,» in Romanticism: Points of View, eds. Robert F. Gleckner and Gerald E. Enscoe, 2nd edition (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1970), pp. 97-98.
- 24 See Romanticism: Points of View, pp. 149-164.
- 25 See Romanticism: Points of View, pp. 165-180.
- 26 See Engagements, p. 163.

27 John Sutherland, «A Note on Metaphor,» in Essays, Controversies and Poems, ed. Miriam Waddington (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), pp. 38-39. See also «The Past Decade in Canadian Poetry» and «Literary Colonialism» in Essays, Controversies and Poems, pp. 72 and 32.

28 See Essays, Controversies and Poems, pp. 23-33.

29 Engagements, pp. 16-17.

30 Engagements, pp. 3-8.

31 Taking Sides, pp. 21-40.

32 Wynne Francis, «Montreal Poetry of the Forties,» p. 26.

33 Waddington, «Introduction» to Essays, Controversies and Poems, p. 8.

34 Louis Dudek, «The Role of Little Magazines in Canada,» in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, pp. 205-212.

35 Letter, First Statement (April 2, 1943), in Engagements, p. 153.

36 Engagements, pp. 14-15.

37 See Michael Gnarowski, ed. Archibald Lampman (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1970), pp. xxi, 119-153; also A.J.M. Smith, On Poetry and Poets, pp. 30 and 43-44.

38 Engagements, p. 14.

39 Engagements, pp. 22-25.

40 Engagements, pp. 26-27.

41 Dudek, Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 4-10.

42 Engagements, pp. 73-80.

43 Compare Louis Dudek, «E.J. Pratt: Poet of the Machine Age» in Selected Essays and Criticism (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1978), p. 116. The first paragraph of this essay is very similar to the comments on Pratt in the «Introductory Note» to Canadian Poems 1850-1952.

44 «Montreal Poets of the Forties,» pp. 24-25, and 34.

45 «Montreal Poets of the Forties,» p. 33.

46 John Sutherland, «A Note on Roy Campbell,»
Northern Review, 6, no. 1 (April-May, 1953), pp. 17-20.

47 Kenneth Norris, «The Role of the Little
Magazine in the Development of Modernism and Post-
Modernism in Canadian Poetry,» Diss. McGill University
1980, p. 1.

48 Neil H. Fisher, First Statement 1942-1945: An
Assessment and an Index, pp. 23-24.

Chapter Two

Against Gentility

The 1950s began, it seems, with a lull. There was a seemingly pervasive feeling among poets and critics that the «ferment» of the 1940s that had produced so many promising young poets, particularly in Montreal, had settled into indifference and languor. In his «Preface» to Cerberus Layton argued that the lull was largely the invention of John Sutherland who had simply stopped publishing poems submitted by Canadian poets. However it does seem that the turn of the decade was a period of regrouping and change. E.K. Brown found that «the poetry of 1949 is less striking than in any year since 'letters in Canada' began.» Pacey maintained that the year 1949 had «brought a sudden ominous pause» in the «triumphant progress» of Canadian poetry since the Second World War. Dudek, in «The State of Canadian Poetry, 1954,» put on a brave face. He insisted that «in the midst of world chaos,» Canadian poets, unlike their British and American contemporaries, did «have something to say.» This essay appeared in The Canadian Forum, and one of its functions, perhaps, was to promote contemporary Canadian poetry among a wider audience. Dudek maintained that the «process» of modern poetry in

Canada, begun in the 1930s and 1940s, «is now going on.» He could even commend the work of Douglas Le Pan, and praise D.G. Jones who «is developing a skill in a formal style which is just the example we need.» However, in his essays in Contact, Culture, and his «Preface» to Cerberus, he seems much more critical of the «new» poetry. In «Où sont les jeunes?» (Contact, 1952), he found that «our younger poets are getting grey about the temples.» At a time when the poet should have more to say than at «any other time in history,» Dudek wonders, «Why are the young poets at a loss for words?» In his later introduction to the chapter «Signs of Reaction, New and Old» in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, (1967), Dudek dates the «lull» from 1948, when poetry in Montreal «began to show distinct signs of self-doubt and re-orientation.»¹

As the decade recovered from its «lull», new names, a new 'centre', and a new critical theory appeared in Canadian literature. Some of the names that became more prominent were Roy Daniells, Phyllis Webb, George Whalley, Wilfred Watson, Douglas Le Pan, D.G. Jones, Eli Mandel, James Reaney and Jay Macpherson. Toronto began to rival Montreal as the centre of poetic activity. And the new critical activity became archetypal criticism. Looking back over the decade in 1961, Pacey found it had been «dominated» by the «mythopoeic school.» In «English-Canadian Poetry, 1944-1954,» he observed that most of

the newer, younger poets were professors, that they seemed to write with «less conviction» than the older poets of the 1940s, and that «vulgarity», rather than social injustice, inspired whatever outrage they could muster.² Dudek focused on the «reactionary» tendencies of the new poets, their distinct preference for traditional forms. He regarded this as symptomatic of a return to outmoded notions of poetry that reduced it «to a purely ornamental or 'cultural' function.» It is Dudek who makes the point that during the 1950s the 'centre' shifted from Montreal to Toronto, and to him this represents the break-up of what had become a definite tradition of modern poetry in Canada. What had been a «highly concentrated and localized activity» had been dispersed, and the new mood, centred on Toronto, was «essentially antithetical to the old, aggressively realistic poetry of early modernism.»³

Layton continued to insist that rigorous, realistic poetry was still being written, but it was being met with public and critical indifference or distaste. However, while Dudek, Souster, and Pacey tended to regard the problem largely as a complacent reluctance among poets and critics to take on the difficult tasks of social protest and technical experiment, Layton identified and attacked a more general malaise, pervading all levels of Canadian society and culture. He regarded the mediocrity of contemporary poetry and criticism as

only one aspect of the general malaise, though a particularly crucial one. His term for the malaise is «gentility»:

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 pruriency 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 are 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 school-marms, university graduates, and right-thinking social workers, very little vigorous and original artistic work will ever be seen in Canada.⁴

The emphasis upon the audience, upon the need to «communicate,» to «make contact» is still very strong among the Contact group. In his «Preface» to Cerberus, Souster insisted that if the poet fails to «make contact» with his audience, «everything else you throw in is wasted and you might as well start all over again.» In «Où sont les jeunes?», published in the first edition of Contact, Dudek still maintained that «there is a ready audience for any young writer with something fresh and bouncing to say, someone with a new technique, a vision, or a gift for making art out of matters of fact.»⁵ In Layton's own «Preface» to Cerberus, there seems to be no such «ready audience.» Canada is «the

most philistine country in the world.» The poet «has no public, commands no following, stirs up less interest than last year's licence plate.» Layton's criticism seems to shift from social realism toward psychological realism, toward a much greater emphasis upon the mental and emotional health of society, and when society is fundamentally diseased, «the best part of any man . . . is the hell he carries inside him.» Layton focuses his attack upon «the drag of middle-class morality, suspicious of all enjoyment and neurotically hostile to the release of art and sex.» Contemporary «culture» bears little relation to creative artists; rather, it represents «the gilded and gelded pseudo-culture of flourishing bankers and brewers.»⁶ During the 1950s sex comes out of the social-realist closet; it is an important subject for poetry not because, as Smith had put it, «the picture of our great dominion as a country where all the women are chaste and the men too pure to touch them if they weren't» is false, but because it may be too true. A healthier attitude toward sex becomes virtually a pre-condition for a healthier society, in all of its aspects.

The comparison of Layton's «Preface» to Cerberus with the «Prefaces» of Dudek and Souster suggests other differences. Both Dudek and Souster place considerable emphasis on the need for innovations in language and technique. There are echoes of Pound's criticism when

Dudek casts poetry **as a protector** of language «against the destroyers and perverters of our time,» the journalists and advertisers. Souster states his dissatisfaction «with existing forms, feeling bound within them, mummified.» He sees an «opening» in the Cantos of Ezra Pound and the principles of Olson's «Composition by Field.»⁷ Layton demands «vigorous and original artistic work,» but originality does not rest upon innovations in language or upon new theories, but upon the uniqueness of the poet's own experience. Dudek and Souster would not disagree with this, but the difference in emphasis is significant.

I have emphasized the shift in Layton's criticism, but the «Preface» to Cerberus still retains a core of social realism. Sutherland's disenchantment with contemporary poetry, is, according to Layton, specifically a disenchantment with the social-realist poetry of protest «against war and social inequality.» Such disenchantment was a godsend to the middle-class philistines, who «at once took heart at the news and began to crawl out of their kennels.» The attack upon «gentility» is not confined to aesthetics. In fact, «gentility» extends the notion of philistinism to include not only pretentious, middle-brow tastes, but also an impenetrable intellectual, emotional, and moral torpor. Some of the symptoms of «gentility» are a protective respectability, a clinical, academic

detachment, and self-conscious «culture,» but the root cause is a fear of life itself, which induces an anesthetized moral sensibility that is virtually impervious to either intellectual or emotional shock. In Layton's poem, «The Improved Binoculars,» even a city in flames is unable to shock the inhabitants out of their gentility. Dignitaries continue in their ceremonial processions and their petty rivalries, and 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.

This is a society unable to distinguish between holiday spectacle and apocalyptic destruction. Gentility renders it morally blind and impotent. Under these conditions, the poet who writes with a didactic purpose is confronted with a formidable challenge. Nevertheless, Layton maintains that the poet not only must but can penetrate this state of organized torpor. In fact, the poet is the only one who can. This becomes one of his fundamental convictions in the 1950s, and throughout the 1960s and 1970s, against the encroachments of lobotomized collectivities and political totalitarianism.

There is a definite anti-British thrust to the attack on gentility. Layton frequently uses the adjectives «English» and «Anglo,» and usually with considerable opprobrium. His harshest criticism in the

«Prologue» to The Long Pea Shooter, is for Douglas Le Pan whose special talent is to

Express in words vacuous and quaint
 The cultured Englishman's complaint
 That decency is never sovereign,
 That reason ought to, but doesn't govern -
 That maids have holes and men must find them
 (Alas, that Nature WILL so blind them!)

In a letter to The Canadian Forum, in reply to a Mr. Christopher of Ile Bigras, Layton rails against «Anglo-Saxon hypocrisy,» and contends that the Anglo-Saxon is simply «not at home in the world of art.» In another letter, a few months later, he claims Herbert Read as an ally against the «inartistic Anglo-Saxon.»⁸ «Anglo» and «English» become identified with a cultivated duplicity that pretends to a high-minded concern for justice, culture, and art, yet finds moral fervour, emotional intensity or indignation in poor taste.

Layton's anglophobia seems to have had some cause. Current developments in poetry and criticism in England were definitely in opposition to the kind of poetry Layton demanded. However, Layton's main target was English Canada. Developments in English culture and society might have been more varied and complex than the narrow image Layton presented, but it was precisely that narrow image that seemed to be held in servile reverence in Canada.

The anti-Eliot, anti-Auden «ferment» in England after the Second World War - that Layton had acclaimed

in «Politics and Poetry» - very quickly soured into the sullen doctrines of «The Movement.» Among the more prominent poets and critics who became identified with the Movement were Donald Davie, Philip Larkin, Thom Gunn, Kingsley Amis, John Wain, Anthony Twaite, and Robert Conquest. On several issues, Layton would have found himself in close agreement with them. For example, Donald Davie railed against the «dislocated syntax» of the poets of the 1920s and 1930s, and against their deliberate ambiguities and complexities, all of which had alienated the traditional audience for poetry, replacing it with specialists and coteries. Davie attacked, in italics, «the assertion or the assumption (most often the latter) that syntax in poetry is wholly different from syntax as understood by logicians and grammarians.» Against the discontinuous «symbolist syntax» of the modernists, Davie reasserted the importance of the «authentic syntax» of normal, rational, discourse. He maintained that «the emphasis on presentation rather than description has tended to exclude authentic syntax from poetry.» Davie observed that in poetry, it is often precisely the discursive, allegedly sub-poetic, commentary on experience that has «passed into the popular heart;» in fact, «just those lines that have gone over into folk-wisdom are stigmatised as unpoetical.» He concludes that there must surely be something wrong with theories that «banish from poetry

all that part of it which is taken up into popular wisdom.»⁹

The attempt to reinstate the syntax of rational discourse in poetry is related to the more general aims of the Movement to bring poetry into closer contact with empirical or social reality, to place reality under the scrutiny of poetry, and, perhaps more important, poetry under the scrutiny of reality. They insisted that poetic statements were subject to the same kind of test as scientific statements, or any other statements about the real world. According to Philip Larkin, the modernists were guilty of «irresponsible exploitations of technique in contradiction of human life as we know it.»¹⁰

These are similar to the views of the First Statement and Contact poets. However, in England the doctrines of authentic syntax, rational discourse and intellectual responsibility soon settled into a programme calling for a poetry of moderation, good taste, common sense, and enlightened liberalism. Patrick Swinden describes the characteristic work of the 1950s as a poetry of the «centre.» He means a poetry of the political centre, but also a poetry of the emotional and social centre, a middle-class poetry that avoided extreme opinions and extreme emotions, a «safe» poetry. The audience that the Movement wished to reclaim was not a broadly based national audience, drawn from a range

of social classes and interests, but specifically from the upper middle and professional classes. This audience was to be encouraged by giving it a poetry that «confirms its values, its confidence in itself.» Consequently, says Swinden, poetry became «conservative and responsible, because civil servants, doctors, and teachers are conservative and responsible.»¹¹

There does seem to be a definite «lowering of expectations» during the 1950s, a sense of having been betrayed by all that 'great' poetry of the preceding decades, and a consequent resolve to make do with more conventional sentiments expressed in conventional forms. Eric Homberger finds the predominant note of the decade is one of «sadness and nostalgia, a positively hangdog tone of regret.»¹² It is not that there is a retreat from the world of politics and social issues, but that these subjects are dealt with in the language of polite concern, with little sense of urgency. It was Robert Conquest's anthology New Lines, 1956, that first put all the Movement poets «between the same covers.»¹³ Swinden suggests that Conquest himself, as a poet and also a «celebrated commentator on Soviet affairs,» represents the ideal of the Movement, «an intelligent and cultivated man whose liberal, elitist temperament is well suited to that ambiance of taste and reasonableness which is held to be the proper domain of poetry writer and poetry alike.»¹⁴

W.H. Auden, after his about-face in the 1940s, remained independent of the Movement poets, but he certainly shared their lowered expectations. Poetry, he now maintained, had little effect upon politics or society, and too often the effect it did have was not beneficent. Poetry functioned best as private meditation or as intimate conversation among trusted friends, «the speech of one person addressing one person, not a large audience.» He regarded the notion of l'art engagé as an extension of the heresy that poetry has utility, «and when poets fall into it, the cause, I fear, is less their social conscience than their vanity; they are nostalgic for a past when poets had a public status.» The Movement poets were determined to regain a public status, even if only among a very select public, and even if that status amounted to little more than an endorsement of current taste and opinion. For Auden, however, the poet is «singularly ill-equipped to understand politics or economics.» He is rather like an impressionable child who adores «thunderstorms, tornadoes, conflagrations, ruins, scenes of spectacular carnage.»¹⁵

The Movement poets appeared disenchanted with the strenuous intellectual probing of the modernists and the 1930s leftists; they seemed prepared to forego greatness, to settle for minor achievements. Kingsley Amis's poem, «Against Romanticism» is not a manifesto but a kind of position paper. It favours «useful» visions, however

«pallid,» not the exalted, mystical visions of the romantics and early moderns. Instead of a «swooning wilderness» or a landscape parched by «frantic suns,» it prefers a «temperate zone,» «the grass cut,» and «roads that please the foot.» Instead of the stentorian commands «of a rout of gods,» it prefers words that cannot force a single glance.» And instead of ominous warnings that monstrous evils lurk everywhere, it prefers «woods devoid of beasts» and a sky «clean of officious birds.»¹⁶ Graham Hough, a polemicist and critic for the Movement, expressed, with revealing candour, the diminished, and demeaned, role of poetry that seems to have been characteristic of the 1950s:

Admitting that we live in a bad time, that none except the very old have ever known a good one, we must admit that the isolation of the poet is perhaps his only salvation. The fact that poetry is not of the slightest economic or political importance, that it has no attachment to any of the powers that control the modern world, may set it free to do the only thing that in this age it can do - to keep some neglected parts of the human experience alive until the weather changes; as in some unforeseeable way it may do.¹⁷

F.R. Leavis and Scrutiny had made more strenuous claims for the social function of literature, but Scrutiny folded in 1953, to be replaced by F.W. Bateson's Essays in Criticism, «written by academics for academics.»¹⁸ Landmark studies of modernism from a more social-realist perspective were translated in the 1950s, for example, Auerbach's Mimesis (1953) and Lukács's Studies in

European Realism (1950), but there seem to have been no native works of this kind and stature. One exception, perhaps, was Herbert Read's Form in Modern Poetry (1957). Read also contributed important periodical essays on painting and literature. In «The Drift of Modern Poetry» (1955), he identified a «failure of nerve»:

English culture in the last few years - in reaction, maybe, to shifts of world power - has become much more self-protectively insular. The bright young men no longer read Kierkegaard, Kafka, Sartre, and what have you, but rediscover Bagehot, George Gissing, 'Mark Rutherford', or Arnold Bennett.¹⁹

In Canada, there seemed to be indications that poetry and criticism were headed in the same direction. For critics like Frye and Smith, there seemed little cause for apprehension. Looking back over his ten years as a reviewer of Canadian poetry in the University of Toronto Quarterly, Frye concluded that «the fifties have been a rich and fruitful time: no other decade in our history has seen such variety of originality.» Smith seems to have been relatively unaware of the reaction against Eliot and Auden, or the simmering counter-reaction. In his «Introduction» to The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse, 1960, he still regards the development of «the modern spirit» in Canadian poetry as a «progressive and orderly revolution.» He commends the «characteristic cosmopolitan flavour» of the 1950s, brought about by the «fusion of the modern world with

the archetypal patterns of myth and psychology.»²⁰

For Layton, Dudek, and Pacey, the new enthusiasm for myths and archetypes, together with a rather jaundiced view of politics and society, represented a new formalism. They saw and opposed a real danger to poetry as a social force, particularly to its adversary function. The fact that the mythopoeic poets are closely associated with Toronto and Northrop Frye may disguise the strong influence of the Movement upon them. Many of them share the Movement preference for traditional forms and syntax, but the influence goes beyond that to similarities in pose, or their assumed social position and function. Paul West, for example, has noted that Jay Macpherson appears rather like a «transatlantic Elizabeth Jennings, composing hermetic paradigms» or «cerebral riddles in the manner of the English 'Movement'.» During the 1950s, Frye himself has much in common with the Movement critics (one remembers that Anatomy of Criticism did not appear until 1957). When he praised George Johnston (The Cruising Auk) for domesticating the «age of anxiety,» and for his «controlled portrayal of the ineffectual,» he was praising Movement virtues. Johnston may have other virtues, but they were not apparent, or important, to Frye when he wrote his review.²¹ In fact, except for his reviews of Pratt's poetry, there is not a great deal of evidence of the mythopoeic critic in Frye's «Letters in Canada.» The

Movement critic predominates.

In «Patterns of Recent Canadian Poetry,» 1958, Dudek associates the new academic poets with the «English Traditionalists,» with poets like C. Day-Lewis and Edwin Muir. They are the «most intelligent» of the new poets, «well-bred, inner-directed gentlemen,» but they represent «formidable hostile forces to the troops of the young who want to write with radical new energy, with negative intent.» Dudek specifically contrasts the «idealism» of the social-realist poets of the forties with the «political and moral disillusionment» of «Les Jeunes of Today.» The former group, out of a sense of frustrated idealism, wrote «angry poetry. . . (unlike the Angry Young Men),» but their idealism nevertheless gave their work «moral and emotional coherence,» «created a spirit of confidence,» and they «established the test of poetry as its total effect, even its pragmatic effect.» The «predicament» of the 1950s is that the younger poets are «not even capable of social anger.» Theirs is a sardonic, bitter realism «without any utopian idealism to support it.»²² Dudek comes very close here to pleading for «visions that we need,» similar to Amis and Davie. Like them, too, he sees the poet becoming ever more isolated from his audience, but unlike them, his antidote is more modernism, more experiment, new discoveries in form and language, building on the legacy of Pound and Williams. In «The Transition in Canadian Poetry,» 1959, he maintains

that the contemporary poets are merely «foddering at the mid-century on the stored achievement of our recent predecessors.» The 1950s represent the «Victorian stage» of modern poetry, where the poets are merely «exploiting methods already tested and proved good.» Instead of striving for new breakthroughs, as their modern predecessors had done, the contemporary poets are content to live on the «quick wealth» of their «nouveau riche parents.»²³

The issue of experimentation in poetry occupied other critics. Sutherland was clearly weary of «rabid experimentalism» by 1953. Lorne Pierce regarded the «second-hand notions and tricks of style» of the poets of the 1930s and 1940s as a new and undesirable colonialism. Several critics of a less conspicuously reactionary bent seem to express a similar weariness. E.K. Brown, for example, in «Letters in Canada,» 1949, maintained that the radical experiments of the early moderns had been necessary, but he clearly looks forward to the future when «poets will no longer concern themselves so much in experimenting with language,» when they will move beyond the «noisy heaving and straining that have been so characteristic of the past fifteen years in Canada.» Similarly, Alan Bevan, in an editorial in Evidence (1961), did not find it «necessary or desirable that literature produce new models each year,» and cautioned against new forms «which themselves

constitute a decay or corruption of language and thought.»²⁴

In Layton's criticism during the 1950s, there is little concern with the necessity for new techniques. From 1953 to 1956, Layton published eight collections of his poems, including In the Midst of my Fever, 1954, and The Cold Green Element, 1955. Here Layton developed the language and syntax that were to become characteristic of his work. It is during this period, more than any other, that Layton seems to have fashioned the essentials of his craft, and made some of his fundamental discoveries. Smith and Frye rather overstated the distance between «the hot-gospeller» of The Black Huntsmen and the technical finish of The Cold Green Element, but this was certainly a period of remarkable development in his craft. However, in his criticism, there is little evidence of any enthusiasm for new techniques. The emphasis in his criticism continues to be on the didactic function of poetry, on «what it has to say» in a specific social context, on how it achieves its effect. The formalism of the early modernists, their «difficult» experimental poetry, reflected, or was thought to reflect, the tremendous gulf between established late-Victorian culture and an antagonistic, radically new sensibility. The formalism of the 1950s, whether in the assumed manner of the early modernists or in reaction to the modernists, was still accompanied by gestures of alienation, but, as Layton saw it, the gulf

between the poet and established culture had been reduced, to a hollow pretence. The sensibility of 1950s formalism was all too compatible with mainstream, middle-class gentility.

Layton's essays and reviews in CIV/n during the early 1950s express his exasperation that so much industry and skill in the composition of poems serves so little purpose. In his review of Patrick Anderson's collection of poems, The Colour as Naked, there is no quarrel with regard to his technical proficiency, «everything is here, considerable talent, a sensitive ear, ambition.» Neither is there a quarrel because Anderson had abandoned modernism and taken up Georgian or Augustan forms, as so many of the Movement poets had done: the «borrowings» that Layton specifically cites include Auden, Rilke and Dylan Thomas. Layton allows that the borrowings are resourceful, some of them even «clever and exciting.» There also seems to be no quarrel with Anderson's political position as such; he has «doffed his Marxism,» but his Marxism was never «anything more than a clothes-hanger.» What irritates Layton is that he «has really nothing to say.» His poems «lack a central urgency» and any sense of «spontaneous and genuine feeling.» Consequently, there is only weariness, a «flanneled ease,» «fastidious boredom,» and a distinct datedness. His images, from whatever source they are borrowed, seem «all as fresh as last year's eggs.»

Layton seems to imply that whether the poet is a fastidious craftsman among old, established techniques, or deliberately strives for originality, is not of crucial importance. Only the pressure of the poet's experience can infuse a poem with vitality and immediacy. Failing that, his poetry is necessarily stale and dated, «an idle pastime.»²⁵ Consequently, while Dudek and Souster tended to pin their hopes for a new, vital poetry upon the discovery and development of new forms, Layton seems to have been much more sceptical.

«Shaw, Pound and Poetry» appeared in the fifth issue of CIV/n.²⁶ It is a rather astonishing essay. First of all, it seems strange that the late-Victorian, Fenian Shaw and the arch-modern, Social-Credit Pound should be so closely coupled. For Layton, they are both exemplary writers who understood and boldly attacked a corrupt society, and they attacked it where it mattered - in its economic foundations. Layton acclaims a «realism and fundamental sanity in both springing . . . from their awareness of money's role in contemporary life; in both, a demonic restlessness and irritability, artists to the fingertips.» Layton is amazingly tolerant, or dismissive, of their ideological affiliations. They «both embraced Mussolini,» but that was because «they were fed up to the gills with liberal pluto democracies that put forward shekel-chasing as the noblest purpose of man.» Layton is quite prepared

to «forget their temporary love-affair with Mussolini and Italian Fascism,» and equally quick to dismiss «Pound's Gesellism» and Shaw's «rigid egalitarianism» as «so much blah.» Neither Pound nor Shaw were ever to get off quite so easily again in Layton's criticism. The language and the basic argument of the essay are Marxist, but the point that Layton is anxious to make is that whether the writer's ideology tends to the left or the right is not crucial. The important thing is that he make himself felt as a threat to the established political and economic powers. Conversely, it is the failure of the contemporary poets to make themselves 'felt' that earns them Layton's scorn:

With Shaw dead and Pound a certified madman, the American and English bourgeoisie can sleep more soundly. They have nothing to fear from the delicate poets who have no searching economic questions to ask, or the convertees multiplying like black flies on the maggoty corpse of a plutocratic culture. The rebel of yesterday has withdrawn into the safe folds of sanctimoniousness, retreat is labelled wisdom, resignation Christian charity.

The essay seems to show Layton's criticism in transition, from left-wing realism toward Nietzschean vitalism. He is determined to retain his place on the front line of social and political controversy, his passionately partisan commitment to social and economic justice, but the essentially Marxist outlook that had provided a kind of platform for his involvement now seems

inadequate. Hence his scorn, in the «Letter to Cid Corman» (1954), for «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.»²⁷ Layton is clearly searching for a persona that would declare his distinctive, realist, adversary role, but at the same time invest it with the authority of imagination, instinct, emotion, as well as intellect.

There is a tone of exasperation in Dudek's, Souster's, and Layton's criticism that the colonial instinct should be so strong that even the conspicuous mediocrity of contemporary English poetry could not shake it. It is one thing to be in a state of cultural subservience to Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Joyce, and Lawrence, but quite another to accept subservience to Davie, Amis, and Larkin. When Layton, Dudek and Souster turned to contemporary American poetry for relief, they were certainly attracted by the more free-wheeling, energetic realism of some of the American poets. They identified, or identified with, a tradition of modern realism in opposition to the modernism of Eliot and Auden, but their preference for American over English poetry seems also to have had a polemical purpose. To many of their contemporaries, their preference must have seemed of questionable taste. Furthermore, whether consciously or not, by enlisting the 'authority' of the American realists they gave their own opposition to

English modernism and English neo-formalism more credibility; they could not so easily be dismissed as simply a pack of minor colonial talents yapping at the heels of the imperial giants.

It was undoubtedly Raymond Souster who became the most ardent, and through Contact magazine, the most influential apologist for the new American techniques. In his «Preface» to Cerberus he states his dissatisfaction with «existing forms,» and makes the claim that Olson's theory of Composition by Field «may well start a revolution in English poetry.» Compared to Souster's, Dudek's reception of the new American techniques was more guarded. Dudek regarded Olson as an «experimenter» on the «frontier» of language, and thought it important to keep «our lines of communication with him wide open.» As a poet, Olson was «one of the most energetic, and verbally gifted, of the new voices in poetry,» but Dudek also found a good deal of nonsensical primitivism and «self-analytical sentimental 'buzzing'.» Dudek's mentors were Pound and Williams, and he seemed to regard them as sufficient guides for the exploration of new techniques. Similarly, Milton Acorn hailed Olson as «an innovator in the science of poetics,» and found some of Creeley's poetry «a wonder to behold,» but he resisted what he sensed to be a new orthodoxy.²⁸

However, the United States was by no means free of the influence of gentility, and neither Layton nor Dudek were uncritical in their acclaim. Eric Homberger

sardonically calls the 1950s in America «the great age of formalism in poetry, of university novels, and of the New Criticism.»²⁹ It was also the period of prosperity, or at least consumption, of the Cold War, McCarthyism, and the super-market, and it seemed to leave many poets disenchanted. They turned their back on it and devoted their energies to technique. Richard Wilbur argued that «the relation between an artist and reality is always an oblique one, and indeed there is no good art which is not oblique.» He allows that poets may be «intelligent men, and they are entitled to their thoughts, but intellectual pioneering, and the construction of new thought-systems, is not their special function.»³⁰ Martin Duberman, in his study of the Black Mountain community, comments that the members were «monkishly indifferent to the world outside,» and that Olson «put down political involvement as wasted effort.»³¹ William Carlos Williams clearly found the younger poets somewhat of a disappointment. In «On Measure -- Statement for Cid Corman,» he wrote:

If men do not find in the verse they are called on to read a construction that interests them or that they believe in, they will not read your verses and I, for one, do not blame them. What will they find there that is worth bothering about? So, I understand, the young men of my generation are going back to Pope. Let them. They want to be read at least with some understanding of what they are saying and Pope is at least understandable; a good master. They have been besides scared by all

the wild experimentation that preceded them so that now they want to play it safe and to conform.³²

Consequently, Homberger dismisses the 1950s as a «'moment' of formalism» and «cultural contraction»:

An increasingly isolated and defensive intelligentsia, which saw the abandonment of its traditional adversary function as a tempting though dangerous opportunity to effect a rapprochement with America in the post-war period, managed to praise a dominant style in poetry which turned its back upon the new 'reality' of the cold war.³³

Similarly, Dudek, writing in Origin, 1956, found that «the best poetry of our time» is «unbearably bad.» It is «void of interest or utility for the reader; it concerns only the poet himself, it is a subject for self-display or self-analysis; at best, an ironic picture of the 'intellectual' in a hostile environment.» It is «anything but well-aimed speech; anything but words that teach; anything but conviction; anything but a guide to action.»³⁴

Many of the expressed aims of the Movement in England -- for example, to rid poetry of gratuitous complexity and give it a more «empirical» content -- might have seemed laudable to Layton, Dudek and Souster. It was only when these principles were enlisted in support of a poetry of cultural entrenchment that they began to resist. Similarly, the expressed aims of the «new poets» in America, their reaction against symbolism and private, esoteric visions, were not unlike

the aims of the Contact poets. Munroe K. Spears (who is much less insistent upon «realism» than Homberger), summarizes the professed aims of the «new poetry» in a more sympathetic manner:

In general, the change is a reaction against any form of aesthetic discontinuity, against the poem as in any sense autonomous, against any esoteric quality or unnecessary difficulty.³⁵

In a sense, Spears is not describing quite the same 'scene' as Homberger; Spears's account seems to anticipate the sixties, but the formalists that Homberger attacks would probably not have found Spears's account, to this point, all that disagreeable. Marius Bewley, writing in 1954, has few regrets that the influence of the early modernists is in decline, but he seems rather ambivalent about the new poetry. He observes a «growing emphasis on technique among American poets, and a taste for complicated metrical forms» which he much prefers to the «older hackneyed emphasis on experimentalism.» Nevertheless, he is wary of a tendency to reduce the poet to a mere «verbal engineer»:

Many modern American poets have acquired great skill in writing in intricate metrical patterns, but the complications of form which they pursue frequently seem to be achieved with facility rather than sustained with conviction or an unbrittle poise. There is a disquieting tendency on the part of many American critics to refer to such poets as

'great technicians'. I say it is 'disquieting' because a highly ordered form in poetry ought to relate to patterns of living, to organizations of feeling and thinking, somewhat less technological than the favoured term implies.³⁶

If this is at all an accurate account of the state of poetry and criticism in the United States during the 1950s, Layton's, Dudek's and Souster's courtship of their American contemporaries seems a little odd. To some extent, they seem to have 'read into' American poetry the qualities they admired, and then used the Americans in their polemics against the genteel Canadian formalists. It may be worth noting that Dudek, writing for a more international audience in Origin, is more critical of the Americans than he is in Contact or Culture. However, in spite of Richard Wilbur and Delmore Schwartz and the New Critics, there did exist in the United States a tradition of modern poetry, running counter to the Eliot-Auden traditions. It began with Walt Whitman, but the most important figure seems to have been William Carlos Williams. Against Eliot's and Pound's cosmopolitanism, Williams had maintained a close identification with «deep-seated American ideals.» Throughout the 1930s and 1940s he had opposed symbolism and the influence of Eliot's «Waste Land.» In his autobiography he maintained that the appearance of «The Waste Land» had

wiped out our world as if an atom bomb had been dropped upon it. . . . I felt at once that it had set me back twenty years Critically Eliot returned us to the classroom just at the moment when I felt that we were on the point of an escape. . . . I knew at once that in certain ways I was most defeated.³⁷

He had called for «enlarged technical means,» not simply for the sake of virtuosity but in order to «liberate the possibilities of depicting reality in a modern world, . . . in order to be able to feel more.»³⁸

According to Karl Shapiro, «the radical difference between Williams and, say, Eliot, is that Williams divorces poetry from 'culture', or tries to.» Against Eliot's principle of impersonal poetry, Williams «has been dedicated to the struggle to preserve spontaneity and immediacy of experience.»³⁹

There also seems to have been a kind of feeling in the air -- that the First Statement and Contact poets were among the first to sense -- that English poetry had simply reached a point of exhaustion, while American poetry, for all its lack of direction, still had fresh resources to draw on. According to Marius Bewley, after the War there was a particularly intense desire in the United States «to explore and define American experience,» and «an emboldened sense of function and responsibility.» Throughout American society, Bewley argues, there was an «energy», and for the first time in American history, it was co-ordinated with «discipline and poise.»⁴⁰

The interest in American poetry, in opposition to contemporary English poetry, that began in Canada in the late 1940s and early 1950s, was taken up in England itself fifteen years later. According to Homberger,

England proved remarkably receptive to certain kinds of American poetry in the 1960s. . . . Williams, Olson and Zukofsky were published in England in a remarkably lavish fashion. . . . In the decade 1964-1974 there must have been close to fifty volumes by individual American poets published in England. . . . A number of British academics found ready audiences in America for the flattering message that the only poetry worth reading was by American poets.⁴¹

Stephen Spender has written a whole book comparing English and American «sensibilities,» and, in the last chapter particularly, comparing the «felt» functions of English and American poets toward their respective national societies. He suggests that typically the English writer does not wish to be so 'great' that he becomes an embarrassment in polite society:

The temptation for the English is rather the opposite -- to sink cosily into the I'm-doing-no-one-any-harm family atmosphere. English writers and painters often find that the practice of writing or painting can become a vehicle which conducts the artist into pleasant, entertaining and gentle company, among people easily chilled by the arid unpoliteness of the higher slopes of noble egotism. But the New England idea of the poet as teacher of the society, which still influences the concept of the poetic vocation in America combines attitudes difficult to reconcile and leading often to personal tragedy.

If Layton had written the first two sentences above, he would doubtless have found critics to accuse him, at best, of outrageous overstatement, and at worst of self-important, egotistical posturing. Spender makes it sound very reasonable, believing, as he does, that this «English» view of the poet is not without its merits. Spender goes on to describe an address given by Randall Jarrell, attended by «an adulatory audience of about two thousand deeply interested colleagues, teachers, students and autograph-hunters,» where he bitterly railed against the obscurity to which the modern poet is condemned, except among a select professional and social elite. Spender's comment is:

To any Englishman with common sense, it is perfectly obvious that spiritual goods are graded and only shared in the sense that one public gets the top grade, another the inferior. But Jarrell's attitude made of the serious American poet of great ambition a tragic hero who is sacrificed in his persecuted flesh in order that the ideal democracy should be reborn in the spirit.⁴²

Spender is not without admiration for the crucified American poet, but he is also grateful that he himself is, or was, an English poet. On the other hand, it is clear why Layton, searching for a poetic persona that could speak with an authoritative, public voice on the crucial issues of his time, should be more attracted to American models. What primarily attracted Dudek and Souster to American poetry, the exciting possibilities

of new techniques and a strong sense of 'place', seems to have been of secondary importance to Layton. It was rather the public stature and function of the poet, perhaps best represented by Whitman, that was most important to Layton in his development toward an understanding of the poet as a prophetic visionary.

In his «Foreword» to The Swinging Flesh, 1961, Layton denounces those who regard poetry as «a game of verbal chequers to be played while prize-awarding committees of professors look on and make encouraging or disapproving signs to the players,» and then calls upon the poet to fulfil «his role as prophet and critic»:

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.

Similarly, in the short essay, «Poets: the Conscience of Mankind,» Layton warns that if the poet is eliminated, «governments are free to commit any outrage they wish, inflict any indignity on human beings.» In another essay, he claims a role similar to Shelley's «unacknowledged legislator;» the artist «is also the creator of values. He's a law-giver. If he is not a decadent artist, if he is not a nihilistic artist, then he is in some sense divine and God-like because he gives values by which other people can guide their own lives and

experiences.»⁴³

Layton's conviction of the power and authority of the poet is at stake in his attacks upon gentility. As Layton sees it, throughout his life as a poet he has been confronted by «a genteel academicism and a faded romantic sensibility which politely questioned the poet's creative role in society.» From this perspective, he sees enemies almost everywhere. In a letter to Pacey, he suspects that professors, clergymen and critics «exist largely for the purpose of blunting his [the poet's] impact.»⁴⁴ He scorned «the Eliotic nonsense about the impersonality of the artist, of art,» and Frye's and Smith's «elegant sterilities, the making of lifeless poems out of other poems.» He has insisted that «what the poet is primarily concerned with . . . is the nature, the quality, the plasticity of experience,» with «the terror and ecstasy of living daily beyond one's psychic means.»⁴⁵

Layton has been particularly scornful of any attempt to elevate criticism to the level of poetry. In his «Preface» to The Laughing Rooster, Layton allows that critics may have sensitivity and concern, «yet it cannot be said too often that their activities are parasitic on those of the poet dedicated to exploring his own existential being for the meanings of human experience at a given time and place.» The greatest threat to the poet comes «from those who wish to appear his friends and

allies. . . . They're the ones who wish to bracket the poet between Culture and Education and fob off their cerebral theories as having equal authority with the experience of the poet.» In the «Preface» to Engagements he states the difference between the critical and the creative process in the language of a fundamental conviction: «I shall insist till my dying day that literary theorists and critics mine a knowledge contained in books while creative writers are concerned with experiencing life at first hand and interpreting it through a faculty critics simply have no acquaintance with - intuition.»⁴⁶

In their early correspondence, Layton and Pacey conduct an extended argument on the nature and function of criticism.⁴⁷ Pacey argues that criticism, when it is doing its job properly, is «creative;» the critic, like the poet, makes order out of chaos. His work «differs in degree, not in kind from the creative activity of the poet.» The poet takes «the stuff of experience and (not reduces but) lifts it to order, to meaning, to clarity, to poignancy, to passion.» Similarly, the critic «takes the stuff of his experience - individual works of art - and lifts it to order, to meaning, to clarity, etc.» Pacey concedes that «the degree of order achieved» by the critic is less than that achieved by the poet, because the critic is concerned «with secondary rather than primary experience.» Pacey then

argues the role of the critic as a kind of mediator between the poet and his audience: «After all, art at its best is a dynamic relationship between artist and audience - and the most sensitive, trained, receptive fraction of the audience is the critic.» Pacey then subtly extends the role to include a kind of supervisory function: «If he [the critic] says 'here you fail in clarity, or in power, or in passion' the artist had better listen and search his soul.» Finally, Pacey claims that «Coleridge was just as creative when he wrote his Shakespearean criticism as when he wrote his poems.»

Layton would have none of this.⁴⁸ To compare the critic's «experience» of literature and the poet's «experience» of life trivializes the passion, ecstasy and suffering that go into the making of a poem. To compare the encounter of literature and the reality that the poet confronts virtually amounts to a negation of the latter. Pacey's argument, Layton maintained, struck at the two pillars of the poet's authority - that he speaks with passion and honesty out of his personal experience, and that what he speaks about is reality or truth. Moreover, Layton sensed in Pacey's argument, particularly the argument for the critic's supervisory function, a certain condescension. The poet begins to appear somewhat child-like, or perhaps an inspired lunatic, or «a happy, lecherous nature boy,» at any rate, one whose thoughts and judgments about his

work or about the world he so passionately engages must be taken with a grain of salt, must be weighed and sifted by the more objective, mature powers of judgment of the critic. In response Layton argues that, for all his erudition, the critic has no intuitive sense of what is significant in current events, no way of taking the pulse of the age. He can only hope to follow, at one remove from reality, where the poet leads. It is definitely not the poet's task to follow the lead of the critic. The critic must sense where the poet leads, and prime public taste and awareness accordingly.

Whenever Layton senses a threat to the poet's 'honour', he counters it with all his energy. In another letter, Layton concedes that in part his «arrogance» is a «protective device to conceal . . . a certain shyness,» but «in larger measure it's the triumphant affirmation of the poet's role in a world that's gone deaf, dumb and blind.» In a later letter, written in 1962, Layton confides to Pacey that his fierce defence of the poet is an attempt to avenge all artists who have suffered while complacent philistines prospered, both psychologically and materially:

When I spit into their eyes, Desmond, I do so for all the poets, for all the gifted and talented who've had to eat the bread of humiliation from the fat-assed, prostituted many: the cowards, the lunk-heads, the well-heeled philistines, the spiteful dullards whom wealth has given the upper hand over those least able to defend themselves. I am

a dangerous man, a madman if you wish, because I think I have been chosen by Time and Fate, to avenge all the indignities they ever suffered: the suicide of Chatterton, the pauper's grave of Mozart, the madness of Hölderlin. I'd say this is the strongest feeling I have: it colours almost everything I write and think. It's the clue to my short stories and to many of my poems.

Layton's strong sense of his rôle as a defender of the poet's honour accounts for the fierceness of his attacks when the provocation seems relatively slight. One example is his reply to an article by Gerald Taaffe, «Diary of a Montreal Newspaper Reader,» in The Tamarack Review, where Taaffe reviewed the recent controversy in The Montréal Star between Layton and Walter O'Hearn.⁴⁹ Taaffe calls Layton's role in the controversy «disagreeable and pathetic;» he concludes that Layton is unable to face the fact of the Holocaust; and he doubts «whether Irving Layton could have flourished as well in a more cosmopolitan literary centre.» Taaffe himself is no great force in the literary world, but he seems to typify the hermetically sealed gentility that Layton does regard as a formidable force. Taaffe's posture in his article is that of the urbane, cultured gentleman in his mahogany panelled club, looking down upon the excited babble of the local journalists and poets. Implicit in this attitude is the colonial notion that a local controversy must be a mere parody of the real issues that are debated elsewhere. It is precisely the posture that

characteristically rouses Layton to his full fury.

The subtle lures of gentility are illustrated in an anecdote by Norman Podhoretz, the editor of Commentary. In his autobiography, Making It, he describes his induction as a young man into the «mysteries» of good taste and bourgeois culture, under the guidance of a Mrs. K., a teacher in his native Brownsville. He writes: «What seemed most of all to puzzle Mrs. K. who saw no distinction between taste in poetry and taste in clothes, was that I could see no connection between the two.»⁵⁰

Layton has insisted that to make the connection virtually destroys the impact of poetry, and that the subtle pressures on the poet to make the connection threaten the vitality of his work.

It may appear that the acute perception of, and suspicion of, gentility is largely a Jewish phenomenon. In fact, John Murray Cuddihy in The Ordeal of Civility has argued that emancipated Jews in the nineteenth century were confronted with conformity to a set of manners and social rites, to «civil» behaviour, as a requisite for admission to modern bourgeois society. In modern secular Europe, says Cuddihy, a code of civility had evolved, consisting of surface refinements and restraints necessary for «civilized» social interaction in an anonymous, competitive, urban setting. Quoting Eric Auerbach, Cuddihy maintains that this demanded «the adaptation of the individual's inner life to the

socially appropriate, and the concealment of all unseemly depths.» A pervasively institutionalized «niceness» holds modern society together, while «intensity, fanaticism, inwardness -- too much of anything, in fact -- is unseemly and bids fair to destroy the fragile solidarity of the surface we call civility.» This put a considerable strain on the Jewish sense of 'self' which was at once more earthy and more sublime than the code allowed. Hence, Maurice Samuel's wry observation in Jews on Approval: «The Jews are probably the only people in the world to whom it has been proposed that their historic destiny is -- to be nice.»⁵¹

It is certainly true that Jews have been acutely vulnerable to the demands of gentility, have suffered most from some of its brutal manifestations, and that, as 'newcomers', as an excluded minority, and as a people with its own identity and traditions, Jewish writers have had a particularly critical view of gentility. But to suggest that a perception of the menace of gentility requires a peculiar Jewish perspective would seem to Layton a typical gentile evasion, «the familiar picture / of enlightened Jew ass bared to the winds.»⁵²

It is indicative of Layton's view of the function of poetry, and the role of the poet, that vulgar acclaim, with resort to promotional gimmicks, should hold much less terror for him than being enshrined in a university. Following the triumphant launching of A Red Carpet for

the Sun, Layton found himself lionized by the press and the public, and he enjoyed it. To Pacey, who had been his most ardent supporter during the leaner years, Layton began to sound like a «stuffed shirt,» pontificating on sex, politics and art. Pacey seemed to find this gala-show-business spectacle lacking in dignity and cautioned Layton not to let his success go to his head. He wrote to Layton congratulating him on becoming a «lion,» but confessed that he liked him better as «a flea-bitten terrier.» Layton replied:

All this is good for poetry in this country:
 A poet has at last broken the sound barrier!
 You ought to rejoice that one of us, and that
 one your own devoted friend, turned the
 trick. What's more, much of your criticism
 helped me to do it. You're a funny dog! You
 yelp and wag your tail excitedly while I'm
 battling the waves and gasping, but when you
 see me nearing the beach you let your tail
 droop and you let out the most mournful howl
 my ears ever heard.⁵³

The attack on gentility whether it is expressed by a theatrical gesture or a complex poem, is an integral part of Layton's criticism, and follows from his didactic purpose. It is certainly not simply an attention-getting device, as is sometimes alleged. Layton demands that the poet must be free to treat whatever subject he pleases in language that he finds appropriate, but he also demands much more than that -- namely, the removal of all barriers, of class, culture, good taste, or whatever, that would undermine the authority of the poet and inhibit the

social and personal impact of poetry. As a term to identify one of the basic ills of the modern age, «gentility» seems at least as useful as 'crisis of confidence' or 'crisis of belief', or Eliot's «dissociation of sensibility.» In fact, gentility prevents questions of belief or confidence from becoming truly crucial, and restricts «sensibility» to the sense of good taste. Layton argues that through a complex of attitudes, institutions, and ideologies, gentility enables modern society to absorb any attack or evade any challenge to confront its darker aspects. Canada had been spared the gross paradox of evil on the scale of the Holocaust perpetrated by an enlightened, cultured, civilized society, but this did not moderate Layton's attack on Canadian philistinism. To some extent he seems to have implicated genteel Canadians in modern international evil, although they may have been limited in the amount they could contribute to it. In its local manifestation, Canadian gentility threatened to de-vitalize poetry. The danger seemed real enough to Pacey for him to comment that Layton, Dudek and Souster «deserve our thanks for helping to keep poetry alive in a difficult age.»⁵⁴

When Eliot proposed the idea of the «dissociation of sensibility,» he called for a revision of literary history. The most contentious revision was his demotion of Milton. Layton's idea of «gentility» also seems to

call for a revision. Although Layton has not attempted anything on the scale of Eliot in this regard, it is clear that when the criterion of gentility is applied to literary history, Byron is raised above Wordsworth, Milton above Spenser, Hart Crane above Wallace Stevens, and in Canada, Robert Service and Tom MacInnes each move up a notch (see Layton's and Dudek's «Introductory Note» to Canadian Poems 1850-1952). It is also clear that a rigorous application of the criterion would seem perniciously to exclude several esteemed works, but the number of glaring anomalies by current standards could turn out to be surprisingly few.

Eli Mandel has observed that when Layton attacks the bulk of modern and contemporary poetry as merely a game of verbal acrostics, many of his critics «unwind for horse-laughs and professorial jokes.»⁵⁵ However, the attack that Layton launched against gentility in the 1950s seems to have been joined by an increasing number of critics in the 1960s and 1970s. A. Alvarez, for example, entitled his introduction to the 1962 Penguin selection of The New Poetry, «Beyond the Gentility Principle.» He argues that although the upper-middle class ideals have «given way to the predominantly lower-middle class, or Labour, ideal of the Movement and the Angries, . . . the concept of gentility still reigns supreme.» He defines gentility somewhat more narrowly than Layton - as «a belief that life is always

more or less orderly, people always more or less polite, their emotions more or less decent, and more or less controllable; that God, in short, is more or less good.» For Layton, this means that society is more or less impervious to the impact of poetry. Alvarez believes that there is «a good deal of poetic talent» in England, but «whether or not it will come to anything largely depends . . . on the degree to which the poets can remain immune to the disease so often found in English culture: gentility.»⁵⁶ In a later essay Alvarez debunks the alleged «alienation» of the artist. He argues that it holds out no challenge to gentility. He observes that society rewards the alienated artist with prizes, professorships and mass-media publicity, «a kind of consolation prize for not being taken seriously.» He maintains that «the most immediate danger to poetry, in short, is that it will disappear as a living art and survive only as a more or less useful museum piece.»⁵⁷ Here Alvarez echoes very closely Layton's 1959 «Foreword» to A Red Carpet for the Sun: «the big issue confronting mankind [is] : will the Poet, as a type, join the Priest, the Warrior, the Hero, and the Saint as melancholy museum pieces for the titillation of a universal babbittry? It could happen.»⁵⁸

In the United States, Karl Shapiro has been particularly strident in his criticism of «the political simple-mindedness and viciousness of the great trio of

Pound, Eliot and Yeats . . . and the literary establishment which have made them the touchstones of our age.» In accord with Layton, Shapiro denounces the reduction of «literature» and «culture» to leisure-class diversions, and as such, obstacles to the true function of poetry. He insists that poetry must «liberate» itself from literature, and that poets must «experience the world» as «our painters, our musicians, and our novelists have experienced it.» Again, in affinity with Layton, Shapiro finds the university setting debilitating to the poet; he is reduced to an object of idle amusement: «A poet on an American campus, if he is not a bona fide professor, is no more than an exotic insect, a zoology specimen, a Live One.»⁵⁹

Layton's attack on the poet-professor seems to have become increasingly apt. At least, it seems clear that the dominant role now played by the university as patron of the arts is not necessarily a 'normal' condition. Eric Homberger points out that the condition is virtually unique to the post World War II period:

The war years conclusively ended that last flowering of private patronage which emerged in close alliance with the modernist generation: Harriet Shaw Weaver and the Egoist, Robert McAlmon and Contact, Harold Loeb and Broom, Harry Crosby's Black Sun Press, Harold Monro's Poetry Bookshop, Sylvia Beach's Shakespeare & Co., John Rodker's Ovid Press, Nancy Cunard's Hours Press. From now on it was left to the great foundations and universities to pick up the tab for high culture. . . . In this situation, literature:

was merely one among numerous expressions of cultural activity in competition for our time, attention and money.⁶⁰

Layton's opposition to the wide-spread tendency to raise literary criticism to the level of poetry, as a creative act of the same kind, acquired supporters among critics as various as Karl Shapiro and George Steiner. Shapiro denounces the «insidious» notion that «criticism is the twentieth-century substitute for poetry,» and Steiner insists on the profound difference between «literature» and criticism. In his essay on F.R. Leavis in Language and Silence he writes:

Most critics feed upon the substance of literature; they are outriders, hangers-on, or shadows to lions. Writers write books; critics write about books in an eternity of second-hand. The distinction is immense.⁶¹

These, then, are some of the manifestations of gentility that Layton opposed. The phenomenon is international, although it may be more apparent in some places than others. In Canada, the hold of gentility is strengthened by a lingering colonial insecurity, unsure of its genuine tastes and convictions, and distrustful of its instincts.

Layton's attack on gentility goes beyond its social and literary manifestations to focus on its psychological causes, namely, malice, self-contempt, and resentment. His antidote to gentility is the «Dionysian element.» This becomes a central theme

in his work from the mid-1950s on. The Dionysian element is crucial to a healthy society. It represents an earthy sensuality, it manifests itself as reckless, exuberant, life-affirming joy, but it also represents the creative principle itself and accepts that creativity involves suffering and death. The idea is drawn from Nietzsche, whose importance to Layton can hardly be overestimated. In his October, 1972 discussion with Mandel, «Nietzsche and Poetry,» Layton draws a crucial distinction between Nietzsche's «Dionysian pessimism» and «the romantic pessimism of Schopenhauer and . . . Wagner.» Nietzsche's is above all a «yea-saying» pessimism:

Nietzsche had no use for that kind of romantic pessimism that dismisses the world or feels that the world is evil or irrational, and bad or immoral, and therefore the best thing to do is to escape from the misery and the finitude of the world. His own view could be called tragic, that of the Dionysian pessimist who sees everything tumbling or hurtling toward oblivion on the wings of meteors, and yet who accepts the entire show as might an artist who is entranced by the flames that consume cities and buildings and whole civilizations, who feels that within the very wings of destruction there is nevertheless the Dionysian assertion of creativity and since the paradox of tension or conflict between energy and form can never be quite resolved there is going to be tragedy.⁶²

So tragedy, for Layton, is both a catastrophe and a triumph; man is brought low but he is also exalted; the tragic hero is isolated yet at the very centre of human experience; he rejoices in his fate as he cries out

against it. Layton's view of tragedy also has affinities with Yeats's «tragic joy,» although in a letter to Pacey on May 18, 1961, Layton insists that his tragic vision is historical -- «the influence of Marx» -- while Yeats's is «purely literary.» This is not entirely fair to Yeats but it makes the point that for Layton the substance of tragedy is not just «projected» into his poetry, it is «really there.»

In The Birth of Tragedy, Nietzsche describes Greek tragedy as the «marriage» of Dionysus and Apollo. The tension between them is certainly evident throughout Layton's poetry and criticism. Wynne Francis has pointed out the very close affinity between Layton's and Nietzsche's views of tragedy in two of her articles, «Layton and Nietzsche» and «The Farting Jesus: Layton and the Heroic Vitalists.» In the former article, she notes that in both Nietzsche's The Birth of Tragedy and Layton's poem by that title, «the pain and joy of birth» is juxtaposed with «the suffering and death connoted by tragedy.» For both writers, tragedy is the marriage of the energy and suffering of Dionysus to the form and lucid serenity of Apollo. As Wynne Francis sees it, «Apollo's triumph of serenity and joy must be won at the necessary expense of a tragic struggle with the Dionysian forces of darkness, chaos, suffering and death.»⁶³ There is a bit of a problem here with the term «necessary expense» in that it tends to suggest

that the Dionysian forces are in a sense defeated or overcome. It is more accurate to see them as transformed. Neither Layton nor Nietzsche see the «struggle» as ending in the defeat or diminution of either force. For Nietzsche, tragedy represents the «consummation of both the Apollonian and Dionysiac tendencies. «Dionysus speaks the language of Apollo, but Apollo finally the language of Dionysus; thereby the highest goal of tragedy and of art in general is reached.» In the state of «enchantment» which is the «precondition» of tragedy,

the Dionysiac reveller sees himself as a satyr, and as satyr, in turn, he sees the god. In his transformation he sees a new vision, which is the Apollonian completion of his state.⁶⁴

This last quote could almost serve as a poetic gloss on the exquisite last stanza of «The Cold Green Element»:

But the furies clear a path for me to the 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 worm, as formless a creature as any in nature, and as earthy as any, seems to be transfigured by his death song, not into some other, higher state, nor into mere nothingness, but into a «completion of his state,» a triumphant monument of suffering, dying life. Similarly, the poet, lured alternately by the wayward, ambiguous

«cries» of young boys, and the Apollonian stillness of the «cold green element,» («cold» form and «green» content, it seems) finds «completion.»

While Dionysus represents one of the two poles of tragedy, he also represents the creative principle itself. He is associated with ecstasy, divine madness, passion and suffering. In the «Foreword» to The Swinging Flesh, 1961, Layton declared that the Dionysian element «is the beginning and assurance of all creativity.» Because he lacked the Dionysian element, even Shaw failed as a «writer of enduring significance.» He may have been «the brainiest writer who ever lived,» (and he certainly had a didactic purpose) but even «die-hard Shavians -- I count myself among their number,» must admit the «superficiality and misdirection» of his work.⁶⁵ On the other hand, when Layton deals with poets like Milton Acorn and especially Leonard Cohen, one senses that he may have a few misgivings about some of their work, but he ungrudgingly regards them as «real poets» because he detects in them the Dionysian element. When he reviews Raymond Souster's poems, however, one senses a deeper uneasiness. He is glad to find in the poems «an original voice,» an «authentic,» personal vision, and enough sharp social criticism to «stick like a fishbone in the throat of Canadian poetry.» However, he also finds the poems «grey and limited»:

I see you as continually walking through a grey tunnel, your head bowed down, and breathing with difficulty -- but it's seldom you don't emerge with a real nugget in your hand. The tunnel is after all a very real place, so I know there's no point in telling you that the burly sun is overhead, that anger is a fine therapy for some of the emotions you express, that poetry is what one does with language, or if that doesn't go down with you, that it's growth, the encompassing in one's self and in one's work, of diverse elements.

Layton allows that the tunnel has «its own reality, its own dignity, its own truth,»⁶⁶ but one senses that such reality, dignity and truth are limited. The Dionysian vitality that breaks out in either joyous celebration or savage indignation seems rather muted in Souster's poems.

Dionysus also represents the opposite of «resentment.» This latter term is again borrowed from Nietzsche. In Layton's work, envy, malice, rancour, puritanism, and joy-hating may all be regarded as manifestations of resentment. It thrives on repression, impotence, and self-loathing. It is the psychological disease of modern man that accounts for much of his otherwise senseless cruelty and evil.⁶⁷ The great antidote to resentment is Dionysian creativity. It celebrates «the divine in extraordinary men, knows that all flesh is grass, and that everything ripens into decay and oblivion.»⁶⁸ It can bless and it can curse; but Layton is wary of any poetry that conveys a sense of self-immolating despair or guilt, of poets whose suffering is a kind of defeat,

whose poems lack the energy that would transform them into a triumphant affirmation of life. Nietzsche called the man who has overcome resentment the «superman;» Layton, in the «Foreword» to A Red Carpet for the Sun, calls him the «free individual -- independent and gay.» «In a world where corruption is the norm and enslavement universal, all art celebrates him, prepares the way for his coming.»⁶⁹ The free individual does not negate tragedy; he does not escape necessity, particularly the facts of suffering and death. Often when Layton is most exuberant in his celebration of freedom, as in the poem «Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom,» he seems also to be on the edge of lament or elegy. Thus, as Mandel says, it remains a «paradoxical freedom,» «something between imagination and fact,» art and life, truth and «lies,» birth and death, tenderness and cruelty, an «apocalypse of freedom» that «includes everything.»⁷⁰

The importance of Nietzsche to Layton's attack on gentility is evident in the letter he sent to me on July 26, 1980:

Though I disclaim any direct influence, doubtless Nietzsche's iconoclastic fervour and courage put the necessary iron in my soul to withstand the cornstarch philistinism I've had to battle ever since the publication of my first collection in 1945. I read him for encouragement and support, delighted to find that someone shared my feelings on so many matters. For me, Thus Spake Zarathustra is the greatest single poem to put beside the Divine Comedy.

Marx was another iconoclast whom Layton drew on to support his attack on gentility. In his 1946 review of Russell's A History of Western Philosophy, Layton suggests that «nowadays it is becoming a simple matter to sift the dead from the living, the wheat from the chaff: ask someone what he thinks of Marx or Nietzsche.» Layton commends Russell for having rejected «uncompromisingly the Platonic-Christian tradition» in favour of scientific materialism, but he still finds his logical positivism «pretty thin stuff, a kind of highbrow semantics.» Russell understands nothing of «Nietzsche's fierce and troubled honesty.» He simply dismissed Nietzsche to the sub-intellectual world of «thugs, gangsters and poets»: «When Russell identifies Nietzsche's Will to Power with lust for power, he betrays an inexcusable ignorance, the obtuseness of the panicky philistine.» Similarly, Russell consigns Marx to «the nineteenth-century belief in progress as a universal law.» «Quite evidently,» Layton comments, «Russell is not a dialectician.»⁷¹

Marx and Nietzsche are again oddly coupled in the 1946 thesis on Harold Laski. Layton, of course, is well aware that the similarity between the two is not readily evident, but he argues that together they represent a formidable front against bourgeois society:

The transvaluation of values of which Nietzsche wrote will be accomplished by the triumphant working class. It is not usual in radical circles to mention Marx and Nietzsche in the same breath: nevertheless, I am firmly persuaded that future historians and thinkers will reckon Nietzsche as great an anti-bourgeois, as great an emancipating force, as Marx himself. Nietzsche was the poet of the proletarian revolution as Marx was its prophet.⁷²

The two of them are again coupled in the May 18, 1961 letter to Pacey, cited above (page 118), where Layton ascribes his «historical» view of tragedy, compared to Yeats's «purely literary» view, to the influence of Marx. However, Marx does not seem to have survived developments in Layton's thinking during the 1950s and 1960s as well as Nietzsche. Layton continues to draw upon Marx's economic critique of bourgeois decadence, but the messianic aspects of his thought, which he explicitly defended in 1946, seem less and less compelling as his insights into social psychology deepen.

The other great pillar supporting Layton's attack on gentility was D.H. Lawrence. In his reply to Kildare Dobb's review of The Improved Binoculars (September, 1957), Layton defends himself and Lawrence against the charge of «smugness and salacity in matters of sex.» He argues that «it is possible to revere Lawrence for a multitude of reasons,» but the fundamental reason seems to be the «sacramental view of nature and sex» that they both share.⁷³ In this regard, Eugene Goodheart, in The Failure

of Criticism, makes the very apt observation that «Lawrence, unlike Eliot and Joyce, continually sacralizes or rather discovers the sacred in ordinary life. Eliot deplures the absence of the sacred, but is incapable of imagining it within the world of common routine.»⁷⁴

The difference is crucial. It illustrates the basis of Layton's strong affinity for Lawrence, and the liberating force of his attack upon gentility as a counter to Eliot's nature morte modernism. Lawrence and Layton can be as 'pessimistic' about modern society as Eliot, and the point is not simply that they put a sacred gloss on «common routine.» For Eliot and Anglo-American modernism generally, poetry, in fact the range and depth of emotional experience itself, is virtually determined by culture, or at least needs the shaping energy of culture to find its own form and expression. Given Eliot's apprehension of modern culture as a sterile wasteland, the sources of poetic or emotional vitality are limited. For Lawrence and Layton the sources of poetry and «vital emotion» lie beyond culture, and usually find unique form in opposition to it. The sacred is something powerful and joyous, something irrepressible in life, not in culture. It is threatened by gentility, but can find triumphant expression in poetry. Hence, Layton is speaking very precisely when he locates the vitality of his work in life itself.

Notes

- ¹ E.K. Brown, «Letters in Canada,» University of Toronto Quarterly 19 (1950), reprinted in Responses and Evaluations: Essays on Canada, ed. David Staines (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), p. 285; Desmond Pacey, «English-Canadian Poetry, 1944-1954,» in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, p. 160; Louis Dudek, «The State of Canadian Poetry: 1954,» in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, pp. 170-173, 142-144, and 113.
- ² Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada, 2nd edition (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1961), p. 245. and «English-Canadian Poetry, 1944-1954,» in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, pp. 161-165.
- ³ Dudek, The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, pp. 143 and 114.
- ⁴ Layton, «Preface» to Cerberus, Engagements, p. 71.
- ⁵ The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, pp. 146-147 and 142.
- ⁶ Engagements, pp. 71-72.
- ⁷ The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, pp. 144 and 147.
- ⁸ Engagements, pp. 158 and 163.
- ⁹ Donald Davie, «What is Modern Poetry,» in Articulate Energy, pp. 147-160.
- ¹⁰ Philip Larkin, «Introduction» to All What Jazz: A Record Diary 1961-68 (London: Faber and Faber, 1970) p. 17.
- ¹¹ Patrick Swinden, «English Poetry,» pp. 390-391.
- ¹² The Art of the Real, p. 70.
- ¹³ Philip Larkin, «Interview» with Ian Hamilton, in Twentieth-Century Poetry: Critical Essays and Documents, eds. Graham Martin and P.N. Furbank (London: Open University Press, 1975), p. 244.

- 14 Swinden, «English Poetry,» p. 386.
- 15 W.H. Auden, «The Poet and the City,» in The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 12-89; see also Twentieth-Century Poetry and Poetics, ed. Gary Geddes, second edition (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 454-455; and Twentieth-Century Poetry: Critical Essays and Documents, pp. 181-194.
- 16 Kingsley Amis, «Against Romanticism,» A Case of Samples (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1956), p. 31. Quoted by Patrick Swinden, «English Poetry,» pp. 387-388.
- 17 Graham Hough, «The Modernist Lyric» in Image and Experience: Studies in a Literary Revolution (London: Duckworth, 1960), reprinted in Modernism 1890-1930, eds. Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 312-322.
- 18 C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson, «Literary Criticism,» p. 440.
- 19 Herbert Read, «The Drift of Modern Poetry,» Encounter 4, no. 1. (January, 1955), p. 10. Quoted by Homberger, The Art of the Real, p. 87.
- 20 Northrop Frye, The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), p. 124. A.J.M. Smith, Towards a View of Canadian Letters, pp. 17-21.
- 21 Paul West, «Ethos and Epic: Aspects of Contemporary Canadian Poetry,» in Contexts of Canadian Criticism, ed. Eli Mandel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 212; Northrop Frye, The Bush Garden pp. 110-113.
- 22 The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, pp. 274 and 282-285.
- 23 Dudek, «The Transition in Canadian Poetry» (1959), in Selected Essays and Criticism, p. 122.
- 24 John Sutherland, «The Great Equestrians» (1953), in Essays, Controversies and Poems, p. 76; Lorne Pierce, «Foreword» to Canadian Poetry in English, reprinted in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, pp. 289-291; Alan Bevan, Editorial, Evidence 3 (Fall, 1961), reprinted in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, pp. 289-291.
- 25 Engagements, pp. 33-34.

26 Engagements, pp. 35-37. Only a few of the issues of CIV/n are dated; however the magazine ran for only seven issues, 1953-1954.

27 Engagements, p. 156.

28 Milton Acorn, «Open Letter to a Demi-Senior Poet,» in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, p. 288; Raymond Souster, «Preface» to Cerberus, in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, p. 147; Louis Dudek, review of Paul Blackburn's Proensa, Charles Olson's In Cold Hell, In Thicket, Robert Creeley's A Kind of Act Of, in Selected Essays and Criticism pp. 36-37.

29 The Art of the Real, p. 127.

30 Richard Wilbur, «The Bottle Becomes New, Too,» Quarterly Review of Literature, 7, no. 3 (1953), p. 192, and «On My Own Work,» in Contemporary American Poetry, ed. Howard Nemerov (Voice of America Forum Lectures, n.d.), p. 213; quoted by Homberger, The Art of the Real, pp. 91 and 93.

31 Martin Duberman, Black Mountain: An Exploration into Community (New York: Dutton, 1972), p. 399.

32 William Carlos Williams, «On Measure -- Statement for Cid Corman,» in Twentieth-Century Poetry and Poetics, p. 598.

33 The Art of the Real, p. 133.

34 Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 56-57.

35 Munroe K. Spears, Dionysus and the City: Modernism in Twentieth-Century Poetry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 236.

36 Marius Bewley, «Some Aspects of Modern American Poetry» (1954), in Modern Poetry: Essays in Criticism, ed. John Hollander (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 255-256.

37 William Carlos Williams, Autobiography (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 174.

38 Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 289.

39 Karl Shapiro, The Poetry Wreck, Selected Essays: 1950-1970 (New York: Random House, 1975), p. 112.

40 Marius Bewley, «Some Aspects of Modern American Poetry,» in Modern Poetry: Essays in Criticism, pp: 250-251.

41 The Art of the Real, p. 180.

42 Stephen Spender, Love-Hate Relations. A Study of Anglo-American Sensibilities (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974), pp. 221-223.

43 Engagements, pp. 89-91 and 46; Taking Sides, p. 187.

44 Engagements, p. 56; Letter to Desmond Pacey, October 7, 1963.

45 Engagements, pp. 90, 96, 109; Taking Sides, p. 187.

46 Engagements, pp. 116-117 and xiii. I have not hesitated to draw extensively from Layton's later work wherever I have found particularly apt illustrations of his attacks upon gentility that are equally applicable to the 1950s.

47 Desmond Pacey, Letters to Irving Layton, September 7, 1955; and November 9, 1955.

48 Layton, Letters to Desmond Pacey, August 22, 1955; October 30, 1955; January 18, 1958; February 16, 1959; May 21, 1961; and April 30, 1956. The long quote on pages 107-108 is from an undated letter filed after the letter dated June 23, 1962. It was probably written before the end of this month, or in the first week of July.

49 Engagements, pp. 188-191.

50 Norman Podhoretz, Making it (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 26.

51 John Murray Cuddihy, The Ordeal of Civility (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 12-14; Eric Auerbach, Scenes from the Drama of European Literature (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 164; Norman Podhoretz, Doings and Undoings; The Fifties and After in American Writing (New York: Farrar Straus, 1964), p. 15; Maurice Samuel, Jews on Approval (New York: Liveright, 1932), p. 9. It should be noted that while Cuddihy's book contains many intriguing ideas, the general argument tends to reduce the work of Freud, Marx, and Levi-Straus to case-histories of culture-shock.

52 The quote is from Layton's poem, «Osip Mandelshtam (1891-1940).» It is not that easy to come up with a long list of non-Jewish writers who have opposed gentility. Lawrence and Rimbaud are two that do come readily to mind, but even Wordsworth, in his way, attacked those «who will converse with us as gravely about a taste for poetry, as they express it, as if it were a thing as indifferent as a taste for rope-dancing, or Frontiniac or Sherry.» (Preface to The Lyrical Ballads, 1802).

53 Pacey to Layton, October 21, 1959; Layton to Pacey, October 24, 1959.

54 «English-Canadian Poetry, 1944-1954,» in The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada, p. 166.

55 Mandel, Irving Layton, p. 28.

56 A. Alvarez, «Beyond the Gentility Principle,» reprinted in Beyond all this Fiddle: Essays 1955-1967 (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1968) pp. 38 and 44.

57 Beyond all this Fiddle, pp. 6 and 62.

58 Engagements, p. 86.

59 Karl Shapiro, The Poetry Wreck, pp. xv, 351, 352, and 238.

60 The Art of the Real, pp. 70-71..

61 The Poetry Wreck, p. 6; George Steiner, Language and Silence (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 221.

62 Taking Sides, p. 65.

63 Wynne Francis, «Layton and Nietzsche,» in Irving Layton. The Poet and his Critics, ed. Seymour Mayne (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978), p. 277. See also Wynne Francis, «The Farting Jesus: Layton and the Heroic Vitalists,» CV II, 3, no. 3 (January, 1978), pp. 46-51.

64 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals, trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 141, 131, and 56.

65 Engagements, p. 92.

66 «Crepe Hanger's Carnival,» in Engagements, pp. 38-40.

67. Engagements, p. 106.
68. Engagements, p. 81.
69. Engagements, p. 83.
70. Mandel, Irving Layton, pp. 31-33.
71. Engagements, pp. 30-31.
72. Taking Sides, p. 37.
73. Engagements, pp. 164-165.
74. Eugene Goodheart, The Failure of Criticism
(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978),
p. 78.

Chapter Three

The Quarrel with Pacey and Dudek

With the publication of A Red Carpet for the Sun in 1959, Layton's career took another turn. The most conspicuous change was in his critical and public reception. In the Midst of My Fever, The Cold Green Element, and The Bull Calf and Other Poems had all drawn favourable reviews, even from A.J.M. Smith and Northrop Frye, and The Improved Binoculars contained the enthusiastic introduction by William Carlos Williams; but it was A Red Carpet for the Sun, published and promoted by McClelland and Stewart, that thrust Layton's work into public and critical awareness. In the decade that followed, Layton held the attention, sometimes adulation, of a considerable public, through his appearances on television, radio, and in the popular press, and through his poetry. The period from 1959 to 1967 was less prolific than the mid-fifties, but it saw the appearance of some of his most impressive volumes of poetry, including The Swinging Flesh, Balls for a One-Armed Juggler, The Laughing Rooster, and Periods of the Moon, and, in 1965, McClelland and Stewart published his first Collected Poems. Each of these volumes, and also the anthologies, Poems of 27 Cents and Love Where

the Nights are Long, begins with a «Foreword» in which Layton continued to defend and develop his view of the role of the poet, and to attack contemporary poetry, criticism, and gentility. He also continued to publish articles and correspondence in The Montreal Star, The Telegram, The Canadian Forum, and elsewhere. Among these is the «Open Letter to Louis Dudek» in Cataract, 1962.

The public acclaim that Layton acquired after A Red Carpet for the Sun did little to mollify his attacks on gentility or brighten his view of contemporary society. Instead, his poetic vision during the 1960s seems to grow darker and become more apocalyptic as it attempts to account for the human capacity for evil on the scale of the Holocaust and the Siberian labour camps. In the «Foreword» to A Red Carpet for the Sun, he states bluntly that «Man is not a rational animal, he's a dull-witted animal who loves to torture.»¹ This becomes a 'given' that much of his work in the 1960s, and also in the 1970s, rests on. Some of its manifestations are explored in poems like «The Cage,» «Still Life,» and «The Predator.» During the 1950s, Layton's attack on gentility focussed primarily upon its aesthetic effect; for example, in his «Preface» to Cerberus he claimed that gentility accounted for «nine-tenths of the miserable devitalized stuff that passes for poetry in this country.»² The attack was against priggishness and a servile, formal sophistication.

In the 1960s, the attack on gentility focuses primarily upon its moral effect. Layton was not content to flog a dead horse. With the arrival of the 'sexual revolution', with the liberalization of the censorship laws, and with the new wave of films, pop art, post-modern literature, and their apparently raw, primitive energy, the priggishness and academic formalism of the 1950s were no longer such formidable inhibitors. However, Layton seemed to regard these developments as relatively superficial. He sensed a more deeply ingrained gentility that could accommodate, even thrive on, the alleged 'revolutionary' developments of the 1960s, while remaining virtually invulnerable to either creative joy or moral outrage.

Layton's newly acquired public status as a poet also did little to ameliorate the problems of the poet's role and function in contemporary society. In fact, in the midst of public and critical acclaim, the problems seemed to become even more complex. At «The Poet and the World of Man» conference in September, 1967, Layton found that in spite of all the exalted claims that had been made for poets and poetry, he felt «profoundly uneasy,» as though he were at «a funeral, when nice things are said about the deceased.»³ Layton certainly did not scorn public acclaim; he enjoyed it and courted it. His view seemed to be that if public adulation was a threat to the poet's precarious integrity, that threat

was minimal compared to the self-congratulatory, hot-house atmosphere of the poetry conference. On the other hand, he was just as certainly not content to be a showman, to thrill his audience with a display of wit and invective flattering to their own arriviste liberation. In spite of the acclaim, and in spite of the 'revolutionary' mood of the decade, Layton seemed to find that a role for the poet at the centre of moral, social and political life was as remote as ever. In the «Foreword» to Periods of the Moon he observed that poetry had become the current fad, that «hordes of copywriters, admen, PR executives, arid doctrinaires, and the bright young men in the English departments» were «overwhelmed by invitations to contribute articles, reviews, and of course 'poems'» to a variety of literary causes. However, «authentic poetry» remained a rare miracle.⁴ In the «Preface» to The Laughing Rooster, he warned against a «danger» to poetry «from its avowed friends» who lavished their esteem upon trivial exercises.⁵

Toward the end of the «Foreword» to A Red Carpet for the Sun, Layton breaks into an apocalyptic rage against «a hideously commercial civilization spawning hideously deformed monstrosities.» His language and imagery take on a savagery that is extreme even for Layton.

Modern women. I see cast in the role of furies striving to castrate the male; their efforts aided by all the malignant forces of a technological civilization that has rendered the male's creative role of revelation superfluous - if not an industrial hazard and a nuisance. We're being feminized and proletarianized at one and the same time. This is the inglorious age of the mass-woman. Her tastes are dominant everywhere - in theatres, stores, art, fiction, houses, furniture - and these tastes are dainty and trivial.⁶

In this passage, Layton is vulnerable to accusations of sexism and hysteric sensationalism. This attitude is imperfectly typical of his writing during the following decade, but outbursts like this are too frequent to be ignored. In the «Foreword» to The Swinging Flesh, there is a similar outburst:

As our bourgeois-Christian civilization joins its shade to those of other vanished epochs, hilarious idiots speak of progress. Progress. Build stinking Chicagos in the Congo; or dull monolithic Moscows and Leningrads. Build the mindless yacancies of suburbia and people them with manipulating politicians, squint-eyed lawyers, vendors of chromatic bumpaper, successful meat and poultry merchants, halitotic public relations and ad men. With shrinks and neurotic commissars. With the disordered progeny of those who lust after money and power. With gastric ulcers, distended livers, cardiac disease, alcoholism, insanity. For these the African Negro, the last of the Dionysians, is asked to exchange his wonderful sensuousness, his rich uncorrupted instincts, and his exuberant rhythms.⁷

The «Foreword» to Balls for a One-Armed Juggler has a passage in the same vein:

There is a frightful stink in the souls of all men and women living today. Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Vorkuta, the Soviet frame-up trials of the thirties: with these man touched the infiniteness of evil - and survived! The stink in his soul is not only that of burning flesh, of decomposing bones. It is also the stink of self-guilt. At last he knows the truth about himself and of what he's capable. Nevertheless, so perverse is the human being, he cannot but be pleased with the outcome, even with the entire titanic drama that made possible his unique distinction. More than anyone before him, twentieth-century man had extended his being into the realm of evil: and though he looks fearfully at the remaining moral scars, he does not do so without a certain dark pride and exultation. 8

It is certainly possible to find any number of passages among Layton's work of the 1960s, particularly in the poetry, where the same theme is treated with more restraint, where the wit is subtle, and where the apocalyptic pessimism is lightened by mischievous irony. But the language and imagery of these savage indictments of twentieth-century evil cannot entirely be dismissed as attention-getting devices, used only for the purpose of shock. Layton does seem to be struggling to comprehend, and to make comprehensible, the moral enormity and psychological complexity of real events, and it does seem that he had to undertake the task with very little help from his contemporaries. His point is that rational, efficient and progressive social planning is fundamentally implicated in the «organized nature of twentieth-century wickedness.»⁹ The principal perpetrators of Nazi and Soviet outrages were not, Layton

points out, deficient in «reason» or «culture.» It is, paradoxically, only the Dionysian element, «an all-inclusive name for instinct, emotion, intuition, madness,»¹⁰ that stands any chance of thwarting the systematised, rationalized evil perpetrated by and upon a populace numbed by gentility and enslaved by technology. It does its work partly by throwing the march of «organized wickedness» into confusion, but more important, it is the creative joyful antidote to the resentment and self-contempt that renders twentieth-century man uniquely vulnerable to fanatic planners and ideologues. Layton thus turns the popular account on its head - that is, the account that maintains an excess of Nietzschean - Dionysian intoxication, of primitive, irrational instincts, of «madness,» permitted the rise of Nazism. Layton's view of the complicity of twentieth-century rationalism in totalitarian brutality is basic to his quarrel with Dudek.

Again and again Layton insists that the absence of the Dionysian element is the root cause of the modern malaise, and that it threatens poetry with extinction. In A Red Carpet for the Sun, Layton writes in conclusion to the passage quoted above,

Dionysus is dead; his corpse seethes white-maggoty with social workers and analysts. Not who is winning the Cold War is the big issue confronting mankind, but this: will the Poet, as a type, join the Priest, the Warrior, the Hero, and the Saint as

melancholy museum pieces for the titillation of a universal babbitttry? It could happen.»

Similarly, in the «Foreword» to The Swinging Flesh, he regards the extinction of the Dionysian element as the crucial issue of the age:

What engrosses the mind, what troubles the spirit of the creative writer today are not the inequities and malfunctioning of the so-called capitalist system. These are in the process of being rapidly eliminated. His anxiety, his concern, to be quick about it, is something else: 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.¹²

In the passages I have quoted, there seems to be little left of the social-realist criticism of the 1940s. Layton now seems to have a rather scornful confidence that contemporary society is quite able and willing to take care of the dispossessed, of economic inequities, and capitalist exploitation generally. These are not the pressing concerns they were formerly. He is clearly much more concerned with psychological issues, particularly with resentment and the pathology of gentility. However, the social context remains in the foreground. He is not concerned with 'self fulfillment' or the reduction of various 'complexes', or whatever promises

to be therapeutically «uplifting.» Layton also has a scornful confidence that society can take care of its «culture,» that it is willing and able to provide endowments and prizes. Yet the fundamental dis-ease remains. Thus, the «big issue» that his literary criticism confronts is: how does the poet discharge his time-honoured prophetic role when he must stand apart from, or in opposition to, precisely those liberalizing sweetness-and-light movements within society - its culture, its learning, its traditions - that are normally held to be supportive and necessary to the functioning of poetry.

During the 1960s Layton became increasingly impatient with both the early modern poets and their contemporary emulators. Since the 1940s, he had been scornful of the aloof, high-art formalism associated with Eliot, Pound, and the later Auden, and the derivative, self-conscious cosmopolitanism of the Preview poets and their successors. One of the effects of his criticism during the 1960s was to subvert the alleged uncompromising integrity of the modern poets, compared to novelists, dramatists and film-makers, who, given the economic pressures on their media, were supposedly forced to make aesthetic concessions in order to entertain and sell. According to Layton, it was the modern poets who made the concessions, to high-brow taste and gentility, and provided essentially escapist fare. In the «Foreword» to Balls for a One-Armed Juggler, Layton complains that

the modern poet has been an empty windbag and

a chatterer. No wonder anguished people turn from him in amusement, boredom, or pity. He has nothing to say worth listening to. . . . The truth is this: instead of remembering they are prophets and the descendants of prophets, the poets have swapped roles with entertainers and culture-peddlers.

Unlike the novelists, the playwrights and the film-makers, the poets have rendered themselves superfluous to their society, and have been quite willing to accept their superfluity, «pleased if someone overhears them and recommends them for a travelling fellowship or a university post.»¹³

It seems that no sooner had Layton won some of the public and critical acclaim that had long been due, particularly from left-leaning, anti-establishment fellow-travellers, than he took up a series of positions that seemed decidedly reactionary. «Collectivism» now holds more menace for him than «capitalism.» Marxism is often coupled with Christianity as a «sour, boring joke.»¹⁴ On issues ranging from women's liberation to the Vietnam War he seemed consistently on the 'wrong' side. Even the 'sexual revolution' seemed to cause him uneasiness. Having contributed, probably more than anyone else in Canada, to the break-down of taboos and prudery, and having celebrated in verse and prose the lusty animal passions, he now laments that

the idea of courting a woman in a beautiful way has certainly gone out of the window, and what you have is the display of crudity,

of vulgarity, on the part of both sexes. The sexual offer is made in the most brutal fashion and the girl is expected to respond either to a grimace, or a goosing, or whatever it might be, as direct and ape-like as possible. And the girl has no alternative, apparently, but to behave like a female ape and the two of them are to be found sloshed, at some party, rattling ice cubes in their glasses, looking glassy-eyed at each other, and after the right number of stares, it is understood that they are going to trundle off to bed and make love.¹⁵

Here the apparent shift in his attitude is more illusory. In spite of poems like «Misunderstanding,» Layton's attitude had always been much too Lawrentian to accept casual, or merely athletic, sex. In his political and literary criticism, however, the shift seems more real. It is partly accounted for by shifts in the mainstream of intellectual discourse - the New Left and Modernism had themselves become 'establishment' - but there is undeniably a movement toward the right in Layton's work during this decade. To many of his critics it seemed ironic, for example, that while Layton was so acutely aware of all the nuances of evil in both National and Soviet Socialism, he seemed to accept American imperialism, even in Vietnam. In fact, more and more he became an outspoken apologist for American foreign policy.

The correspondence with Desmond Pacey becomes distinctly acrimonious in 1959, and continues so throughout the 1960s. There seem to be two aspects to the

quarrel. One is that Pacey regards Layton's delight in his new success as dangerous to his work, encouraging him to write too much, too quickly, and pandering to his public's craving for more naughtiness and cheap titillation.

In March, 1959, Layton sent Pacey his poem, «Because My Calling is Such.» Pacey took the occasion to attack Layton for his posturing and self-indulgent egotism: «Don't tell me you're going to retreat from your honesty into this kind of fakery - that your goddamn poetry is so mysterious and important that for it you'd jettison the love of woman.» He concludes, «Because the great Frye has said you're good, everything you write is ipso-facto excellent. Balls!» He accuses Layton of becoming a «stuffed shirt,» and allowing himself to be exploited by McClelland and Stewart. Late in 1964, Layton triumphantly reported the success of a reading tour together with Birney and Cohen, a tour that had been vigorously promoted by McClelland and Stewart and filmed by the National Film Board. He joyfully claimed that, as popular symbols of Canada, poets were now «running neck and neck with Mounties.» Pacey scoffed at all the hoopla, calling the tour «the McClelland and Stewart travelling circus.» In December, 1962, Pacey met Kingsley Amis in Cambridge, and found him smug and conceited, reduced to predictably shocking declarations, lack-lustre cynicism, self-consciously out of fashion, but still

trying to milk his early success. On June 19, 1963, following a flurry of public appearances by Layton on television and in the press, Pacey comments:

I see you are still emitting a stream of platitudes about poetry, professors and penises. You are rapidly becoming the Kingsley Amis of Canada.

Pacey was particularly scornful of Layton's introduction to Love Where the Nights are Long. He found Layton's dismissal of the love poetry of the Cavalier poets as «insincere frippery» itself insincere and ignorant: «You're a great big bluffer and it's time someone called your bluff.» Pacey maintained that the only poet in Love Where the Nights are Long who has «a real gift for amorous verse» is Leonard Cohen: «Your own love poems are seldom your best - they are either too rhetorical, or too diffused, or too laboured.»¹⁶

Layton responded with invectives against critics and professors, maintaining that academics were merely peeved and resentful to see poetry flourishing outside the English Departments, and dismissing Pacey's warnings that his showmanship was compromising his integrity as a poet, and the dignity of poetry generally. He maintained that his integrity was much less compromised than that of the poets ensconced in the universities, and that their cowering isolation and triviality posed a much greater threat to the dignity of poetry than

his public performances.¹⁷

The other main source of the acrimony was Layton's apparent political conservatism. As early as 1956 Layton confided to Pacey that he found himself questioning his «socialistic beliefs,» that he had begun to find socialism and capitalism «woefully inadequate terms.» By February 18, 1959, he had rejected them outright, together with modern aestheticism:

I feel that all the old concerns are dead — the aestheticisms of Eliot, Yeats, Gide, Proust, equally with those of the anti-Establishment antics of the left-winged social realists of a decade and two ago. Irrelevant, that's the word. Irrelevant, irrelevant, irrelevant. As usual, the professors are caught napping, this time on the heavily annotated tomes of Joyce and Eliot, unaware that humanity has turned a sharp corner into a world where pity and sensitivity, or even ordinary decency, have no address. . . . Our condition is worse than that of the Romans — with no Christians in sight to redeem us. The 'Beat' writers are saying it, but not very well or very successfully, and they'll end up by destroying themselves rather than the conditions that produced them.

By 1961 he has nothing but contempt for «flabby socialists» and «decadent left-wing intellectuals.» He finds a distrustful «puritanical strain» in the poets of the Left, and in this regard, he much prefers Roy Campbell to Stephen Spender. His praise is now all for the greatness of J.F. Kennedy, De Gaulle and Churchill. He approves entirely of Kennedy's handling of the Cuban crisis; he refers to him on one occasion as «truly a wise

and noble prince.» Then, in 1965, he is with «L.B.J. all the way,» fully supportive of American imperialism in Vietnam. The tone is occasionally lightened when Layton reports that he is sending reams of poems and political advice to the White House, but so far «the silence is deafening. Ah well. . .»¹⁸

Pacey watched his 'progress' with dismay. He found Layton's adulation of the Kennedys, both Jackie and John, «silly,» and after a particularly enthusiastic outburst, Pacey demands to know, with reference to Yeats, why Layton must assume «the ass's mask of an insufferable braggart.» He denounces Kennedy as a capitalist and imperialist. Layton he denounces as an outright fascist, although the denunciation is softened a little when he signs the letter «Pinky Pacey.» He compares Layton on the Cuban crisis to the aging Wordsworth's conservative stance on the First Reform Bill. More and more he finds that Layton has become a typical romantic conservative.¹⁹ Layton resists both terms. What Pacey regards as conservatism, Layton argues, is in fact the result of his acute sense of the forces of history, and he denies any inclination toward a romantic nostalgia; rather, his «historical realism» is prophetic, looking to the present and the future.

In February, 1959, with regard to the Suez crisis, he scorns the «noble» liberalism of Canadian intellectuals. He sees the crisis as «the herald of the West's doom,

invested with all the tragic grandeur of historical symbolism.» The poet, he insists, is «one who knows what the essential things in his age are, what is dying and what is coming to life, what approaches on cat feet from afar.» On April 1, 1970, he writes, «Me a romantic? You must be nuts!» As proof that he is a «hardened realist,» Layton points out that he was the only intellectual in Canada to support the Vietnam War. In another letter, he recalls that Coleridge said of Shakespeare that «his judgment was commensurate with his genius.» Layton says he wants the same to be said of him.²⁰

It is clear that Layton rejects the term «romantic,» applied to himself, if that term implies a fanciful dreamer out of touch with reality, or one who casts a spell of enchantment, whether heroic, arcadian, or demonic, over mundane events. In other contexts, Layton is much more receptive to being called a romantic. He allows that if Blake and Byron were romantics, then he is one too.²¹ What is unrealistic, he maintains, is to argue that the poetic imagination, instinct, or intuition, have no role in the cognitive process.

In spite of many bitter, even brutal, arguments, the quarrel between Pacey and Layton during the 1960s never led to a falling out. This demonstrates the remarkable capacity for friendship of both men, but also their fundamental agreement on the function of poetry. When Pacey calls Layton a romantic, it is not always in

disparagement. Characteristically Pacey delighted in Layton's aggressive assertion of personality in his poems. He shared much of Layton's scorn for modernist purity in language and form, and supported his purpose, if not always his methods, to get poetry out of the withering confines of 'high art' and into the impure atmosphere of public debate. Pacey also shared much of Layton's scorn for «modern invalidism.» For Pacey, as for Layton, acute sensitivity and exquisite suffering were insufficient motives for poetry. He demanded that the poet «triumph over adversity,» and it is particularly this sense of triumph, Pacey maintained, that sets the work of Pratt, Klein, and Layton apart. He demanded honesty and fidelity to personal experience, not a linguistic performance. He praised Layton's poetry above that of his contemporaries because it was «so damned hard to be apathetic about.» The feeling of literary kinship is especially evident in the July 4, 1957 letter where Pacey writes, with reference to Yeats, «Bitter and gay - that is the heroic mood let this be our motto.»²²

The quarrel with Dudek was, in a narrow sense, more «literary,» but much more acrimonious. One aspect of the quarrel focussed upon Layton's alleged «archaism». During the 1950s, Dudek had challenged his contemporaries to attempt new breakthroughs in language and

form, and often he wrote with an infectious exuberance and the promise of a bright future; for example, in «Où sont les jeunes?» he takes stock of the achievements of Canadian modernism to date:

Imagination, the raw stuff? Yes, we are capable of it; exuberantly. Social realism, ditto. Free verse, we can do. Seven types of ambiguity? We have surpassed. Why go on; we are capable of writing modern poetry of a rudimentary kind in various forms and schools.

But in Canada we have not written the perfectly original thing, nor even the perfectly finished imitation in any one kind.

One could easily regard Layton's prolific and startling achievement of the 1950s as a resounding answer to the challenge. Moreover, Dudek demanded energy:

Let there be energy. The tone of a poem need not be limited to grey nature morte, melancholy and meditation. There are other emotions, states of mind: Activities! Let's take poetry out of its present boundaries. Carry the gods to a new Latium.²³

Again, it would seem that Layton provided in abundance precisely what Dudek had called for, and as late as 1956, Dudek was among Layton's strongest supporters. However, in 1958, he began to attack Layton publicly, claiming his disaffection had set in as early as 1953.²⁴

In Dudek's and Layton's earlier attacks upon formalism in the 1950s, it becomes clear, at least in retrospect, that their critical views were developing in opposing directions. They had many common enemies, but

Dudek focused his attack on the need for a new breakthrough in form and technique, building on the legacy of Pound and Williams, while Layton focused his attack on gentility. As I have pointed out in the preceding chapter, the sterile forms and academic exercises of the 1950s were, for Layton, symptoms of a more general malaise, and, in contrast to Dudek, he seemed to regard formal and technical matters rather casually, adapting what was new as he found it useful, and retrieving what modernist poetics had supposedly discredited as unpoetic, rhetorical, discursive. Layton seems to have become increasingly pragmatic; Dudek more dogmatic. This corresponds to Layton's continuing emphasis upon the didactic function of poetry, and Dudek's apparently increasing emphasis upon formal and subjective aspects.

It seems inevitable (and, from the point of view of the public, not altogether unfortunate), that, given their eminence among poets and critics at the end of the 1950s, their respective views should clash publicly. By 1958, in «A Note on Metrics,» Dudek's position has hardened to the point where he can claim that «the poetry of unique form is the only kind worth trying today; it is the poetry from which the forms of the future are bound to evolve.» A.J.M. Smith remains an outsider, but nevertheless, Dudek, in a 1963 review, claims him as «our miglior fabbro, and in the last resort it is the fabbro that looks best to immortality.»

In «Lunchtime Reflections on Frank Davey's Defence of the Black Mountain Fort,» 1965, Dudek isolates a distinctive «development» in modern Canadian poetry that has its sources in Pound and Williams and attains its most promising extension in the work of the Vancouver-based Tish poets. This «development» has virtually his exclusive approval:

Numerous book reviews and several articles, as well as the notebooks of my students for the past twenty years, will show that Pound and Williams are the two sources I have always insisted on, as the clearest and most profitable continuation of modernism, even in preference to Eliot, Yeats, Auden, or Dylan Thomas, since each of these latter poets is, as I see it, in one way or another, a distraction, a reaction, or a confusion of the main intent of the modern renewal. . . . Thus, in general, Scott is more significant for us in Canada than Smith; Souster is more significant than Layton; Purdy more so than Reaney. These latter may be more gifted - even better poets - but the main line of continuing modern development runs through Scott, Souster, Purdy - and at present centres clearly in the activity in Vancouver.²⁵

Two paragraphs later, Dudek concludes: «Vancouver, then, is the present continuation of the authentic modern tradition in Canada.» There is an uneasiness about several of these statements. First of all, that the Tish poets should be regarded as the principal carriers of «the authentic modern tradition in Canada» seems to require considerable qualification, particularly in the light of Keith Richardson's book, Poetry and the Colonized Mind: Tish. Moreover, Dudek seems to call

for a revisionist literary history where «better poets» are acknowledged to be less «significant» than lesser poets. This point was certainly not lost on Layton:

Prof. Dudek is convinced that only a certain way of writing poetry is permissible today: that deriving from the Pound-Williams-Black Mountain tradition. Though he concedes other poets writing in a different tradition may possess greater talent and may even produce better poems, he nevertheless insists that the only true path for Canadian poets to follow is the one which he and empirical observation have indicated for them. If this isn't doctrinaire academicism gone stark raving mad, I do not know what is.²⁶

In fact, about «better poets,» like Pratt and Klein, Dudek had always had reservations, particularly with regard to their language. Now he becomes increasingly impatient with their whole poetic vision, with Pratt's «reductive zoological outlook» and Klein's «clownish form of piety.» Both poets, he maintains, use poetic devices for ornamentation, and thus evade the confrontation with bitter disillusionment that simple, direct speech would have forced upon them.²⁷

Layton's failure to attend to the canons of modernism inherited from Pound and Williams, Dudek maintained, had lured him into the easy success, and excess, of sensationalism and egotism. In «Layton on the Carpet,» 1959, he allows Layton only a «minor» gift for craftsmanship. He attacks his «troglydytic» barbarism, his «stentorian rhetoric,» his «orotund sentences,» his

«un-English idiom,» and his «tone-deaf» ear for rhythm: In «Three Major Canadian Poets - Three Major Forms of Archaism,» 1961, Dudek reviews The Swinging Flesh, along with current work by Daryl Hine and Leonard Cohen. Each poet represents a distinct form of «archaism»: Cohen writes in the archaic manner of the 1890s decadents; Hine in the manner of the Georgian poets; and Layton is somewhere between the Victorians and the Romantics. His work is «filled with pseudo-poetic diction, old-fashioned inversions, and even would-be rhyming techniques,» a mixture of «verbal archaism and new barbarities,» «grandiosity, and even sentimentality.» In «Lunchtime Reflections on Frank Davey's Defense of the Black Mountain Fort,» Dudek claims that Layton is entirely innocent of any influence from either Pound or Williams:

Layton is rhetorical in a fustian tradition that goes back to Klein and then to Marlowe rather than to any modern poet. It is really archaic stuff that will not pass technical analysis as twentieth-century poetry.²⁸

Reviewing the Collected Poems, 1965, Dudek finds that the collection «offends, as Irving Layton's poetry always does, against the most elementary literary values, in the use of language, in the quality of feeling, in the sense of form.» He maintains that the poetry is admired «entirely for non-literary reasons,» and he makes the perennial complaint that «it is impossible to deal with Irving Layton's poetry as poetry» because «it

consists almost entirely of dramatizations of his own ego.»²⁹

There are undoubtedly «archaisms» in Layton's poetry, and Dudek does have a point when he identifies a shift in his work around the mid 1950s. Elements of expressionistic fantasy and a more «stentorian rhetoric» do become increasingly prominent. Such «lapses,» from Dudek's point of view, would be the more irritating because they were not perpetrated in ignorance. Layton did have some credentials as an avant-garde poet. As he himself put it in a recent interview, «I was once adopted as the white-haired boychick by the Black Mountain boys.» He declined the honour, but he did not simply revert to worn out forms and idioms. Dudek seems to have become increasingly disinclined to acknowledge the range of Layton's work, in form and language, as well as subject and persona. Seymour Mayne has pointed out that, in «Layton on the Carpet,» Dudek «chooses one less successful short poem as an example, and then proceeds to generalize on Layton's craftsmanship, and to criticize the whole corpus of his work to date.» Mayne suggests that this is characteristic of Dudek's method throughout the 1960s; he «goes at the hack marks in Layton's oeuvre,» he «develops a position on Layton . . . and then proceeds to entrench himself in it, with little variation of tone or nuance in his subsequent reviews.»³⁰

Dudek's position also became «entrenched» with regard to other poets, but there is some variation, or at least a shift in emphasis. Several of Dudek's attacks on Layton are directed specifically against his «archaism» while others emphasize his egotism or persona. The latter are related to Dudek's theory on «the psychology of literature» and this aspect of the quarrel reveals some of their fundamental convictions about poetry.

Toward the end of the 1950s, Dudek began to regard the impulse to write poetry as the result of some sort of neurosis or psychosis, analogous to delinquent social behaviour generally. The theory is in evidence as early as January 1958, in the article, «Absinthe Drinkers or Squares?» The article attempts to account for the «glaring fact» that, «outside the academic ring of the so-called conservative poets writing today» the new writers «are all desperate, hashish-crazed non-conformists, raging against your panelled and pre-fabricated Age of Conformity.» Dudek argues that «the good artists today, the few, young, indomitable ones, wherever they occur, have the same moral set-up as juvenile delinquents.» This seems to be written partly in warning, and partly to spur them on, but the concluding paragraph of the article tentatively probes the possibility of an alternative to the extremes of conformity and anarchic rebellion: «Is there still a way of knowledge and vision,

practicable against the evil, unknown to the absinthe drinkers and the squares?»³¹ As the formalism of the 1950s gave way to the apparent anarchy of the 1960s, Dudek became increasingly critical of the «anti-social» role of the artist. He proposed, not exactly an alternative, but a militant modernist poetics as a restraint against the contemporary artist's vulnerability to the excesses of egotism and morbidity.

The essay that seems to mark a shift in Dudek's criticism is «Patterns of Recent Canadian Poetry,» 1958. Throughout most of the essay, Dudek is the ebullient, social-realist critic he had been since the late 1940s, attacking the «English Traditionalists» as «formidable hostile forces» to those «who want to write with radical new energy, with negative intent.» However, in the last few pages of the essay, where he deals with «Les jeunes of Today,» he seems to express disillusionment with the whole enterprise of contemporary poetry, and contempt for the social conditions that seem to cause the contemporary poet so much discomfort. In contrast to the older generation of social-realist poets, Dudek argues that the newer generation, including those whose work is alleged to represent a development of social realism, lack a clear understanding of the condition they wish to redress; in fact, they regard the condition incapable of redress, and consequently their «social

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protest» presents «a blank face on all such real issues.» Their protest is not against specific social injustices, but against «the tragedy of life itself, of humanity, suffering and incurable condition.» Layton clearly understands «tragedy» as something quite other than a despairing nihilism, but, to this point, he would not find much to quarrel with in Dudek's assessment of the condition that confronts the contemporary poet, and he would share a good deal of Dudek's impatience with those among his contemporaries who would use the assumed incurability of the human condition as an excuse for morbid self-indulgence. But he would certainly not propose that the contemporary poet restrict his concern to partisan issues, and ignore the «tragedy of life itself,» however incurable, or however dangerous to the poet's mental equilibrium. In fact, it is Dudek's apparent condescension toward the extreme conditions that confront the poet, and his consequent scepticism regarding the poet's savagely indignant response, that most infuriate Layton. In the following passage, the image of the poet that Dudek conveys, with an assumed clinical detachment, is that of a spoiled, perverse child:

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. Hence we have the

paradox of an apocalyptic mythological poetry combined with a certain complacent non-engagement of manner - sometimes even of dilettantism. Yet in these poets, an intellectual disorder (not only in politics, but in morality and 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 the 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 of perverse exhibitionism, which is the psychological compensation for guilt and inadequacy.³²

This entire passage is quoted by Layton in «An Open Letter to Louis Dudek.»³³ For Layton, it reveals a hatred of poetry, «envious impotency,» «the lymphoidal fears of an over-timorous professor of English Literature,» and more. But the crux of the quarrel is Dudek's allegation that poets are mentally deranged. This is evident in Layton's reply to George Ellenbogen in the July, 1962 issue of Cataract. Ellenbogen had found Layton's attack on Dudek somewhat excessive. Layton's reply indicates that he, unlike Ellenbogen, takes Dudek's criticism at its word, and points out that Dudek has literally described him, Ellenbogen, as «fundamentally disturbed,» «deeply neurotic,» «a perverse exhibitionist,» irresponsible, guilty and inadequate.³⁴

The image of the poet as a bewildered, perverse child, engaged in an uncritical, non-rational activity, is again clearly evident in Dudek's essay, «The Fallacy of Literalism and the Failing of Symbolic Interpretation»,

1964:

The process of imagination as I see it is sub-rational, pre-logical, and semantically pre-verbal. Though it may resemble the thought of the primitive and is of course nearer to it, it is not primitive so much as rudimentary. And therefore not superior but inferior to conscious thought; and not supremely ordered, but disordered and groping in its nature. It is the thought process of the dreamer, somewhat cloddish and limited, though pictorial and truly emotional, because it proceeds from the deepest emotional centres, 35

This allows the poetic process in itself very little claim upon the intellect. The 'meaning' of the poem has little to do with direct correspondence to objective reality, and the 'experience' of the poet has virtually no direct authority. The 'experience' is valuable only from a clinical perspective; the poet merits close and careful study because, given the weak, exposed organism that he is, the traumas and dilemmas of the age register upon him most vividly. It is because the poet is so vulnerable to infection by the malaise of the age, and manifests the symptoms of infection so distinctively, that he is so useful to the critic as a specimen for social diagnosis.

This account is slightly over-simplified, but it

does describe one pole of Dudek's ambivalent attitude toward the post-romantic poetic ego. In «Irving Layton - A Vicarious Rebel,» Dudek's attack fixes specifically upon Layton's «dramatization of the self»:

Layton's ego is neither spontaneous nor natural; it is hardly even real. It is a fiction; the distorting inflated ego of a man who has indulged in too much self-worship. And the world he presents is equally distorted. I cannot see how this can make for lasting poetry.

Dudek invites the reader to compare Layton's poetry with that of William Carlos Williams. Williams is «a poet of personality,» of the «spontaneous natural self,» but his poems, «how objective and free they are of the hateful 'I'.»³⁶

In Dudek's CBC lectures, The First Person in Literature, 1967, the subjective ego fares much better. Here his main argument is that the personal element in literature represents both a necessity of historical evolution and the triumph of art over religion and rational philosophy. «The personal element, first asserted by Sappho and then Catullus, was thwarted by the Middle Ages: «It is as if a great new evolution of history had started at various points, only to be interrupted by the centuries of barbarism and religion, as they have been called, to start all over again in the modern world.» Nevertheless, while Dudek regards the assertion of the ego as the highest development of art, he remains wary

of the various forms of romantic and post-romantic egomania, and sets definite limits on the 'truth' to which the subjective ego has access:

The first person is not a complete being. He is a dilemma in the world, caught between the truth he can no longer see outside himself, the universal, which is the truth for all men, and his own private fancies, his preferences and aversions, his little phobias and little ecstasies.

Dudek makes a point of the distinction between the prophetic «I» of relatively non-personal literatures, the «I» that spoke universal, objective truth, typically dramatized as the voice of God, and the subjective, «distorted» truth of the modern or romantic «I». He stresses the danger of the ego in literature and society, its tendency to «self-destructiveness,» its «paranoia,» and the similarity between «artists who create fictions and the dictators and world conquerors who make their egomania a reality.» Dudek writes with some admiration about Byron, yet he is representative of the artist who becomes the victim of his own ego. In contrast, Dudek proposes the example of the «great» romantics, like Beethoven, Hugo, and Whitman, whose ego «absorbed into itself a noble and generous humanity, a moral principle that still keeps the ego a servant, never a master.»³⁷ Layton would certainly have the ego «absorb into itself a noble and generous humanity, a moral principle.» But he would not allow that this is achieved by «mastering»

it. Layton would undoubtedly argue, with reference to Nietzsche's «Will to Power,» that to keep the ego a «servant» tends rather to thwart the impulse toward generosity and moral principle, to infuse it with resentment. For Dudek, the moral agent is the rational intellect, in conflict with the ego; for Layton, it seems to be the imagination in creative tension with the ego.

Direct and indirect references to the quarrel with Dudek can be found almost everywhere in Layton's criticism during the 1960s. To read the criticism during this period with the quarrel in mind often reveals the specific critical point that Layton is making, a point that might otherwise seem a little vague, or might appear simply as somewhat extravagant statements of romantic truisms. When, for example, Layton argues that poets are the conscience of mankind, this may seem rather like a romantic 'motherhood' statement, but the point is that Dudek had virtually denied this function of the poet. When the poetic process is regarded as the unconscious, almost automatic, outburst of a frustrated, rebellious ego, as it is in much of Dudek's criticism during this period, the poet can be the conscience of mankind only indirectly, as a victim of the age, in the same way that a war amputee is the conscience of mankind. To argue that the «great» poet-egoists have a corresponding moral faculty that keeps their egoism in line implies

that a non-poetic, non-creative part of the poet functions as a conscience, and the poetic ego is reduced to a troublesome, wayward impulse that clouds the clear perceptions of the rational or critical mind. When Layton argues that the poet is the «interpreter of his age» it is important to remember that for Dudek he functions mainly as a reflector of his age, or as a kind of test-specimen that dramatically manifests the symptoms of a disease that would otherwise be more difficult to diagnose. As such he does not comment upon, or interpret, his age; instead, he is the object of commentary and interpretation. When Layton asserts the «totality of the self» against the «totalitarianism of the twentieth century,» the assertion stands in opposition to Dudek's view of the poet as an «incomplete» ego, with a distorted perception of «universal truth» or «objective reality.» And when Layton asserts that «the poet is a free man» it is important to remember that the poet, as Dudek often seemed to regard him, determined by consumerism, technology, history, and his own neurotic ego, is not free.³⁸

The main argument of Layton's «Foreword» to The Swinging Flesh is that the poet is «wedded» to «Reality . . . to Truth,» and that reality and truth cannot be fully comprehended without the presence of the Dionysian element. Reason, Layton seems to argue, deals only with «Appearance,» and it is «Appearance» that is «fertile

in invention, endlessly playful,» enticing the rational mind to fanciful fictions. It is the rational mind, not the creative ego, that is incomplete, that lashes out with malice and resentment against «life,» social and individual, in order to evade the knowledge that it has been deceived, that its constructions are absurd in a world of Becoming. The impression that Layton conveys is that the constructions of the allegedly rational mind, «stinking Chicagos in the Congo» and «dull monolithic Moscows and Leningrads,» are the manifestations of a perverse fiction, supporting a perverse ethic. In contrast to Dudek, Layton maintains that it is cold, critical reason that is incomplete, anti-social, destructive, and that the creative, Dionysian ego alone can restrain the excesses and fanatic delusions of the commissars and planners.³⁹

Dudek and Layton clearly developed contrary views of realism. For Dudek, realism became more and more metaphoric, the description of a subjective rather than an objective condition. Urban realism is specifically the subject of Dudek's essay, «The Poetry of the City,» 1968.⁴⁰ His discussion takes in a range of polarities and extremes, but the following passage seems to state his basic position:

Realistic poetry, we should note, is based on the figure of speech known as synecdoche - that is, of a part taken for the whole. In realism, by a process of selection and strong

emphasis, the rhetorical impression of truth or authenticity is vividly created. But this emphasis and selection results in a literary statement having all the personal bias, complexity and ambiguity of fable or fantasy. The synecdoche, in fact, serves as a kind of metaphor, disguised as mere literal depiction, because in synecdoche one thing stands for many things; and the imagery of realism produces the same artistic effects, of exaggeration, emotional catharsis, and metaphorical implication, as any other kind of literature.

To illustrate just how subjective urban realism can be, how it characteristically tends toward positive and negative extremes, Dudek compares a number of poems, among them a passage from Klein's «Autobiographical» and Layton's «The Improved Binoculars.» These poems illustrate the «polarization,» the extreme attitudes that poets infuse into an allegedly objective condition:

I chose this poem, «The Improved Binoculars,» because the title might lead one to suppose simply that a clearer view of reality was being conveyed through the improved binoculars. This is the assumption of realism. Here, actually, a passionately coloured view is presented. The poem is an extreme example of negative polarity, as Klein's poem is an example of the reverse, with its paradisaical imagery of dreaming «pavement into pleasant bible-land.» In Klein's poem, the negatively-charged «ghetto,» the «pavement,» the «slums,» the «gutter-scattered oats,» are wholly absorbed and transformed by the bible-land imagery. In Layton's poem the «steeple» and «lovers» are caught up in the fires of hell. The poem, in fact, is in three-line stanzas, with unmistakable echoes of Dante's Inferno.

Having virtually denied the 'reality' content of realism, Dudek attempts to restore a modest measure of objectivity

to the work:

But poetry, like other kinds of intellectual activity, makes no arbitrary sporadic judgments. A decent poetic statement needs to be supported by reasons, by evidence from experience and history, by admirable grounds in the author's temperament and character, and by significant harmony with other poems, before it can be considered justifiable, or before it can be praised as a relevant or a profound insight into reality. All things are possible in poetry, but only within the limits of authenticity. Our study of poetry becomes rewarding when we discover this kind of unity, superior validity and integrity in any piece of work.

The terms that seem to strike a censorial note are «decent poetic statement,» «admirable grounds,» «significant harmony,» «justifiable,» and «superior validity.» At best, these terms are vague, begging the question. At worst, they restrict and subordinate the creative act to the «superior validity» of accepted feelings, tastes, and ideas. The minute measure of prophetic authority that poetry retains after all this is evident in Dudek's closing sentence: «So poetry is not the least important of social facts, and the poet's voice may not be insignificant among the genuine prophetic voices.» This may be intended as understatement, but as such it is quite ineffective. The purpose of the whole essay, whether consciously or unconsciously, seems to be to reduce the prophetic voice of the poet to an endorsement of enlightened liberal opinion.

Layton's main purpose, in the «Foreword» to Balls

for a One-Armed Juggler⁴¹ is to argue that the 'objective' world, not the subjective ego of the poet, is monstrously demented. Where Dudek cautioned the contemporary poet against indulging the frustrations and excesses of the subjective ego, against infusing his «realism» with the extreme imagery of his own neurotic mind, Layton argued that, «because he is a prophet, the poet must take into himself all the moral diseases, all the anguish and terror of his age, so that from them he can forge the wisdom his tortured fellowmen need to resist the forces dragging them down into the inhuman and the bestial.» Against Dudek's image of the poet as a victim of his own neuroses, Layton presents an image of the poet who wills upon himself the diseases and neuroses of the 'objective' world created by commissars and planners. While Dudek's poet is acutely vulnerable to the moral diseases of the age, Layton's poet wilfully exposes himself to «the worst,» yet triumphs over the disease to «forge wisdom» out of the experience. He certainly suffers - «in silent anguish he will absorb the evil of his times, himself place the crown of thorns on his head» - but he is not reduced to simply a victim or a symptom of the modern malaise. Layton demands that poets must «teach» themselves to imagine the worst. Clearly, this implies a conscious effort, a conscious decision to undertake a task that goes against the grain. "In contrast, the poet as Dudek regards him all

too easily lapses into a neurotic state and projects «the worst» of his own imagination upon reality.

The issue is whether the poet writes out of sickness or health. As early as 1956, the issue was raised by John Sutherland in an essay entitled «Pegasus on Parnassus - or, The Oyster in the Ooze?»⁴² He quotes the following passage from a lecture by A.E. Housman:

I think that the production of poetry, in its first stage, is less an active than a passive and involuntary process; and if I were obliged, not to define poetry, but to name the class of things to which it belongs, I should call it a secretion; whether a natural secretion, like turpentine in the fir, or a morbid secretion, like the pearl in the oyster.

Sutherland then quotes another passage, by Hillaire Bellôc, to the same effect:

Verse is a slow thing to create; nay, it is not really created: it is a secretion of the mind, it is a pearl that gathers round some irritant and slowly expresses the very essence of beauty and desire that has lain long, potential and unexpressed, in the mind of the man who secretes it.

This, says Sutherland, expresses «a notion of the birth of a poem that is thoroughly typical of the twentieth century,» and, he maintains, «it is one of the most pernicious ideas that have ever been circulated, and one that is thoroughly destructive of poetry.» The danger of the idea lies in its half-truth - the impulse to poetic creativity is in a sense unconscious and non-

rational, but to reduce it to a physiological reaction is, to Sutherland, «ridiculous and degrading»:

Poetry is exuberant action - not a passive, involuntary process. Poetry is supreme well-being - not a state of neurotic discontent. Poetry may be signed with a flying hoof but not with the self-pity of the oyster or the tear-drop of its pearl.

Poetry is proud because it gives voice to the whole man in balance with his world. But, grab the poet in a false modesty, demean him to a watery blob, and this pride is twisted into arrogance. Oysters too taste glory in the depths of degradation. They wallow joyously in the ooze at the sea-bottom, see their isolation as the sign of their salvation, and nourish a twisted version of the theological truth that the last shall be first.

There are a few points in Sutherland's essay that might irritate Layton, but he would certainly agree with the main thrust of the argument. Dudek, on the other hand, throughout the 1960s, expressed a view of the poet and the poetic process that is very similar to the oyster in the ooze. The similarity extends even to the point Sutherland makes about the arrogant isolation of the poet. In «Poetry of the Sixties,» 1969,⁴³ Dudek attacks the «new barbarism,» the shift from «resistant modernism,» with its «powerful, elitist standards,» toward «a new type of popularism.» He is scornful of the new, wider audience for poetry, «the teen-age and hippie group,» and of the role of the publishers, particularly Jack McClelland, promoting their too-willing poets to the status of stardom.⁴⁴ The leaders of the new popularism

are Layton, Purdy and Cohen. They are the creations of the mass media, the products of «a blow-up culture,» «generous exploiters of sex as an entertainment come-on,» and the purveyors of «primitive realism - even 'stupid realism,' as Northrop Frye once called it - a nostalgia for the mud mixed with a hankering for lost divinity.» Dudek continues to regard Layton as representative of «a vulgar romantic misconception of the poet's role and method.» He presents a very bleak picture of the current 'ferment,' but predicts that «the popular will become more mediocre as time goes on - a highly desirable change, since the distinction between art and mass appeal will again become clear - and that good poetry will return to its minority audience, perhaps a smaller audience than ever before.» Dudek's candour is remarkable; he is surely one of very few literary critics who find the prospect of increasing mediocrity to be «a highly desirable change.» It is clear that Dudek's position has shifted considerably since the early 1950s when, in «Où sont les jeunes?» for example, he called for energy and «apocalyptic fantasies,» demanding that poetry break out of its stuffy confines and reach a wider audience. In Sutherland's words, «soon it is de fide with them that they must not cast their pearls before swine.»⁴⁵

Layton could be as sceptical about the new «ferment» as Dudek. His scorn is immediately evident in the opening

sentences of the «Foreword» to Periods of the Moon.

For several crazy reasons the writing of poetry has become immensely popular. It beats the taking of marijuana and lysergic acid as a coveted status symbol and is even more super than a beard to identify oneself as rebel and non-conformist.⁴⁶

Layton maintains that «authentic poetry will survive the inundation of sewage rushing from the burst mains of pseudo-poetry,» but he is clearly aware of some dangers, that «force and fraud still have a long lease to run.» Layton is also no less aware than Dudek that «the pseudo-poet thrives on the decay of values.» In the «Foreword» to The Shattered Plinths, Layton admits that many contemporary poets suffer from «painful mental disorders,» and he seems to concur with Dudek that these poets «provide us with many insights helpful for an understanding of the general disorder of our age.» However, he finds their work «illuminating only in small, indecisive patches.»⁴⁷ These are clearly not the «interpreters of the age,» the poets who «forge wisdom» out of their encounter with «the anguish and terror» of their age.⁴⁸ But, in contrast to Dudek, Layton finds these poets, «who go completely nuts and have to be hauled away to the loony bin,» worthy of more respect than the formalists, those who, «examining the shattered plinths of christianity and humanism, have reacted by embroidering the old texts more furiously than ever

or by emitting infantile shrieks that are to be taken as a measure of their pain and involvement.»⁴⁹

The Dionysian-Apollonian duality that is characteristic of Layton's vision is applicable to his understanding of the poetic process, but it is important to stress that the two elements are held in creative tension. One does not master the other. However, in their 'marriage', they both undergo a transformation. In Layton's account of the poetic process in the «Preface» to The Laughing Rooster⁵⁰ he insists that «the true poet is inspired; impelled, that is, by forces his will is powerless to summon or disperse.» But he rejects the Platonic notion that the poet is «an inspired dunce,» or the Freudian (Dudek) notion that he is «a grown-up infant wallowing irresponsibly in the region of Id.» Layton defines inspiration as follows:

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 or rhythm.

At the creative moment, «instinct becomes intelligence.»

An important difference between Dudek and Layton is that Dudek tends to regard form organically, while Layton regards it didactically. For Dudek, form is

something that grows out of a tradition, the result of experiment and innovation, but governed by definite organic laws. The relationship between experience and form is between something raw and something cooked, and the latter is clearly superior to the former. Hence, the apparent conflict between the experience of the subjective ego and the demands of objective or universal truth. For Layton, form is the means whereby the experience becomes known to the poet and is conveyed to an audience, and whereby it has its desired effect. The distinction between raw and cooked hardly applies. In the «Foreword» to «A Red Carpet for the Sun», Layton wrote:

The aesthete, nursing incurable ego-wounds, has the relationship down pat - life is the raw material for art! I can't persuade myself this is so. In my very bones I feel it isn't.⁵¹

This seems to be a strange view to ascribe to an aesthete; normally aestheticism represents a view that scorns any alleged relationship between experience and art. However, the term «raw material» clearly implies that experience is subordinate to form, and that it must be altered by form. In contrast, Layton's own accounts of the poetic process convey the impression that experience craves form. Hence, for Dudek form is a restraint; for Layton it seems to be a release.

In the «Preface» to The Laughing Rooster Layton

compares «craft» to a locomotive standing idly on the tracks. Inspiration is the switch that makes the wheels begin to move. This analogy obscures as much as it reveals. A more instructive analogy occurs in the following paragraph. Here craft is compared to «the scrubbing of a window pane to allow the sunlight to come through.» This clearly reveals the didactic emphasis of Layton's view of craft. The sunlight seems to represent the poet's experience or knowledge of the world, and the window pane seems to represent the form of the poem. The purpose of the scrubbing, polishing the form, is to better convey the experience to the audience.

Dudek and Layton still had many common opponents, particularly the Toronto-based mythopoeic poets and critics, but they regarded many of their contemporaries quite differently. Layton and Cohen are the poets Dudek most frequently and consistently attacks throughout the 1960s, but given his Pound-Williams bias, few poets get his full approval. In his «Open Letter to Louis Dudek,» Layton maintained that Dudek disapproved of any poet «who has any life evident,» that «even the smallest stirrings of vitality» were sufficient to provoke his censure. Among the younger poets whom Layton characteristically supports as «real poets,» poets who «risk» personal involvement, are Leonard Cohen, Purdy, MacEwen, Acorn, Nowlan, Mandel, Newlove, Moscovitch, Mayne, and Patrick Lane.⁵² Compared to Dudek's list of approved

poets, these poets represent a considerable range of technique, manner, geography, and social/political conviction.

The two critics diverge sharply in their appraisal of the Tish poets. Dudek regards their work as one of the most promising developments of the Pound-Williams tradition, but for Layton they represent the arid formalism he most detests. In «Forever Honeyless: Canadian Criticism» he mocks the «flatulent pseudo-poetry produced by Tish hopefuls,» and scoffs at Warren Tallman's notions about «composition by field» and «four degrees of stress.» In the «Foreword» to Periods of the Moon, Tish and Black Mountain poetics are described as a «new atrocity,» demonstrating «the arrogance of the rationalists and secularists among us.» A letter to The Montreal Star in 1969 attacks Warren Tallman and Robert Duncan specifically, and the Tish poets by implication. Tallman is attacked for his vacuous, pompous terminology, delivered in the manner of a «circus barker.» Duncan is simply dismissed as a «non-poet.»⁵⁹ Layton's most exuberant attack occurs later, in 1975. In the «Foreword» to New Holes in the Wall Layton distinguishes three different kinds of non-poets: Throwaways, Laryngeals, and Simple Simons. The latter term applies to the Tish poets:

They get their name because they make their nests on the West Coast, especially around

the precincts of Simon Fraser University. Though piping and trilling that they're modernists and anti-traditionalists, it is easy to detect behind their shrill noises an inverted academicism, or the smirking rationale for our accelerating depersonalization. Depositing their stale eggs in nests that are not theirs, these truly deserve the name of cuckoos. Their machine-tooled dismissal of emotion, eloquence and meaning as archaic humanism and «message-writing» - what in the name of assenpoopery is it but the latest version of that sterile gentility which has afflicted this country's literature from its earliest Prot beginnings?⁵⁴

Neither the Tish poets nor their Black Mountain forebears seem to present much of a challenge to Layton. In his public attacks, he is usually content with a scornful dismissal. However, in one of his letters to Pacey it is clear that his opposition is based on his didactic view of the function of poetry, and the formal implications of this view:

The Tishites have been screwed by an excessive interest in prosody and by the influence of Olson, Creeley, and Levertov. However, had Dayey, Bowering, et al been true poets they would have assimilated the influence and eventually found their own voice levels. But a poet is a teacher, and these have no doctrine in them. The desire to make fastidious bric-a-brac, all the coquettings with words and line-placements will not conceal the empty heart. If a man urgently wishes to improve the lot of his fellow-man, the quality of their lives, he'll discover or invent the means for reaching them - always pre-supposing he has the necessary talent with words, without which, of course, his good intentions will count for nil.⁵⁵

Among the older modern poets, Souster and F.R. Scott

are the two poets, Dudek regards most highly, for their poetry itself, and as models for the younger poets, and in «Poetry of the Sixties» Earle Birney is upheld, along with Scott, as «The most satisfying modernist of them all.»⁵⁶ Layton seems to have had little to say about Souster after his ambivalent review, «Crepe Hanger's Carnival.» The little that Layton has written about Earle Birney has been similarly ambivalent, particularly with regard to his more experimental work, but generally Layton has held him in high regard. About F.R. Scott, Layton has also written very little in his published prose, but there is a verse-portrait of Scott, and there are several comments in the correspondence with Pacey. They reveal a rather strong antipathy toward Scott. On December 12, 1956, Layton wrote to Pacey: «His love poems are among the saddest that I have ever read, telling of abnegation and restraint and withdrawal: no gaiety here, no release.» Layton seems to be repelled by Scott's reductive rationalism, by his subjection of 'instinct' to 'will,' but it is clear that Scott is also implicated in Layton's attacks upon «flabby socialists.» On June 6, 1964, Layton complained to Pacey that he could find «no feeling for life in the man.» He is the personification of «that gray, rationalistic goody-goodness that has undone the C.C.F. and now the N.D.P.» He has «a deep fear of life, a distrust of its unpredictable upsurges.» Because he lacks a «feeling for life» he

lacks insight generally: «Whenever F.R. Scott takes up a political position, all one has to do is to take up the contrary one and be proven right in the long run.» In another letter Layton describes an occasion in Scott's home, where A.J.M. Smith was also present. When Layton read his poem «Elegy for Marilyn Munro,» Smith wept openly, and declared it «the greatest poem written in this century.» But Scott «demured mildly.» Layton modestly observed that the century still had thirty-eight years to run. The point that Layton wishes to make with this anecdote is that, in contrast to Smith, Scott was too wary to allow himself to respond to the poem on an instinctual, elemental level. The portrait that Layton presents in the poem, «F.R. Scott,» is similar. Scott has charm and wit that «leaves you gasping / your delight,» but he has an «icy brain,» an intellectual weariness, that make his charm and wit seem a fearful defense against emotion.⁵⁷ The Dionysian element that Layton found lacking in Dudek during the 1960s, he found, not quite lacking, but utterly suppressed in Scott.

The quarrel between Layton and Dudek is usually regarded as a personal affair that should have been conducted privately. Michael Gnarowski, for example, referring specifically to Dudek's review of The Laughing Rooster in The Montreal Star, and Layton's reply, called it «an intemperate exchange of opinions which seems to have served neither the purpose of intelligent

controversy, nor the cause of Canadian poetry.»⁵⁸ Wynne Francis similarly regrets the public airing of the quarrel. In an article on Dudek, «A Critic of Life: Louis Dudek as Man of Letters,» 1964, she finds Layton's attack in «An Open Letter to Louis Dudek» confusing:

It is difficult, upon reading it, to decide just what Layton was objecting to, since his attack was made in a confusing fashion, on several different levels - personal, literary and ideological, to name a few. But it is clear that Layton treated Dudek as a traitor to a cause: Dudek appears as a professed realist turned intellectual, as a proletarian turned bourgeois, as a man of the people turned academic, and as a poet turned critic, among many other «infidelities.»⁵⁹

For Layton, these «infidelities» amounted to a betrayal of poetry. In 1964 it was not yet clearly evident that Dudek's criticism had undergone a shift. Francis hardly deals with Dudek's theory of neurotic creativity, but she does portray Dudek as a scientific neo-Arnoldian rationalist, and this is essentially what Layton had in mind when he attacked Dudek as an academic ideologue.

Pacey was also embarrassed and dismayed by the quarrel. On February 4, 1959, he wrote Layton that he was «sorry to see your creative energy being diverted into these literary squabbles which are so futile.» He charged Layton to «get on with the poetry and let your fellow poets get on with theirs.»⁶⁰ Layton replied that his quarrel with Dudek, and also his wife Stephanie, was not simply a matter of personal animosity:

My quarrel with Louis is a literary one; it's the same sort of thing I had with John Sutherland. I reject his point of view as vehemently as I did John's and for the same reasons. If it were to prevail it would stifle creative activity in this country. . . . My quarrel with Stephanie is of the same kind I have with all psychologists who step heavily into the field of literature. I detest the whole kaboodle. . . . I frankly regard her kind as a real danger to poetic activity.

The following day, February 6, 1959, Layton wrote two letters to Racey, defending his conduct in the quarrel. Layton clearly felt that some of his fundamental convictions about poetry were at stake:

What then do I see in Stephanie and Louis? In Stephanie, the psychologizing attitude that wishes to reduce every poem to a fragment of autobiography, of case history. That regards poets as gifted but crazy people. . . . Louis's 'embodiment' is more complex. . . . There was always in him a moralistic, puritanical streak: no more than John Sutherland was he ever able to open up to literature as pure experience. He must always, alarmed or confused, send for the generalizing intellect to let him know how he ought to feel when confronted by the novel and the dionysian. All my conscious life I have fought this attitude towards art, towards poetry. . . . I'll fight anyone who exalts reason above imagination and intuition; anyone who refuses to see that the creative process is supra-rational. It's the fellow whose fires have gone out or who never had any who wishes to pretend that the moralizing and generalizing intellect is supreme. In our time the creative fires are being leveled down on all sides, with all the little people happily lending a hand: social workers, psychologists, university professors . . . and the thousands of good-natured philistines who demonstrate again and again that while they may care for art, they can also live without it. 61

To Layton, Dudek's understanding of the role of the poet and of the poetic process seemed fundamentally contrary to his own understanding of the prophetic function of poetry. It was reductive, it subordinated the creative process to scientific rationalism, and it undermined the poet's claim to truth, his authority as a teacher, based on his unique perception and experience of reality. Layton's tendency toward «moralizing» was as strong as Dudek's, but Layton insisted that, for the poet, moral knowledge came directly out of the creative experience, while Dudek demanded that such knowledge must first pass muster before an enlightened, liberal understanding of psychology and society.

There was obviously a good deal of personal acrimony involved in the quarrel. Dudek's dismissal of some of Layton's finest work as «pure rubbish,» and Layton's caricature in «Mexico as seen by the Reverent Dudek»⁶² certainly seem unnecessarily vindictive, and do little to serve the cause of Canadian poetry. On the other hand, neither of them ever entirely lost sight of the merits of the other; for example, in a letter to Pacey, January 13, 1971, Layton complained that Dudek had been given a «raw deal,» being excluded from Geddes's 15 Canadian Poets: «Dudek has range and substance that the younger poets don't even try for.»⁶³ Undoubtedly, however, there were real and important issues at stake. It is unthinkable that Layton would have allowed views so fundamentally

opposed to his own, expressed by a poet/critic of Dudek's stature, to go unchallenged. It is tragic that the quarrel broke a close friendship. But in the process, important issues, that might otherwise have remained vague rumblings, were confronted, and their respective implications were demonstrated and debated. The effects of the quarrel were strongly felt by the younger poets in Montreal. According to Seymour Mayne, the quarrel «did help the younger writers to clarify their own views and poetics. And we became more independent». However, «the negative effect of the Dudek-Layton quarrel was that it disrupted the community of discourse which was so much a part of the Montreal scene from the days of The McGill Fortnightly onwards.» One of the results of the disruption was that McGill and Sir George Williams Universities brought in poets from Vancouver and «insidious new American literary hustlers» who promoted a kind of poetry «very much against the grain of the poetics of Scott, Smith, Klein, Sutherland, Dudek and Layton.»⁶⁴

Notes

- 1 Engagements, p. 83.
- 2 Engagements, p. 71.
- 3 Taking Sides, p. 73.
- 4 Engagements, p. 123.
- 5 Engagements, p. 116.
- 6 Engagements, p. 86.
- 7 Engagements, p. 91.
- 8 Engagements, p. 107.
- 9 Engagements, p. 106.
- 10 Engagements, p. 93.
- 11 Engagements, p. 86.
- 12 Engagements, p. 93.
- 13 Engagements, p. 105.
- 14 Engagements, p. 105.
- 15 Taking Sides, pp. 184-185.
- 16 Desmond Pacey, Letters to Irving Layton, March 10, 1959; October 21, 1959; November 25, 1964; December 28, 1962; June 19, 1963; April 30, 1963; and March 27, 1963. Irving Layton, Letters to Desmond Pacey, October 11, 1964; April 6, 1963; July 19, 1963; and August 9, 1963.
- 17 Layton, Letters to Desmond Pacey, April 6, 1963; July 19, 1963; and August 9, 1963.
- 18 Layton, Letters to Desmond Pacey, November 7, 1956; February 18, 1959; January 10, 1961; April 21, 1961; April 29, 1961; October 7, 1963; March 21, 1965; April 1, 1965; and February 27, 1961.

- 19 Desmond Pacey, Letters to Irving Layton, March 6, 1961; March 24, 1961; March 27, 1963; April 24, 1961; April 26, 1961; May 8, 1961; and January 5, 1962.
- 20 Layton, Letters to Desmond Pacey, February 7, 1959; February 16, 1959; April 1, 1970; April 22, 1970; and June 2, 1970.
- 21 Layton, Letters to Desmond Pacey, November 27, 1958.
- 22 Pacey, Letters to Irving Layton, December 1, 1958; March 12, 1957; May 27, 1957; July 4, 1957. Layton, Letter to Desmond Pacey, January 10, 1961.
- 23 Louis Dudek, «Où sont les jeunes?» in Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 24-25.
- 24 In «Layton Now and Then: Our Critical Assumptions,» 1956, Dudek defended Layton against his old detractors and against the mis-applied praise of his supporters new and old, including Smith and Pacey among others. In «Layton on the Carpet,» he claims that the «turning point» came in 1955. In «The Transition in Canadian Poetry» published a month or two earlier, he set the date at 1953. Seymour Mayne has noted the contradiction, and the irony «that Dudek rose to Layton's defense in 1956 at a time when he claims to have begun to disapprove of Layton's work.» See Irving Layton: The Poet and his Critics, pp. 8, 49-51, 77, and 89.
- 25 Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 114, 168, and 212-213.
- 26 «Forever Honeyless: Canadian Criticism,» 1966, in Engagements, p. 57.
- 27 «E.J. Pratt: Poet of the Machine Age,» 1958, and «The Transition in Canadian Poetry,» in Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 121 and 132-133.
- 28 Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 137 ff, 153 ff, and p. 214.
- 29 «Irving Layton - A Vicarious Rebel,» 1965, in Irving Layton: The Poet and his Critics, pp. 144-146.
- 30 See Tom Henighan, «Freedom and the Life of Poetry: An Interview with Irving Layton,» Journal of Canadian Poetry, 2, No. 2 (1979), p. 6; and Seymour Mayne, «Introduction» to Irving Layton: The Poet and His Critics, pp. 8-9.
- 31 Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 83-85.

- 32 Louis Dudek, «Patterns of Recent Canadian Poetry,» in Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 97-98 and 107-110.
- 33 «An Open Letter to Louis Dudek,» 1962, Engagements, pp. 175-181.
- 34 Engagements, p. 182.
- 35 Selected Essays and Criticism, p. 184.
- 36 Irving Layton: The Poet and his Critics, pp. 145-146.
- 37 The First Person in Literature (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1967), pp. 5, 11, 19, 21 and 23.
- 38 «Poets: The Conscience of Mankind,» in Engagements, pp. 48 and 50. See also Dudek, The First Person in Literature, pp. 11 and 21.
- 39 Engagements, pp. 88-94.
- 40 Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 240-251.
- 41 Engagements, pp. 104-118.
- 42 John Sutherland, Essays, Controversies and Poems, pp. 84-86.
- 43 Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 269-281.
- 44 Frank Davey has demonstrated that Dudek had a long-standing antagonism toward commercial publishers and the popular press. His career as a publisher and editor reflects his strong conviction that poets must control their own outlets, that poetry must shun popular success, or court a wider audience than that reached by the little magazines. See Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1980), pp. 19-21.
- 45 See Dudek, Selected Essays and Criticism, p. 25, and Sutherland, Essays, Controversies and Poems, p. 85.
- 46 Engagements, pp. 123-126.
- 47 Engagements, p. 129.
- 48 Engagements, p. 106.
- 49 Engagements, p. 129. Some of the points that are at issue between Dudek and Layton have been discussed by William Philips, «Artistic Truth and Warped Vision,» in The Idea of the Modern, ed. Irving Howe, pp. 97 ff.
- 50 Engagements, pp. 109-119.

- 51 Engagements, p. 85.
- 52 Engagements, pp. 179, 135, 137 and 197; Taking Sides, p. 86.
- 53 Engagements, pp. 57-58, 124-125, and 197-198.
- 54 Taking Sides, pp. 85-86.
- 55 Letter to Desmond Pacey, June 6, 1964.
- 56 Selected Essays and Criticism, p. 281.
- 57 Letters to Desmond Pacey, December 12, 1956, June 6, 1964, and September 17, 1962. Also, Collected Poems, p. 303.
58. Michael Gnarowski, «Of Prophets and Multiple Visions,» Yes, No. 13 (1964), pp. 1-3. See also Louis Dudek, «Peripatetic Poets Show Their Wares,» The Montreal Star (October 31, 1964), Supp. 8; and Irving Layton, Letter, The Montreal Star (November 4, 1964), p. 8 (also in Engagements, pp. 192-193).
- 59 Wynne Francis, «A Critic of Life: Louis Dudek as Man of Letters,» Canadian Literature, No. 22 (1964), p. 15.
- 60 Desmond Pacey, Letter to Irving Layton, February 4, 1959.
- 61 Letters to Desmond Pacey, February 5, 1959, and February 6, 1959.
- 62 Collected Poems, p. 300. The poem first appeared in Moment, 1 (1960), under the title «Mexico as seen by Louis the Lip.»
- 63 Letter to Desmond Pacey, January 13, 1971.
- 64 «Signature Marks and Burnt Pearls: An Interview with Seymour Mayne,» conducted by Kathleen C. Moore, Athanon 1, No. 4 (1980), pp. 8-9.

Chapter Four

Layton's Quarrel with Modernism

Dukek was not alone in finding Layton outside the pale of mainstream modernism. A number of critics have attacked him for abandoning the hard lessons of modernist poetics in favour of a more self-indulgent nineteenth-century rhetoric and a romantic egotism. George Woodcock finds an «undeniable tinge of antique poeticism» in Layton. He sees Layton the poet as «a traditional wild man according to conventions laid down early in the nineteenth century.» Layton, he says, suffers from «a romantic absorption with the poet as personality, while he has been too little absorbed by poetry as language.» According to Warren Tallman, Layton has failed to absorb the lessons first taught by Pound and Williams and extended by Olson, Duncan, Creeley and others. Layton had all the advantages; he had been «discovered early» by Williams, he had been featured in Origin 14, and he was listed as a contributing editor to Black Mountain Review. But all these advantages were lost on him: «it's clear that from Here and Now, 1945, on through to the present, he has concentrated upon himself as object and scarcely at all upon the language innovations necessary in order to enter Modernist writing.»

Moreover, Layton has been slow to appreciate the importance of «proprioception», defined by Tallman, in a footnote, as «sensibility within the organism by movement of its own tissues,» and in the text as «inner stars in their hidden courses.» The point is, Layton has failed to move beyond mere «perceptions;» he has remained fixed «on the surrounding world» and on «such commonplaces» as «man's vicious inhumanity to man.» In consequence of all this, Tallman concludes, Layton has been «of little or no direct use to west coast Modernists.» Similarly, Frank Davey allows that Layton does on occasion write «particularistic poetry,» but he is distinctly old-fashioned compared to Newlove, Bowering and Atwood because he continues to write essentially «message poetry.» According to Tom Marshall, Layton has been «a fine craftsman in a variety of traditional forms or derivations thereof,» but he has been «too traditional and eclectic and not exploratory enough.»¹

Among Layton's more supportive critics, there is a similar tendency to regard him as a kind of renegade with regard to literary modernism. In «Other Canadians and After» (1958), Milton Wilson exclaimed, «How can any poet be so dated with so much conviction?» In 1960, reviewing A Red Carpet for the Sun, Wilson found that the «unabashedly tender-minded» Layton suggests «everyone's portrait of a nineteenth-century poet.» Similarly, Eli Mandel, reviewing A Laughter in the Mind (1959),

discerned «the relatively uncomplicated portrait of Irving Layton as a Victorian poet» by virtue of his traditional forms and didactic purpose, but he adds that Layton comes by his Victorianism «honestly» - that is, by assimilating modernism and passing beyond it. Finally, the case against Layton as a modernist is categorically stated by Wynne Francis:

It is misleading to think of him as a modern poet. . . . His poems present few technical innovations. He is an eclectic, versatile stylist at ease with most traditional forms, but he is not given to the experimentation in verse which marks the modern poet. Rather, his rhetorical fullness, vivid metaphors and compelling rhythms place him well within the conventions of nineteenth-century English poetry.

It is Layton's poetry that is described here, but these comments apply equally to his criticism. For Mandel and Francis, Layton's affinities for nineteenth-century images of the poet, and nineteenth-century podium rhetoric, are not necessarily lapses. The impression they convey is that Layton's imagination, his passions, his «heroic vitalism,» are too large to be confined within the strictures of literary modernism.²

Among the younger poets of the 1960s, his stature was much greater than Warren Tallman seems to suspect, even though he may not have been regarded as an innovator in form and technique. Al Purdy, for example, flatly denies that Layton was in any sense a «technical

innovator.» He suggests, somewhat elliptically, that even those elements in Layton's work that may seem modern could just as easily be derived from any number of non-modern sources:

Layton picked up and developed his form and tone from fairly obvious sources, perhaps Gregory's translations of Catullus being the most easily apparent. The enjambments and juxtapositions of much modern poetry are, in Layton, conspicuous by their absence.³

This is a little overstated; there are enjambments and juxtapositions in Layton's work, but they are certainly minor features. The point is that there is virtually a consensus, both among his detractors and his supporters, that much of Layton's most distinctive work frustrates purely modernist expectations.

In his own criticism, Layton has become notorious for his contemptuous attacks on the «fathers of modern poetry.» At best, they are dismissed as irrelevant to the tasks confronting the contemporary poet, or, to the crises confronting contemporary society, and, at worst, they are attacked as pernicious obscurantists -- not so much because their poetry is itself obscure, but because they obscured the crucial social and historical forces acting upon contemporary society. One of Layton's most contemptuous attacks appears in the «Foreword» to Balls for a One-Armed Juggler:

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. His psychology, pre-Freudian; his political thought, pre-totalitarian; his metaphysic, non-existent, his well-meant babblings originate in a bourgeois-Christian humanism totally unable to account for the vilenesses enacted by men and women of this century. Does the aestheticism of Pound explain them? The sweatless paganism of Wallace Stevens? Pound's mid-Western blat about Social Credit? Eliot's weary Anglicanism? Yeat's fairy-tale Byzantium? . . . Frost's jaunty pastoralism? Auden's sensationalistic mishmash of psychoanalysis, Marxism, and Christianity? What a sour, boring joke!⁴

Against the «exhortations» of the «so-called fathers of modern poetry,» and their apologists, Layton maintains that the contemporary poet must reject «the limiting conventions» that «would keep him from dealing with the seminal conflicts of the age in which he lives.» This seems to be the main thrust of his attack upon modernist orthodoxy; that is, established modernist practice and theory had itself become a convention of 'poetic' discourse, removed from the language and concerns of contemporary life, imposing its own limits on the «freedom in the choice and treatment» of the poet's subject that Smith had demanded in 1928.⁵

It is apparent that several major poets since World War II have found the canons of modernist poetry more of a hindrance than a liberation. In The Art of

the Real, Eric Homberger sketches the development of Theodore Roethke's career as a poet in terms that suggest striking parallels to Layton's experience:

For most of his working life, Theodore Roethke was a teacher as well as a poet. The combination suited him exceptionally well, and he is remembered as a dedicated and sensitive teacher. His professional career effectively coincided with the canonization of Eliot as 'international hero', the incorporation of the modernist movement into the mainstream of English and American literature, and the arrival of the New Critics. Roethke watched all three developments with growing unease.⁶

In a 1948 letter to William Carlos Williams, Roethke complained about «the dreary text-creepers, the constipated agrarians and the other enemies of life.» Roethke attacked rationalism, the cult of impersonality, the obsession with nature morte, and called for energy and passion. This seems to have been particularly the case during the 1940s and early 1950s, in poems like «Praise to the End» («I believe! I believe! -- / In the sparrow happy on gravel»), and «I Cry, Come! Come!» («Reason? That dreary shed, that hutch for grubby schoolboys!»).⁷

Perhaps the most celebrated opponent of modernism was Pablo Neruda. As early as 1935, Neruda challenged modernist/symbolist orthodoxy with his call for an «impure poetry»:

A poetry impure as a suit of clothes, as a body, soiled with food, a poetry familiar with shameful, disgraceful deeds, with dreams, observations, wrinkles, sleepless nights,

presentiments; eruptions of hatred and love;
animals, idylls, shocks, negotiations,
ideologies, assertions, doubts, tax demands.

Impure poetry does not confine itself to exalted states of mind or to extraordinary perceptions; it accepts also the banal and the commonplace, «the threadbare sentimentality,» all the «forgotten human potentialities, impure, perfect, thrown away by literary men in their delusion.» «To be afraid of bad taste,» said Neruda, «is to be frostbitten.» After 1943, when Neruda joined the Communist Party, his poetic principles seem to become a little more astringent, but his attacks on the «great» European modernists become more extravagant, condemning «Gidean intellectualists, Rilkean obfuscators of life, specious existentialist jugglers, surrealist poppy flowers, bright only in your graves, europeanizing modish carcasses, pale maggots in the cheese of capitalism.» He regarded «obscurity of language» as «the privilege of a literary caste,» and demanded instead a «poetry like bread that can be shared by all.»⁸

Layton's development as a poet and critic has been very different from Neruda's, but there does seem to be at least a similar purpose in their attacks upon modernism. It should be clear that Layton was not yearning for the old certainties and established methods. While his critics argued or implied that his persona and poetics

represented a throwback to nineteenth-century romanticism, Layton constantly urged his contemporaries to move forward, even if that meant, paradoxically, reviving old, discarded forms. He has always insisted that «if a poet is not contemporary in feeling and expression he has no future.»⁹

In part, his attacks on modernism, particularly on English literary modernism, expressed his conviction that modernism was obsolete, that it had done all it could by the end of the 1930s. Some of the opposition Layton encountered in the 1960s, particularly from critics like Pacey and Dudek who had championed his earlier work, Layton attributed to their reluctance to see him move forward, to explore new questions and new methods.¹⁰

Among contemporary poets, Layton observed that «most of them are unaware that their excellent lines hopping with half-rhyme, slant rhyme, and internal rhyme, have become delicious archaisms.»¹¹

«Modernism» is rather difficult to define. Frank Davey describes it as «a massive movement which contained countless groups and subgroups: symbolists, surrealists, fauvists, futurists, dadaists, postimpressionists, imagists, vorticists, aestheticists, primitivists, constructivists and cubists.»¹² Similarly, Malcolm Bradbury and James MacFarlane, in their introduction to Modernism 1890-1930, describe the phenomenon as

an extraordinary compound of the futuristic and the nihilistic, the revolutionary and the conservative, the naturalistic and the symbolistic, the romantic and the classical. It

was a celebration of a technological age and a condemnation of it; an excited acceptance of the belief that the old régimes of culture were over, and a deep despairing in the face of that fear; a mixture of convictions that the new forms were escapes from historicism and the pressures of the time, with convictions that they were precisely the living expressions of these things.

Moreover, according to Michael Hamburger in The Truth of Poetry, «there is no such thing as a single modern movement in poetry, wholly international, and progressing in a straight line from Baudelaire to the middle of this century.»¹³

Nevertheless, «modernism» does seem to identify a specific historical phenomenon whose force is still evident among contemporary writers. It was not simply an anarchic hodge-podge of extreme opinion. Certain declarations of the modernist movement have acquired the status of «classics» even though they fail to account for the full spectrum of movements and counter-movements. One such well-known classic is Ortega y Gasset's The Dehumanization of Art, 1925, translated in 1948.¹⁴

Ortega regards modernism, whether in poetry, painting, or theatre, as a movement toward «pure art» or «absolute art,» and one of its basic tenets is «an art not for men in general but for a special class of men,» an art «which can be comprehended only by people possessed of the peculiar gift of artistic sensibility -- an art for artists and not for the masses, for 'quality' and not for hoi polloi.» One possessed of such a gift understands that «not only is grieving and rejoicing at such

human destinies as a work of art presents or narrates a very different thing from true artistic pleasure, but preoccupation with the human content of the work is in principle incompatible with aesthetic enjoyment proper.» He understands that «an object of art is artistic only in so far as it is not real,» and that the tendency of modern art is to effect «a progressive elimination of the human, all too human, elements» predominant in nineteenth-century art. In fact, during that century, «artists proceeded in all too impure a fashion;» they were too «realistic.» In contrast, the modern artist «is brazenly set on deforming reality, shattering its human aspect, dehumanizing it.» Moreover, he has little choice in the matter. All the «possible combinations» of the nineteenth-century genres have been «exhausted.» The artist and his gifted audience «have to accept the imperative imposed by the time,» and «obedience to the order of the day is the most hopeful choice open to the individual.» Furthermore, as «reality» or «the human element» is eliminated from poetry and fiction, «the metaphor assumes a more or less leading part in the poetical pursuit.» Formerly, reality was «overlaid» with metaphor «by way of ornament,» but now «the tendency is to eliminate the extrapoetical, or real, prop and to 'realize' the metaphor, to make it the res poetica.»¹⁵

For Layton, the Nietzschean yea-sayer, the objective

world was definitely not, in Mallarmé's phrase, a «brutal mirage.» In direct opposition to the alleged modernist programme of «dehumanization,» Layton maintained that «poetry is the most human activity,» fully engaging both the emotions and the intellect, the exalted and the mundane, the exotic and the commonplace, the public and the private, «all sides of human energies.»¹⁶ In the poem «Still Life» in Balls for a One-Armed Juggler, the «stranger» seems to be a disturbingly apt portrait of the classic modernist:

«The human's no longer interesting,»
said the stranger.
«God, nature, man,
we've exhausted them each in turn.»

Thereupon the «stranger» crushes the «joyful» linnet with a flat stone so that, almost surrealistically,

Only the fluttering wing was visible,
and it looked
as if the ridiculous stone
was attempting to fly.

The stranger comments: «That makes an exciting composition.» His is clearly a perverse aesthetic, the result of a personal world-weary resentment against joyful, living things, rationalized as an historical development.¹⁷

Ortega's formulation of «modernism» is perhaps representative of only one among several major lines of development, but it is a line that acquired a strong influence in England through the works of Yeats, Pound,

Hulme, Eliot and Joyce, and it was transmitted to Canada by the McGill Movement, especially by A.J.M. Smith. Neither Layton, Sutherland nor Dudek had any quarrel with the principal and immediate aims of early Canadian modernism, namely, to cleanse poetry of high-sounding banalities, of trivial sentiments charged with inflated emotionalism, and a precious disdain for the idioms of contemporary speech. These are the issues that contemporary criticism tended to dwell upon, and they continue to be emphasized in more recent criticism.

In the Literary History of Canada, Munro Beattie discerns a «threefold revolution» in the development of modern poetry in Canada:

first prosodic experiment -- free verse, conformity to none of the conventions of metre, line-length, stanza form; secondly, the use of language and imagery appropriate to a modern sensibility; thirdly, the enlargement of subject-matter to take in areas of behaviour, attitude and milieu neglected or shunned by most poets of the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. Experimental verse was the aspect easiest to argue about and to imitate. Free verse became a shibboleth among reviewers and newspaper correspondents.¹⁸

It is clearly not on this level that Layton, Sutherland and Dudek engaged the problems of modernism. Experimental verse, more colloquial language, and a wider range of subject matter were certainly part of the movement, but modernism also, in Canada and elsewhere, assumed a definite view of man in relation to the historical

evolution of Western civilization, and, more specifically, of modern society at a point of crisis. This is a little more evident in Frank Davey's account of early Canadian modernism, in spite of his blasé manner:

Smith, Scott, Gustafson, Page and Finch reflected many of the characteristics of early Anglo-American modernism: the rejection of humanism, of democratic taste, of commercialism, of technology, of verbal imprecision and excess, as well as a preference for the traditional over the contemporary, for order over chance process, for abstraction over realism, for literary detachment over advocacy, and for irony and symbol over emotional expressionism.¹⁹

When modernism came to Canada in the mid 1920s, it was already an evolved modernism, its basic tenets having been refined and reformulated by a generation of poets and critics. By 1940, some of those tenets had attained an almost canonical status, and required no further elaboration by Canadian modernists. Thus, when Smith spoke of «pure poetry,» «detachment,» «classical restraint,» «cosmopolitan tradition,» and «objectivity,» these terms were charged with a meaning beyond that conferred by their immediate context. Layton would have heard in them a moderate apology for the «dehumanization of art.»

In «The Transition in Canadian Poetry,»²⁰ 1959, Louis Dudek finds the «transition» to modernism in the pessimism and «negation» of poets like Robert Service, Drummond and Pratt, in the period between 1900 and 1925.

In contrast to Carman and Roberts, they confronted the blind, impersonal cruelty of man and nature. The «direct inheritor» of Pratt is Earle Birney, more pessimistic, more laconic, «but more laconic still, so allusive in fact that the intellectual premises now remain unstated, the dry austere poems of F.R. Scott and A.J.M. Smith are the first small bitter fruit of the tree of modernism in Canada.» Scott's «eternal lifeless processes,» as in his poem «Old Song,» are, for Dudek, the «clue» to the constricted metaphysics of the early modernists. The task confronting the next generation of poets was «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.» To this point Layton would be in essential agreement with Dudek, however much he may disagree with Dudek's conclusions toward the end of his essay.

Toward the end of Chapter One of this thesis, I suggested that Sutherland and Klein were Layton's most important allies against Eliotic, nature morte modernism. Sutherland's opposition to modernism became most strident in his later criticism, for example, in «The Great Equestrians» and «A Note on Roy Campbell.»²¹ In the latter essay, Sutherland maintains that «the famous split between imagination and reality is not operative in Mr. Campbell's work.» Instead he «persuades us that

the world of everyday is the world of imagination.» He is a didactic poet, Sutherland maintains, and he teaches, above all, that

there is no compromise with despair. Never blame it all upon the poor old war, never be prostrate because the times seem uncongenial. Do not ask the imagination to wage a holding action: set it out in the field, make it a fighting force.

However, Sutherland's opposition to early Anglo-American modernism is also evident in his earlier work. His criticism of P.K. Page, 1947, virtually denied that her poetry offered new insights into contemporary society or modern psychology; instead, Sutherland emphasized the distortions of reality effected by her «mole's-eye view of the world.»:

The glitter, the flippancy, and dash indicate in her case a self-consciousness unaccompanied by intellect or even sophistication. Ideas simply help her to locate her poetry in space and time.

In contrast, Sutherland found Earle Birney's early poetry both more spacious and more honest. «David,» he maintained, has «a warmth and intimacy and a personal note.» Unlike the cultivated mannerisms of P.K. Page, Birney's style «is an expression of something basic in the author's mind and personality.» It is inclusive rather than restrictive when confronted with the complexities of modern life: «Space and air are admitted into our contracted modernist poetry.» Sutherland's

early admiration for Pratt is similarly directed toward his spaciousness and energy, in contrast to «the modern poet, shivering in the solitude of himself.» Pratt «severs the last connection with our Canadian nightingales, but he vaults right out of the contemporary scene.»²²

There are certainly numerous echoes of Eliot's early poetry in Klein's work, yet the two poets seem totally different in their use of language, rhythms, traditions, and their social roles as poets. There is little of Eliot's nature morte or grim, impersonal objectivity in Klein's poetry, but he did use many devices derived from Eliot's Prufrock and Sweeney poems for his own satirical portraits, particularly in those poems that Miriam Waddington has dubbed the «radical» poems. Thus, somewhat ironically, the debt to Eliot is most apparent in those poems that illustrate the left-wing, social-realist thrust of Klein's work. In contrast to Smith's classicism, Klein's work is exuberantly baroque. In fact, Klein was rather too «clownish» for Dudek, and too fanciful for Sutherland, who regarded him as «'modern' in appearance only.»²³ Layton found other faults in Klein, but he found above all a liberating antidote to the constricted modernism of Smith, Scott, Page and Finch.

A number of observations can be made at this point. First of all, Layton, along with Dudek and Sutherland,

opposed the «dehumanization of art» represented, explicitly or implicitly, by the modernism of the McGill Movement and certain of the Preview poets, in fact, by most of the poets whom Smith identified as «cosmopolitans.» Ironically, the poets in the «native tradition,» including Pratt, Birney, Livesay and the First Statement group, seemed, in spite of their restricted localism or regionalism, able to accommodate a wider range of contemporary experience in their poetic visions, and imbue their work with a sense of spaciousness, energy, and urgency. The cosmopolitans, soaking up eclectic international influences, nevertheless seemed to remain confined to a relatively narrow line of modern experience and expression. There was clearly a social-realist basis to Layton's, Dudek's, and Sutherland's attacks on the cosmopolitans, but the purpose of realism was not simply to bring poetry down from some supposed height, to restrict it to «native» issues and landscapes, but to release it, to open it up to wider possibilities than those of the modern waste land.

Internationally, modernism has been widely attacked for reasons similar to those of the First Statement group, particularly for its problematic treatment of «reality.» One of the most formidable opponents of modernism has been the Marxist critic Georg Lukács. In The Meaning of Contemporary Realism,²⁴ his basic argument is that modernism attains its effects «by

evoking the disintegration of the world of man.» Where traditional realistic literature «had always assumed the unity of the world it described and seen it as a living whole inseparable from man himself,» the modernists introduce elements of disintegration, such as subjective time, and thus «the one natural unity becomes a conscious, constructed unity.» Lukács maintains that the consequent disintegration of personality «coincides with the ideological intention» to frustrate effective criticism of society. The modernist presents a confessedly distorted picture of reality under the guise of subjective experience and so evades his responsibility to place «specifically modern experience in a wider context, giving it only the emphasis it deserves as part of a greater objective whole.»

Several Anglo-American critics of modernism have also opposed the hermeticist tendencies of modernism, and its distortions of objective, empirical reality. The opposition has been substantial, if not overwhelming, including critics like F.R. Leavis, Yvor Winters, Frank Kermode, Edmund Wilson, Herbert Read, Susan Sontag, Donald Davie, Irving Howe and Philip Rahv. Together they represent a wide range of political and literary persuasions. The American social-realist critics, like Howe and Rahv, have been particularly critical of the modernist abnegation of political responsibility, but again much of their criticism begins with an attack on

the disintegration of reality in general. Irving Howe, for example, argues that «literary modernism had a way of cavalierly dismissing the world of daily existence.» He allows that modern literature «apprehended with unrivalled power the decline of traditional liberalism, its lapse into a formalism ignoring both the possibilities of human grandeur and the needs of human survival,» but it increasingly turned in upon itself. He regards modern poetry as an extension of symbolism where «the symbol ceased being symbolic and became, instead, an act or object without 'reference', sufficient in its own right.»²⁵ More recently, Gerald Graff, a neo-aristotelian critic, has made the disintegration of reality in modern literature and criticism the central theme of his book, Literature Against Itself. He argues that without a definite reference to the real world, all literature is capricious nonsense; without some assurance that the real world can be known -- however limited the knowledge -- literature is reduced to triviality. Graff argues specifically against the shift from «correspondence» to «coherence» criteria of truth, not only in speculative criticism but also in science and philosophy. The effect of the shift is to reduce all knowledge to fiction, and he points out that this «expansion of the concept of myth or fiction has the effect of reducing the literary theme to the status of a pretext.»²⁶

The growing international opposition to modernism

throughout the 1960s and 1970s generally supports the earlier contentions of Layton and the First Statement group. In Canada, Layton's quarrel with Smith and the early modernists may have «sounded particularly strident, gross, polemical, self-seeking,»²⁷ but in an international context his opposition appears perceptive and judicious. However, there is also a significant difference between the opposition of critics like Lukács, Howe, and Graff to the modernist treatment of reality and that of Layton and Sutherland. Among the international critics, there is a strong mimetic bias, and a strong urge to bring modernist «reality» into line with a left-liberal humanism. This became a major concern of Dudek in his later criticism, but it is much less prominent in Sutherland's work, and virtually absent in Layton's. One recalls that in the quarrel with Dudek, Layton strongly opposed any suggestion that the creations of the poetic imagination should be subject to the «superior validity» of rationalized empiricism. One also recalls that in his own poetry Layton has shown no hesitation to thrust upon the reader images as disorienting as any surrealist fantasy.

Moreover, Canadian modernism presented distinctive problems. Modernism had hardly gained a foothold in Canada when the 1930s brought a strong resurgence of social realism. In fact, early Canadian modernism, particularly in the early criticism of A.J.M. Smith,

began with a strong realist thrust. However, Smith's progress represents an anomaly; in the course of the 1930s and 1940s, Smith moved steadily toward an aloof Anglo-Catholic aestheticism while modernism elsewhere moved toward an engaged social realism. If Scott was a laconic waste-land modernist, he was also an effective social and political satirist. Birney and Livesay were both engaged in social controversy and political activism. The Preview group, under the leadership of Patrick Anderson, espoused a strong Marxist, early-Auden line. To protest that Canadian poets must address contemporary social and political realities would indeed seem gratuitous.²⁸ Certainly many of the early modernist concerns and postures became «irrelevant» at this stage. However, to Layton it still seemed that the world was being seen through a modernist filter, that a vague, unquestioned modernist aesthetic continued to disorient the contemporary poet's experience of reality. The Preview group could eclectically acclaim Eliot, early-Auden and Dylan Thomas as models, all at the same time. Furthermore, if the poets had moved somewhat beyond the aestheticism of early modernism, critics and English Departments had not.

One of the unquestioned tenets of modernism was that the contemporary poet laboured under unprecedented historical conditions. Commerce, science, technology, the break-down of religious belief, had all profoundly

changed the way the poet confronted the real world and related to his society. The most persuasive and influential form of this idea seems to have been Eliot's «dissociation of sensibility.» It assumes that at some point in the seventeenth century, a momentous socio-cultural shift occurred that fractured the unity of emotion and intellect, and ever since western civilization has moved inexorably toward the cultural wasteland of the twentieth century. According to Frank Kermode, the rapid and rather literal acceptance of this doctrine by poets and critics was remarkable. He offers two related reasons for it. One is that «it gave design and simplicity to history» and «explained in a subtly agreeable way the torment and division of modern life.» The other is that it represents «the most successful version of a Symbolist attempt to explain why the modern world resists works of art that testify to the poet's special, anti-intellectual way of knowing truth.» Kermode states that «the most deplorable consequence of the doctrine is that the periods and poets chosen to illustrate it are bound to receive perverse treatment.»²⁹

Another consequence of the doctrine is that it confirms the contemporary poet in his isolation and alienation. The poet is left with no other choice than to approach truth and reality obliquely, however highly he may acclaim concrete images and objective language. Moreover, a fundamental irony is built into the poetic

experience. It is robbed of its innocence. The doctrine tends to filter the poet's experience; and Layton might well have cited the too familiar images of cultural decline in Dudek's Europe as an example. Many of Layton's rages against «ideologues» are directed against the disorienting effects upon the poet's experience under the influence of such a doctrine. It imposes a «gap» between «rhetoric and experience.»³⁰

Along with «irrelevance,» the term that Layton characteristically uses in his attacks upon modern poets and critics is «invalidism.» Here again there is broad support for Layton's attacks among a number of critics. Georg Lukács attacked modernism for asserting «an abstract polarity of the eccentric and the socially average,» leading to a «fascination with morbid eccentricity,» a «glorification of the abnormal» and an «undisguised anti-humanism.»³¹ Raymond Williams has suggested that modernism failed modern society because of its exclusive emphasis upon extreme states of mind or consciousness:

There is great danger in the assumption that art serves only on the frontiers of knowledge. It serves on the frontiers, particularly in disturbed and rapidly changing societies. Yet it serves also at the very centre of societies. It is often through art that the society expresses its sense of being a society.³²

Lionel Trilling's response is more ambivalent, but he too acknowledges a «perverse and morbid idealism» in modern literature, and even Michael Hamburger finds

«there is no denying that a profound nihilism underlies the extreme aestheticism of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.»³³

On occasion, Layton could maintain that the poet's function is «to keep alive men's resources of sanity, humour and affection,»³⁴ and that too many modern poets had failed to perform this function; but characteristically his attack upon «modern invalidism» seems to be more discriminating than many of his contemporaries'. One recalls again that in the quarrel with Dudek, Layton resisted the notion that the poet is a sick, neurotic child whose distorted visions require the rectifying agency of reason, and he frankly preferred «poets who go completely nuts» to those who confine themselves to a safer sort of commentary (see preceding chapter, page 171).

The modernist disease that Layton's criticism focuses upon is more specifically a defensive, furtive, self-doubt, and a despairing impotence. The poet, at least the poetic persona, becomes less of an adversary and more of a chronic victim. Hence, Layton's «Advice for Two Young Poets»: «The idea's to drive them to madness and drink/ -- not yourselves.» And hence his contempt for the modern poet's self-pitying, and often self-satisfied, alienation from the modern society that he deems inherently and irrevocably corrupt. In the «Foreword» to The Swinging Flesh, Layton declares that the poet is not helpless:

To hell with moaning and whining, 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.

What especially appalls Layton is that whether the modern poets candidly display their sensitivities, guilts, and anxieties, or stoically restrain themselves in elegant, exquisite rhythms, they have little effect upon their imperturbable contemporaries: «the dull muttonheads» continue to «pick their teeth or mount their females.» The poet «should strike his head against the wall of men's ferocity and senselessness, but let him yell and curse; not whimper, not bleat.»³⁵ The main point of Layton's attack, therefore, is not that the modern poets have had a subversive effect upon their society, but quite the opposite: their «unlovely rhetoric of impotence» has permitted the genteel, 'enlightened' liberal-humanism of bourgeois society to remain virtually unchallenged by the darker vision of modernism. The result has been that the poet appears somewhat ridiculous to the more well-adjusted victims among his contemporaries, and quite harmless to the more ruthless victimizers.

Some of the complexes and paradoxes of the modernist disease were identified as early as 1927, by Laura Riding and Robert Graves in A Survey of Modernist Poetry:

As a generation writing in the limelight of modernism it has an overdeveloped historical sense and professional self-consciousness. It is mentally uncomfortable -- shrewd, nervous, suspicious of itself It is like a person between life and death: everything that would ordinarily seem serious to him now seems a tragic joke. This nervousness, this superior sort of stage fright, is aggravated by the fact that in the new synthesis of values -- even in the system that he is attempting to realize for himself -- the historically-minded modernist poet is uncertain whether there is any excuse for the existence of poets at all.³⁶

The modern poet has been acutely aware that the survival of poetry, of a great tradition of poetry, depends on him, and hence his «superior sort of stage fright» as he consciously plays before an audience not only of contemporaries but of past masters and listeners. He may well, like Prufrock, complain that he is poorly cast as Prince Hamlet, that he was «meant» for less demanding roles. And moreover, it is not a good age for heroic action. The lapsed condition of modern society is no longer redeemable, no longer responsive to the kind of poetry demanded of the great tradition, and any other kind is unworthy. The problem becomes aggravated by the poet's apprehension that if the age lacks heroic stature, he too is subject to its reduced capabilities.

Another paradox is that while the modernist poet is convinced he is living in a singularly 'bad' time, he is also aware that the traditional distinctions between good and bad have been undermined, that traditional 'good' is at best illusory, and almost by

definition inauthentic, tainted by greed, hypocrisy and resentment. Accordingly, Eugene Goodheart has observed that «the natural impulse toward immediate indignation or protest necessarily yields to a kind of resignation in the feeling that the enormities of contemporary life are not subject to the human will:» Georg Lukacs has made the same point; as the modernist writer «asserts the unalterability of outward reality . . . human activity is, a priori, rendered impotent and robbed of meaning.» According to John Sutherland, the contemporary poet is the victim of a «time» cult, a «determinism of the foulest sort» that «produces an art of the most passive sort.» The most striking quality of modern literature «is its despairing passivity,» to the point where «a writer is no longer a man but an environment.»³⁷ The decay and corruption of modern civilization is now regarded as an irreversible organic process, and therefore beyond the effective reach of the human will. Any reform becomes merely symptomatic of the disease in its later stages, and strenuous protest is quixotic. However, while the great modernists were bewailing the unalterability of the human condition, «evil and arrogant men,» Layton maintained, were making disturbing alterations at Gulag and Belsen.

In the «Foreword» to The Shattered Plinths, 1968, Layton seems to be summing up his case against the modernists:

I suppose what I chiefly have against the older poets and, for that matter, some of the contemporary ones as well, is their astonishing ignorance of the social sciences, an ignorance matched only by their political naïveté. It is this ignorance and naïveté, coupled with the psychological primitivism, which have already given much of their work a faded air.³⁸

«Social science» normally does not fare very well in Layton's criticism, either as a scientific discipline or a critical tool, so it seems that a more 'classic' sense of the term is intended here. It is not, primarily, the modernists' restricted knowledge of current sociological theory that accounts for their «ignorance» but their apparent lack of intuitive insight into how contemporary society works. Whatever political or sociological convictions the modernists did have, particularly the Anglo-American modernist poets, they are usually dismissed by Layton with a scoffing allusion to pastoralism or Anglo-Catholicism. It is perhaps significant that, with regard to Ezra Pound, Layton mentions his social credit theories much more often than either his support for Mussolini or his anti-semitism. It is not only the questionable political opinions and leanings of the modernists that concern Layton, but also an apparently deeper problem. The modernists could, with piercing ironic insight, honesty, and moral fervour, apprehend the spiritual vacuum and disoriented ego emanating from contemporary society, and the bankruptcy of its progressive liberalism and technological utopianism; but

they seemed incapable of bringing the same insight and honesty to their apprehension of contemporary ideological and political forces. Their acute sense of their own integrity, their radical poetic visions, their contempt for sham, and particularly for the shameful uses of language, seemed, paradoxically, little protection against amoral, low-brow, sloganeering political movements that too often flatly parodied their otherwise exacting idealism.

The extreme right-wing politics of so many of the early modernists have concerned other critics. To some extent, their conservative bias has been seen, as the result of their disdainful, anti-political aestheticism. Michael Hamburger attempts to deal generously with the modernists in this regard, but he acknowledges their weakness:

In a sense all the poets with Romantic-Symbolist attitudes have been non-political, in as much as their values have sprung from the imagination, and the imagination is too radical and utopian to adjust to political issues proper. Yet ever since Thomas Mann's Reflections of a Non-Political Man (1917), and his later reversal of its anti-democratic argument, it has been clear that to be non-political or anti-political at a time when «the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms» is almost inevitably to be conservative or reactionary.³⁹

Stephen Spender attempts to account for the conservatism of the Anglo-American modernists in his essay «Writers and Politics» (1967).⁴⁰ He too attempts to deal generously

with the alleged anti-politics that, in the cases of Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Wyndham Lewis and Lawrence in particular, seemed to lead inevitably toward fascism. He points out that their «shared vision of the greatness of the European past» implied «hatred and contempt for the present.» He suggests that when they attempted to integrate politics with their central poetic vision, that is, when they attempted to «carry forward the vision into action and propaganda, there is a good deal of peripheral mess, resulting from their search for political approximations to their love of past intellect, art, discipline and order.» Here Spender suggests that their attempt to integrate politics and poetry essentially failed, and hence their political crankiness and naïveté. In another passage, however, Spender seems to suggest a much closer relationship between their central poetic vision and their politics:

The awesome achievement of the earlier generation was to have created for their contemporaries a vision of the whole past tradition which had a poignant immediacy: giving shattered contemporary civilization consciousness of its own past greatness, like the legendary glimpse of every act of his life in the eyes of a man drowning [vide supra Riding and Graves]. Without the awareness of drowning, of the end of the long game, the apprehended moment could not have been so vivid. Thus the gloomy prophecies of the future, and the consequent weakness for reactionary politics, were the dark side of an intensely burning vision.

In a rather perverse way, the modernists seemed

to «aestheticize» politics.⁴¹ Spender concludes that what is distressing about the reactionaries is that «in the excess of their hatred of the present and their love of the past, they developed a certain cult of inhumanity.»

Spender does attempt to account for the reactionary politics of many of the major modernists in terms of their central poetic vision, and to the list of Eliot, Pound, Yeats, Lewis, Lawrence, Forster, and Woolf could be added Rilke, Hofmannsthal, Gottfried Benn, Stephan George, Wallace Stevens and others. The final effect of Spender's essay, however, is again to dissociate their politics from their central poetic vision, and so minimize the slur upon the greatness of their work generally. For Layton, such dissociation is much more difficult. Claiming as he does a more significant role for the poet in shaping contemporary society than Spender, Layton cannot be so tolerant of the political naïveté of the modernists, or acknowledge their greatness in spite of their politics. For Layton it is not sufficient to say that their poetic visions might have been all wrong, but out of those visions they made great poetry. First of all, it reduces the poet's vision to merely a useful illusion, and secondly, it again illustrates the kind of genteel liberal humanism that is determined not to confront the particularly «heinous» evil in modern society. Michael Polanyi has aptly pointed out that the

instincts and values that are revealed in modernist literature are not confined to that literature. They are not simply the product of an overwrought and isolated poetic imagination, but have responsive echoes throughout modern society. In his essay «On the Modern Mind,» Polanyi identifies a «tension between a positivist scepticism and a modern moral perfectionism» that has manifest itself in both art and philosophy and in politics. The effects have been, respectively, extreme individualism and totalitarianism. They both express the need for «the joint satisfaction of a belief in moral perfection with a complete denial of moral motives»:

A man looking at the world with complete scepticism can see no grounds for moral authority or transcendent moral obligations; there may seem to be no scope then for his moral perfectionism. Yet he can satisfy it by turning his scepticism against existing society, denouncing its morality as shoddy, artificial, hypocritical, and a mere mask for lust and exploitation. Though such combination of his moral scepticism with his moral indignation is inconsistent, the two are in fact fused together by their joint attack on the same target. The result is a moral hatred of existing society and the alienation of the modern intellectual. . . . All the moral fervour which scientific scepticism has released from religious control and then rendered homeless by discrediting its ideals, returns then to imbue an a-moral authenticity with intense moral approval.

The result has been «a moral nihilism charged with moral fury.»⁴²

Polanyi seems to support Layton's argument that the modern malaise must be understood in terms of politics

and psychology, not exclusively in terms of a quasi-mystical historical dynamism that mocked the possibility of moral action, let alone moral grandeur, in contemporary society. The moral perfectionism of the modernist poets was, in fact, tainted with a resentment that prevailed beyond their own poetic imaginations, and manifested itself in totalitarian politics. To fail to understand this, Layton maintained, amounted to «psychological primitivism.» The modernist poets were not aloof from their age but all too representative of its lapsed moral will. Layton was not, however, about to plead for «visions that we need,» for utilitarian moral uplift. The deep, ironic insights of the modernists into liberal, bourgeois morality could not be evaded. The «traditional christian and humanistic values which hitherto Western man had pretended to allow himself to be governed by» no longer demand even token adherence.⁴³ The task confronting the contemporary poet is to move beyond modernist valuations of good and evil as social strategies of resentment and class-solidarity. He must find the courage, vitality and will to forge contemporary images of good and evil that affirm life, heroism, compassion -- not bemoan and deny them. Because the modernist poets had failed in this, their role had been usurped by commissars and ideologues.

Stephen Spender's distinction between «moderns» and «contemporaries» helps to illustrate Layton's

position with regard to modernism.⁴⁴ The modern artist, according to Spender, «is acutely conscious of the contemporary scene, but he does not accept its values.» He cultivates «an extreme critical awareness» that implicates his own sensibility as a product of the age he deplures. He tends to see «life as a whole and hence in modern conditions to condemn it as a whole.» The «contemporary» writer, on the other hand, «belongs to the modern world,» and accepts «the historic forces moving through it.» He is critical; in fact, typically he is a revolutionary, but unlike the «modern» writer who rejects society as a whole, «the contemporary is a partisan in the sense of seeing and supporting partial attitudes.» He fights with the contemporary weapons of ideology and utilitarian philosophy, but «for different goals.» He does not regard his own sensibility as implicated in the general malaise, but sees himself standing «outside a world of injustices and irrationality.» Joyce, Lawrence and Eliot are moderns; Shaw, H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett are Spender's examples of contemporaries. He refers to the latter as «Voltairian egoists»: «What they write is rationalist, sociological, political and responsible.» When they criticize, satirize or attack, they do so «in order to influence, to direct, to oppose, to activate existing forces,» Their «faith» is that contemporary historical forces can be directed «into better courses through the exercise

of the superior social or cultural intelligence of the creative genius, the writer prophet.» The moderns lack such faith; in fact, they see it as part of the sickness of the modern age. Moreover, they are acutely aware of unconscious forces that «erupt» through the surface of rationalism. Their own faith is that «by allowing their sensibility to be acted upon by the modern experience as suffering, they will produce, partly as the result of unconscious processes, and partly through the exercise of critical consciousness, the idioms and forms of new art.» As prophets and sages, Shaw, Wells and Bennett see their responsibility to the welfare of society, and to progress toward a better future. Their work is not conspicuously experimental; they expect to be understood by a large public, and to influence the opinions of that public. In contrast, as artists and guardians of culture, the moderns see their responsibility to the integrity of their art and they expect to influence only a small but élite public.

It does seem that Layton is more of a «contemporary» than a «modern.» Layton's view of the «subversive» function of poetry, his determination to use poetry «to influence, to direct, to oppose, to activate existing forces,» and his image of the poet as a «writer prophet» all identify him as a «contemporary.» Moreover, Layton demanded that the poet address «mankind at large, not small coteries of the sensitive and frightened»

(«Foreword» to Balls for a One-Armed Juggler). In the «Foreword» to A Red Carpet for the Sun, Layton allows that he has his «share in the common disgrace,» but characteristically he resists the notion that the poet is implicated in the modern malaise in the sense that Spender says of the modern writers. The fact of his Jewishness, of his childhood experiences, his perspective from the «outside» as a member of a minority group within a larger minority, somewhat removed from the major artistic centres, are all at times referred to by Layton to account for his independence of the prevailing modern sensibility, but the main reason is simply that the poet as prophet must be, virtually by definition, «free» and «independent.»⁴⁵

However, in other respects Layton does not fit Spender's image of the «contemporary» writer. One recalls his verdict on Shaw in the «Foreword» to The Swinging Flesh: Shaw might have been «the brainiest writer who ever lived» but he lacked «the Dionysian element,» and consequently he was «already part of the problem.» The importance that Layton places upon the Dionysian element, as a vital force that undermines the neat arrangements of enlightenment humanism, and as the sine qua non of artistic creativity, aligns him with the main thrust of modernism. Lionel Trilling has observed that «nothing is more characteristic of modern literature than its discovery and canonization of the primal, non-

ethical energies.»⁴⁶ Layton's essentially tragic vision also aligns him with the moderns rather than the contemporaries, and moreover, implicit in the tragic vision is a profound scepticism of, and protest against, the confidence of enlightened humanism. One recalls, finally, Layton's declared «reverence» for one of the key figures of literary modernism, D.H. Lawrence.

I have argued that Layton, along with Dudek and Sutherland, opposed certain basic tenets and tendencies of modernism whose effect can be summed up as «the dehumanization of art.» Layton did resist the cult of impersonality and objectivity, the restriction of modern experience to the «eternal lifeless processes,» the disintegration of the experience of reality into «dissociated» images and sensations, and the displacement of the poet from interpreter of the age toward symptom of the age, to the point where, in Sutherland's words, «a writer is no longer a man but an environment» (see above, p. 213). However, Layton did not reject the whole modernist movement. He was certainly aware that the major modernist writers had looked deeply and courageously into the human condition, and created an art more intensely personal and disturbingly realistic than any that had gone before. With the great modern novelists and dramatists, Layton had no quarrel, but on occasion also the poets, even as they proclaimed their aloof aestheticism, are acknowledged to have profoundly

engaged the dilemmas of modern life.

From the late 1950s onward, another paradox emerges in Layton's criticism of many of his contemporaries. Alongside his scornful attacks on the early modernist poets, Layton attacks his contemporaries for failing to assimilate the dark knowledge of modernism, either as they polished the glittering surfaces of their tightly-wrought poems, as they agonized over their alienation, or cheerfully presided over the final spasms of disintegration. The «cosmopolitans» begin to appear more «Movement» than modernist, and the «natives» become «Loyalists.» The alignment of «worried,» «spare,» «neurotic» cosmopolitans and «sane,» «vigorous» and «direct» natives set out in the «Introductory Note» to Canadian Poems 1850-1952 begins to blur.⁴⁷ He continues to speak well of Pratt, Birney and Livesay, but not with a great deal of enthusiasm or conviction. Purdy, Hine, Avison and Reaney, whatever their differences, are all alike in their «peripherality.» They «haven't assimilated Nietzsche.»⁴⁸ When Layton reproached Klein for not having «known Satan» and denying the «strong wayward, bohemian streak inside him,»⁴⁹ he was essentially accusing Klein of evading a full confrontation with modernism. However, when Layton turns to Leonard Cohen, his admiration is expressed with enthusiasm and conviction, whatever lapses and excesses he may find in Cohen's work. Layton demands that the poet deal with «the

seminal conflicts» of his age, a task that the modernist poets, as he saw them, had not fully engaged, yet the assimilation of modernism seems to be a necessary step.

In the «Preface» to The Laughing Rooster (1964), Layton clearly regards Yeats, Eliot and Pound as giants towering over the contemporary university-poets:

Passion, ecstasy, adventure have departed;
in their place he [the contemporary
university-poet] has substituted meditative
calm, maturity, reasonableness, and so on:
all, all excellent virtues to be sure, but
not very likely to produce a Villon, a
Catullus, or a Yeats. Or if it came down
to that, even a T.S. Eliot.⁵⁰

In 1972, in a conversation published in The Golden Dog, Layton even acknowledged a «collective» influence of the moderns upon his work:

You can't escape Eliot's great work in dynamiting the Edwardian sensibility, and you can't escape Auden's versatility, his journalistic style and his frantic effort to be modern. His encompassing of Freud and Marx and Jung; modern psychology, politics, sociology, that sort of thing. One can't escape that, and one shouldn't try to escape.⁵¹

From the mid 1950s until at least 1967 there are many fundamental similarities between Layton's view of the modern condition and that of the earlier modern poets: his apprehension of «the demise of our bourgeois-Christian civilization;» his conviction that in spite of enlightened, liberal notions of progress, «corruption is the

norm and enslavement universal;» his contempt for the «Massenmensch»; his complete rejection of scientific and technological utopias; and his acute awareness of an historical dynamism radically affecting social, political and personal life. These are familiar themes in the works of Yeats, Eliot and Pound, and other modern classics.⁵² In «Poets: the Conscience of Mankind,» Layton describes the familiar modern ennui, the prevailing sense of weariness, angst, and joylessness:

Western civilization seems to be enveloped in a Freudian sadness that assumes the world has become one vast sanitarium or hospital. For a large number of people life has lost its savour and zest. The joy of living has gone out of them. They are weighed down by inexpressible cares and worries; they are repressed, anxious, and suffer from feelings of unreality.

It is for these frightened, alienated, unhappy people in Western society that the modern poet speaks. He is their voice, their champion and protector. For they, along with himself are the internal exiles in a world that has forgotten what it is to be human. Where is the love and laughter and joy that should be the birthright of every human being? Where, indeed, is that abundant life once promised to us by the founders of the Christian religion and by the architects of the liberal, progressive state? It lies in ruins on the analyst's couch.

The tone of this passage is, for Layton, uncharacteristically sympathetic, and the sympathy is clearly achieved at considerable effort. The language is somewhat flattened and there is a strong hint of impatience with all these «frightened, alienated, unhappy

people» and the modern poets who must champion and protect them. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that this is the condition that prevails, and in many of his critical writings during this period, his diagnosis of the root cause of the modern disease is again very similar to that of the earlier poets. In «Poets: the Conscience of Mankind» there seem to be distinct echoes not only of Lawrence but also of Yeat's breakdown of «unity of being»:

The pressures on the individual to simplify and abstract, to deaden his senses, and to live either in his brains or his loins, are becoming more and more difficult to withstand and resist Modern life, with its specialization and division of labour, is turning each of us into anatomical and physiological fragments -- a brain, an eye, a nose, an arm, or a leg. We must somehow find a way to reassemble these into a human being.

There are also the familiar attacks on «suffocating conventions» and «dishonest rationalizations and hypocrisies,» and against «abstractions» and moral up-lift in poetry.⁵³ These concerns are certainly not unique to the early modern poets, but the point is that Layton's diagnosis of some of the fundamental diseases of the modern age, its fragmentation, moral insecurity, spiritual bankruptcy, and morbid self-consciousness, had much in common with that of the early modernists.

W.B. Yeats inevitably appears, along with Eliot, Pound and Auden, in Layton's lists of the pernicious

moderns whose influence must be resisted. However, in the late 1950s Pacey began to notice the strong affinities between Yeats and Layton. In his review of The Bull Calf and Other Poems Pacey noted a «ripe bitterness,» and assured tone «akin to that of the later Yeats.» In his correspondence with Layton, there are frequent comparisons between the two poets -- their tragic vision, their heroic affirmation, the triumph of laughter and gaiety over despair, their earthy vitality, and their stature as «public» poets. On December 6, 1956, Pacey wrote to Layton: «You really write with authority now, with that sonorous finality that Yeats attained in his later work.» Pacey often quoted from a letter of Yeats's to Dorothy Wellesley, «Bitter and gay -- that is the heroic mood,» and claims this as «our motto.» In 1967, reviewing Periods of the Moon, Pacey claims that «throughout the book Layton exemplifies what Yeats called the heroic mood.» In response Layton wrote:

After all the guff Smith, and now a new offender, Margaret Avison, have written about Wm. C. Wm.'s and Pound's influence on me, it's enough to restore my faith in the intelligence of people when someone like you comes along and speaks of my affinity with Wm. B. Yeats. At last! I wrote Smith a long time ago that my favourites among the poets were Isaiah, Blake, and Yeats.⁵⁴

In part, at least, it appears that the quarrel between Layton and Dudek could be seen as Yeats and Lawrence against Pound and Williams. Layton is certainly

impatient with some of Yeats's poses, with his interest in the occult, his «fairy-tale Byzantium,» and his nostalgia for a more aristocratic age, but there are clearly distinctive qualities that set Yeats apart from most Anglo-modernist poets. Michael Hamburger has remarked that «despite his use of masks, Yeats did not allow an aesthetic system or any other to insulate him against shocks and disturbances and breakdown.» This is what Layton demanded of the modern poet, perhaps above all else. This is the kind of «realism,» the kind of poetry of personal experience, that Layton insisted upon, in contrast to Eliot's insulating «dissociation of sensibility» doctrine, or Dudek's appeals to higher Reason. Moreover, Hamburger argues that Yeats stands out among the modernist poets in that he was «on more intimate terms with the Zeitgeist, more responsive to the tremors and rumblings of a violent age,» and «more involved in the human condition generally,» by virtue of his political involvement with Ireland specifically. Conor Cruise O'Brien has made similar claims. Although there is no denying Yeats's fascist sympathies, and although he regularly retreated from political involvement to his aesthetic tower, «Yeats had a greater feeling than most other poets, most other writers, for what was happening in Europe, an understanding of the telepathic waves of violence coming from Europe which touched something in his own heart and character. 55

It would not be altogether erroneous to say that Layton was less appalled by the deeply held political convictions of Yeats, even though they definitely tended toward fascism, than he was by the comparatively glib opinions of many of his own contemporaries, whether of the Left or the Right (for example, Patrick Anderson). This argument has to be made very cautiously. Clearly, there is nothing that could deflect Layton's outrage with anything that is implicated in the Holocaust. Nevertheless, in his early essay on «Shaw, Pound and Poetry,» he is prepared to «forget their temporary love-affair with Mussolini and Italian Fascism» out of sympathy for their contempt for the «liberal pluto democracies that put forward shekel-chasing as the noblest purpose of man.»⁵⁶ In the 1960s, Layton was not so understanding, yet he still seems more infuriated by political naïveté than political wrong-sidedness.

In the «Introductory Note» to Canadian Poems 1850-1952, Patrick Anderson is gently mocked for attempting to combine «the rhythms of Dylan Thomas with the ideas of Karl Marx.»⁵⁷ It seems that neither Thomas's rhythms nor Marx's ideas were held with much conviction. This represents the opposite of Yeats's, and Layton's integration of politics and poetic vision. In an essay in Commentary, «What Happened in the 30s» (September, 1962), William Phillips attempted to account for the division he perceived between modern literature and a rational

and positive politics. He concluded that the division must be acknowledged and maintained:

A radical literature and a radical politics must be kept apart. For radical politics of the modern variety has really served as an antidote to literature. The moral hygiene, the puritanism, the benevolence -- all the virtues that sprout on the left -- work like a cure for the perverse and morbid idealism of the modern writer.⁵⁸

Although Layton found Yeats's politics appalling, he would surely find Philips's «anti-dote» even more appalling. It virtually denies that poetic vision is capable of informing a rational and humane politics. The responsible citizen has no need of the morbid modernists in formulating his political convictions. But in fact, it is Patrick Anderson's versified politics that is gratuitous, while the «idealism» of a poet like Yeats demands to be challenged and somehow absorbed into society.

I have attempted to illustrate some of the paradoxes and complexities of Layton's response to modernism, drawing extensively upon parallel and contrasting responses among contemporary critics. It seems that he has been remarkably deft at sensing or discovering those aspects of modernism that are necessary to his view of the poet's function in the twentieth century, and those that lead to a dead end. While he demanded that the poet «have the severity to descend from one level of foulness to another,» that he must «take into

himself all the moral diseases, all the anguish and terror of his age,» «absorb the evil of his times,»⁵⁹ he has resisted the many temptations of modernism to helpless despair, resentment, aloof aestheticism, or to some insulating ideology or doctrine. He has also resisted any form of wholesome or «hygienic» anti-modernism -- that is, any attempts to minimize the very real crisis of modern society that demanded the extreme, radical visions of modernist poetry.

I find I can best illustrate Layton's relation to modernism with another reference to Trilling's essay, «The Fate of Pleasure.» Trilling compares Dostoevski's Underground Man and Nietzsche's Overman as representative of two modern but opposing attitudes to the «specious good» of liberal, bourgeois ideology. The Underground Man is, by his own confession, charged with bitterness and resentment against the ideal of a rational, benevolent social order. He regards himself as an «anti-hero,» and thus becomes «the eponymous ancestor of a now-numerous tribe.» He is the «antagonistic opposite» of the «'sublime and the beautiful'»; not simply of philistine sublimity and beauty, but also that represented by «the Greek conception of the hero.» And neither is his bitterness directed at social injustice:

It is the essence of the Underground Man's position that his antagonism to society arises not in response to the deficiencies of social life, but, rather, in response to the insult

society offers his freedom by aspiring to be beneficent, to embody «the sublime and the beautiful» as elements of its being.

Trilling acknowledges that Nietzsche has at one point claimed that Dostoevski's Underground Man and his Overman «are the same person clawing his way out of the pit into the sunlight.» However, Trilling maintains that Nietzsche «is mistaken in the identification, for his own imagination is bounded on one side by that word sunlight, by the Mediterranean world which he loved: by the tradition of humanism with its recognition of the value of pleasure.» Thus, Dostoevski's presentation of modern spiritual life has been «definitive» in its influence on literature, while Nietzsche's has remained «marginal»:

Despite the scorn he [Nietzsche] expressed for liberal democracy and socialist theory as he knew them, he was able to speak with sympathy of future democracies and possible socialisms, led to do so by that element of his thought which served to aerate his mind and keep it frank and generous -- his awareness of the part played in human existence by the will to power, which, however it figures in the thought of his epigones and vulgarizers, was conceived by Nietzsche himself as comprising the whole range of the possibilities of human energy, creativity, libido. . . . It is because of this humanism of his, this naturalistic acceptance of power and pleasure, that Nietzsche is held at a distance by the modern spiritual sensibility. And the converse of what explains Nietzsche's relative marginality explains Dostoevski's position at the very heart of the modern spiritual life.⁶⁰

Layton, along with Nietzsche, is a «marginal» modern in this sense. Trilling acknowledges that his argument might seem somewhat «hygienic,» and the distinction between Dostoevski and his persona might be a little blurred, but the main point of Trilling's argument seems remarkably suited to illustrate Layton's precise relationship to modernism.

By 1960, modernism seems to have been widely regarded as a movement of the past. Critics began to engage in the exercise of fixing terminal dates. The current mood is evident in the title of Harry Levin's essay, «What Was Modernism,» 1960. The movement was now established; it was no longer avant garde. Layton had been saying this since the late 1940s in his polemics against the «irrelevance» of his contemporaries who continued to write in the studied mannerisms of Eliot, Pound and the later Auden. However, many of the critics who came to this awareness in the 1960s wrote with a tinge of regret and nostalgia as they contemplated successive decades of reduced vitality since the end of the 1920s. Just how established modernism had become is evident in the language of Levin's essay. He speaks of the «shock» of modernism, of the dramatic extensions in form and sensibility, and the acute awareness of the past, but his tone is almost comforting, full of assurances that periodic shake-ups and bizarre literary experiments are to be expected in the progress

of literature, that periods of consolidation must be followed by new breakthroughs and exciting outbursts of literary activity, which are followed in turn by decades of reaction and consolidation:

the manic Twenties declined into the depressive Thirties, which yielded in turn the war-interrupted Forties. If the counter-movement of the Fifties seems to have begun unpromisingly, we may take comfort in expecting the Sixties to proceed on a rising plane, looking toward the next watershed in the Nineteen-Eighties.

Public resistance to new forms and experiments is to be expected, but so, eventually, is public acceptance; the public «after all, in buying cars or clothes, accepts the principle of planned obsolescence.» Coupled with the modernist demand for the new, with «the sense of novelty,» was «the inherited sense of the past and the pleasures of retrospection»:

Every man, in his more thoughtful moods, is conscious of his overwhelming patrimony as heir of all the ages; and his relation to them takes the guise of an endless stroll among the masterpieces of their invisible museum.⁶¹

Thus the pressures of the modern age that demanded a radical break with established practice are reduced to shifts in fashion; a momentous shift in sensibility is accepted as a regular periodic occurrence; and the acute, ambivalent pressures of the past upon the modern sensibility can now be regarded as a leisurely «stroll among

the masterpieces of their invisible museum.»

For A.J.M. Smith, modernism had not ended; its progress had merely become more orderly. In his «Introduction» to The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse, 1960, Smith assessed the development of modern poetry in Canada as follows:

The modern spirit in Canadian poetry, indeed, has developed, as it has in Europe and the United States, in a progressive and orderly revolution. There was first a widening of the subject matter of poetry to include all aspects of contemporary life, especially the homely, the familiar, and the urban, treated realistically or with irony. . . . The free-verse movement in France and imagism in England and America were part of this technical revolution. Influences which made for simplicity and inclusiveness were felt by all serious Canadian poets after the First World War, and particularly by writers of the native tradition. . . . The poetic revival of the forties was continued throughout the fifties without diminution.⁶²

Both Smith and Levin seem worlds removed from the fierce paradoxes that troubled the early modernists. It does seem that modernism had indeed been domesticated, and, in the process, trivialized. In contrast, Layton may have been much more wary of certain aspects of modernism than either Levin or Smith, and much more eager to move beyond modernism, but the aggressive urgency of his criticism is more loyal to the true spirit of modernism.

Among the poets and poet-critics who began writing and publishing in the mid 1940s, the decline of modernism seems generally to have been regarded with greater

urgency. For Dudek and Souster, the 1960s called for a rapid shoring-up of the ruins of modernism, at least those principles of language and metrics developed by Pound and Williams, and marginally extended by Black Mountain and Tish. In «The Transition in Canadian Poetry,» 1959, Dudek is contemptuous of the «new orthodoxy» that has abandoned «modern poetry like an old playground,» but he acknowledges that «we are now in the Victorian stage of modern poetry; we are exploiting methods already tested and proved good.»⁶³ These protests are directed primarily against the anti-modernist criticism inspired by the Movement. In England, Charles Tomlinson, whom Eric Homberger describes as «the fiercest home-grown critic of the Movement and all its progeny,» also tried to shore up the ruins of modernism. In «Poetry Today,» 1961, he maintained that «the effect of those generations who have succeeded to the heritage of Eliot, Pound and Yeats has been largely to squander the awareness these three gave us of our place in world literature, and to retreat into a self-congratulatory parochialism.»⁶⁴

Dudek, Souster, Black Mountain, Tish, and Tomlinson, whatever their differences, all demanded innovation and experiment, and made distinctive contributions to late-modernist poetics, but more and more they seem to represent a rear guard. A new avant garde was emerging in the late 1950s and became a dominant force in the

1960s. According to Homberger, the «moment» of formalism in both England and America reached its peak around the mid 1950s. After the death of Stalin in 1953, the tensions of the Cold War began to slacken, and «the political and cultural climate began to ease.» This became evident first in films of social protest like The Wild Ones and On the Waterfront, and in plays like Miller's A View from the Bridge and Osborne's Look Back in Anger, and slowly the effects began to be felt in poetry:

It became marginally harder to carry on writing sestinas and madrigals. There was a contradiction between formalism and the age, which led to a questioning throughout the late 1950s of whether the traditional forms were any longer adequate for the real world in which the poets lived.⁶⁵

The «Beats» became increasingly prominent, particularly Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and the work of three prominent formalists of the 1950s, W.D. Snodgrass, Robert Lowell and Sylvia Plath, began to strike out in new directions. Ginsberg published Howl in 1956 and Kaddish and Other Poems in 1961; Gary Snyder published Riprap in 1959; Sylvia Plath published The Colossus in 1960; and Robert Lowell published Life Studies in 1959, where he proclaimed the end of the «tranquilized fifties» and demonstrated his determination to involve himself with the inner violence of the self and the outer violence

of the contemporary world. He became the accredited founder of the school of «confessional» poetry, whose most remarkable member was Sylvia Plath.⁶⁶

The shift that occurred in the late 1950s seems to require a new name, whether post-modernism, neo-modernism, anti-poetry, performance art, or neo-primitivism.

According to Bradbury and McFarlane,

We have now amassed, on the basis of the art or anti-art of the post-war period -- which at first appeared to be moving away from Modernism in the direction of realism and linearity -- a new entity, called Post-Modernism This is no longer simply a style; it is a form of post-cultural action, a politics. The avant-garde has entered the streets, and become instinctive or radical behaviour; and we are in a new stylistic age in which that enterprise of humanism and civilization Modernism attempted desperately to reinstate by its subversions of form is over. Anarchism and revolutionary subjectivism predominate; the uniqueness of the work vanishes; the cults of impersonality and pure form are done; art is either action, outrage, or play.⁶⁷

According to Monroe K. Spears, the qualities emphasized by the «new poetry» are «openness, simplicity, directness, colloquial language, the accents of psychological truth as the poet reveals (often) the most sordid, humiliating, and intimate details of his life.»⁶⁸

For Frank Davey, «modernism was essentially an elitist, formalistic, anti-democratic, and anti-terrestrial

movement.» He has no inclination to lament its passing:

The modernist collapse is evident throughout contemporary Canadian writing. The modernists -- Smith, Finch, Dudek, Webb -- who recoiled from the popular mechanical world of homogenous culture and looked toward a largely mythical world of stability, religious devotion, and artistic splendour, are here [From There to Here] noisily succeeded by the post-modernists -- Nichol, Coleman, Gilbert, Marlatt, Godfrey, Thomas, Matt Cohen -- who are equally revolted by the monolithic power structure of early twentieth-century technology but who see in its electronic offspring new means of asserting human variety and significance. The modernists sought to control both their world and their art; the post-modernists seek to participate in anarchic cooperation with the elements of an environment in which no one element fully controls any other. The modernist yearned to replace a Newtonian universe of mechanical certainty with a Ptolemaic one of medieval diversity; the post-modernist believes that the Newtonian has already been neutralized in the relativity theory of Einstein. To a modernist -- like Margaret Atwood in her role as critic -- lack of control over reality causes one to be a victim; to a post-modernist -- like Gerry Gilbert -- lack of control merely makes one a participant, the normal and desirable human condition.⁶⁹

These are all fairly cheerful notices, especially Frank Davey's. George Steiner offers a more sombre account of the collapse of modernism. In Bluebeard's Castle, Steiner maintains we are now living in a «post-culture.» Our art has recognized, with a vengeance, the lie of the old «high culture» and the specious glory of Western civilization. The enormous toll of two world wars, and, above all, of the Holocaust, have forced upon art the knowledge that our highest cultural values actively

collaborate in human cruelty:

Though in parodistic and ultimately negating forms, political bestiality did take on certain of the conventions, idiom and external values of high culture. And, as we have seen, the infection was, in numerous instances, reciprocal. Mined by ennui and the aesthetics of violence, a fair proportion of the intelligentsia and of the institutions of European civilization -- letters, the academy, the performing arts -- met inhumanity with varying degrees of welcome. Nothing in the next-door world of Dachau impinged on the great winter cycle of Beethoven chamber music played in Munich. No canvases came off the museum walls as the butchers strolled reverently past, guide-book in hand.⁷⁰

If the post-modernist breakthrough of the 1960s did indeed mark the end of decades of agonizing over the ruins of high culture, and the complicity of art in «political bestiality,» Layton should have welcomed the decade with a sense of triumph. The sixties seemed to proclaim the end of gentility in the arts, the end of the poet as «culture pedlar,» and the beginning, at last, of his engagement with the «seminal conflicts» of his age? The poet who perhaps best exemplifies the 1960s is Ginsberg. According to Eric Hømberger, he is «a millennial prophet, a celebrator, a radical spirit,» «a political poet, whose politics are visionary and despairing, and whose mysticism was intensely political.»⁷¹

Layton is strikingly absent from Frank Davey's «Introduction» to From There to Here. He is regarded, apparently, as neither a modernist nor a post-modernist. On this point, at least, Davey's criticism seems

perceptive; Layton is difficult to fit into either camp. He fits neither Davey's image of the modernist as high priest of art, nor his image of the gleeful post-modernist participant. Furthermore, Layton shows little evidence that he is aware of the profoundly liberating effect of the electronic media upon poetry, a central point in Davey's analysis. However, Layton is aware of the significance of the Holocaust and twentieth-century totalitarianism, and he may be regarded as post-cultural, if not post-modern, in that he regards the Holocaust precisely as a manifestation of «culture» and «civilization,» not as a temporary lapse into primitive barbarism.

In much of his criticism during the 1960s and early 1970s, he regards the collapse of modernism and modern culture as a fait accompli. In the «Foreword» to Balls for a One-Armed Juggler, Layton scoffed at the poet who continues to regard himself as a guardian of culture and language, «breathing spasmodically before the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.» More urgent tasks confront the poet:

There is a new, dark knowledge waiting to be assimilated into the minds and conscience 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 megalopoli.⁷²

In an article in The Montreal Star, 1963, Layton wrote:

«Man is a sick animal, and civilization is the disease he suffers from.»⁷³ This idea may come out of Freud's Civilization and Its Discontents, but it has become a central doctrine of post-modernism. In the «Foreword» to The Shattered Plinths, dated August 5, 1967, only a few weeks after the Arab-Israeli war, Layton's theme is «the geological fault separating yesterday from tomorrow.» Again, a distinctly post-modern tone of desecration pervades Layton's presentation of the dilemmas racking contemporary society. That «a new element was ushered into the human situation with World War II» is a fundamental fact «that utterly invalidates ninety-nine per cent of the world's literature of the past» and demands «a re-definition of human nature.» Layton is contemptuous of «the more sophisticated reader who believes with the new academics that the last word in modern poetry has been said by Messrs Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Frost, Graves, and Auden.» To Layton, their work appears «only a little less quaint than the sight of a horse-and-buggy at a frantic intersection in Montreal or Toronto. It is no longer adequate for the poet to attempt «to humanize people by trying to make them conscious of the evils of injustice and misery.» That had been tried, but there was no evidence of moderation in the human appetite for cruelty. Consequently, «the poet today labours under the constraint of finding other means.»⁷⁴

However, when Layton turns to the literature of the 1960s, which seems premised on many of the principles he had urged with increasing fervour since the mid 1950s, his response is, at best, guarded and ambivalent. When Frank Davey observes that among the post-modernists «much of the pessimism which characterized earlier Canadian writing vanishes,» or that «there is a strong sense of perverse excitement in the face of ominous objects and events,»⁷⁵ it becomes clear that Layton is not endorsing at least that kind of post-modernism.

In his 1962 lecture, «Prince Hamlet and the Beatniks» Layton can «derive hope» from the work of Corso, Ferlingetti, Ginsberg, and Kerouac because they demonstrate that the traditional ideals of American society - fellowship, love, freedom - «are still very much alive,» the more so because they have gone «underground.» He compares the Beats favourably with the followers of Stefan George in Germany after World War I. They represent «an authentic protest movement, in the great tradition of the American protest movements.» However, Layton also has serious reservations about both their moral motives and their effect upon corrupt, affluent American society:

The Beats, I feel, are too frightened, much too hysterical, too passive. They have given up the fight to produce the good society or to even think about it. And this, is their fatal weakness and their fatal limitation as writers.

The Beats constitute a «significant phenomenon,» and «we will neglect them only to our own cost,» but «to surrender to unintelligence, to surrender to chaos, to give frenzy and chaos the name of art, is a betrayal of art.» Towards the end of the lecture, when Layton holds the example of Hamlet above that of the Beats, Hamlet begins to appear much more like a modern than a post-modern. His reluctance to act even though he knows the 'time' demands that he act, seems particularly characteristic of the modernist poet. Layton contrasts this reluctance with the aggressive self-righteousness of the Beats who seem to have a greater facility to turn their minds and thoughts to bloody deeds, even while they «turn their backs on reform, or on the hope and possibility of reform.» Hamlet, the «true poet,» resists the temptation to «go underground»:

The writer cannot escape the obligation to think about the evil and corrupt society in which he lives. Like the Hebrew prophets he has to storm against them. He cannot go underground. He cannot exhibit cowardice. He may not retreat. He must constantly attempt to enlighten his fellowmen, his contemporaries, and point out to them the defects of their society, and never discourage them by saying, «This situation is well-nigh hopeless, there is nothing you can do about it. Human beings are so evil, so corrupt, there is no hope of recovery for them.» This is the difference between a Hamlet and a Ginsberg.⁷⁶

This is the kindest treatment that the Beats receive in Layton's criticism. In his other work, he is much

less patient with them. In an article, in the Vancouver Sun in 1960, he wrote: «Beatnik poetry is the expression of despairing impotence. Its savage nihilisms are related to the frustrations growing out of the cold war and the dignified donothingism of the Eisenhower era.» In «What Canadians Don't Know about Love,» Layton attacks the modern age that «has bred narcissism, hysteria, anxiety, beatnikism;» that is, beatnikism is a symptom of the problem, not a measure against it. In the poem, «On Rereading the Beats,» their «megalomania, narcissism, hysteria, effeminacy» almost leads him to prefer the «Eton boys & eunuchs of England.» The Beats have vitality, but «Consider the animation of a garbage heap in mid-August: its seethe & flow of maggots.»⁷⁷

Several critics have maintained that post- or neo-modernism represents a capitulation to the moral, social and aesthetic wilderness of contemporary society. Eugene Goodheart maintains that

the heroism of the earlier writers was precisely in the effort of resistance: moral, religious, aesthetic. With a large portion of contemporary literature, it is as though there were no left-over energy for resistance. The imagination is totally committed to the experience of disintegration: it is in conspiracy with the destructive tendency of modern life and 'teaches' us to accept it with an almost perverse pleasure.⁷⁸

In The Decline of the New, Irving Howe laments the fact that we are entering «a new phase in our culture, which

in motive and spring represents a wish to shake off the bleeding heritage of modernism and reinstate one of those periods of the collective naif which seem endemic to American experience.» Howe's admiration for the earlier «great modernists» has been cautious and discriminating, but he clearly prefers them to the neo-modernists. He has some sympathy with the «impulse to shake off the burdens and entanglements of modernism,» but the neo-modernists have fallen considerably short of producing a joyous, life-affirming body of work:

What strikes one most forcefully about a great deal of the new writing and theater is its grindingly ideological tone, even if now the claim is for an ideology of pleasure. And what strikes one even more is the air of pulsing ressentiment which pervades this work, an often unearned and seemingly inexplicable hostility.

As Frank Davey's account (quoted above) perhaps illustrates, the ressentiment of the neo-moderns can be quite gleeful, but, according to Howe, that glee does not proclaim their triumph over the dark knowledge of the early modernists, only their evasion of it:

The great literary modernists (to cite but one instance) put at the center of their work a confrontation and struggle with the demons of nihilism; the literary swingers of the sixties, facing a nihilist violation, cheerfully remove the threat by what Fielding once called «a timely compliance.»⁷⁹

The undercurrent of ressentiment that Howe detects in contemporary literature has also been noted by Trilling,

although he detects it in certain earlier modernist works as well. He suggests that «nothing is more characteristic of the literature of our time than the replacement of the hero by what has come to be called the anti-hero, in whose indifference to or hatred of ethical nobility there is presumed to be a special authenticity.» Trilling illustrates the point with reference to the protagonist of Diderot's Rameau's

Nephew:

Although he envied anyone at all who had access to the creature comforts and the social status which he lacked, what chiefly animated him was envy of men of genius. Ours is the first cultural epoch in which many men aspire to cultural achievement in the arts and, in their frustration, form a dispossessed class which cuts across the conventional class lines, making a proletariat of the spirit.⁸⁰

Hints and echoes of similar critical judgments are scattered throughout Layton's work in the 1960s and 1970s. Layton does not need to be told where to find resentment. But in contrast to resentful nihilism, Layton holds out the hope of modest reform. Toward the end of the «Foreword» to The Shattered Plinths, after making his argument for the «complete collapse of the traditional christian and humanistic values,» Layton «cautions» the reader against nihilistic despair:

On no account should any of my poems be construed as an apology for acts of nihilistic violence. The latter is the madness

I see spreading with frightening speed across a world torn by racial, national, and ideological conflicts.

Layton continues to insist that it is possible for contemporary man to direct his egotism «into less apelike manifestations»: «Men will never create a world flowing with milk and honey or even one that will provide all its inhabitants with the minimum conditions for their physical and moral health, but they ought to be able to keep it reasonably clear of poisonous weeds and polluted waters.» Layton's moral demands seem moderate and realistic compared to the «moral perfectionism» that Polanyi noted as characteristic of the modernists. In «Prince Hamlet and the Beatniks» Layton suggests that the outraged modern American writer, «offended by the contrast» between the exalted ideals and the debased daily reality of American life, «loses, perhaps, a necessary perspective on his own people because he is judging his own people as only God has the right to judge them.»⁸¹

When Layton turns his attention to Canadian writers in the 1960s, he still seems to regard academic formalism as a much greater danger than beatnikism, particularly in response to Dudek's attacks on the neurotic excesses of his contemporaries. One reason that poetry in Canada has shared only marginally in the hysterical antics of the Beats is that the Canadian poet, Layton maintains, has a definable national audience:

There is a sizeable community, literate and literary; knit together by the CBC; by national periodicals like the Canadian Forum and Tamarack Review; by common interests and curiosities, and now by the well-publicized activities of the Canada Council. This is the poet's primary audience and it keeps him on his mettle. Nothing like this group, cohesive and discerning, exists in the United States; and for the poet who lives and writes in Canada, this makes all the difference.

Consequently, the Canadian poet «may feel alien, but not alienated»:

And because he feels himself to be neither ignored nor ineffectual, he has no need for adolescent tremors and tragi-comic posturings; for exposing his beard and his sensitive, flayed skin to pity or ridicule; for the unlovely rhetoric of impotence.⁸²

The other major difference that Layton finds between Canadian and American poetry is that «Canadian poets have an interest in personality which seems to have completely disappeared from contemporary American poetry.» In an article in The Montreal Star, 1969, Layton makes a similar claim, after denying that Canadian poetry is any longer merely derivative of American and English poetry:

It is in its poetry, even more than in its painting, that Canada finds expressed the unique flavour of its collective experience. With a voice of surprising range and resonance, this poetry speaks with compassion and depth. In a world that has gone nearly psychotic, it speaks with the lucidity of Canada's own mountain streams and it speaks sanely. If I were asked to characterize its most abiding and distinguishing quality by a single word that word would be «humanity.»⁸³

Perhaps Layton's most eloquent and moving tribute to the «humanity» of Canadian poetry is the foreword to Love Where the Nights Are Long, and perhaps the foreword together with the whole anthology can be regarded as a kind of critical protest against the humiliating, nihilistic, confessions of contemporary poetry «in the more advanced countries in the world.» Layton seems to suggest that the very survival of love in the hostile environment of vast, cold, prudish, materialistic Canada itself represents a considerable triumph of the human spirit:

Canadians plead for compassion, as no other people on earth. . . . This is a cold country. Cold with snow and frost that have entered into the bloodstream and packed ice around the heart; cold with fear, ignorance, repression, denial. . . . And yet Canadian poets have written some of the best love-poetry in the world.

Layton clearly presents this as a triumph over the «age» that,

in the great centres of civilization, has bred narcissism, hysteria, anxiety, beatnikism; it has filled nostrils with the unmentionable odours of death, and increased the egocentricity of the individual whose first concern today is with himself and his own survival. Think of those sprawling megalopoli whose monstrous, unstoppable advance converts fields and healthy forests into acres and acres of neurotics. Love cannot grow in this wreckage of human hopes, this junkyard; only psycho-analysis can, to explain why it doesn't.⁸⁴

More and more, in the course of the 1960s, Layton seems to have come to the conclusion, that Canada «has produced

the most substantial body of poetry in the-English-speaking world since the end of World War II.»⁸⁵

However, if Canada has been spared some of the nihilistic antics of many American poets, the 1960s did see the «flourishing» of the mythopoeic school of poetry, and this school became one of the major targets of Layton's critical attacks.

The poet whom Layton particularly championed during the 1960s was Leonard Cohen. In 1962, Layton was outraged that Cohen had not received the Governor General's Award, and throughout the decade he defended him against Dudek's attacks. In response to Dudek's review of Flowers for Hitler, Layton declared Cohen «without doubt the most talented, the most promising young writer in this country today,» and compared «the humour and surrealist fantasy» of his performances during a recent reading tour to «Oscar Wilde at his best.»⁸⁶ Unlike Dudek, Layton did not begrudge Cohen's stardom; however, Layton does occasionally seem to worry about Cohen's apparent nihilistic tendencies, his introverted «black romanticism,» his immersion in the «sensationalism of the disintegrative experience,» as Sandra Djwa has described his work.⁸⁷ Layton's poem, «Portrait of a Genius» is in tribute, but there are a few phrases that seem a little ambiguous, suggesting a surrealist imagination that has lost contact with the world. In his later «ruminations,» Layton still maintained that

Cohen was a «true poet,» but he was «unhappy about where Leonard is at now.» Cohen, Layton suggests, is in danger of capitulating to the «immense hunger for high sounding banality and cliché,» which is «the other side of the coin» of the idealism of his young audience. Layton would like to see «more hard thinking about the real problems that we confront in our civilization.»⁸⁸

I have attempted to show that among the many controversies, paradoxes and contradictions of modernism, post-modernism, and «beatnikism» -- with their conflicting doctrines of aestheticism, moral perfectionism, revolutionary action, elitism, populism, invalidism, humanism -- Layton seemed to have a remarkable talent for acute, surefooted critical judgment, drawing support where he could for his vision of the poet as a prophet and a teacher, and resisting whatever threatened to compromise this vision. In the process he acquired a profoundly realistic understanding of the poet's vocation in contemporary society, and took a position that is remarkable for its courage. A passage toward the end of the «Foreword» to The Shattered Plinths perhaps best sums up his position:

The plinths of christianity and humanism lie shattered and useless, their broken surfaces possible stoops for doves and pigeons. Whether we like it or not we must continue along the road indicated to us by the Enlightenment even though it has led through the fires of Bergen-Belsen and Hiroshima.⁸⁹

Notes:

- ¹ See Irving Layton: The Poet and his Critics for the following: George Woodcock, «A Grab at Proteus: Notes on Irving Layton» (1966), pp. 159-160; Warren Tallman, «Wonder Merchants: Modernist Poetry in Vancouver During the 1960s» (1974), pp. 246-249; and Frank Davey, Review of The Collected Poems of Irving Layton (1972), p. 207. See also Tom Marshall, Harsh and Lovely Land, p. 74.
- ² See Irving Layton: The Poet and his Critics, pp. 72, 94 and 61-62. Also Wynne Francis, «Irving Layton,» Journal of Commonwealth Literature, 3 (July, 1967), p. 37; and «The Farting Jesus: Layton and the Heroic Vitalists,» CVII, 3, No. 3 (1978), pp. 46-51.
- ³ Irving Layton: The Poet and his Critics, pp. 149-150.
- ⁴ Engagements, pp. 104-105, and 108.
- ⁵ A.J.M. Smith, Towards a View of Canadian Letters, p. 169.
- ⁶ The Art of the Real, p. 107.
- ⁷ Selected Letters of Theodore Roethke, ed. Ralph J. Mills, Jr. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), quoted by Homberger, The Art of the Real, p. 107. See also Straw for the Fire: From the Notebooks of Theodore Roethke 1943-64, ed. David Wagoner (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972), pp. 181 and 207.
- ⁸ Pablo Neruda, «Sobra una poesía sin pureza,» in Caballo Verde, (Madrid, 1935); and Canto general V, (Mexico City, 1950). Quoted by Hamburger, The Truth of Poetry, pp. 221-224.
- ⁹ «By Way of an Introduction,» Poems for 27 Cents (1961), Engagements, p. 95.
- ¹⁰ See Taking Sides, pp. 211-213; and Letters to Desmond Pacey, October 29, 1958 and November 27, 1958.

11 «Foreword,» Balls for a One-Armed Juggler, in Engagements, p. 104.

12 Frank Davey, Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1980), p. 159.

13 Malcolm Bradbury and James MacFarlane, «Introduction» to Modernism 1890-1930, ed. Bradbury and MacFarlane (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 46; Michael Hamburger, The Truth of Poetry, p. 27.

14 José Ortega y Gasset, The Dehumanization of Art (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948). Selections from the title chapter, «The Dehumanization of Art» are included in The Idea of the Modern, ed. Irving Howe, pp. 83-96. All of the passages I have quoted are found in Howe's selections.

15 The number of pertinent essays and detailed studies of literary modernism is legion, but it seems that sooner or later many of them quote Ortega. His account of the modernist contempt for reality, although he may express it in phrases most appropriate to the late-nineteenth century in France, illustrates one of the problems of modernist poetics and criticism that seems to have remained crucial. The German critic Hugo Friedrich, for example, in The Structure of Modern Poetry, 1967, again stresses the «destruction of reality,» the commitment to «a process of dehumanization,» the denial of the «objective world» and the disintegration of the poetic persona. The modernist emphasis upon the concrete, upon objects, Friedrich regards as all part of the programme of denial and disintegration:

One of the many variants of dehumanization is a poetry whose contents consist exclusively of objects. And the choice of extremely insignificant objects is as characteristic as the omission of any sort of qualification.

Friedrich cites the poetry of Francis Ponge, a contemporary French poet, as an example of a poetry that seems to have no content other than «objects» - bread, door, shell, cigarettes. These are hypnotically stamped upon the consciousness of the poetic persona, but

the capturing 'I' is fictive, a mere conveyor of language. And the language is anything but realistic. It does not really warp the objects but either paralyzes them or imbues naturally dumb objects with such a bizarre

life that a ghostly unreality springs forth.
And the human element is also omitted.

Friedrich's account of modernism is very similar to Ortega's but his illustrations are much more extensive, and, while his purpose is explicitly apologetic, his tone is a little more ambivalent. See The Structure of Modern Poetry, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974) pp. 21f, 48f, and 135. Friedrich is extensively quoted by Hamburger in The Truth of Poetry, pp. 27-29. His translation of the passage on Ponge's 'object' poetry seems little more apt than Neugroschel's: «The ego that captures them is fictitious, a mere carrier of language. This language, however, is anything but realistic. It does not so much deform things as make them so inert, or impart so strange a vitality to things inert by nature, that a spooky unreality is created. But man is excluded.»

- 16 Taking Sides, pp. 213-214.
- 17 Collected Poems, p. 138.
- 18 Munro Beattie, «Poetry 1920-1935,» Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English, ed. Carl F. Klinck, 2nd edition, vol. 2 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 235.
- 19 Frank Davey, Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1980), p. 160.
- 20 Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 124-133.
- 21 «The Great Equestrians,» in Essays, Controversies and Poems, pp. 76-84; «A Note on Roy Campbell,» Northern Review, vol. 6, no. 1 (April-May, 1953), pp. 17-20.
- 22 Essays, Controversies and Poems, pp. 106, 95-96, and 166.
- 23 Dudek, Selected Essays and Criticism, p. 132; Sutherland, Essays, Controversies and Poems, p. 138. It should be noted that Sutherland's observation was made before the publication of The Rocking Chair.
- 24 Georg Lukács, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, trans. John and Necke Mander (London: Merlin Press, 1969), pp. 39-51.
- 25 Irving Howe, The Decline of the New (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970), pp. 17-21, and 218.

26 Gerald Graff, Literature Against Itself (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); pp. 153-154.

27 Eli Mandel, Irving Layton, p. 14.

28 According to Ken Norris, modernism in Canada developed in three stages: the first stage covers the 1920s and 1930s, identified with «Anglo-aestheticism,» Smith, Scott, and The McGill Fortnightly. The second stage occurred during the 1940s. It is associated with Contemporary Verse, Preview, and First Statement, and described by Norris as «Social Realism's First Phase.» The third stage began in the 1950s with the founding of Contact and extends into the 1960s, described by Norris as «Social Realism's Second Phase.» See «The Role of the Little Magazine in the Development of Modernism and Post-Modernism in Canadian Poetry,» pp. 278-281. Another account of the development of modernism in Canada, also from a Montreal perspective, appears in «Signature Marks and Burnt Pearls: An Interview with Seymour Mayne,» Athor 1, No. 4 (1980), pp. 6-16.

Furthermore, F.W. Watt maintains that by the mid 1930s, literary theory had swung away from «escapist» or «pure» subjective art «towards a conception of art as propagandizing for or at least symptomatic of social revolution.» See «Literature of Protest» in Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English, ed. Carl F. Klinck, first edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 470. Similarly, Richard F. Hornsey has documented the strong tradition of social commitment among modern Canadian poets, evident in the «little magazines,» beginning with New Frontier in the mid 1930s: «Thus the proletarian poetic of New Frontier initiated an interest in the social function of poetry and the social responsibility of the poet which with modifications has continued to be a most important characteristic of modern Canadian poetry down to the present day.» See «The Function of Poetry and the Role of the Poet in Canadian Literary Magazines from New Frontier through Delta.» Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1975.

29 Frank Kermode, «'Dissociation of Sensibility': Modern Symbolist Readings of Literary History,» in Modern Poetry: Essays in Criticism, ed. John Hollander (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 318-325. The essay appeared in Romantic Image, 1957.

30 See Ken Sherman, «An Interview with Irving Layton,» in Essays on Canadian Writing, 10 (Spring, 1978), p. 11.

31 Georg Lukács, «The Ideology of Modernism» in Issues in Contemporary Literary Criticism, ed. Gregory T. Polletta (Boston: Little Brown, 1973), pp. 714-724.

32 Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution (London: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 47.

33 Lionel Trilling, Beyond Culture: Essays on Literature and Learning (New York: Harcourt Bruce Jovanovich, 1965), p. 73; Michael Hamburger, The Truth of Poetry, p. 29.

In Chapter I, note 17, I noted that Layton had endorsed the criticism of Hamburger and George Steiner. He has also endorsed Howe, Trilling, and Alfred Kazin: «Absent from the national scene have been the Alfred Kazins, Lionel Trillings, Irving Howes, critics who might have laughed them [the genteel Canadian critics] out of existence along with their mothballed pieties. Canada has yet to produce a critic to shake it loose from its vast reserves of corn starch.» See Layton, «Open Letter to PCR,» Poetry Canada Review (Spring, 1981), p. 13.

34 From an article in the Vancouver Sun, August 13, 1960, reprinted in Taking Sides, pp. 94-96. See also Letter to Desmond Pacey, January 10, 1961.

35 Collected Poems, p. 241; Engagements, pp. 91 and 85.

36 Laura Riding and Robert Graves, A Survey of Modernist Poetry (London: Folcroft Library Editions, 1971, first published in 1927), p. 227.

37 Eugene Goodheart, The Cult of the Ego: The Self in Modern Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 7; Georg Lukács, «The Ideology of Modernism,» in Issues in Contemporary Literary Criticism, p. 726. See also Lukács, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism, p. 51; John Sutherland, Essays, Controversies and Poems, p. 81.

38 Engagements, p. 131.

39 The Truth of Poetry, pp. 83-84.

40 Stephen Spender, «Writers and Politics,» in Partisan Review, vol. 34, no. 3 (Summer, 1967), pp. 359-381.

41 Walter Benjamin has remarked that whereas Communism «politicizes art,» Fascism «aestheticizes politics.» See Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1968), pp. 243-244. Quoted by Michael Hamburger, The Truth of Poetry, p. 93.

42 Michael Polanyi, «On the Modern Mind,» in Encounter, vol. 24, no. 5 (May, 1965), pp. 12-19.

43 «Foreword» to The Shattered Plinths, Engagements, p. 128.

44 Stephen Spender, «Moderns and Contemporaries,» in The Struggle of the Modern, pp. 71-78.

45 Engagements, pp. 83 and 108.

46 Beyond Culture, p. 17.

47 Taking Sides, p. 81; Engagements, pp. 76-78.

48 Letters to Desmond Pacey, November 13, 1956; February 16, 1962; April 28, 1962.

49 Engagements, p. 26; Letter to Desmond Pacey, December 12, 1956.

50 Engagements, p. 119.

51 See Taking Sides, p. 211.

52 Engagements, pp. 82, 83, 91-93, and 106.

53 Engagements, pp. 48-49.

54 See Desmond Pacey, «A Group of Seven Poets» (1956) in Essays in Canadian Criticism 1938-1968 (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1969), pp. 112-121; Letters to Irving Layton, November 26, 1956; December 6, 1956; July 4, 1957; November 21, 1957; November 22, 1957; March 10, 1959; March 16, 1959; Review of Periods of the Moon, Fiddlehead, 71 (Spring, 1967), 69-72. Irving Layton, Letters to Desmond Pacey, November 7, 1956; November 9, 1956; March 12, 1959; March 21, 1959; March 30, 1959; March 31, 1959; July 8, 1962. Echoes of Yeats occur frequently in Layton's poetry and prose. Layton's stilts in «Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom» may be compared to Yeats's in «High Talk;» the rhythm and language of Layton's «The Skull» may be compared with Yeats's «The Fisherman;» and the following passages from Layton's «Ruminations» and Yeats's «A General Introduction for my Work»:

Layton: There is always a difference between the man who goes into the washroom and the man who writes a poem. There is a difference between the man who chews his meat, picks his teeth, pats his infant's head, and the fellow who goes into the privacy of his room and writes a poem about the day's activities. In a sense the poet is the fuller man, or the completer man, the man more in control of experiences and events, because art is a kind of control and a kind of evaluation of experience.

Yeats: A poet writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it be, remorse, lost love, or mere loneliness He is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete.

See Layton, Collected Poems, pp. 316 and 491; and Taking Sides, p. 188; W.B. Yeats, Collected Poems (London: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 485-486 and 167; Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 509.

⁵⁵ Michael Hamburger, The Truth of Poetry, pp. 89 and 92; Conor Cruise O'Brien, «Yeats and Irish Politics,» in The Idea of the Modern, ed. Irving Howe (New York: Horizon Press, 1967), p. 316.

⁵⁶ Engagements, p. 36.

⁵⁷ Engagements, p. 77.

⁵⁸ Quoted (disapprovingly) by Lionel Trilling, Beyond Culture, pp. 72-73.

⁵⁹ Engagements, pp. 104-108.

⁶⁰ Beyond Culture, pp. 63-68.

⁶¹ Harry Levin, «What Was Modernism?» in Varieties of Literary Experience, ed. Stanley Burnshaw (London: Peter Owen, 1963), pp. 307-329.

⁶² Towards a View of Canadian Letters, pp. 17-21.

⁶³ Dudek, Selected Essays and Criticism, p. 122.

⁶⁴ Eric Homberger, The Art of the Real, pp. 102 and 74; Charles Tomlinson, «Poetry Today,» in The Modern Age, vol. 7 of The Pelican Guide to English Literature, ed. Boris Ford (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), pp. 458 ff.

- 65 The Art of the Real, pp. 133-134.
- 66 See Eric Homberger, The Art of the Real, pp. 167-217; Michael Hamburger, The Truth of Poetry, pp. 267-287; C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson, «Literary Criticism» in The Twentieth-Century Mind, 3: 1945-1965, pp. 452-455.
- 67 «The Name and Nature of Modernism,» in Modernism, pp. 34-35. The name and nature of post-modernism is a complex and controversial issue. However, there already seems to be a body of classic texts on the subject; some of them are: Bernard Bergonzi, ed., Innovations: Essays on Art and Ideas, 1968; Ihab Hassan, The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett, 1967, and The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature, 1971; George Steiner, Language and Silence: Essays 1958-1966, 1967, and In Bluebeard's Castle, Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture, 1971; and Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation, 1967.
- 68 Monroe K. Spears, Dionysus and the City, p. 236.
- 69 Frank Davey, From There to Here (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcepic, 1974), pp. 20-21.
- 70 George Steiner, In Bluebeard's Castle. Some Notes Towards the Re-definition of Culture (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), pp. 51-74.
- 71 Homberger, The Art of the Real, p. 133.
- 72 Engagements, pp. 106-108.
- 73 Taking Sides, p. 98.
- 74 Engagements, pp. 127-132.
- 75 From There to Here, pp. 22-23.
- 76 Taking Sides, pp. 50-62.
- 77 Taking Sides, p. 95; Engagements, p. 100; Collected Poems, p. 310.
- 78 Eugene Goodheart, The Cult of the Ego, p. 4.
- 79 Irving Howe, The Decline of the New, pp. 255-259.
- 80 Beyond Culture, p. 22.

- 81 Engagements, pp. 130-131; Taking Sides, pp. 54-55.
- 82 Taking Sides, pp. 95-96.
- 83 Taking Sides, pp. 200 and 77.
- 84 «What Canadians Don't Know about Love,» Engagements, pp. 98-103.
- 85 Taking Sides, p. 77.
- 86 Letter to Desmond Pacey, April 12, 1962; Engagements, pp. 192-193.
- 87 See Sandra Djwa, «Leonard Cohen: Black Romantic,» in Poets and Critics, ed. George Woodcock, pp. 179-190.
- 88 From The Laughing Rooster, 1964, in The Darkening Fire, pp. 130-131; Taking Sides, pp. 205-206.
- 89 Engagements, p. 131.

Chapter Five

The Quarrel with Northrop Frye and Historicism

In the course of the 1950s and 1960s, Northrop Frye rose to international eminence as a literary critic, and became the pre-eminent critic in Canada. Fearful Symmetry appeared in 1947, The Anatomy of Criticism in 1957, and throughout the 1950s, Frye contributed the annual survey of Canadian poetry in the «Letters in Canada» issues of the University of Toronto Quarterly. Layton quickly became aware of Frye's commanding presence, and on several occasions he paid generous tribute to Frye's «brilliance.» Writing to Pacey in 1956, Layton had high praise for Fearful Symmetry, and in another letter, in 1958, he wrote to Pacey that he had read The Anatomy of Criticism «with awe.»¹ In a letter published in the Canadian Forum in 1957, Layton paid homage to Frye as «a truly great and creative mind.» In the 1960s the tributes lapse, but in 1972, in the «Preface» to Engagements, Layton again acknowledged Frye as «a literary titan,» and in 1975, in the article «My Troublesome Compatriots,» he included Frye among the small «handful» of «intelligent and perceptive reviewers» deserving of the poet's «warmest thanks.»²

Frye was not particularly receptive to Layton's work during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Reviewing The Black Huntsmen in 1952, Frye claimed that most of the book was the work «not of the poet in him, but of a noisy hot-gospeller who has no real respect for poetry.» Love the Conqueror Worm, 1953, seemed, to Frye, to consist largely «of what one has come to recognize as Laytonese - forced language and flaccid rhythm.» Around 1955 Frye began to discover some real merit in Layton's work. Reviewing In the Midst of My Fever, Frye found evidence of «a poetic mind of genuine dignity and power.» In 1956, he still finds The Blue Propellor «an obstacle race for the sympathetic reader, a dark tunnel of noisy dullness,» but in The Cold Green Element he concedes that the surrealistic fantasy «is not irresponsible or a mere playing with verbal patterns, because the distortions of the poetic imagination are geared to the distortions of society.» Moreover, the poems are written with «humour» and «technical competence.» By 1957, Frye is prepared, however reluctantly, to proclaim Layton «the most considerable Canadian poet of his generation.» The reluctance is apparently due to Layton's «posing,» to «the sense of too insistent a speaking voice,» and to the strident exposition of Nietzschean and Lawrentian themes. Frye seems aware that much of Layton's strength as a poet comes from «a direct reaction to experience,» but this does not seem to be the kind of strength he

most admires in a poet, and consequently he reads the work of apparently less «considerable» poets like Jay Macpherson and James Reaney with a more willing enthusiasm.³

It is clear that Frye and Layton have a good deal of respect for each other, but it is equally clear that there are fundamental differences in their conception of poetry and of the function of criticism. The most prominent difference concerns the importance of the poet's direct experience in the poetic process. For Layton, direct experience is the very stuff of poetry, to which craft, language, structure, form, rhetoric, are all subordinate, however necessary they may be in realizing the experience; for Frye, direct experience is at best incidental, and at worst an unfortunate egocentric distraction from the structural meaning of the work.

Frye declared his position as early as 1943, when he debunked what he called «the Ferdinand the Bull theory of poetry»:

This theory talks about a first-hand contact with life as opposed to a second-hand contact with it through books. . . . American even more than Canadian poetry has been deeply affected by the clash between two irreconcilable views of literature: the view that poets should be original and the view that they should be aboriginal. Originality is largely a matter of returning to origins, of studying and imitating the great poets of the past. But many fine American poets have been damaged and in some cases spoiled by a fetish

of novelty: they have sought for the primitive and direct and have tried to avoid the consciously literary and speak the language of the common man. As the language of the common man is chiefly commonplace, the result has been for the most part disastrous. And here is one case where failing to achieve a virtue has really warded off a vice. There has on the whole been little Tarzanism in Canadian poetry.⁴

By 1943, Layton had published very little poetry, so the above passage is not specifically directed at his work. However, Preview was founded in 1942 and First Statement in 1943, and although neither is mentioned specifically by Frye, the controversies between them seem to lurk in the background, and he is clearly partial to the Preview group. Moreover, there are certainly many similarities between Frye's early criticism of Canadian poetry and that of A.J.M. Smith. They are both anxious to define the «identity» of Canadian poetry, to trace its general thematic development, to examine its relation to British and American culture, and to the Canadian landscape. They both admire elegance, polish, and sophisticated wit. Although Layton acknowledged Frye's stature as a critic, in his early criticism Smith and Frye are often condemned together; for example, in a letter to the Canadian Forum in 1956, Layton maintained that «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.»⁵

There are, however, significant differences between Smith's criticism and the early criticism of Northrop Frye. While Smith's affinities tended toward Eliot and the New Critics, Frye has always had a distinct antipathy toward them. He has been impatient with the restrained, austere, classicism of the Anglo-American modernists, while his own affinities have tended toward the nineteenth-century romanticism they had disparaged. Most of the «Polemical Introduction» to The Anatomy of Criticism, with its scornful treatment of the Eliotic «tradition,» first appeared under the title «The Function of Criticism at the Present Time» in the University of Toronto Quarterly, as early as October, 1949. In Frye's practical criticism, including his annual reviews for «Letters in Canada,» the anti-modern, anti-New Criticism bias is often aggressively explicit. Reviewing Alfred Bailey's Border River in 1953, Frye declared his weariness of the current critical canons:

I get very tired of the critical cliché that everything in poetry should be hard, concrete, and precise. That dogma was lugged in to rationalize the techniques of imagism thirty years ago, and it is time to realize that it is only one more formula, like the unities, designed to save critics the trouble of making independent judgments on poetry. It is quite possible to construct just as good poetry out of diffused, muzzy and generalized language. Byron's «She walks in beauty like the night» is a very lovely poem, and it is a masterpiece of vagueness.

If there remained any doubt about Frye's antipathy to modernism, it was dispelled in his 1956 review of

Dudek's Europe:

The century of meditation is a fatal idea for a facile poet, and although at his best Mr. Dudek escapes being merely facile, I find large stretches of the book unrewarding. In the first place, the influence of Pound is oppressive. Pound is everywhere: the rub-a-dub three- and four-accent line, the trick of snapped up quotations and illusions, the harangues against usura, the toboggan-slide theory of the decline of Europe after the Middle Ages, and so on. In the second place, the conversational style brings the ideas into sharp relief, and the ideas are commonplace, prejudice reinforced by superficial tourism.⁶

Layton immediately came to Dudek's defense,⁷ but he might well have welcomed Frye's antipathy toward Anglo-American modernism and the New Critics, and his exoneration of the Romantics, especially Blake. However, the same poem by Byron, «She walks in beauty like the night,» whose vagueness Frye had approved in his review of Alfred Bailey's Border River, is cited by Layton in a 1955 article as exemplary of «the poetry of acceptable sentiments,» opposed to «the poetry which is critical and exploratory.»⁸ There is nothing in the context of the article -- other than the implicating coincidence of the Byron poem -- that specifically reproaches Frye, but it does become clear that Layton's and Frye's attacks on the New Criticism, and their defense of the Romantic poets, had, fundamentally, little in common.

When Frye championed the romantic bards against their metaphysical reviewers, his manner and language seemed to remain decidedly Augustan; and he rarely championed the aggressively poet-centered views of the Romantics; for example, he rarely draws upon Wordsworth's expressive theories of poetry, or emphasizes the poet's singular prophetic vision as in Blake, or Shelley's radical creator and legislator. Instead, Frye set out to demonstrate that the Romantics rewarded formal critical analysis at least as much as any other group of poets, and that they were not nearly as anarchic or idiosyncratic as either their contemporaries or the modern classicists had maintained. Frye seems to argue that if the work of a poet as allegedly wild and anarchic as Blake can be resolved into a consistent, formal structure, then all literature is amenable to such resolution.

In «The Keys to the Gates,» 1966, Frye retrospectively reconstructs the development of his argument as follows:

I realized that poetic thought is inherently and necessarily schematic. Blake soon led me, in my search for poetic analogues, to Dante and Milton, and it was clear that the schematic cosmologies of Dante and Milton, however they got into Dante and Milton, were, once they got there, poetic constructs, examples of the way poets think, and not foreign bodies of knowledge. If the prophecies are normal poems, or at least a normal expression of poetic genius, and if Blake nevertheless meant to teach some system by them, that system could only be something connected with the principles of poetic thought. Blake's 'message', then, is not

simply his message, nor is it an extra-literary message. What he is trying to say is what he thinks poetry is trying to say: the imaginative content implied by the existence of an imaginative form of language.⁹

This is not one of Frye's most persuasive passages, but it does reveal some of his characteristic attitudes and assumptions. Frye's statement that «poetic thought is inherently and necessarily schematic» seems, literally, little more than a truism, but he clearly intends to suggest that «poetic thought» is something quite different from «thought» in other spheres. His persistent aversion to «foreign bodies of knowledge» in poetry seems almost neurotic in this passage, and illustrates that he is determined to go to considerable lengths to demonstrate that «the poet nothing affirmeth.» In another sense, however, the poet does affirm. Although individual poems may appear rebellious, nihilistic, or violently anti-social, what poetry affirms is the «normative,» collective experience of society. The terms, «normal poems» and «a normal expression of poetic genius» may seem to have a disturbing censorial ring, but, perhaps even more disturbingly, they imply that censorship is gratuitous; any 'abnormality' in a poem arises simply as the result of misreading, out of a faulty criticism that fails to attend properly to the inherent schema of poetic thought.¹⁰

The importance that Frye ascribes to the «imagination» in the above passage is typical of his work,

but again it is typical that the fiercely personal, socially and metaphysically volatile faculty that the Romantics identified with «imagination,» that is, a faculty that is both iconographic and iconoclastic, is defused by Frye with a reductive and tautological allusion to the inherently «imaginative form of language.» The effect of Frye's writing on the «imagination» is therefore paradoxical. «Imagination» is exalted as the pre-eminent humanizing faculty in civilized society, and a correspondingly pre-eminent place is claimed for literature and poetry as a whole, but the individual poet's personal imagination, and the fund of personal experience that feeds his imagination, seem to be regarded with distaste. Frank Lentricchia has observed that «it is not the individual poet who is given a privileged place by Frye but the society of all poets across history.» Frye's schematic formalism demands that «the poet must release himself from his particular existence» and «merge his isolate being with the archetypal currents because . . . literary expression is not the exfoliation of a subject, an individuated consciousness anterior to all discourse and worldly determinates; it is the function of a system, a literary universe which is the source of all models of expression, and to which the self submits in order that it may be permitted to speak.»¹¹

Frye's attacks on the New Critics rarely challenged

their dismissal of the «referential» aspect of poetry, or of the personal element in poetry. Rather, he seems to have attacked the vulnerability of their formalism — its susceptibility to extra-literary value judgments, its subservience to matters of taste. Frye did expose the hypocrisy of their proclaimed ideological aloofness, namely that their criticism constituted a masked apology for an elitist, conservative Anglo-catholicism. (In contrast, Frye has been distinctly Protestant and liberal). Given their somewhat narrow formalism, the New Critics were compelled to dismiss substantial blocks of literature as «impurities,» as unpoetic lapses into rhetorical and abstract discourse. Virtually nothing is an impurity for Frye, since virtually everything can be subsumed in the «poetic thought» of literature, and ultimately in the structures of language itself. Frye's formalism is much more liberal and inclusive, but also much more impenetrable.

It should perhaps be noted that most of the Anatomy of Criticism first appeared in scattered essays in the University of Toronto Quarterly, Kenyon Review, Yale French Studies, Hudson Review, and English Institute Essays between 1949 and 1954.¹² However, it does not, at first, seem to have been his interest in myths and archetypes that was found to be startling and original, and brought him to the attention of literary critics throughout the English-speaking world. Aside from the

prominent interest in myth among Yeats, Eliot, Joyce and most other modernists, mythopoetic and archetypal criticism had been practised for decades. Jane Harrison's Themis had appeared in 1912, F.M. Cornford's The Origin of the Attic Comedy in 1914, Gilbert Murray's The Classical Tradition in Poetry in 1927, and Maud Bodkin's Archetypal Patterns in Poetry in 1934. Thus, by 1949, Wellek and Warren could claim that «myth» had become «a favourite term of modern criticism.»¹³ What did seem startling were Frye's bold claims for literature as a coherent «autonomous» structure, and his contempt for «value judgments.» Mythopoetic criticism, it seems, had threatened to raise the flood gates, to release wild, primitive energies among staid literary texts, to inundate literary criticism with dark, disturbing notions drawn from anthropology and Jungian psychology. Frye's achievement was to demonstrate that to study literature in relation to myth need not undermine formal criticism or the established methods of literary scholarship; in fact, Frye seemed to suggest, myth provided the key to an air-tight formalism.

In Chapter Two, I noted that in the 1940s and 1950s Frye somewhat resembled the Movement critics in England. He shared their impatience with modernism, with the modernists' exalted claims for the exclusive integrity of their art, with their cult of objectivity, with their antipathy toward science, with their reactionary politics

and their cryptic syntax. The expressed desire of both Frye and the Movement critics was to reclaim poetry in the service of liberal/socialist ideals.¹⁴ This tended toward a preference for «hygienic» poetry, a tactful turning aside from dark, uncontrollable, irrational forces; that is, a preference for «visions that we need.» The difficulties that Frye's early criticism posed for Layton were, therefore, analogous to those posed by the Movement. There is, however, at least, one important difference between Frye and the Movement critics. One of the main tenets of the Movement was that syntax in poetry is subject to, or ought to be subject to, the same basic principles that govern the syntax of discursive, rational thought. I have argued that for Frye this has not been the case. He has always insisted that to read a poem «authentically» it must be read by its «imaginative 'underthought' and not by its explicit conformity to contemporary prejudice.» The «meaning» lies in the poem's structure and pattern of imagery, not in its explicit content, and thus the «meaning» of a poem can be, and normally is, quite different from the discursive, rational thought it may explicitly state.¹⁵ The difference was noted by the Movement critic Donald Davie in Articulate Energy. On the basis of Frye's essay, «Levels of Meaning in Literature,» Davie welcomed Frye's defense of «rhetoric» as the distinctive element of poetry, bridging the «logic» of philosophy and the

unadorned, functional «narrative» of history, but he resisted Frye's implication that «logical discourse is permissible in poetry only when the metaphors it uses, whether spatial and passive, or temporal and active, come to life in the reading.» Thus, discursive thought, or empirical reality, were reduced by Frye to subordinate rhetorical functions, to devices used by the poet to hold the attention of his naive reader, who demands at least a token acknowledgment of the «plausibility principle.» Davie comments that, according to Frye, «the forms of discursive and narrative syntax may be retained in accordance with the 'plausibility principle',» but in that case, argues Davie, «the forms are empty and fraudulent, for articulation in rhetoric and poetry is not by syntax but by figuration of images.»¹⁶ Regardless of the merits of Davie's own position, the point of his disagreement with Frye is apt: although Frye accepts all sorts of «rhetoric» in poetry that the modernists had regarded as impurities and unpoetic lapses, he nevertheless manages to maintain the separation of literature and reality.

It does appear, therefore, that Frye's extreme formalism can be alleged in bold terms. Eli Mandel in Another Time defines formalism as the tendency «to regard society or material reality as a formal element of literature: no more than any other necessity in a story, and no realer than a spell cast on the liberating creative

power the work celebrates.» Mandel then names Frye as «the foremost theoretician of the aesthetics of formalism» in Canada.¹⁷ Similarly, Frank Lentricchia regards Frye as the ultimate formalist, the culmination of a tradition of formalism whose roots are in German idealism, and whose progressively hermetic tendencies have reached their extreme position:

The easy absolutism of his definition of literature, and particularly of his contention that the «poet's intention» is «directed towards putting words together, not towards aligning words with meanings,» is profoundly formalistic and almost unimaginable before Kant. I think it likely that theorists and critics in the mimetic tradition, from Plato and Aristotle on down to Samuel Johnson, as well as most of our contemporaries of historicist persuasion, whether pre- or post-structuralist, would consider Frye's characterization of the poetic intention as powerful evidence of -- let me appeal to Johnsonian rhetoric -- a high and frenzied madness.¹⁸

After the publication of Anatomy of Criticism in 1957, Frye's stature as a critic was clearly apparent. His work has been extravagantly attacked, and extravagantly praised. The critical essays on Frye collected by Murray Krieger in Northrop Frye in Modern Criticism, 1966, whether they were for or against Frye, acknowledged his formidable presence, and since then his stature has, if anything increased. Gregory Polletta regards Frye as «the foremost theorist of literature writing in English since the 1950s» Francis Sparshott regards him as «the one indispensable figure in literary studies in the

English-speaking world.» His most important achievements, according to Sparshott, are firstly, to have «redeemed critical theory from the neglect earned for it by the philosophical imbecility of the 'new criticism',» and secondly, to have anticipated «what is most crucial» in contemporary versions of structuralism, namely, «the insistence that literary works are preceded by myths or codes that shape their meanings, and the realization that an author has only limited freedom because his medium (Derrida's writing) imposes meanings on which he can only perform variations and with which he must co-operate.»¹⁹ Such assessments of Frye's work have become increasingly common, particularly among American critics. In Canada, his influence on James Reaney, Jay Macpherson, Margaret Atwood, D.G. Jones, and Eli Mandel is appreciatively acknowledged. Moreover, Frye became increasingly involved in contemporary social and political issues, and gained a considerable influence well beyond the confines of English departments. It became clear that Frye was no ordinary formalist. More than any other critic in Canada, he argued persuasively for the central role of literature in civilized society. As Gerald Graff has remarked, «if Frye can be called a 'formalist', his formalism does not retreat into the autonomous purity of the literary imagination but aggressively projects that autonomous imagination outward onto the external world and absorbs that external world into itself.»²⁰

In a much quoted passage from The Educated Imagination, Frye describes the transformation that occurs when his primitive island poet, who has created his stories out of his own desires and anxieties, picking and choosing his metaphors from the changing seasons, now comes under the spell of his own creations. At this point his «literature» no longer «reflects» life or nature, but «swallows» it. His ideal world of the imagination becomes the real world, «the real form of human society hidden behind the one we see.» In the Anatomy of Criticism a similar apotheosis of the imagination is evoked in disarming, enchanting language:

Nature becomes not the container, but the thing contained, and the archetypal universal symbols . . . are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature. Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the milkyway.²¹

Layton was not persuaded. He continued to regard Frye's influence on poetry and criticism as «baneful.» He was well aware that in Frye's literary universe the individual poet plays only a bit part. In «Forever Honeyless: Canadian Criticism,» 1966, Layton describes Frye as «The most dangerous academic of them all, because the most persuasive in his ability to camouflage himself.» He regards Frye's all-consuming system, with its emphasis on form and convention and its de-emphasis of personal experience as a denial of the «creative fact.»

Layton sensed that Frye's understanding of «imagination» or «poetic thought» as the collective elaboration of forms and archetypal themes left little room for his own view of the poet as a disturbing, prophetic presence, for «the unique, irreplaceable role of the poet in the community.»²² In the «Preface» to The Laughing Rooster Layton again rails against «those pallid theorists who wish to depersonalize the creator and make of him a helpless purveyor of psychological archetypes requiring certification from them as to purity, substance, and value.»²³

Layton's constant raging against «literature» and «culture» has a direct application in his quarrel with Frye. «Culture,» Layton maintains, is not the concern of the creator but of those «who exploit the creativity of the artist.» In the «Foreword» to Collected Poems, 1965, Layton insists on a sharp distinction between «poems» and «literature.» The fact is that Frye has insisted on the same distinction; but while Frye exalts «literature,» Layton exalts «poems.» For Layton, «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.»²⁴

This last point is especially important. Layton sensed that the exalting of «literature» over «poems» undermined the poet's didactic role. As such, he regarded it as a particularly insidious form of gentility. In

«Forever Honeyless: Canadian Criticism,» Layton claimed that the «genteel academicism» which in the 1940s and 1950s «had politely questioned the poet's uniquely creative role in society» continued to flourish in the 1960s under a more subtle mask, and Frye's mask was the most subtle. It must have seemed particularly perverse to many of Frye's admirers that Layton should so construe the effect of his work. By Frye's own account and that of his admirers, he was the avowed enemy of gentility. His stated purpose was to redeem literature and criticism from the fluctuations of fashionable taste and the inane «dithers» of «leisure-class gossip.» He was determined to bring high culture out of «its sacred cloister» into «the world» and into «the human community.» His catalogue of the archetypes of literature was thought to «demystify the discipline of English studies,» to demonstrate that the same structures and archetypes pervaded at all levels of culture, from Elizabethan romance to contemporary advertising and propaganda. According to one critic, this would make the fruits of «high» culture available to a wider audience than the established bourgeoisie, and so «further the cause of Eros, of freedom, of liberation.» Many of Frye's colleagues, particularly among the New Critics, were, in fact, appropriately shocked.²⁵

However, it does seem that Frye's use of criticism tends to blunt the poet's shafts. It does this in three ways. First of all, as I pointed out earlier in this

chapter, by emphasizing the poem's «under-thought» or «poetic thought,» that is, by paraphrasing it in terms of structure and archetype, Frye's criticism can defuse the explicit over-thought; for example in The Critical Path Frye writes,

Questionable or dated social attitudes, as expressed in what appears to be the surface meaning, do not effect the real meaning of poetry, which is conveyed through a structure of imagery and action. When we examine the imagery of Henry V, and listen carefully to the moods and overtones which that imagery suggests, we realize that the play is very far from expressing the simple-minded patriotism that it appears to be expressing. . . . If we give primary importance to the primary meaning, the explicit meaning will take on a very different relation to it.²⁶

«Questionable social attitudes» seem to Frye particularly prevalent in modern and contemporary literature. However, if the critic attends properly to the «primary meaning» the urgency or the shock of the «explicit meaning» can be mitigated. The term «displacement» is useful to Frye in this regard. It is defined in the Anatomy of Criticism as «the adaptation of myth and metaphor to canons of morality or plausibility;» that is, the pristine mythical structure of a work is subject to minor distortions imposed by what contemporary taste deems life-like or true. Particularly in modern realistic and ironic fictions, «the presence of a mythical structure . . . poses certain technical problems for making it plausible, and the devices used in solving

these problems [ie. mimesis, realistic action, true-to-life characters, etc.] may be given the general name of displacements.»²⁷ Consequently, although it may seem that a 'realistic' work urgently demands a serious response to its explicit content or theme, the critic understands that this urgency is merely a concession to current fashion, that it is simply an accident of locality and period, at best a tolerable annoyance to anyone who wishes to de-code the archetypes and discover the «primary meaning.» What is required of reader and critic alike is, contrary to Coleridge, the willing suspension of belief.

The second way in which Frye blunts the poet's shafts is by failing to attune his language to his subject. When he is debunking his subject, his language is often alive with wit, but otherwise, whether he is dealing with a dark tragedy or a bright lyric, he often tends to muffle his subject with flat, discordant language. In The Modern Century Frye makes fun of an official communiqué about education:

If we are to keep pace with the swiftly moving developments of our time, we must strive for ever higher standards in every field of endeavour. . . . No informed person is unaware of the tremendous effort that [it] will take to meet the demands that the years ahead will produce. Yet we are also aware that the general well-being of our nation is dependent on our ability to meet the challenge.

Frye's comment on this passage is witty and pertinent:

One would say that it is impossible to write flatter clichés or more obvious platitudes, and the effect of cliché and platitude ought to be soothing. So it is, and yet every word is soaked in the metaphors of a gasping panic.

A few pages later, Frye attempts an analysis of Kafka's work:

In Kafka, for example, the event, the ordinary unit of a story, is replaced by the psychological event, and the social and other significances of what is happening are allegories of the psychological events. The primary emphasis is on the mental attitude that makes the events possible. Thus The Castle is presented as a kind of anxiety-nightmare, yet a theological allegory of God's dealings with man and a political allegory of the police state run in counterpoint with it.²⁸

One would say that it is impossible to write flatter prose or speak more soothingly about «anxiety-nightmares» and «police states.» To appreciate just how flat and soothing Frye's comments are, one may compare George Steiner's criticism of Kafka in Language and Silence:

To Kafka . . . the act of writing was a miraculous scandal Listening to the mystery of language with more acute humility than ordinary men, he heard the jargon of death growing loud inside the European vulgate. Not in any vague, allegoric sense, but with exact prophecy. From the literal nightmare of The Metamorphosis came the knowledge that Ungeziefer («vermin») was to be the designation of millions of men. The bureaucratic parlance of The Trial and The Castle have become commonplace in our herded lives. The instrument of torture in «The Penal Colony» is also a printing press. In short, Kafka heard the name Buchenwald in the word birchwood. He understood, as if the bush had

burned for him again, that a great inhumanity was lying in wait for European man.

Since Steiner is a critic whom Layton has often held up against Frye, it is perhaps appropriate to illustrate the contrast with another quote from Language and Silence:

We engage the presence, the voice of the book. We allow it entry, though not unguided, into our inmost. A great poem, a classic novel, press in upon us; they assail and occupy the strong places of our consciousness. They exercise upon our imagination and desires, upon our ambitions and most covert dreams, a strange bruising mastery. Men who burn books know what they are doing. The artist is the uncontrollable force: no Western eye, since Van Gogh, looks on a cypress without observing in it the start of flame.²⁹

Certainly not all of Frye's criticism is flat and platitudinous. When he is writing on literature-as-a-whole, or on the later prophecies of Blake, or Shakespeare's comedies, his language often conveys excitement and the shock of insight.³⁰ However, there seem to be relatively few works that inspire that kind of response in his writing. Particularly when he is writing on modern or contemporary literature, his language, though witty, conveys boredom and condescension, and often seems to deserve Layton's charge of «sterility.» Even a critic as sympathetic to Frye as Francis Sparshott detects in his criticism «a certain strange deadness at the centre.»³¹

The third way in which Frye blunts the poet's shafts is by using literature-as-a-whole as a cushion

against the impact of an individual poem or poet.

(Sparshott has observed that «the word 'total' recurs like a hiccup throughout the Anatomy of Criticism.») ³²

If literature «swallows» nature, it can also swallow individual poems, or at least cast a spell over them - that is, «normalize» them. In The Educated Imagination, Frye suggests that the experience of a work of art incorporates it into a continuity that consists of the reader's experience of all other works of art, and as such the experience «encourages tolerance.» However, it is evident that the process Frye describes also encourages a genteel pedantry that reduces the shock of a new work to a merely interesting perspective. In the Anatomy of Criticism, Frye describes a similar process:

The goal of ethical criticism is transvaluation, the ability to look at contemporary social values with the detachment of one who is able to compare them in some degree with the infinite vision of possibilities presented by culture. One who possesses such a standard of transvaluation is in a state of intellectual freedom. One who does not possess it, is a creature of whatever social values get to him first.

Again, it is an admirable cosmopolitanism that Frye is commending, and, in this case, when he speaks of «whatever social values get to him first» he has in mind primarily those values derived from propaganda and advertising, or whatever is conducive to fanaticism. But the same «standard of transvaluation» permits the detached

observer to cancel the impact of any individual work by quickly invoking a tribunal of competing schools and traditions that suit him better. Any urgency a work of art may convey, any demands on the reader's commitments, can be reduced to the characteristics of a type. That this is indeed how Frye understands the process whereby «literature is to be absorbed into society» is evident in the following passage from The Modern Century:

The university classroom is concerned with 'liberal' education, and liberal education is liberal in every sense of the word: it emancipates, it is tolerant, it assimilates the learning process to a social idea. Yet so far as it is concerned with contemporary culture, its material includes all the reactionary and antisocial attitudes I glanced at earlier, some of which are, in detail, quite obviously silly, perverse, or wrong-headed. But when contemporary authors are assigned for compulsory reading, and when they are taught in a way that relates them to their cultural heritage, a certain detachment comes into the attitude toward them. Not all the detachment is good, but one thing about it is: the social attitude of the writer is taken over by the social attitude of education itself, and loses its crankiness by being placed in a social context.³³

Layton has distilled the essence of this passage to a single sentence: «literature is regarded as a conditioning subject, as a form of indoctrination into the values of our contemporary society.»³⁴

If the point needs any additional explication, it is provided by one of Frye's major supporters, Geoffrey Hartman:

Frye's problem (ours too) is that major art in its very negativity or terrifying respect for exact witness cannot be co-opted. There is no accommodating it. So what can the function of criticism be? Must art remain outside of society, ineffective, a «useless passion,» as Sartre named human existence itself? By a magical sleight of style, by a superb manipulation of our intellectual hopes and desires, Frye rescues criticism as accommodation. Criticism, he alleges, says nothing about the artistic experience as such - the latter may indeed be provocative, irritable, antisocial - but evolves a structure of its own to absorb the arts into society by education. For the anti-arts of advertisement, propaganda, and the culture industry cannot be driven out by the very art whose resentful shadow they are. Art can enter society only when tempered by the frame criticism provides. 35

Both Frye and Hartman seem to see the academic critic and the artist in an adversary relationship. It is not surprising that occasionally Layton should also see them so. His incessant raging against critics who wish to usurp the poet's creative function as interpreter of his age and prophet to his society, his railing against the perversions of literary instruction throughout the educational system, his accusations of sterility, gentility and pedantry, become understandable. It should, however, be noted that it is not necessary, in reaction to Frye and Hartman, to advocate that literature, particularly modern and contemporary works of literature, should be consumed uncritically as a stimulus to hysterical, fanatic action. Another critic-teacher, Lionel Trilling, who has been at least as wary of the subversive force of modern literature, offers one alternative to

Frye and Hartman that Layton would find much less distasteful:

I do not know how other teachers deal with this extravagant personal force of modern literature, but for me it makes difficulty. Nowadays the teaching of literature inclines to a considerable technicality, but when the teacher has said all that can be said about formal matters, about verse patterns, metrics, prose conventions, irony, tension, etc., he must confront the necessity of bearing personal testimony. He must use whatever authority he may possess to say whether or not a work is true; and if not, why not; and if so, why so. He can do this only at considerable cost to his privacy. How does one say Lawrence is right in his great rage against the modern emotions, against the modern sense of life and ways of being, unless one speaks from the intimacies of one's own feelings, and one's own sense of life, and one's own wished-for way of being?³⁶

Whatever Layton may think of Trilling's criticism generally, he would support the view that the critic-teacher must confront the «truth» of literature and speak «from the intimacies of one's own feelings.» He would also support Trilling's conviction that literature has to be dealt with «in the terms it announced for itself,» and that the teacher's «first concern» is «the animus of the author, the objects of his will, the things he wants or wants to have happen.»³⁷ Yet in contrast to Trilling who accepts that the teaching of literature involves risks and dangers, and to Steiner who understands why men burn books, Frye proclaims that «there are no negative visions: all poets are potentially positive contributors to man's body of vision.» This is not an

expression of Frye's reckless resolve to deal with literature «in the terms it announced for itself,» but of his confidence in the power of his critical method to defuse poetry's explosive energy.³⁸ This confidence is occasionally shaken, as in the third lecture of The Modern Century, but the objective is clear. Frederick Crews has appropriately entitled his attack on Frye, «Anaesthetic Criticism»:

A criticism that explicitly or implicitly reduces art to some combination of moral and abstract form and genre convention is literally an anaesthetic criticism. It insulates the critic and his readers from a threat of affective disturbance.³⁹

Crews has weakened his case with contentious claims for the absolute rightness of Freudian criticism, but the main point of his attack is pertinent.

Another criticism that Layton directs against Frye, in «Forever Honeyless», is that «he is still bedevilled by the Aristotelian notion that poetry yields some kind of knowledge, and his imposing edifice is very largely undertaken to prove its falsity.»⁴⁰ This must have been the unkindest cut of all since Frye has claimed Aristotle as his model. On this question, whether or not poetry yields some kind of knowledge, Frye can be frustratingly evasive. In his essay, «The Keys to the Gates,» Frye confronts the problem from an Aristotelian perspective:

The nature of poetic 'truth' was discussed by Aristotle in connection with action. As compared with the historian, the poet makes no specific or particular statements: he gives the typical, recurring, or universal event, and is not to be judged by the standards of truth that we apply to specific statements. Poetry, then, does not state historical truth, but contains it. . . . Thus poetry is 'something more philosophical' than history.⁴¹

This last observation of Aristotle's, however, «has been of little use to critics except as a means of annoying historians.» The most that Frye will allow is that there are «infinite treasures of thought latent in poetry,» but the poet «does not think in the sense of producing concepts, ideas or propositions, which are specific predications to be judged by their truth or falsehood.» There is, then, some kind of knowledge «contained» in poetry, but it is more or less incidental to poetry's main function, which is to embody in metaphorical language various «hypothetical» versions of the kind of society man wants, or does not want. Some knowledge of what man is may be inferred from what man wants, but such inferences are the job of criticism, not poetry. As Frye put it in his «Polemical Introduction,» «criticism can talk, and all the arts are dumb.»⁴² But even the critic must beware of the futilities of such «allegorical criticism.» The importance of poetry, Frye insists, is not dependent on the knowledge it yields of «the world out there.»

What Frye gives us is the authorization, indeed the licensing, of what earlier positivistic theorists and philosophers disparagingly used to call the «emotive,» as they worried about the primary role of wish-fulfillment in the structures of poets and of too-ambitious philosophers. . . . But Frye insists on the emotive as poetry's only content and would not have it otherwise; he celebrates poetry precisely for the characteristic that its old enemies proclaimed as its weakness and that its old friends sought to deny.

This is the approving observation of Murray Krieger.⁴³ Frye's vision of the infinite possibilities of literature, and of the power of literature to overwhelm mundane reality, is certainly not without its glory, but it is of little use to the poet-prophet as Layton understood him. According to Layton, the poet does make «specific statements,» although they are rarely disinterested or detached, and he does demand that they «be judged by their truth or falsehood.» Layton will not concede that the poetic process, because it is inspired by personal experience, emotion, and imagination is therefore incapacitated as a cognitive process. He claims all the knowledge known to society plus the vital knowledge drawn from his own experience and imagination. For the poet-prophet, the interpreter of the age and the relentless adversary of hypocrisy and injustice, knowledge and truth regarding the human condition are fundamental. When the poet lashes out against a society that is sick and corrupt, that society is not a «hypothetical» construct of what a sick and corrupt society might look

like. It is the society that daily confronts him.

Often when the word «myth» is used by mythopoeic critics and contemporary anthropologists, like Claude Levi-Straus, it is made to reverberate with a primal and sovereign knowledge that makes all other kinds of knowledge appear as crude, make-shift illusions. This is not how Frye normally uses «myth.» In fact, he does not use it consistently. His theoretic understanding of myth is not consistent, and there often seems to be an implicit inconsistency between his theoretical descriptions and his practical uses of the term. When Frye speaks of «the myth of concern» he conveys a very different sense of the term from what is conveyed when he speaks of the seasonal mythoi, or the ur-myth of the quest, or the centrality of the Biblical myths. Francis Sparshott has observed that «Frye has given two separate accounts of what literature is.» The first account, «anchored in Blake, Spengler and Fraser,» places the emphasis upon literature as «a single imaginative order, as it were a single great work of which particular writings are parts that could not have existed without it and cannot be understood without reference to it.» The second account emphasizes a central mythology, culled from the current folk-tales and legends of a culture, «articulating the shape of its imaginative concerns.»⁴⁴

The inconsistencies in Frye's use of «myth» correspond, to some extent, to the two basic and somewhat

conflicting views of myth in recent literature. The more old-fashioned view is to regard myths as «functional», as they were regarded by Fraser and Malinowski (in spite of their profound effect upon modern writers and subsequent theories of myth) and as they are still popularly regarded. According to this view, the purpose or function of myths in primitive society is to provide a symbolic description of the phenomena of nature, or of «group fantasies,» designed to stabilize or authorize the values of a society. Myth is a primitive substitute for science and reason and it signifies a stage (usually a primitive stage) in the development of culture.⁴⁵

This is essentially how Frye tends to regard myth when he speaks of «the myth of concern» as a communal repository of society's desires and anxieties. However, he de-emphasizes the primitive aspect and ascribes to myth an important function at all stages in the development of culture, namely, as the informing structure of literature.

The other view emphasizes the «ritual» origins of myth.⁴⁶ This is the view that, with variations, is held by Maud Bodkin, Joseph Campbell, Gilbert Murray, Leslie Fiedler, Philip Wheelwright, Ernst Cassirer, and Claude Lévi-Strauss, among others. It holds that myth arose not to explain nature or promote group values but as a narrative accompaniment to a ritual act. The theory stresses the importance of identical, recurring archetypes

among the myths of disparate and mutually isolated societies, and tends to regard myth as the direct and spontaneous verbal embodiment of a profound truth that cannot be rendered or translated into rational or discursive terms without suffering loss of meaning. Jung's notion of the collective unconscious lends additional support to the view that myths embody unconscious forces or «primordial images» which are not otherwise communicable to the conscious mind. The theory implies a correspondence between the structure of mind and the structure of myth, and consequently the structure of knowable reality. According to Ernst Cassirer, myths «are not mere products of fantasy which vapour off from fixed, empirical realistic existence, to float above the actual world like a bright mist.» They are spontaneous forms, neither imposed upon nor pre-dating any other kind of knowledge:

Man lives with objects only in so far as he lives with these forms; he reveals reality to himself, and himself to reality, in that he lets himself and the environment enter into this plastic medium in which the two do not merely make contact, but fuse with each other.⁴⁷

Nietzsche must certainly be regarded as a key figure in the development of modern conceptions of myth. His use of Apollonian and Dionysian myths in The Birth of Tragedy definitely suggests a «ritual» rather than a «functional» approach, and he clearly does regard these

myths as direct embodiments of profound truths. It would be a mistake to regard Layton's opposition to mythopoeic criticism as a positivist's scepticism that myth has anything to do with thought or knowledge. What he opposes is the reduction of myth to a purely formal function in literature.

Among the early myth critics, some of the claims for the profound, mythical truths of literature were made somewhat ingenuously. Maud Bodkin maintained that the ritual patterns identifiable in poetry correspond to a «pattern or configuration of emotional tendencies in the minds of those who are stirred by the theme.» Gilbert Murray claimed that archetypal images like those represented by Hamlet and Orestes are «deeply implanted in the memory of the race, stamped as it were upon our physical organism.» They may seem strange to us, «yet there is that within us which leaps at the sight of them, a cry of the blood which tells us we have known them always.»⁴⁸

Frye never uses racy language of this sort to describe his theories of myth and archetype. In his most subdued moods, he simply regards «archetypes» as recurring images or «associative clusters» familiar to people who share a common culture, and «myth» as «a structural organizing principle of literary form.» Frye has always disclaimed any but the most casual relationship between literary archetypes and Jungian archetypes,

and he has always been wary of «mythical criticism» that reads like «bad comparative religion.»⁴⁹ In fact, after the murky subterranean rumblings of other mythopoeic critics, Frye can be refreshingly light-hearted:

In literature myths are disinterested: they are simply forms of human creativity, and as such they communicate the joy . . . that belongs to pure creation. They are formed out of every conceivable horror and inequity of human life, and yet an inner exuberance lifts them clear of that life. Belief becomes imagination and concern pleasure, as the concerned myth, rooted in a specific culture and told for instruction, is emancipated into the nomadic folktale, travelling freely around the world and told for fun.

In a later essay, Frye does draw a stronger distinction between myth and folktale, and claims a greater authority for the former in that it transmits «a legacy of shared allusion» to a culture. In the essay «Expanding Eyes,» in Spiritus Mundi, Frye seems to go still further toward claiming a profound truth in the mythical affinities of poetry. Here he maintains that the poem «is made out of both conscious and unconscious materials.» The «unconscious» is uncontrollable, but «in certain mental places it can find its own mode of expression,» and when this happens, «it forms a kind of transformer of mental power, sending its voltage into its readers until, as Blake says, the expanding eyes of man behold the depth of wondrous worlds.» And finally, the last chapter of The Well-Tempered Critic is entitled «All Ye Know on Earth,» and here Frye seems to come as tantalizingly

close as he dares to claiming that it is such all-encompassing knowledge that poetry provides. His characteristic method, on such occasions, is to begin with a disclaimer, and then evoke and insinuate what he has disclaimed, and more.⁵⁰

This represents something of the range of meaning and allusion that Frye brings to his theoretical discussions of myth and literary archetypes - from a purely formal term in a theoretic system, to «all ye know on earth.» In his more practical criticism, Frye often seems to insinuate the full range of meanings associated with the «ritual» understanding of myth. This is particularly the case when he is dealing with a subject that enchants him, like Blake or Shakespeare; but he seems to allow only a reductive, formulaic significance to the mythical patterns he extracts from works that do not enchant him, like Eliot's or Yeats's, or from «realistic» works in Canadian literature - with the exception of E.J. Pratt's. It is perhaps inevitable, therefore, that critics have made conflicting statements regarding Frye's view of myth. Thus, Wallace W. Douglas concludes that Frye is typical of the mythopoeic critics who «are ultimately interested in some special knowledge,» and «though in analyzing works they pay more attention to structure and form than most modern critics (and have a more systematic conception of literary forms), in the end they too come around to treating a literary work as

a repository of truth, of racial memories, or of unconsciously held values.» Similarly Dudek maintains that an «apocalyptic revolutionary mania, comprising a naturalistic or visionary rejection of established society, and a prerational return to primitive origins» is central to mythopoeic criticism, and although Frye's «sober scholarly style well conceals this meaning,» it nevertheless «peeps out» here and there.⁵¹

There is some similarity in Dudek's and Layton's disdain for mythopoeic criticism in so far as they both regard it in opposition to social or historical realism, but otherwise Layton seems rather more hospitable to the mythical element in poetry than Dudek. It is significant, in this regard, that Dudek identifies an increasingly prominent mythic quality in Layton's work as evidence of his forsaking the true path of social realism. In «The Misuses of Imagination,» Dudek ascribes Frye's growing esteem for Layton's work during the 1950s to «Layton's ambiguous position in regard to the mythopoeic approach.» As long as he remained a poet «with a direct realistic orientation,» Layton ran «afoul of Frye's prejudice against this kind of poetry.» But after 1954, Layton began to write a «highly-charged 'surrealistic' poetry,» and that «suddenly alerted the mythopoeic critic.»⁵² Dudek's disapproval notwithstanding, it is very evident that Layton wrote most of his finest work after 1954, and that there was an increasingly prominent mythic

quality about it. Mandel's comment, that «we have to view both his biography and the social context of his poetic career as poetic structures, myths, if you like,» seems very appropriate. Layton mythologizes his parents, his Montreal childhood, politics, and his own career as a poet.⁵³

The point is that Layton's opposition to Frye's critical practice and theory should not be construed as a stubborn refusal to acknowledge that an awareness of myth is relevant to literary criticism, that there is both conscious and subconscious traffic between poetry and myth, and that mythical structures and recurring archetypes inform the «meaning» of poetry. In both his poetry and his criticism, Layton in fact does affirm that this is so. His differences with Frye are, first, that Frye construes all this into an «ideology,» a critical ideology, and also a liberal-christian ideology. He regards the presence of myth and convention as the central 'facts' of poetry, and this determines his discussion of the poetic process and function. Secondly, Layton denies that myths and recurring archetypes in poetry undermine the importance of the poet's personal experience or the reality-content of poetry. Mandel speaks of Layton's «aesthetic distancing» of life into myth. One may wish to quibble with this term. The effect of his mythologizing does not seem to be a distancing but, often, a bringing up close, an enlargement

of detail. For Frye, however, «distancing» appropriately describes his method. Several of his critics have noted that his method is the opposite of «close reading.» He tends to stand back to take in the whole panorama. The passage most often quoted in this regard occurs in the Anatomy of Criticism:

In looking at a picture, we may stand close to it and analyse the details of brush and palette knife. . . . At a little distance back, the design comes into clearer view, and we study rather the content represented. . . . The further back we go, the more conscious we are of the organizing design. At a great distance . . . we can see nothing but the archetype.⁵⁴

In Layton's work there is no corresponding sense of gradually drawing back. Often the strongest impression conveyed by his poems is of looking closely and intently until the object begins to squirm under his gaze and expands to fill the whole angle of vision. In «A Tall Man Executes a Jig,» the jiggling gnats, the grass, the hair on the man's arm, become large presences:

The grass,
Even the wildflowers became black hairs
And himself a maddened speck among them.
Still the assaults of the small flies made him
Glad at last, until he saw purest joy
In their frantic jiggings under a hair,
So changed from those in the unrestraining air.

When the tall man shifts his gaze to the distant hills, the effect again is that they leap into proximity:

And on the summit of the asphalt road
 Which stretched towards the fiery town; the man
 Saw one hill raised like a hairy arm, dark
 With pines and cedars against the stricken sun
 -- The arm of Moses or of Joshua.

In «The Birth of Tragedy» the poet observes

how the sensual moths
 big with odour and sunshine
 dart into the perilous shrubbery;
 or drop their visiting shadows
 upon the garden I one year made
 of flowering stone to be a footstool
 for the perfect gods.

For Layton, the mythical archetype seems to appear when he stands close, not when he draws back. The contrast with Frye, whose «infinite man» builds his cities «out of the milky-way» suggests an analogy to microscopes and telescopes, except that Layton, peering through his microscope, discovers unexpected vistas. The contrast also illustrates the point that for Layton the immediate, vivid experience is not something to be simply transcended for a higher vision, but something that releases a vision rooted in the earth.

This brings up a third and crucial difference between Layton's and Frye's mythologizing. For Frye, myth «swallows» reality, reduces it to a pale shadow of the constructs of the imagination. This point is emphasized repeatedly, and again in the essay, «Speculation and Concern»:

Reality is primarily what we create, not what we contemplate. . . . The real world, that

is, the human world, has constantly to be created, and the one model on which we must not create it is that of the world out there. The world out there has no human values, hence we should think of it primarily not as real but as absurd. The existential paradoxes help us to do this, and they thereby reduce the world to the tohu-wa-bohu, the waste and void chaos of a world which man has once again to create.⁵⁵

To Layton, the Nietzschean yea-sayer, this idea is contemptible. It is a re-statement of Mallarmé's «brutal mirage.» It represents an ascetic, resentful suspicion of life. It makes the world «a kind of hospital or sanatorium or leper colony.»⁵⁶ In Twilight of the Idols, Nietzsche maintained that «any distinction between a 'true' and an 'apparent' world» expresses a rancorous, instinctive urge to «slander» life, to «avenge ourselves against life.» The artist's function is to celebrate life and the world of the senses. If, according to Nietzsche, the artist creates his own «appearances,» and even tends to esteem them above reality, this does not suggest a negation of reality but a hunger for it, «for 'appearance' in this case means reality once more, only by way of selection, reinforcement, and correction.» The artist is «precisely the one who says Yes to everything questionable, even to the terrible -- he is Dionysian.» In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche writes,

I carry the blessings of my Yes into all abysses. I have become one who blesses and

says Yes; and I fought long for that and was a fighter that I might one day get my hands free to bless.⁵⁷

One can expect that Layton would emphatically endorse these statements. In the discussion with Mandel in Taking Sides, Layton argues that Nietzsche «had no use for that kind of romantic pessimism that dismisses the world,» and strives «to escape from the misery and the finitude of the world.» The Dionysian artist affirms that «the very essence of being alive is strife, conflict, unceasing desire, unceasing struggle ending in death,» and out of these conditions he creates «some divinity, some form of art, some radiance, some temporary glory to vie with that of the rainbow.»⁵⁸ Thus, for Frye, the artist vies with a «waste and void chaos of a world» while for Layton he vies with a rainbow. Toward the end of the «Foreword» to The Collected Poems, 1971, where Layton has mythologized everything from his parents and teachers to his broomstick (the latter becomes like the rod of Aaron that silences the murmurings of the people of Israel), Layton/exults in the apotheosis of «swirling» life that his poetry has effected, «written it into the hearts and speech of men»:

Normal human vileness, philistine materialism, racial prejudice, anti-Semitism, hypocrisy and the relentless pursuit of ass in parliaments, universities, Salvation Army hostels, editorial offices, courthouses, hospitals, and morgues -- out of this glorious fecund rubbish heap and out of occasional glimpses of beauty, goodness and mercy I have made my poems.⁵⁹

Layton's most explicit statements on the relation of myth and archetype to poetry occur in «A Conversation About Literature: An Interview with Margaret Laurence and Irving Layton,» 1972.⁶⁰ Here again Layton mythologizes his family, and particularly his brother-in-law, Strul Goldberg who, although he «didn't have the education to know that he was reliving a Canadian or Jewish Rastignac,» set out to «conquer America.» Layton makes the claim that «every artist is an incurable mythologist, that is to say he must see the people and the objects which surround him somewhat larger than life and seeing them so universalizes them or strips them of their human trivialities or limitations.» He begins by trying «to understand them and apologize and get deeper meanings,» but then the poet «leaves» them and «goes towards something I have called freedom»:

That is when you release yourself, when you not only stand on the ground they have made for you -- but you soar. You leave the ground and enter into something that they could not know anything at all about and did not know anything about, that only the artist can know something about. Then he begins to mould the shadows and the ghosts; he begins to play with the echoes of a Strul Goldberg, of a Keine Lazarovitch. He shapes them and re-shapes them, because now he wants to say something different -- perhaps not entirely different, but different. And then they become archetypal figures. This is when the artist knows true freedom and then he creates in ecstasy and pain and with a wonderful sense of liberation, because now these ghosts no longer have any power over him. He is truly free.

Frye's approach to myth is analytic. It assumes an essentially static order of myth, however infinite the possible combinations and permutations of its various elements may be. In contrast, Layton's approach is synthetic, responsive to new experience, and creatively plastic. The central 'fact' that Frye's theoretic structure attempts to bring to account is the prominence of genre and convention in literature -- «convention, within literature, seemed to be a force even stronger than history.»⁶¹ For Layton, experience is stronger than convention. For him, the central fact of poetry is that certain figures or events come to dominate experience and demand articulation. For Frye, the archetype is there at the beginning, whether the poet produces a masterpiece or a few lines of doggerel; it permits considerable elaboration, it becomes «displaced» to resemble current notions of reality, but it undergoes no essential transformation; and it tends to bind the poet to certain structures and meanings. For Layton, the archetype is there toward the end; it represents the attainment of «mastery;» it is created out of the poet's struggle to discover the «deeper meanings» of a real presence; and it liberates the poet, lets him «soar.» For both Frye and Layton, «archetype» identifies the presence in the work of something beyond the range of the poet's 'biographical' experience, but for Frye that 'beyond' is supplied by a combination of culture and craft, while for

Layton it still involves «pain and ecstasy,» and some mysterious power in the poet that enables him «to grow, to push the soil apart and come up unstunted.»

There is another point of conflict between Frye and Layton. It involves their understanding of «history.» By far the strongest influence upon Frye's understanding of history has been Oswald Spengler's Decline of the West. The essay, «Spengler Revisited» appears in Part Two of Spiritus Mundi. In his «Preface» to this collection of essays, Frye wrote:

Spengler, as is obvious from other references to him in this book, has always been a formative influence on my own thinking, for reasons which have often puzzled me, he being as a creative personality, so antipathetic to me. This article is, so to speak, an effort to lay a ghost to rest, along with an attempt to show where Spengler belongs in twentieth-century criticism and poetic imagery.

In the essay, «Expanding Eyes,» in the same collection, Frye states that Spengler and Fraser «had been culture-heroes of mine from my student days.»⁶² By Frye's own account, then, Spengler is very important to the development of his work, although his puzzlement and his ghostly imagery suggest that the influence may occasionally be oblique. More importantly, there is a largely unspoken, but nevertheless strongly conveyed antipathy in Layton toward Frye's work that cannot be accounted for even by Frye's formalism or solipsism. I maintain that this antipathy is evoked by a pervasive historicism in Frye's work,

derived from Spengler, who, I further maintain, manifests in full flower a particularly sinister current of modern thought.

Frye's most extended discussion of Spengler is his CBC talk in 1955, as part of the series, «Architects of Modern Thought.»⁶³ He seems both repelled and fascinated by Spengler. He regards The Decline of the West as «a vision rather than a theory or a philosophy, and a vision of haunting imaginative power,» «one of the world's great romantic poems.» Spengler, says Frye, has the power «to expand and exhilarate the mind.» On the other hand, Frye is repelled by his «murky biological language,» by his «woo-woo noises and shivery Wagnerian whinnies about the dark goings-on of nature and destiny,» and, of course, by his apparent endorsement of German imperial ambitions. Frye allows that «a good deal of Spengler's mind was second-rate, and he continually misunderstood and misapplied his own thesis,» but nevertheless his theories seem to have captivated «everybody»:

Everybody really takes his thesis for granted, even if they've never heard of Spengler, even if they've read him and hate his guts. Everybody who thinks about the matter at all thinks in terms of a «Western» culture; everybody thinks of that culture as old, not young; everybody is struck by the difference between us and the Middle Ages and by the similarity between us and the Roman Empire; everybody assumes that some crucial change in our fortunes took place around Napoleon's time.

Whether we like it or not, then, «we are all Spenglerians

today.» Frye and Spengler make a strange pair of bed-fellows, but for years, Frye claims, «I practically slept with Spengler under my pillow.»

There are striking parallels between Spengler's «Introduction» to The Decline of the West and Frye's «Polemical Introduction» to the Anatomy of Criticism. Spengler castigates professional historians for their narrow, departmentalized approach and their theoretical naïveté. Their traditional understanding of historical causes he finds inadequate, and the metaphysical and epistemological assumptions they bring to their study blind them to the real significance of particular historical phenomena. He calls for a method that would relate a particular historical phenomenon to every other phenomenon, and he rejects the idea that the history of music, art, or economics can be studied in isolation. Rather, history must be studied comparatively, not analytically; it is founded upon the discernment and inter-relation of «general biographic archetypes.» He allows that historians, both amateur and professional, have occasionally hit upon illuminating comparisons. It is common enough to hear Napoleon compared to Caesar or to Alexander, but these comparisons, as the example demonstrates, have been haphazard, and consequently they have as often been deceptive as illuminating. What is needed, therefore, is a «technique of analogy,» a systematic approach to history, as an organic whole.⁶⁴

Similarly, Frye attacks current theoretical assumptions, calls for a critical approach that can deal with literary phenomena within the context of literature as a whole, allows that critics have made brilliant insights in spite of their confused theories, and proposes a science of criticism founded upon the study of analogous archetypal patterns.

A fundamental similarity between Frye and Spengler is their contention that cultures, and the productions of culture, can be studied as «organisms.» Spengler tends to be a bit of a literalist in this regard, but for Frye it is sufficient to observe that cultures behave like organisms, and that the study of literary forms demonstrates a corresponding organic development; beyond that, the idea can be «decorated metaphysically to suit the tenant.»⁶⁵ Art is understood by Spengler not as the work of an individual artist, but essentially as the expression of an «epoch.» The maker of the work tends to recede toward anonymity, or to be regarded as a compliant-medium through which the culture expresses its communal «spirit.» The greater the work, the more clearly it manifests the spirit of a particular culture at a particular stage.⁶⁶ Frye has come to similar conclusions with regard to Canadian literature:

I was fascinated to see how the echoes and ripples of the great mythopoeic age kept moving through Canada, and taking a form there that they could not have taken elsewhere. The better the poet, the more clearly and precisely he showed this.

In the Anatomy of Criticism, Frye's fundamental doctrine is that «literature shapes itself,» and the poet, therefore, «is not the father of his poem; he is at best a midwife.» The «true father» is «the form of the poem itself, and this form is a manifestation of the universal spirit of poetry.»⁶⁷

Layton, of course, resists any attempt to «depersonalize the creator and make of him a helpless purveyor of psychological archetypes.» The process whereby the «spirit» of the age takes over an individual mind is mysterious, but such views nevertheless reduce the poet to «some sort of talented idiot.»⁶⁸ Frye has certainly not been reluctant to voice his low esteem of the intelligence of poets. In The Educated Imagination Frye goes down the list of modern poets and their fetishes:

Writers don't seem to benefit much by the advance of science, although they thrive on superstitions of all kinds. And you certainly wouldn't turn to contemporary poets for guidance or leadership in the twentieth-century world. You'd hardly go to Ezra Pound, with his fascism and social credit and Confucianism and anti-semitism. Or to Yeats, with his spiritualism and fairies and astrology. Or to D.H. Lawrence, who'll tell you that it's a good thing for servants to be flogged because that restores the precious current of blood-reciprocity between servant and master. Or to T.S. Eliot, who'll tell you that to have a flourishing culture we should educate an élite, keep most people living in the same spot, and never dis-establish the Church of England.

In «The Critical Path,» Frye again makes the point that «poets are the children of concern: they show a liking

for being converted to dogmatic creeds of all kinds.»⁶⁹

Layton has called the poets worse, but in so doing he has reproached them with a failure to fully discharge their prophetic roles; whereas Frye seems to argue that the stupidity of poets demonstrates his contention that knowledge or intelligence is irrelevant to poetry as such.

In The Decline of the West, Spengler flatly states that art, let alone great art, is impossible in our age. Since a culture is an organism, it is subject to «aging.» The stages of aging are identified with the seasons. The springtime of Western culture was the Middle Ages, its summer was the Renaissance, and its autumn the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, culminating in the poetry of Goethe and the music of Mozart. With Napoleon, Western culture enters its winter stage and becomes Western «civilization.» A «civilization» produces no art. Its «spirit» is expressed exclusively in technological and administrative elaboration. The artistic and philosophical forms have all been exhausted; new developments are no longer possible. Its «literature» and «art» are simply symptoms of a frustrated, anarchic, hysterical reaction against the inevitable. In politics, socialism represents a similar hysterical reaction. The true spirit of «civilization» is manifest in monolithic empires, enormous cities, dictatorships and mass annihilation wars:

Civilizations are the most external and artificial states of which a species of developed humanity is capable. They are a conclusion, the thing-become succeeding the thing-becoming, death following life, rigidity following expansion, intellectual age and the stone-built, petrifying world-city following mother-earth and the spiritual childhood of Doric and Gothic. They are an end, irrevocable, yet by inward necessity reached again and again.

We must accept «the hard cold facts of a late life.» It is futile to pursue the arts and philosophy; better that «men of the new generation . . . devote themselves to technics instead of lyrics, the sea instead of the paint brush, and politics instead of epistemology.»⁷⁰

In the first essay of the Anatomy of Criticism, «Theory of Modes,» Frye classifies fictional literature according to the hero's power of action, beginning with myth at the top, followed by romance, high mimetic, low mimetic, and ironic. European literature since the middle ages, Frye suggests, has steadily moved its centre of gravity down the list, such that «during the last hundred years, most serious literature has tended increasingly to be ironic in mode.»⁷¹ In the ironic mode, society tends to be portrayed as guilt-ridden and sterile, a lynch-mob or a society of chattering monkeys. But irony moves steadily toward myth (although it is a demonic myth), toward what Spengler called a «second religiousness.»⁷² For Spengler this movement suggests little hope of renewal or rebirth, but for Frye it promises the beginning of a new cycle. It is perhaps

significant that the «Theory of Modes» was first published in the University of Toronto Quarterly under the title, «Towards a Theory of Cultural History.»⁷³

The literature of a culture's «youth» would seem to have a higher literary value than the literature of its old age. The suggestion is enhanced by the fact that the two most prestigious genres, epic and drama, particularly tragic drama, belong to a culture's youth. However, Spengler rejects any such ranking among the spring, summer and autumn phases; art does not get either better or worse, it simply gets older. If anything, in fact, Spengler would tend to regard the autumn phase as the highest, with Goëthë at the very apex. In this regard, Frye is solidly aligned with Spengler. Ranking historical seasons is a perversion of the whole system, another instance of the critic's futile penchant for «rhetorical value judgements»:

We get these, for instance, in the sentimental view of medieval culture which sees it as a gigantic synthesis followed by a progressive disintegration which has subdivided and specialized until it has finally landed us all in the Pretty Pass which we are in today.
 . . . Subsidiary forms of the same view are present in the people who cannot listen with pleasure to any music later than Mozart, or whatever terminal they choose.

Ranking literature according to season, Frye declares, is again an attempt to find the meaning of literature in something that is not literature:

A generation ago, a conservative Catholic determinism was fashionable, strongly influenced by Eliot, which adopted Thomism, or at least made references to it, as the summit of Western cultural values, and looked down benignantly on everything that followed it as a kind of toboggan slide, rushing through nominalism, Protestantism, liberalism, subjective idealism, and so on to the solipsism in which the critics' non-Thomist contemporaries were assumed to be enclosed.⁷⁴

Contrary to Spengler, Frye ostensibly ascribes the same value to the literature of a culture's «winter» stage as he does to that of the other stages. What Spengler regards as the exhaustion of form in futile, anarchic experimentation and nihilism, Frye regards as merely the «displacement» of myth to a realistic or ironic mode. However, if we read Frye's criticism by its «imaginative underthought,» if we attend to his tone and imagery, it is very clear that he regards contemporary «winter» literature as inferior. At best, he holds out the hope that irony will «displace» itself and once again become romance. Frye's rejection of the «toboggan slide» image seems rather unconvincing. With uncharacteristic «realism,» he merely increases the gradient and restricts the sliding to «winter» time.

This is a view that any major contemporary poet must find disagreeable, and Layton seems to have been very much aware that he had to contend with it. On July 5, 1970, he wrote to Pacey, «I despair of the future of the free world and begin to think that Spengler may have been right after all.» This is the only direct

reference to Spengler by Layton, but there seem to be several oblique references. In fact, Layton could not easily have avoided confronting Spengler in some form or other. The idea that the modern age lacks certain necessary conditions for the production of great art did not originate with Spengler; he seems remarkable primarily because he elaborated the idea with a systematic relish, and exulted in rubbing his reader's nose in the unpleasant 'facts'. The idea is already present in the works of Matthew Arnold and becomes a distinctive feature of modernism, particularly in the works of Eliot and Yeats. F.R. Leavis observed that to regard the obscurity and discontinuity of modern poetry as symptomatic of our cultural condition «amounts to an admission that there must be something limited about the kind of artistic achievement possible in our time.» Graham Hough has felt compelled to admit «that we live in a bad time» when the best that can be expected is that poetry may «keep some neglected parts of the human experience alive until the weather changes; as in some unforeseeable way it may do.» In The Social Context of Modern English Literature, Malcolm Bradbury maintains that «while we believe that art should and can be free, we also believe that we live in a time and society exceptionally difficult for the production of art.» Eugene Goodheart identifies the «current malaise» as a «paralysis» resulting from an intimidation by «the logic of history.» Much the same

idea hovers over Harold Bloom's The Anxiety of Influence.⁷⁵

Each of these critics, and this is clearly only a very short list, have identified, however implicitly, «the exceptional difficulties» of the contemporary writer in relation to an organic view of history. It should be noted that to deny the very possibility of poetry of the highest order in our age amounts to another effective device for blunting the poet's shafts.

Frye's contention that «we are all Spenglerians today,» whether we like it or not, seems, therefore, to be widely upheld, if not always consciously.⁷⁶ The pervasiveness of «organic» views of history and culture in modern art, philosophy and science has, perhaps, been most fully detailed and attacked by Wyndham Lewis in Time and Western Man. Lewis maintained, first, that to regard the old masterpieces of art, literature and philosophy as simply the collective ticks and jerks of an allegedly «dynamic» culture denied their universal «truth,» and hence their power to instruct contemporary society. Secondly, he maintained that to regard the contemporary arts and sciences as the abortive products of an exhausted civilisation tended to become a self-fulfilling prophecy.⁷⁷ For Frye, the effect of Lewis's attack was to validate Spengler: «The underlying postulate of Lewis' argument, which he takes so completely for granted that he does not bother to formulate it, is that a given society produces the philosophy, art,

literature, politics and religion appropriate to it.» Frye observes that Lewis's polemics are in a characteristically «modern» genre, the diatribe, which Spengler had identified as merely another of the ineffectual forms of protest against a petrifying culture. Another futile attempt to evade Spengler's unpleasant conclusions, according to Frye, was Toynbee's A Study of History. Toynbee's pallid notions of «break-down» and «challenge-and-response» seemed to Frye «woebegone» attempts to shirk Spengler's «pessimism» and «fatalism.» That a culture develops organically, and that Western culture is «old», Frye declares, is not an idea that «may after all rest on nothing but a false analogy. It doesn't.»⁷⁸

It becomes evident that it is not so easy to break out of the Spenglerian time-warp. On occasion, Layton also seems to slip into an organic historicism. In the letters to Pacey he often speaks of Christian or European civilisation as «exhausted,» «doomed,» and «dead.» On February 7, 1959, he maintains, in strikingly Spenglerian language, that the Suez crisis was «the herald of the West's doom, invested with all the tragic grandeur of historical symbolism.» The following week, on February 16, he concedes that «history is on the side of the regulated hordes of the future.» Two days later, he writes, «our condition is worse than that of the Romans -- with no christians in sight to redeem us.» A few weeks later, he glosses his poem, «Because My Calling is

Such»: the phrase, «blind Homer dancing,» expresses «the spaciousness and hospitality that Homer found for his poetry while I and poets of my era 'lie crouched in the rainless air'.»⁷⁹ In Layton's published work, there are similar suggestions of organic decline. In the «Foreword» to A Laughter in the Mind, Layton smells «the demise of our bourgeois-Christian civilization.» In the «Foreword» to The Swinging Flesh, Layton declares that «the society of the future will have no more need for living, creative art than for religion.» In the «Foreword» to The Laughing Rooster, he comments on «the prosiness of a scientific and technological age» that tends to discourage inspiration as Blake experienced it.⁸⁰

It is apparent, however, that some of these statements have to be severed from their context somewhat to make them sound like endorsements of Spengler. Characteristically Layton has refused to concede to any form of cultural organicism; but the refusal has not been made glibly. Layton has delineated the nihilism, cruelty, philistinism, totalitarianism, and resentment of contemporary culture as uncompromisingly as any modern writer, and he has confronted the bleak prospects in store for poetry in a technological society inundated by propaganda and advertising and insulated by an impenetrable gentility. Considering all this, his refusal seems heroic.

Given the unprecedented scale and the ingenious forms of «twentieth-century wickedness,» the contemporary poet «labours under the constraint of finding other

means.»⁸¹ The «means» change, but not the poet's prophetic role. Throughout Layton's criticism, there is an emphasis upon the continuity of the poetic vocation that survives, and must survive, all the disruptions, transformations, calamities, and horrors that mark the history of mankind. He clearly intends to de-emphasize the notion that the poet is an oracular bard in one age, a lusty balladeer in the next, then a courtly entertainer, then an introspective lyricist, and so on. If the issue is forced, all these can be regarded as «means.» The prophetic function remains the same. The poet in every age is opposed to the «organization men» and «commissars.» In «Prince Hamlet and the Beatniks,» Layton defends the extreme «means» of Corso, Ferlingetti and Ginsberg, forced upon them by the extremes of corruption and breakdown in contemporary American civilization, but he does not support their going «underground,» their apparent distrust of their prophetic role:

The true creator shows us the role of the writer in any age. He must grapple with the chaos and do so with passion and intelligence, knowing that if he makes even a beautiful poem he has given an answer to the chaos and the ugliness about him Forces of corruption are always with us. This age is a more difficult age because the challenge is greater.

In the «Foreword» to Droppings from Heaven, Layton concedes that «the climate's not right,» that «even love turns into hate and murder, into bullets and knives.»

But «the climate's not been right for millennia, perhaps taking a turn for the worse just about when our ancestors decided to climb down from the trees and walk erect.»⁸²

It is obvious that Layton's strong identification with the Judaic tradition has been an important factor in shaping his view of the continuity of the prophetic role. It is also obvious that the acclaimed «unity of culture» of some of the allegedly «great ages» may not appear so great from a Jewish perspective. Furthermore, what appears to a Christian or an enlightened liberal writer as an unprecedented calamity, may appear to a writer in the Judaic prophetic tradition rather more like déjà vu. At one point, in the correspondence with Pacey, Layton responds to some despairing observations Pacey has made about the seemingly inevitable decline of civilisation, and the bleak outlook for poetry. Layton refuses to be overwhelmed by the apparent inevitabilities: «Remember, I am two thousand years older than you are.»⁸³

Layton has the highest regard for great, individual poets, but he seems sceptical about the uniform greatness of any age. In the poem, «The Poetic Process,» Layton seems to suggest that a «great age» is of less use to the poet than «melonrinds» and «fruitstones.» At any rate,

The great days of Liz
Are mere Marlovian bombast:
The truth is dung, bubonic plagues

And London a stinking midden;
 The maids unwashed and credulous,
 The men coarse, or refined and corrupt
 Reading their folios.⁸⁴

If the great ages seem less uniformly great, the bad ages seem less radically different from them. In the «Preface» to Engagements, Layton maintains that «all analogies between a 'decadent' capitalist America and the Roman imperium are superficial and misleading, however fashionable certain writers have striven to make them.» In the «Foreword» to The Tightrope Dancer, Layton again concedes that «this is not an easy age in which to live or create.» Nevertheless, he seems to insist that even in the monolithic Spenglerian millennium of the future, poetry will continue to exercise its traditional function:

When women, homosexuals, proles, and blacks are at last free and equal, people will still continue to experience grief and rapture, want sex, grow old, and die. Enduring poetry keeps these constants in mind, whatever the earth-shaking changes in foreign policy and government.⁸⁵

In the poem, «Everywhere, The Stink,» the poet compiles a list of contemporary horrors and perversions, and he hears a man cry «The world's coming to an end!» But, «Lacking his faith, I go on writing my poems.»⁸⁶

Layton also resists any notion of historical determinism or fatalism. «In Nietzsche and Poetry: A Discussion,» Layton maintained that Nietzsche «believes in

the creative individual making history and, in a moment of optimism, creative mankind making its own history.» Prodded by Mandel, Layton adds: «creativity is antagonistic, is in eternal opposition to everything that would destroy creativity and introduce those lifeless structures that are inimical to growth.»⁸⁷ Thus, Layton first of all denies that history is shaped independently of particular human action, that it is governed wholly by its own organic laws. The second point acknowledges that history does manifest an intelligible development, that it does have «structure,» but poetry is not simply the consenting voice of this development, as Frye and Spengler would have it. To regard the work of art primarily as «the product of its age» tends to depersonalize the poet, to reduce him to a «talented dreamer» who formulates the collective desires, beliefs, and anxieties of his «age». To regard the poet as an «antagonist» affirms his strong relationship to his age, but also his unique, solitary, creative role.

When Frye turns his attention specifically to Canadian literature, the most striking feature of his criticism is, again, the evocative power of his own imagery, and secondly, the tendency of his imagery to disengage individual literary works from their social and political contexts. Louis Dudek has persuasively argued the point that mythopoeic and social-realist criticism represent the two poles of contemporary

Canadian criticism,⁸⁸ and Frye certainly has never moved very far toward social realism. However, the «location» of literature is taken much more seriously in Frye's criticism of Canadian works than it is elsewhere. According to Eli Mandel, this puts considerable pressure on his critical theories, and consequently his arguments develop some fascinating «contortions.»⁸⁹

In the «Conclusion» to A Literary History of Canada, Frye maintains that Canadian literature «is more significantly studied as a part of Canadian life than as a part of an autonomous world of literature.» This is because «Canada has produced no author who is a classic in the sense of possessing a vision greater in kind than that of his best readers.» Therefore, «if no Canadian author pulls us away from the Canadian context toward the centre of literary experience itself, then at every point we remain aware of his social and historical setting.» This makes Canadian literature an interesting case study: «It is much easier to see what literature is trying to do when we are studying a literature that has not quite done it.» Frye clearly does not expect to be overwhelmed, but aside from that, the «social and historical setting» of a Canadian author does not remain as prominent in Frye's criticism as the above statements might lead one to expect; the «setting» tends to become swallowed by «cultural history,» which «has its own themes of exploration, settlement, and development, but

these themes relate to a social imagination that explores and settles and develops, and the imagination has its own rhythms of growth as well as its own modes of expression.»⁹⁰ Once again there seems to be a Spenglerian undertone in his criticism.

One question that clearly interests Frye is the «age» of Canadian culture and its literature. From one point of view, its literature is certainly not «young,» since

it is written in a European language with a thousand years of disciplined utterance behind it, and any attempt to ignore that tradition can only lead to disaster. Nor is Canada a 'young' country in the sense that its industrial conditions, its political issues, or the general level of its civilisation, are significantly different from contemporary Europe.

From another point of view, however, Canadian culture does seem to be in its youth. Canadian villages do not «nestle» but «sprawl awkwardly;» their buildings «stand out with a garish and tasteless defiance;» the despoiled countrysides of Canada indicate «the vigorous wastefulness of young countries;» but above all, «it is a country in which nature makes a direct impression on the artist's mind, an impression of its primeval lawlessness and moral nihilism, its indifference to the supreme value placed on life within human society, its faceless, mindless unconsciousness, which fosters life without benevolence and destroys it without malice.» The conclusion to be

drawn from this is that, in Spengler's terms, the Canadian poet is «contemporaneous» with the Anglo-Saxon poets: «In certain Old English poems, notably 'The Wanderer' and 'The Seafarer,' there is a feeling which seems to a modern reader more Canadian than English.»⁹¹

The problem of «Where is here» becomes complex. The Canadian poet has a new 'content' and a youthful vitality, often a primitive vitality, but he has only old forms imported from Europe to put them in. His vitality and environment can provide the content, but they cannot provide the form. What Frye seems to be suggesting here is that Canadian culture is in danger of falling into the condition Spengler termed «historical pseudomorphosis,»

in which an older alien culture lies so massively over the land that a young culture, born in this land, cannot get its breath and fails not only to achieve pure and specific expression-forms, but even to develop fully its own self-consciousness. All that wells up from the depths of the young soul is cast in the old moulds, young feelings stiffen in senile works.⁹²

This is a gloomy prospect. Frye does not explicitly use Spengler's term, but he seems to use Spengler's idea:

The Canadian poet, though he must try to express something of what the Old English poet felt, cannot afford to forget either that a highly sophisticated civilisation is as much a part of Canadian life as deep snow and barren spaces. If we can imagine a contemporary of the Beowulf poet, with equal genius and an equally strong urge to write an archaic epic

of the defeat of a monster of darkness by a hero of immense strength and endurance . . . yet writing for the same public as Ovid and Catullus, and forced to adopt their sophisticated witticisms and emotional refinements to his own work, we shall begin to get some idea of what the Canadian poet is up against.⁹³

When Frye writes on contemporary Canadian literature, his condescension is undisguised. He finds a «social Freudianism» taking shape which regards society as «controlled by certain anxieties, real or imaginary, which are designed to repress or sublimate human impulses toward a greater freedom.» The enemy of the poet is not the capitalist but the «square,» the «anti-creative elements in life as he sees life»:

The advantage of this attitude is that it preserves the position of rebellion against society for the poet, without imposing on him any specific social obligations.

This attitude has been imported from the United States, and although its influence has been limited, «it has affected Layton and many younger Montreal poets.»⁹⁴

Leon Surette has argued that from the early nineteenth century to the present, «a disproportionate amount of commentary on Canadian writing has been cultural history . . . rather than truly literary commentary.»⁹⁵ Some of the works cited by Surette are Lionel Stevenson's Appraisals of Canadian Literature (1926), Lorne Pierce's Outline of Canadian Literature (1927), E.K. Brown's On Canadian Poetry (1943), Frye's review of Smith's The Book

of Canadian Poetry (1943), to D.G. Jones's Butterfly on Rock (1970) and Atwood's Survival (1972). They all illustrate «the tendency to write cultural history when observing the Canadian literary scene.» Frye's «Conclusion» to A Literary History of Canada is a paradigm of the genre, announcing as it does that «this book is a collection of essays in cultural history.»

Surette maintains that the pre-occupation with «culture» begins in Europe with Winckelmann and Vico and develops in the nineteenth century into a dogma that asserts that «some such supra-personal entity as culture existed, and that it somehow expressed the genius of a people or race.» Spengler's Decline of the West is the «most renowned expression» of this view, but it appears also in Hegel, Marx, Arnold and Toynbee, and «it was in this intellectual climate that men first began to write about Canadian literature.» If «culture» is «an entity whose boundaries are determined by place and by race» it becomes literature's job to formulate that culture, and this imposes a definite colouring to the nature of the alleged problem, and the expectation of its resolution. Surette quotes from Pelham Edgar's 1912 assessment of Canadian literature:

We are . . . in the anomalous position of being a young race born into the old age of the world. All the countries of Europe have passed through the ballad and epic stage of unselfconscious literary production, and we are only vicariously the heirs of all this

antecedent activity. They have a mythical as well as an historic past to inspire them, and they possess vast tracts of legends still unexplored which yield, as in Ireland, stores of poetic material as beautiful as they are seemingly inexhaustible.

Surette appropriately points out that this passage was published six years before The Decline of the West.

Speculations on cultural history have certainly yielded some exciting insights, but as they become more formal, some of the basic assumptions begin to appear more and more dubious. National topography becomes inordinately important as a determinant of culture; it «dominates the critical perspective on Canadian literature, because no other means of establishing its boundaries (eg. language or race) are available.» According to Surette, the argument runs as follows:

Culture is a product of physical environment. On that axiom European culture is proper to the European topography and climate. Similarly, Canadian culture ought to be proper to the Canadian environment. However, Canadians are Europeans by race and by culture. Therefore, our European culture is discordant with our North American environment. Or, alternatively, since we have left the soil which nurtures European culture, we are isolated from the fructifying principle of that culture. We are condemned to borrow forever from Europe because we cannot divorce ourselves from the cultural heritage we brought over the sea, and that culture must remain forever barren in an alien soil.

Surette concludes that the topographical bias of Canadian criticism-as-cultural-history constitutes «an essentially invisible intellectual environment in which Canadian

criticism moves and breathes and has its being.» Perhaps Surette's most important contribution in this article is to remind us that «culture,» as the term is used in literary criticism, is itself an invention of the late eighteenth century, that literature thrived before its invention, and may continue to thrive after its demise; that is, contrary to Frank Davey, the idea of a literary masterpiece may survive in a «post-culture.»

Layton has not agonized unduly about the Canadian identity, or, in Frye's terms, how best to adapt Anglo-Saxon content to Ovidian form. He has been as contemptuous as Frye about «adolescent tremors and tragi-comic posturings» imported from the United States, but he does not find the «anxieties» of contemporary society imaginary.⁹⁶ Layton's impatience with the search for «roots» is particularly evident in the «Introduction» to Anvil Blood, 1973. He divides Canadian poets into four overlapping groups. The «Loyalists» and «Indians» are mocked for their anxious anti-Americanism and their «unenterprising type of mind that sees danger in change and experiment.» The «Frygidians» regard the archetypal memories of the unconscious as a «racial kitty waiting to be raided by any enterprising poet bold enough to try it.» The point of Layton's attack on all of them, although it is expressed somewhat flippantly here, is that they prefer to deal with trivial exotica rather than the pressing reality within and around them. Only

the fourth group, the «Jews» confront that reality; «the evil revealed in history and the human heart holds more terror for them than the forbidding landscape conventionally invoked as an explanation for the salient traits in Canadian poetry.» That they may be labelled «rootless cosmopolites» does not worry Layton, although that label might surprise some of his critics.

These groupings should perhaps not be taken too seriously. The important critical insight occurs toward the end of the «Introduction,» where Layton offers his own observations on the «salient trait» of Canadian poetry:

Canadian poetry, especially since the 40s, has been marked by a tough yet engaging humanism that has placed it above the post-war poetic achievement of any other English-speaking country. It is compounded of wisdom, humour, and a concern for the texture of human experience. It is not a People's poetry but a poetry of people. In what other national poetry will you find so many uncles, aunts, grandfathers, cousins, mothers and friends? And so cleanly and lovingly delineated? Or enemies and antagonists? No matter, they are individuals, persons. Canadian poetry -- wake up, critics -- is not a poetry of landscape; it's a poetry of persons. Birney's David, Cohen's father and grandfather, Mandel's children, Klein's Monsieur Gaston, P.K. Page's stenographers, Purdy's fine portraits, Alden Nowlan's, Gustafson's -- the list is endless. Scarcely a modern or contemporary Canadian poet who has not his own private gallery of portraits. Surely one of the most exhilarating features about our poetry is this interest in individuals, in persons.⁹⁷

This passage constitutes a veritable coup. The «salient trait» of Canadian poetry turns out to be a matter of content after all. And the content is real, human individuals. And the poetry is «compounded» not of myths and «culture» but of «wisdom, humour, and a concern for the texture of human experience.» The purpose of this whole paragraph is partly to provoke and taunt, but it also conveys a sincere and infectious delight in Canadian poetry, and the sense of an important critical discovery.⁹⁸

Notes

¹ Irving Layton, Letters to Desmond Pacey, February 4, 1956 and June 30, 1958.

² Engagements, p. xiii, and Taking Sides, p. 78.

³ Northrop Frye, The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), pp. 8, 31, 41, 52-53, 69, 115-118. See Seymour Mayne, «Introduction» to Irving Layton: The Poet and His Critics, pp. 1-22, for a fuller account of the «aesthetic of distaste» expressed by Frye and other critics and reviewers of Layton's work. See also Louis Dudek, Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 307-308.

⁴ Review of The Book of Canadian Poetry, ed. A.J.M. Smith (1943), in The Bush Garden, pp. 135-137.

⁵ Engagements, p. 159.

⁶ The Bush Garden, pp. 18 and 53-54.

⁷ Engagements, p. 159.

⁸ Taking Sides, p. 47.

⁹ «The Keys to the Gates» (1966), in The Stubborn Structure: Essays on Criticism and Society (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1970), pp. 176-177.

¹⁰ I am aware that any number of statements can be selected from Frye's work to flatly contradict everything I have said about him. In fact, Frye's work, like the Bible, seems so wide-ranging, and his method so versatile, that he can be quoted to support or attack just about any position. I am also aware that while Frye often appears as a kind of formalist's formalist, he has championed the centrality of literature in education, culture, and social life generally, and that, more so than any other critic in Canada, he has brought literature into a prominent relation with current social and political issues. Nevertheless, Frye's work does assert and elaborate a definite, consistent view of

literature and society, however elusive it may seem on some particulars. There have been numerous studies and critiques of his work, among them Northrop Frye in Modern Criticism, a collection of essays edited by Murray Krieger; Northrop Frye and Critical Method by Robert D. Denham; and Francis Sparshott's essay, «Frye in Place,» in Canadian Literature, No. 83 (Winter, 1979), pp. 143-155. I will refer to these and others throughout this chapter, but I cannot begin to attempt a clear, comprehensive, and balanced assessment of Frye's criticism. I will, however, attempt to demonstrate that there are important and substantial reasons for Layton's attacks on Frye. If my treatment of Frye seems rather carping, it is partly to illustrate more sharply the nature of the quarrel, and partly to avoid becoming entangled in endless qualifications and gratuitous discriminations. Layton has called Frye «a literary Titan,» and I certainly will not pretend to stand any less in awe of his achievement.

¹¹ Lentricchia, After the New Criticism, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 9-10.

¹² See «Prefatory Statements and Acknowledgments,» Anatomy of Criticism, pp. vii-viii.

¹³ Wellek and Warren, Theory of Literature, p. 190. I will deal with Frye's relation to other archetypal critics later in this chapter.

¹⁴ Frye regards Blake as a romantic revolutionary, and tends to take that position as his own. However, he has also been described as «a Liberal Party guru» and as «one of nature's CCF-ers.» See Francis Sparshott, «Frye in Place,» in Canadian Literature No. 83 (Winter 1979), p. 151.

¹⁵ Frye, The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. 129-130. See also Fables of Identity (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), pp. 37-38.

¹⁶ Donald Davie, Articulate Energy, pp. 130-136. Frye's essay «Levels of Meaning in Literature» appeared in Kenyon Review, 12, no. 2 (Spring, 1950), pp. 246-262.

¹⁷ Eli Mandel, Another Time (Erin, Ontario: Press. Porcepic, 1977), pp. 156-157.

18 Frank Lentricchia, After the New Criticism, p. 18. The quote from Frye's work is found in Anatomy of Criticism, p. 86. It should be noted that Robert Denham has attempted to defend Frye against charges of extreme formalism: «Frye does not say that literature is unrelated to life or to the direct experience of the reader. He says simply that these relations cannot be the basis for systematic critical knowledge.» This still leaves out the personal experience of the creator. Nevertheless, the point Denham makes is apt, and it has been made by Frye on several occasions. However, there is no denying that the cumulative thrust of his work is overwhelmingly toward a clear separation of literature from the direct experience of reality. See Northrop Frye and Critical Method (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), p. 144.

19 Murray Krieger, ed., Northrop Frye in Modern Criticism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966); Gregory T. Polletta, «The Place and Performance of Criticism,» in Issues in Contemporary Literary Criticism, ed. Gregory T. Polletta (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1973), p. 6; Francis Sparshott, «Frye in Place,» Canadian Literature No. 83 (Winter, 1979), pp. 143-144.

There seems to be a widely held view that contemporary literary criticism has reached another point of crisis. A number of recent critical works, for example Geoffrey Hartman's Criticism in the Wilderness, Gerald Graff's Literature Against Itself, Eugene Goodheart's The Failure of Criticism, and Irving Howe's Decline of the New proclaim the crisis in their titles. They seem to fall into two camps: those like Hartman, who wish to preserve criticism as a respectable discipline in the university; and those, like Goodheart and Howe who wish to preserve criticism against the exclusive claims of the university. To the former, Frye's achievement seems heroic, to the latter it tends to appear invidious. Layton would certainly side with the latter.

20 Gerald Graff, Literature Against Itself, p. 182.

21 The Educated Imagination (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1963), p. 66; Anatomy of Criticism, p. 119.

22 Engagements, pp. 56-59.

23 Engagements, p. 109.

24 Taking Sides, p. 182; Engagements, p. 121.

25 See Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 3-29; and Richard Wasson, «From Priest to Prometheus: Culture and Criticism in the Post-Modern Period,» Journal of Modern Literature, 3, no. 5 (July, 1974), p. 1201.

26. The Critical Path, p. 69.
27. Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 134-140 and 365; see also «Myth, Fiction and Displacement» in Fables of Identity (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), pp. 37,38.
28. The Modern Century (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 29-30 and 73.
29. George Steiner, Language and Silence (New York: Atheneum, 1967), pp. 51 & 10. Layton compares Frye to Steiner and Hamburger in his attack on Colombo's article on the Student Writers Conference, Engagements, p. 172. In the Letters to Pacey, March 9, 1962 and January 15, 1974, Language and Silence and Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are commended as antidotes to Frye.
30. When Frye writes on «high demotic style,» his language soars, and can stand comparison to Steiner's. See The Well-Tempered Critic (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), pp. 101-102.
31. «Frye in Place,» p. 147.
32. «Frye in Place,» p. 149.
33. The Educated Imagination, p. 27; Anatomy of Criticism, p. 348; The Modern Century, p. 104.
34. Taking Sides, p. 177.
35. Geoffrey Hartman, Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 183. Louis Dudek has also commented on the passage from The Modern Century quoted above. His comment is illustrative of the direction his criticism began to take after 1958. His quarrel with this passage is not that it perversely undermines the didactic function of poetry, but that the «classroom» is too weak to «insulate» the student from the «anti-social doctrine» of Modern Literature. Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 256-257.
36. Lionel Trilling, Beyond Culture, p. 8.
37. Beyond Culture, pp. 10-12.
38. The Critical Path, p. 127.

39 Frederick Crews, «Anaesthetic Criticism,» in Psychoanalysis and Literary Process, ed. Frederick Crews (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop Publishers, 1970), p. 14. Crews essays first appeared in The New York Review, 14, No. 4 (February 26, 1970) and No. 5 (March 12, 1970). It should be noted that Frye is not the only target of Crews attack, but he is the primary target.

40 Engagements, p. 58.

41 The Stubborn Structure, pp. 176-177.

42 Anatomy of Criticism, p. 4.

43 Murray Krieger, «Northrop Frye and Contemporary Criticism,» in Northrop Frye in Modern Criticism, p. 22. The whole question of knowledge and reality in Frye's work tends toward solipsism. In his essay, «Speculation and Concern,» (The Stubborn Structure, p. 51), the sciences are allowed little more knowledge of empirical reality than the arts:

Reality is primarily what we create, not what we contemplate. It is more important to know how to construct a human world than to know how to study a non-human one. Science and philosophy are significant as two of the creative things that man does, not as keys to the reality of the world out there. There is a world out there, but science sees it as a world under law, and no vision under law can ever give us the whole truth about anything. Science moves with greatest confidence, and makes its most startling discoveries, in a mechanical and unconscious world. If we remove science from its context and make it not a mental construct but an oracle of reality, the logical conclusion is that man ought to adjust himself to that reality on its terms. Thus moral law imitates natural law, and human life takes on the predictable characteristics of nature as science reveals it. What begins as reason ends in the conditioned reflexes of an insect state, where human beings have become cerebral automates. The real world, that is, the human world, has constantly to be created, and the one model on which we must not create it is that of the world out there. The world out there has no human values, hence we should think of it primarily not as real but as absurd.

- 44 «Frye in Place,» pp. 149-150.
- 45 Those who hold this «functional» view are sometimes referred to as the How-the-bunny-rabbit-got-his-white-tail school.
- 46 See David Bidney, «Myth, Symbolism and Truth;» Clyde Kluckhohn, «Myths and Rituals: A General Theory;» and Stanley Edgar Hyman, «The Ritual View of Myth and the Mythic,» in Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice, ed. John B. Vickery (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 3-13, 33-44, and 45-58. See also Philip Rahv, The Myth and the Powerhouse, pp. 7-13; and Eric J. Sharp, «Structural Anthropology,» in The Twentieth Century Mind, ed. C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson, pp. 185-200.
- 47 Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth, trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York: Dover Publications, 1953), pp. 5-28.
- 48 Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 2, 4, and 316. My other principal sources for this discussion of myth are Morton W. Bloomfield, ed. In Search of Literary Theory (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972); Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (New York: Bollinger, 1949); O.B. Hardison, ed. The Quest for Imagination (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1971); Geoffrey H. Hartman, «War in Heaven,» Diacritics, 3 (1973), pp. 26-32; Bernice Slotte, ed., Myth and Symbol (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963); and Philip Wheelwright, Metaphor and Reality (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962).
- 49 Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 102, 341, and 365-366. See also Northrop Frye, Spiritus Mundi. Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 117.
- 50 See «The Critical Path» in In Search of Literary Theory, ed. Morton W. Bloomfield, pp. 189-192 (this is a somewhat shortened version of The Critical Path); The Secular Scripture. A Study of the Structure of Romance (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 9; Spiritus Mundi, pp. 120-121; and The Well-Tempered Critic, pp. 111-156.
- 51 Wallace W. Douglas, «The Meaning of 'Myth' in Modern Criticism,» in Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice, ed. John Vickery, pp. 120-122; Louis Dudek, «The Misuses of Imagination: A Rib-Roasting of Some Recent Canadian Critics» (1973), in Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 309-310.

- 52 Selected Essays and Criticism, p. 308.
- 53 Eli Mandel, Irving Layton, pp. 9-11.
- 54 Anatomy of Criticism, p. 140.
- 55 The Stubborn Structure, p. 51.
- 56 «Nietzsche and Poetry: A Discussion,» in Taking Sides, p. 66.
- 57 The Portable Nietzsche, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Viking Press, 1954), pp. 484 and 277.
- 58 Taking Sides, pp. 65-71.
- 59 Engagements, p. 147.
- 60 Engagements, pp. 65-68.
- 61 «The Critical Path,» in In Search of Literary Theory, ed. Morton Bloomfield, p. 102.
- 62 Spiritus Mundi, pp. x-xi, and 111.
- 63 Northrop Frye, «Oswald Spengler,» in Architects of Modern Thought, first series (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1955), pp. 83-90.
- 64 Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West, vol. 1, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), pp. 3-46.
- 65 Anatomy of Criticism, p. 343. Frye tends to liberalize Spengler's notion of «destiny» somewhat, first by means of his functional view of the myth of concern, and secondly, particularly in his later work, by emphasizing that «culture» belongs to the world of man's creations, that its development is, therefore, not determined exclusively by sub-conscious or «organic» forces. This idea seems to be imported from Vico's The New Science. Vico claimed that man can have knowledge only of that which has been made by man, and can discover the truth about himself and his world only by studying what he has made: «History» is the most inclusive term for what man has made, and therefore it can be studied as a «science, the science of man.» Many of Vico's theories are more compatible with Frye's later work than Spengler's. To some extent, Vico could be described as a Spengler without the «Wagnerian whinnies.» However, by his own account (Spiritus Mundi, p. 111), Frye came to Vico somewhat late in life. Not

until The Critical Path, 1971, is there an extended reference to Vico (see pp. 34-42). See also Giambattista Vico, The New Science, trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), pp. 73-75; Benedetto Croce, The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico, trans. R.G. Collingwood (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), pp. 5 and 24; and David Bidney, «Vico's New Science of Myth,» in Giambattista Vico: An International Symposium, eds. Giorgio Tagliacozzo and Hayden V. White (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 262.

- 66 Decline of the West, vol. 1, p. 222.
- 67 The Bush Garden, pp. viii-ix; Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 97-98.
- 68 Engagements, p. 109; Letter to Desmond Pacey, March 21, 1961.
- 69 The Educated Imagination, p. 7; «The Critical Path,» in In Search of Literary Theory, pp. 189-192.
- 70 The Decline of the West, vol. 1, pp. 31-45 and 339-375. See also Northrop Frye, «Oswald Spengler,» in Architects of Modern Thought, first series, p. 84.
- 71 Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 34-35.
- 72 Decline of the West, vol. 1, pp. 424-428.
- 73 University of Toronto Quarterly (July, 1953), pp. 325-341.
- 74 Anatomy of Criticism, p. 343; The Critical Path, p. 19.
- 75 See F.R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry, second edition (London: Chatto and Windus, 1950), pp. 104-114; Graham Hough, «The Modernist Lyric,» in Modernism, eds. Bradbury and McFarlane, p. 322; Malcolm Bradbury, The Social Context of Modern English Literature (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p. 115; Eugene Goodheart, The Failure of Criticism, p. 52; Harold Bloom, The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). It may be argued that Frye could have picked up his Spenglerisms from any number of modern sources, particularly from Yeats. But wherever Frye encounters organic or cyclic views of history, they are usually referred back to Spengler and found somewhat wanting!

76. It may be noted that a number of social critics and theorists have identified «historicism» or some version of «time-as-history» as a pervasive and baneful force in modern thought. One such critic is Karl Mannheim:

Historicism has developed into an intellectual force of extraordinary significance The historicist principle not only organizes, like an invisible hand, the work of the cultural sciences (Geisteswissenschaften), but also permeates everyday thinking. Today it is impossible to take part in politics, even to understand a person . . . without treating all those realities which we have to deal with as having evolved and as developing dynamically These forces are grasped and understood as potentialities, constantly in flux, moving from some point in time to another; already on the level of everyday reflection, we seek to determine the position of our present within such a temporal framework, to tell by the cosmic clock of history what the time is Historicism is therefore neither a mere fad nor a fashion; it is not even an intellectual current, but the very basis on which we construct our observations of the socio-cultural reality.

See Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge, ed. Paul Hecskemeti (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), pp. 84-85. Philip Rahv has quoted the above passage in support of his attack on mythopoeic criticism in «The Myth and the Powerhouse,» p. 16. Another major attack on historicism is George Grant's Time as History (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1969). The book attempts to find a way to break out of the «trap» of historicism, an attempt that is particularly frustrated by what Grant, following Nietzsche, perceives as the modernist resentment against itself. However, while the attempt is passionately urged, it is not realized: «It is for the great thinkers and the saints to do more». (p. 52).

The pervasive historicism that Mannheim, Rahv, Grant, and others have identified does not amount to quite the same thing as Frye saying «we are all Spenglerians today.» It is a more light-hearted, Bergsonian, historicism that they seem to be attacking, particularly when they regard its manifestations in politics and social science. But whatever they find socially paralyzing and morally debilitating in «historicism» would apply doubly to Spengler's cultural organicism. It is perhaps ironic,

however, that the protest against historicism usually takes the form of either «archaism» or socialist utopianism, for which Spengler had already found a place on his map of cultural morphology.

77 See Wyndham Lewis, Time and Western Man (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), pp. 8-12, 140 and 154.

78 Northrop Frye, «Wyndham Lewis: Anti-Spenglerian,» Canadian Forum (June, 1936), pp. 21-22; «Neo-Classical Agony,» Hudson Review (1957-1958), pp. 592-598; «Toynbee and Spengler,» Canadian Forum (August, 1947), pp. 111-113.

79 Layton, Letters to Desmond Pacey, August 8, 1958; February 7, 1959; February 16, 1959; February 18, 1959; and March 12, 1959.

80 Engagements, pp. 82, 93, and 111.

81 Engagements, p. 128.

82 Engagements, p. 95; Taking Sides, p. 62; Droppings from Heaven, p. 11.

83 Unfortunately I have not recorded this letter in my file on the Layton-Pacey correspondence, and must quote from memory.

84 Collected Poems, p. 156.

85 Engagements, p. xii; The Tightrope Dancer, p. 11.

86 Collected Poems, p. 294.

87 Taking Sides, pp. 68-69.

88 «The Misuses of Imagination: A Rib-Roasting of Some Recent Canadian Critics,» in Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 304-319.

89 Eli Mandel, «Criticism as Ghost Story,» in Another Time, p. 156. Mandel argues that in the 1940s Frye «attempted a formalist analysis of a nationalist literature» that attributed distinctive forms to «The Canadian Imagination.» In the 1960s, Frye regarded Canadian literature in the context of Modernism, with the «surprising consequences» that «Canada disappeared,» replaced by the ideal of a humane, non-national, liberal society. In the 1970s, the emphasis was upon local and regional «identity,» rooted in the imagination, opposed to «unity,» rooted in political feeling. Mandel concludes that

the problem or puzzle in Frye's work . . . has to do with the distinction between the nature of forms and their source, or more accurately, their location. Examine their nature and you move into the world of fantasy or the realm of the ideal. Look at their location and you see them in an historical context, in a given place and time. The first is a formalist approach; the second the radical. (p. 158)

- 90 The Stubborn Structure, pp. 278-279.
- 91 The Bush Garden, pp. 145-146.
- 92 The Decline of the West, vol. 2, p. 187.
- 93 The Bush Garden, p. 147. See also p. 174.
- 94 The Stubborn Structure, pp. 293-294.
- 95 Leon Surette, «Here is Us; The Topocentrism of Canadian Literary Criticism,» Canadian Poetry, No. 10 (1982), pp. 44-57. Eli Mandel's chapter, «Writing West» in Another Time, pp. 45-78, should perhaps be consulted as an antidote to the reductive thrust of Surette's essay, but his main argument remains pertinent.
- 96 Taking Sides, p. 96.
- 97 Taking Sides, pp. 83-84.
- 98 Layton makes the same point, though in more tentative language, in the «Ruminations» in Taking Sides, p. 200.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that there is a development in Layton's own work as a poet-critic, and that this development occurs in direct relation to the major currents that have shaped poetry and criticism since World War II. Secondly, I have maintained that Layton's participation in controversy and criticism has sustained a lively awareness of certain enduring, fundamental principles, and provided a fund of knowledge and experience on how the contemporary human condition is brought to realization in poetry.

Milton Wilson and Seymour Mayne have both identified a tripartite development in Layton's work. The first stage finds its completion in A Red Carpet for the Sun, 1959, the second in the Collected Poems, 1965, and the third extends into the 1970s. They have maintained that the development has been consequent upon a concentric pattern of structural and thematic renewal, constantly yielding fresh discoveries and new points of departure. In his «Notebook on Layton,» Wilson adds that he is an «historical» poet in that his work «exists in continual reaction to the varied events and changing human relations of his own life, to the developing

context of Canadian poetry, and to the cultural, intellectual and social world of his time.» Furthermore, Mayne points out that Layton has maintained an on-going dialogue with both poets and critics over a period of three decades.¹ These views have been substantially endorsed by Eli Mandel in his up-dated study of The Poetry of Irving Layton, 1981. His earlier study, 1969, emphasized the «imaginative and intellectual pattern» of Layton's work, the complex unity of his poetic vision and mythical structures. In the up-dated study, Mandel still maintains that «the coherence and unity of his poetry are so strong that a structural and thematic consideration of his work is inescapable,» but Mandel now adds that «his poetry has its historical dimensions, partly in terms of his own personal history, more particularly in relation to the historical events of his time.»² If this applies to Layton's poetry, it applies doubly to his criticism.

In the course of four decades, Layton has seen the critical climate change from the modest reassurances and reforms of the post-war «Movement» to the cultural nihilism of post-modernism -- whether the nihilism is regarded stoically as in Steiner's work, or more optimistically, as in Frank Davey's. His response to shifts and tremors in literature, politics and society has been quick, forceful, but also discriminating. Against a maze of movements and trends, of highly acclaimed breakthroughs and dogmatic retrenchments, all tending, it

seems, to pull poetry toward one extreme or another, Layton seems to have held a position at the historical centre, identified primarily with the Hebrew prophets and the early Romantics, particularly Blake, Byron and Heine. One of Layton's most important functions as a critic has been to challenge and pressure his contemporaries to push back the limits that current practice, taste, and theory seemed to impose. He has been quick to detect developments that tend either to undermine or strengthen the vitality of poetry, and to discard allegedly new developments that have already withered into reassuring clichés or surrogates for personal experience. What all this indicates is that the nature of his criticism is dialectical rather than analytical or schematic. He tends to examine the motives and implications of ideas rather than the consequences of axioms; he avoids technical language; and the relationships he examines are not bound by categorical or formal divisions. It could be argued that very few critics in Canada have maintained such a lively awareness among their contemporaries of the full range and potential of poetry.

In the 1940s and early 1950s, Layton sensed that the post-World War II generation could no longer regard the early modernists as exclusive models, as the McGill Movement seemed to have done, and that the left-wing «coterie» poetry of the Auden-Spender-MacNeice group had

failed not only to inform public concerns but to sustain its own convictions. Layton re-asserted the didactic function of poetry, and the necessity of a substantial, non-professional audience. His «social realism» emphasized the central importance of personal experience, emotion and passion, not in relation to a sublime landscape or to a private encounter with the ineffable, but honestly and forcefully responsive to current social and political realities. Where the pressure of personal experience was lacking, poetry became merely a clever statement of enlightened opinion, typically accompanied by ritual gestures of alienation. This was the main argument of First Statement against Preview, and «personal experience» also supplied the main thrust of the argument against colonialism and Smith's cosmopolitanism. Without personal experience, a poet's work is inevitably derivative, whatever its themes may be, or however ingenious in formal inventiveness.

In the 1950s, Layton's attacks on gentility were directed against a neurotic Cold War society that seemed to regard reminders of War-time atrocities, dehumanizing technology, death and sex, suffering and joy, as perverse distractions from the pursuits of commerce and respectability. The poetry and poetics of the «Movement» in England, the New Criticism in the United States, and «signs of reaction, new and old» in Canada, all seemed in effect to endorse a state of discreet moral and

spiritual desuetude. In this climate of reduced vitality, Layton reasserted the heroic virtues, the freedom of the imagination, and life-affirming Dionysian creativity. He brings his distinctly Jewish perspective to bear upon «culture» and «literature,» challenging Anglo-Saxon decorum with his earthiness and subversive ironic humour.

The 1960s witnessed a resurgence of radical political activity, the emergence of a cultural underground, a sexual revolution, a reaction against modernism and «high culture,» a profusion of literary activity following upon much increased public support for publishers and poets, and ambitious, comprehensive, «scientific,» literary theories. In response to this «flowering» of the human spirit, Layton seemed to shift markedly toward the right. His vision of contemporary society and the future of poetry became darker. «Gentility» now appears as an impenetrable intellectual, emotional and moral torpor that permits, in fact incites, rationalized human cruelty on an unprecedented scale. In his arguments with Pacey, Layton attacked «flabby» socialists who appeared unruffled by the oppression of Soviet totalitarianism but reacted with predictable fervour against the War Measures Act. He rejected what seemed to him the hysterical nihilism of the Beats and the neo-primitivists, but in his argument with Dudek, he also rejected a rationalist censorship upon the

«neurotic» poet in the name of high culture or civilization as understood by Pound. While he continued to rail against the political illiteracy and «invalidism» of the early modernist poets, he insisted upon the «assimilation» of the profound knowledge of the human soul revealed by the «great» modernists, like Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Lawrence, Kafka and Rimbaud. Against the self-conscious barbarisms of many of the post-modern writers, he endorsed the modernists' commitment to their exalted office, and found, in a poet like Yeats, a grasp of contemporary reality in language that was both supple and monumental.

In the work of Northrop Frye, Layton found the prophetic role of the poet usurped by the critic. The individual work is subsumed in literature-as-a-whole. It is virtually deprived of content. What might otherwise appear as a penetrating indictment of organized human cruelty becomes merely an instance of the «displacement» of myth to an ironic or realistic mode. «Personal experience» and statements of «truth» appear as concessions to current prejudice. Having removed the work from its social context, the critic returns a schematized, defused version of it back to society as an image of literature-as-a-whole, in the service of enlightened liberal opinion. In opposition to Frye's «dumb,» Spenglerian organicism, Layton re-asserted the unique, creative role of the poet, the importance of

his prophetic adversary function in all ages, and in place of the «bush garden» view of Canadian poetry, he asserted the portrait gallery -- that is, his triumphant discovery of the emphasis upon the human element and personality in Canadian poetry.

The 1970s were again a prolific decade for Layton. There is a discernible development in theme and language, but the period is not primarily remarkable for startling shifts or new departures. Rather, it is remarkable for the boldness and finality with which Layton proclaims his fundamental critical convictions. In retrospect, his earlier criticism seems more tentative and exploratory.

Since the appearance of the Collected Poems in 1971, Layton has published ten more volumes of poetry, plus seven selections, two prose collections, and the correspondence with Dorothy Rath. Among these are nine new «Forewords.»³ They contain the familiar themes: the attack on gentility, the contempt for the triviality of recent poetry, scorn for literary ideologues, outrage against the rationalized cruelty of the age, against the lack of conviction among those who would oppose it, and again, the re-assertion of the poet's prophetic function.⁴ However, his criticism now gestures more toward vast historical periods than specific contemporary developments. Auschwitz and Gulag remain the dominant symbols of the uniquely heinous nature of twentieth-

century evil, of anti-semitism and totalitarianism. But more and more, a swelling list of suffering poets and the history of European Jewry itself is placed in judgment over the whole of Western civilization.

The Pole-Vaulter has two inscriptions; the first is a quote from Nietzsche:

In the end it must be as it is and always has been: great things remain for the great, abysses for the profound, nuances and shudders for the refined, and, in brief, all that is rare for the rare.⁵

This idea of the «rare», if not exactly new, is again something that gives Layton's work in the 1970s a distinctive tone. More and more a kind of elite of «rare» individuals seems to carry the burden of hope in an increasingly dehumanized world. It is certainly not an elite identified by class or an established intelligentsia. In fact, it is clearly in opposition to those. Neither does «rare» suggest any sort of precious sensibility. One of Layton's images of the rare individual is the pole-vaulter, a kind of athlete of the spirit. The pole-vaulters include Nadezhda Mandelshtam, Heda Kovaly, Andrei Amalrik, Anne Frank, Desmond Pacey, among select others. «The world is redeemed by its pole-vaulters.»⁶

Layton's most important symbol of the «rare» is the Jew, «the banalities of middle-class Judaism» notwithstanding.⁷ It is the image of the «rare» Jew that

appears in the last lines of «Osip Mandelshtam (1891-1940)»:

let us be the rapturous eye of the hurricane
flashing the Jew's will, his mocking
contempt for slaves.

In the «Foreword» to The Pole-Vaulter, Layton declares that whether it be National Socialism or Russian National Communism, «the Jew with his tenacious faith in the creative principle and in human dignity is their unyielding antagonist.» In the «Foreword» to For My Brother Jesus, the vitality and creativity of the Jew is pitted against «the anti-sexuality, anti-life bias at the heart of Christianity.» The image of the poet as Jew permits Layton to reconcile two opposing principles of his criticism -- the principle that poetry must function at the centre of private and public life, and the principle that poetry stands apart from the collective lunacies of the age. The poet prophet now appears as an outsider speaking to outsiders, yet Layton avoids any sense of the modern alienated poet. In the «Foreword» to The Covenant, Layton points out that «Jews throughout their painful history have stayed on the periphery of civilizations,» yet the «majestic figures of the Hebrew prophets,» including Jesus, have spoken from a timeless centre; while civilizations come and go, they uphold and preserve «those values without which a truly human existence is not possible.»⁸

In Bluebeard's Castle, George Steiner raises the question, «How is one to address oneself, without a persistent feeling of fatuity, even of indecency, to the theme of ultimate inhumanity?» Along with Layton, Steiner contends that «the barbarism which we have undergone reflects, at numerous and precise points, the culture which it sprang from and set out to desecrate.» The Holocaust was not «some monstrous accident in modern social history.» Steiner's response to the finality of the Holocaust is «silence,» or at best a retreat from «culture» to a transitional «literacy.»⁹ Layton regards the accumulated atrocities of the twentieth century with the same finality, and he constantly confronts the «fatuity» of addressing oneself «to the theme of ultimate inhumanity» -- that is, the apparent fatuity of poetry after Auschwitz and Gulag. Yet Layton rejects silence. He insists that only poetry, «only words, artfully shaped out of passion and integrity,»¹⁰ reaching out to «rare» individuals, has any «meaning» within an otherwise absurd totalitarianism, whether of the blatant, crushing Soviet type, or the more subtle technological or technocratic uniformity of the West. Layton considered «silence» in the «Foreword» to The Swinging Flesh, 1961: «The Poet, in the inert, collectivist world order looming up before him, can choose suicide or silence.» It is not difficult to imagine the silence of A.M. Klein ringing in Layton's ears. But Layton declares that the

poet «can also curse: curse long and loud and unceasing.»¹¹
In his essay on the «Ethnic Voice in Canadian Writing,» Mandel poses the question, «How can you be a Jew in a goyisha land?» One answer is, «Be a monster,» the answer, Mandel argues, of Richler and Cohen. For Layton the question posed by Mandel means essentially, how can you be a poet in a barbarous post-culture? But, as Mandel aptly points out, Layton's answer is an inversion of Richler's and Cohen's; he insists that «the other is monstrous» while «the self authentic, Layton's self» is «defined as identical to the poet.» Layton equates «poet with Jew» and places «the Judaic-prophet-poet in opposition to WASP professor, presbyterian morality, christian ethics and vision, Canadian society in its puritanical and lifeless routine.»¹²

Layton insists that the poet must engage the seminal conflicts of his age, and those conflicts appear also in his criticism. He has recognized no national restrictions with regard to either his themes or imagery. One of his important contributions to Canadian criticism has been to challenge his contemporaries to assimilate developments not only in England and the United States but also in Europe, both East and West. However, if he has been scornfully impatient «with the search for roots of the Canadian identity which so engrosses Loyalists and Indians,» and with the alleged «terror» of the «forbidding landscape,»¹³ he has not been indifferent to the

national context of Canadian poetry, as is evident in his enthusiastic participation in national issues, his defense of a Canadian tradition in poetry, and his strong advocacy of the merit and unique quality of poets like Lampman, Klein, Birney, Scott, Purdy, Cohen, Acorn, Mandel, Nowlan, Mayne and Solway. It is clear that he finds their work identifiably Canadian, namely, «a poetry of persons,» but he resists identifying it with Canadian «culture.» Normally he seems to see the best of Canadian poetry as standing in opposition to Canadian «culture», which he tends to regard primarily as the negative by-product of two great revolutions, the French and the American. On the other hand, through Canadian institutions like the CBC and a small number of magazines, he has found that it is possible for poetry in Canada to interact with a sizable, responsive national audience and thereby sustain a necessary public function.

While «thematic criticism,» by scholars and poet-critics, continues to thrive in Canada, it seems to have encountered growing, or at least more vocal, opposition. Pacey, Dudek, and Miriam Waddington come immediately to mind as long-standing opponents of thematic criticism. Frank Davey has also become prominent, and Barry Cameron, Michael Dixon, Russell M. Brown, as well as Leon Surette, have recently published substantial critiques of the «thematic four.»¹⁴ In fact, among contemporary critics, the recurrence of the same four names, Frye, Atwood,

D.G. Jones and John Moss, may suggest that this kind of criticism is not as dominant as some of its opponents have avowed. The most prominent critics of Canadian poetry, most of them poet-critics, represent a considerable variety of critical approaches. Dudek and Souster, as Frank Davey's study of their combined careers illustrates, have long held a prominent and influential place in Canadian criticism, keeping open lines of communication with modernist developments in the United States and elsewhere, and challenging the craftsmanship of their contemporaries.¹⁵ Davey himself, along with, or in reaction to, Mandel and Dennis Lee, have brought post-modernist perspectives and techniques to bear upon Canadian poetry. A lively debate has been conducted among poet-critics in Alphabet and Tish, and now Open Letter. In addition there is George Woodcock's collection of criticism by poets.¹⁶ Yet, among a profusion of poet-critics, Layton's contribution stands out. A cluster of ideas associated with the prophetic role of the poet, gentility, Dionysian creativity, a versatile craftsmanship, Auschwitz and Gulag have been brought into currency in Canadian criticism with a force that seems to assure their permanence. Moreover, Layton has successfully demonstrated that poetry and criticism can be prominently and provocatively engaged in public affairs. In the 1940s, the First Statement poets began their campaign to bring poetry out of the «coteries»

and the universities and turn it loose upon a wider public. The campaign can claim substantial success, and Layton's contribution to its success has been by far the most important. Furthermore, the notion that an engaged poetry becomes merely versified party-line, merely «propaganda,» can no longer be held with the complacency it once enjoyed. In the «Foreword» to A Red Carpet for the Sun, Layton saw his work «as an effort to achieve a definition of independence. Not, though, of disaffiliation.»¹⁷ This is a stance that he has maintained with rare integrity.

However, Layton's criticism has not been well received by the literary establishment. If Layton's ego is annoying in his poetry, where it is thought to be muffled by the demands of poetic form and craftsmanship, it is found overbearing in its raw state in the prose.¹⁸ It is indicative that Layton is cited, along with Earle Birney, in Woodcock's «Introduction» to Poets and Critics as one of the few contemporary Canadian poets who have not engaged in criticism.¹⁹ Layton has a point when he argues that those among his critics who have been relatively receptive to his work, «the Reform congregation,» nevertheless insist that he has «no judgment,» no «critical wisdom,» that he is «some sort of freak» who somehow managed to compose a number of excellent poems, almost in spite of himself.²⁰ Eli Mandel is one of the few major critics who have taken Layton's

criticism seriously. In his «Introduction» to Contexts of Canadian Criticism, Mandel regards Layton's «Forewords» as «surely the single most important body of criticism of its kind in Canada.»²¹

The idea of writing poetry for poets has been anathema to Layton. However, he seems to have written criticism for poets. If his criticism has been met with distaste or indifference by Canadian critics, it has been appreciatively and productively absorbed by many of his fellow poets including several who have strenuously opposed it. This point is persuasively argued by Seymour Mayne:

Perhaps no other Canadian poet has had so many poems addressed to him by other poets, and many poems addressed to him in a spirit of literary dialogue and homage. It demonstrates how his influence and the impact of his presence were felt by his contemporaries. Poets of the McGill group to the poets of the Sixties and Seventies provide a running commentary upon the man and poet. In their changing attitudes to him can be found perspectives on his growth and development and the centrality of his career and writing to Canadian literature.²²

In the interview by Lawrence Resnitsky, 1972, Layton made a similar assessment of the importance of his work to contemporary poets:

I am going to make the claim that most recent writing of poetry in Canada has been influenced by the style of poetry I fashioned The kind of style that I hammered out twenty years ago, is the dominant style of writing

poetry in Canada today. Whether it's the George Bowerings, or Margaret Atwood, or John Newlove, there isn't one young poet today who in some way has not been imitating my style of writing poetry.²³

One can only add that this is the least of it. Not only in matters of style, but in the range of images of the poet, the range and power of his poetic themes, and the successful assertion of his presence in a reluctant literary and social environment, Layton offered his contemporaries the amazing spectacle of a great poet in their own time and place.

While I have found it necessary to emphasize the fact that Layton's criticism has been conducted in the heat of controversy, it is not necessary to accept uncritically his own estimates of the exigency of his quarrels, his repeated claims that should the views of Frye or Dudek or Smith prevail, poetry would suffer imminent extinction. These are by no means idle claims, but Layton does seem to expand his quarrels to mythic dimensions, and in a letter to Pacey on July 8, 1962, he acknowledges that he tends to «exaggerate, distort, blow everything up,» but out of necessity, in reaction to the otherwise oppressively staid, unruffleable literary community. In another letter, January 6, 1965, Layton craves a long respite «from controversy and argument, from myself, perhaps mostly from myself.» To some extent Layton's quarrels may have been quarrels with himself. This would certainly not diminish their

significance or urgency. Yeats said, «We make out of our quarrel with others, rhetoric, but out of our quarrel with ourselves, poetry.» Quarreling with both himself and others at the same time, Layton made a remarkable and enduring body of criticism.

Notes

¹ Milton Wilson, «Notebook on Layton» and Seymour Mayne, «Introduction,» in Irving Layton: The Poet and his Critics, pp. 221-236 and 1-22.

² Eli Mandel, Irving Layton, p. 9; and The Poetry of Irving Layton (Toronto: Coles Notes, 1981), p. 1.

³ The ten volumes of new poetry are Nail Polish, 1971; Lovers and Lesser Men, 1973; The Pole-Vaulter, 1974*; For My Brother Jesus, 1976*; The Covenant, 1977*; The Tightrope Dancer, 1978*; Droppings from Heaven, 1979*; For My Neighbours in Hell, 1980; Europe and Other Bad News, 1981*; and The Gucci Bag, 1983*. The seven collections are Seventy-Five Greek Poems, 1974; The Darkening Fire, 1975; The Unwavering Eye, 1975; The Poems of Irving Layton, ed. Mandel, 1977; The Uncollected Poems, 1977; The Love Poems of Irving Layton, 1980*; and A Wild Peculiar Joy, 1982. The two prose selections are Engagements, 1972*; and Taking Sides, 1977. The asterisk indicates volumes to which Layton contributed a «Foreword.»

⁴ See «Forewords» to For My Brother Jesus, p. xv; Droppings from Heaven, p. 11; and Europe and Other Bad News, pp. 10-11.

⁵ The Pole-Vaulter, p. 5.

⁶ The Pole-Vaulter, p. 9.

⁷ «Foreword» to Europe and Other Bad News, p. 9.

⁸ The Pole-Vaulter, p. 9; For My Brother Jesus, pp. xvi; and The Covenant, pp. xii-xiii.

⁹ In Bluebeard's Castle, pp. 31-36. See also «Silence and the Poet,» in Language and Silence, pp. 36-54.

¹⁰ «Foreword» to The Tightrope Dancer, p. 11.

¹¹ Engagements, p. 93.

- 12 Another Time, pp. 95-96.
- 13 Layton, «Introduction» to Anvil Blood, 1973, in Taking Sides, pp. 82-83; see also p. 182.
- 14 See Miriam Waddington, «Literary Studies in English» in Supplement to The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature, ed. William Toye (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 204-210; Frank Davey, «Surviving the Paraphrase,» Canadian Literature, 70 (Autumn, 1976), pp. 5-13, and «Atwood Walking Backwards,» Open Letter, second series, 5 (Summer 1973), pp. 74-84; Louis Dudek, «The Misuses of Imagination: A Rib-Roasting of Some Recent Canadian Critics.» Selected Essays and Criticism, pp. 304-319; Barry Cameron and Michael Dixon, «Introduction, Mandatory Subversive Manifesto: Canadian Criticism vs. Literary Criticism,» Studies in Canadian Literature 2 (Summer, 1977), pp. 137-145; and Russell M. Brown, «Critic, Culture, Text: Beyond Thematics,» Essays in Canadian Writing 11 (Summer, 1978), pp. 151-183.
- 15 See Frank Davey, Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster.
- 16 See Davey, From There to Here; Eli Mandel, Another Time and Criticism: The Silent-Speaking Words (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1966); Dennis Lee, Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology (Toronto: Anansi, 1977); and George Woodcock, ed., Poets and Critics.
- 17 Engagements, p. 83.
- 18 See, for example, the following reviews of Engagements: R.W. Watt in University of Toronto Quarterly, 42, pp. 440-444; Burton Kurth in Malahat Review, 26 (April, 1973), pp. 229-231; and Robert Fulford in The Toronto Star (November 11, 1972), p. 57, reprinted in Irving Layton: The Poet and his Critics, pp. 214-216.
- 19 George Woodcock, «Introduction» to Poets and Critics, p. ix.
- 20 «My Troublesome Compatriots» (1975), in Taking Sides, pp. 79-80.
- 21 Contexts of Canadian Criticism, p. 16.
- 22 «Introduction» to Irving Layton: The Poet and his Critics, p. 14.
- 23 Taking Sides, p. 212.

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