THE OCCASIONS OF IRVING LAYTON

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FULL EXPOSURE to Irving Layton's work and character (through the work) is for me very recent. What is distinctive about Layton is his energy, sometimes zestful, sometimes fierce, and his thoroughgoing commitment to his own views of humankind and human experience. A confident egotist, he is yet "faced toward the stars"; believing in himself, he has had to struggle mightily for that belief — first against years of neglect, then against years of misunderstanding. Capable of generosity, tenderness, it is well-known that he has not survived without bitterness. He has written often of the spontaneity of his emotions, but has sustained himself by means of a pervasive Nietzscheanism, convinced that the battle is to the strong. The world of human happenings fascinates him. He may not love people much, or many of them, but he is not indifferent to them. His poems are populated. For most of his career his misanthropy is Swiftian, affection for individuals on the one hand (even though he is often harsh towards them), hatred of the mass and its abstractions on the other.

As is often pointed out, Layton is a traditionalist in technique. His career has coincided with the cult of "the new", but that is ultimately irrelevant. His own claim that he is a fine craftsman with a near-faultless sense of rhythm is not too extravagant, but (to use a phrase of Eli Mandel's) his early poems are a "pell-mell scattering of images". While many have moments of penetrating beauty — a quality achieved by image, intensity, tone — often they are not coherent wholes, being too clotted, over-detailed, combining clumsy syntax with an overplus of material. Too much happens in too confined a space; but this is a squandering of riches, disclosing eagerness to proffer the largesse available to a true poet. Later, of course, he manages a range of traditional forms impressively, sometimes magnificently.

With fair frequency Layton is a *convincing* poet, "for real" as they say, but, despite the fact that his work is characteristically clear and clean-limned, there is something elusive about the exact nature of his talent. One critic has claimed that Layton is a didact, another that he is precisely not that. One sees him as a "performer", whose content is undemanding while his language is "daring" and "fresh". Another says he pays too little attention to rhythm and sound, that he is a rather boring purveyor of anecdotes, that he has no sense of the order of the universe. To some extent at least, it depends on where you start from!

Throughout his work there is much evidence that Layton can put on a style: pastiche of Auden, Eliot, Yeats, Williams, Stevens. Obviously, he is interested in all the means available to the poem. True, he has not explored much into the rhythm and sound of colloquial speech, for he is a literary poet, but he is not at all rhetorical in the bad sense, for he does have a good ear and, after the very early period, an ease of line which allows him to bring all his senses into his work with a high degree of naturalness. While one of his subsidiary notes is anti-cultural, anti-academic, he is steeped in European culture and he uses it to good purpose, just as he uses a wide range of the forms of English poetry — from song and ballad to sonnet and octosyllabic couplet, epigram, nursery rhyme, dramatic monologue.

Layton's undeniable anecdotage derives from his close interest in people, but the approach clearly demonstrates his typical relationship to them. A curiously pervasive effect in his work is of the poet at once committed and apart. Where he is a participant it is most commonly in sexual encounters, and even then one very often has the sense that he is clinically observing the woman, if not using her. In human encounter he can be involved to the point of anger or compassion, but apart nevertheless. He weeps to see an example of human decrepitude or the death of a bull-calf, but it is also he who, godlike in "The Mosquito" (26),* notes his insect, his "Franciscan monk", "in the exact centre/ of the white writing table — a bullseye!", which he smashes with a fist and a "philosophical" observation. In other poems he is sickened by the aesthete who kills a frog by dropping a rock on it from above — for the effect (138), or by the "Neanderthal" (497) who, instead of simply swatting a fly, seals it off, condemning it to a slow death by insecticide. Highly characteristic anecdotes, these accounts of the slaughter of insects and small animals seem, in his consciousness, to represent a paradigm or analogy for man's fate, the fate of Job in the hands

*Bracketed numbers are page references to *The Collected Poems of Irving Layton* (McClelland & Stewart, 1971), which is the occasion for this essay.

of a God for whom justice equals power. Paradoxically, man within his own sphere is dominant.

Elsewhere Layton reveals himself to be infected by the cynical aestheticism which repels him in another:

> Whenever
> I see bugs manoeuvring
> on the kitchen floor
> with bits of food or paper
> sticking to their bodies
>
> I have a resistless desire
> to crush them
> under my foot
>
> Only if they have bright colours
> will I spare them (536)

Finding a sinkful of brown insects, he (the poem is in the third person, but we may assume that "he" is the poet) feels the insects to be "philistine matter":

> His daily ontological lesson.
> Nothingness hell-bent for nowhere. Godlike he
> observes for a few moments this ridiculous parody
> on human existence, sponge in hand. No angel parts
> the ceiling to shout, "Hold!" And with one rough
> sweep he wipes away this living smear of fig-jam
> (including one or two artists and philosophers
> who have separated themselves from the frothing
> brown mass). (531)

The tone is, of course, ironical, but the particular posture occurs often enough in Layton's work for the irony to double back on itself. While man is the dominant creature in his world, the most sensitive and best of men need to isolate themselves to play their appointed roles. Such isolation has its dark side. Layton is as far as can be from a sense of possible community or from the attitudes of, say, a Schweitzer. As far as Layton is concerned, bill bissett's chant, "we are here to take care of the earth" is very likely the reverse of the truth, for he asks: "How to dominate reality? Love is one way;/ imagination another" (28). Rich and ranging as are his attempts at domination, they are ultimately piecemeal.

Layton appears to be a prime example of one ruled by his own "ego-system" (as Charles Olson might have put it) but what does this imply, and need we

assume that Layton's universe has no other ordering principle? It is well to keep in mind Leo Spitzer's dictum that any author should be criticized only after a full and detailed attempt has been made to understand his purposes. First, generally speaking Layton presents himself as a *personality* rather than as a *voice*, but this is not absolutely so, as is shown by a handful of his apocalyptic poems (even such an early piece as "Halos at Lac Marie Louise" — 33). The distinction in question is between man as part of the process, continuous in the whole of phenomenal reality (and therefore a voice of it) or man sensing himself as discontinuous, as a personality. Participation in reality or "How to dominate reality?" — the question is a crux.

POET, COCKSMAN, TEACHER and misanthrope — these are the prominent facets of Layton's personality as presented through his writing. What does each role mean to him? Early he admitted to himself that "there isn't a ghost/ of a chance/ people will be changed by poems" (68), while somewhat later, writing of "Suzanne" (209), he acknowledges:

> I owe to her
> beside simple thanks
> my notion of poetry
> as visceral sanity.

Poetry, then, is a condition of his own existence, something which happens to him ("I wait/ for the good lines/ to come" — 9), he receiving it as Sebastian received the arrows; but is it anything more? An attempted answer in "Whom I Write For" (78) conveys a markedly ambivalent sense of where Layton is as poet and human being. In summary, he suggests that he writes for all suffering humanity (including "Adolph Eichmann, compliant clerk"), famous or unknown, powerful or weak:

> I do not write to improve your soul;
> or to make you feel better, or more humane;
> Nor do I write to give you any new emotions;

but rather

> When reading me, I want you to feel
> as if I had ripped your skin off.

Why, he does not reveal, but the clearest impression is that he writes for others in order to feel and demonstrate his power over them. Yet he is at the mercy of that power, sometimes happily as in "At the Alhambra" (291), or disturbingly as in "Haruspex" (4), but always in danger of feeling "a seedless Joseph, castrate, storing grain" (64) or sensing himself one of a "congregation of sick egotists" (174). He is at the mercy of that power in another sense, remarking in his "Foreword" to this volume that "the poet is someone whom life knocks on the head and makes ring like a tuning fork". "Lies?/ No: Language", he answers his own question in "The Poetic Process" (156), but it is not usually language that he is tuning to.

Eli Mandel,[1] basing his view to some extent on the preface to *A Red Carpet for the Sun*, sees Layton's poetic personality as a fusion, as the double-god Dionysius/Apollo, a neat way of overcoming many apparently contradictory attitudes in Layton's work. Mandel's condensed exegesis is very convincing, but another remark in Layton's "Foreword" may be helpful here: "I see life as a Dionysian cock-and-cunt affair with time off, though precious little of it, for meditation and good works". Sometimes one lives, sometimes one stops to think about that and about other people's lives. The "good works", then, are in a context of:

> One miserable human more or less hardly matters
> but the loss of a good poem does,
> being irreplaceable. (241)

Why are poems so important?

> the poet transfigures
> Reality, but the traffic cop
> Transcribes it into his notebook. (156)

The poetic process is one of transmogrification. Behind these expressions (where they are not stock responses) is a Shelleyan sense of the poet's role. Yet William Carlos Williams (to take a one-time mentor and influence of Layton's) would have thought the cop's notes vastly more relevant and "real" and therefore the true stuff of "the poem".

Layton runs a whole gamut of attitudes about poetry, from the Shelleyan, to the Byronic (i.e., sardonic) (61), to a sense of the modern poet as eunuch (188, posed against a background of looking to earlier, Byronic models). The fundamental "doubleness" in Layton's attitude to poetry may be seen as a balance (thus, with great sympathy, Eli Mandel sees it), as tension, or as confusion. The

"trick of lying/ All poets pick up sooner or later" (316) can come perilously close to an illusion that one "transfigures/ Reality". In effect here Layton momentarily recommends attention to the cop's notebook, but he is immediately off in his crown of mist playing beggar-buffoon on the stilts which allow him to "see" at a higher level (and how appropriate the image is!) These flourishes seem necessary to his "freedom", to the kind of poet he is, to his sense of his poet-self. In a later poem, "The Skull", is a moment, a word, which synthesizes all:

> I want to write poems
> as clean and dry
> and as impertinent
> as this skull (491)

Observable everywhere in his poems, Layton has a gift (a very literary gift, let's accept it) for the word which is "fine excess". Here "impertinent" reverberates. The skull "grins", but it is also impertinent because in the end everything is as pertinent as anything, or nothing, part of the "poem/ that has written me since time began" (389). One has the feeling that his securest sense of poetry is when he is nearest to *voice*:

> In me, nature's divided things —
> tree, mould on tree —
> have their fruition;
> I am their core. Let them swap,
> bandy, like a flame swerve
> I am their mouth; as a mouth I serve. (121)

But the early image of "The Swimmer" (2), "Opening the spray corollas by his act of war", may be the nearest he has come to concentrating his various notions about the poet and his function. Immersing in "the cold green element" by an aggressive, functional plunge, the swimmer is at once transformed into something much closer akin to the water, "A brown weed with marvellous bulbs". He "goes under like a thief" as if headed for "home", but soon, "Stunned by the memory of lost gills", is forced to the surface again. *Almost* at one with the water element he is, simultaneously, participant, observer and self-absorbed. The poem speaks of integration at many levels, sexual, spiritual, and in poetry. Just so the poet, or Layton's deepest sense of the poet, plunging for his poem.

OF THE MANY OTHER ELEMENTS in Layton's work, predominant are: hatred of man's raging but all-too-rational cruelty in an apocalyptic universe, and an erotic sense of woman, a chief means of whatever solace he may achieve.

One of his most scarifying poems, "The Cage" (42) is a terrible vision of man's "altruism". Blinded "without charge" by the "selfless blacksmith", the poem's protagonist is kept in a cage made of iron and stone donated by masons and ironmongers. Each of these worthies competes in disinterested goodliness, clumsily colliding with his fellows in eagerness to attend the "Blinded and raging" prisoner. A similar view of the human universe is conveyed with still sharper irony in "The Improved Binoculars": city in flames, firemen first to save themselves, real estate men already gazing speculatively at the land being cleared by ruin, lovers deserting each other in mid-coition:

> And the rest of the populace, their mouths
> distorted by an unusual gladness, bawled thanks
> to this comely and ravaging ally, asking
>
> Only for more light with which to see
> their neighbour's destruction.
>
> All this I saw through my improved binoculars. (139)

Both poems lay bare the demonic aspect of man, and Layton's Faustian view of the world is further strikingly evoked in "In the Midst of My Fever" (98), which absorbs an attitude from his Auden period ("large/ as Europe's pain" catches the tone here), going beyond it, to portray, in technicolor irony, a world in which it is miraculous that "someone/ quietly performed a good deed", in which cruelty is expected and the ways to freedom are labyrinthine and fugitive:

> Nudes, nodes, nodules, became all one,
> existence seamless and I
> Crawling solitary upon the globe of marble
> waited for the footfall which never came.
> And I thought of Time's wretches and of some
> dear ones not yet dead
> And of Coleridge taking laudanum. (99)

This vision of human depravity, in a world "Like a backdrop held by an enormous claw" (142), is held in suspension in one of Layton's finest poems, "Seven O'Clock Lecture" (110). Speaking simultaneously of his roles as poet

and teacher, and of the "permanent bloom on all time-infected things", he sees the appalling contrast between spilt blood and the beauty of "the Arts", despairing of their being brought into any kind of life-giving balance in this world of well-aired sheets and "chromium gods" ("chromium" being his term for mindless contemporary barbarism, the abstractionism of modern life). He sees the poet as suffering clown ("God! God! Shall I jiggle my gored haunches/ to make these faces laugh?"), yet as controller, (teacher?) even inventor, of the scene; so that "the immortal claptrap of poetry" fits ambiguously into the whole ambiguity of man's "will to falsehood" among the "immortal coal of the universe".

Ambiguity is deepened by Layton's sense of an over-riding power, the "enormous claw" of a wrathful God (in an "atheist's" world!):

> God, when you speak, out of your mouth
> drop the great hungry cities
> whose firetrucks menace my dreams (143)

Whatever coherence may be discerned in his view of human experience, it is through this nightmare of holocaust, of the apocalyse. With it goes a bitter sense of betrayal, for it is this same teeming God of whom the whale, in its joyous "being-at-oneness/ with the universe", thinks:

> "Surely the Maker of Whales
> made me for a purpose".
>
> Just then the harpoon
> slammed into his side
> tearing a hole in it
> as wide as the sky. (470)

Layton is not a poet of the single vision, but a man of varied (often inconsistent) moods and passions, whose intensity is frequently a fusing power in his work. While here and there (especially in his portraits of women or responses to the plight of animals) are moments of tenderness and generosity, he is mostly an energetic hater. Perceiving that love is essential for survival, his own contribution to that end tends paradoxically to be negative and destructive. He detests mass-man and conformist hypocrisies, persistently attacking the abstract, the academic, the theoretical which drives out flesh-and-blood responses:

> Frantic love of the Divine
> Burns out common affection:

So it was that Augustine
Thinking concubinage sin
Abandoned child and wife
To essay the holy life (272)

or

The Leninists are marching on us.
Their eyes are inflamed with social justice.
Their mouths are contorted with the brotherhood of man.
Their fists are heavy with universal love. (222)

He despises "the world's acquired acumen: / To sin privately and speak well of Good" (277). One of his greatest strengths is forthrightness or, at least, a willingness to admit his own positions and to realize without apology that they are partial. What does *he* mean by "Good", though? A good lay, an honest merchant, a dead Nazi or Arab? If, in one mood, his stance towards reality is Faulknerian-romantic (for Faulkner too professed to think a good poem worth the lives of any number of old ladies), so, in terms of human behaviour, Layton tends to be Hemingway-existentialist. An action is good if you "feel good" after it, and

All the motions of living are equally absurd
But one might as well have clean linen. (25)

It depends on you, positively, being yourself, as opposed to "Homo Oeconomicus":

From everywhere comes up the stench
Of technology's *massenmensch*,
Not a man really, but a tool.
Frightened, alienated, dull;
A machine part, replaceable . . . (282)

None of this is new, it need not be, and it shows Layton very much as a man of his period. Tinged with sentimentalism, it can carry him as far as a curious inversion of the pathetic fallacy:

Philosophies
religions:
so many fearful excuses
for not letting the sun

nourish one
and burn him to a cinder

Look at the skeletons
of those oaks:
the proud flame of life
passed through them
without their once having heard
of Jesus or Marx (308)

Disgust with human beings leads him to despair that the end of our universe is still "more than a billion years away". Observing human depravity through his "improved binoculars" he adopts a tone of scathing irony, forgetting that in another mood a human fate seems to him akin to that of a roach drowned in a glass of wine. He sees "Everywhere,/ the stink of human evil", yet regards the average man as "a repressed nine-to-five slave," encountering whom in a restaurant,

I had a sudden vision
of mashed potatoes.
But these had their coats on. (44)

Finding the so-called "good life" deplorable, yet he seems to feel that its material sleaziness is all there is, the "truth" (he advises the rabbi) being sensible investment in real estate by men "bored by whisky and wifeswapping" (49). Slave or not, man is predatory, but his predatoriness is without grace, freedom or self-enjoyment. Self-hating, "tamed and tainted" man sets traps for wild free natural creatures, but "even/ more terrible traps for his own kind" (67). Without lustre, man (Layton's elevator man) spends his life pointlessly "going up and down", fulminating against anyone who threatens his world with the least change. The poet says "almost aloud":

"Civilization could not endure
A single hour without your trapped soul" (70)

Layton loathes civilization, or professes to, but his rage here echoes curiously that of the "affable tool" he is addressing, and he himself is subject to "the insult of birth,/ the long adultery with illusion" (75). On the one hand are the "unlived lives" of the ladies at Traymore's, on the other the repeated view that man is more venomous (evil) than a snake, a venom which takes the form of abstraction, alienation, dehumanization, lack of ability to empathize (theme of many

poems, such as "Life in the 20th Century" — 247). But what does human Mr. Layton say to all this?

> Idiot!
> The one human I'd trust
> is a deaf-mute paraplegic —
> behind bars! (260)

The realm in which he feels at ease is one where he is conscious of the sun, of delicate flowers, of children, of grassy fields, of trees and "Waiting patiently for their gift of leaves" (326) "in this world of mournful beasts/ that are almost human" (455); but at the heart of this same nature-loving, peace-loving Layton is a Heraclitean restlessness, the rejector of "dreary Absurdist plays", craver for the "sweet smell of lechery, of steamy scrotum/ and crotch", one who is finally a lover of the abyss:

> I'm tired of seeing the world go by on its well-oiled joints,
> of all this repetitive, ignoble, useless pother.
> It's the sameness that finally disappoints (426)

At the same time, as in "Epiphany" (459) he is disgusted by human sensation-seeking.

LIKE WHITMAN, Layton "contradicts" himself, but it may be questioned that the contradictions partake in a larger harmony. His personalism is no heresy, merely a limitation of range. He once wrote that a "poet is someone who has a strong sense of self", but his sense is of the occasions of his own ego. Without belittlement we may say that he is an occasional poet, one who stands as a critic of our society (from "this arsehole of a country" to the whole Western way of life), but whose criticisms are not especially fresh insights and not buttressed by an alternative vision or a suggestion for new ways of living. Apparently he sees himself as a being profoundly different from his fellow-citizens, as looking deeper than they, and suffering more, but it may be simply that he is a more articulate victim of the same psychological and moral confusions.

Erotic love would be a chief component of any Layton vision of utopia or paradise. In quest of "love" he bares his back to sun and moon, and one version of Layton the lover, going up and down like a bicycle pump (or an elevator man?), is comical, if sometimes savagely so. But many of the love poems are true celebrations, such as the early "Song for a Late Hour" (30), "For Musia's

Grandchildren" (455) and the tenderly beautiful and deservedly much-anthologized "Berry Picking" (345).

In some of his less likeable and more perfunctory erotic poems woman is viewed as if she were a side of meat; but often his eroticism is evinced with a respect and tenderness akin to love. Sometimes, too, he generates a feeling of human excitement in the occasion, conveying a sense of propinquity and mutual complicity (as in the epigrammatic sequence "Five Women" — 332). Women's Libbers must find Layton appalling and would certainly argue that he is chained by old-fashioned sexual attitudes. He is in that, as in so much else, a traditionalist.

> It is sad to be an atheist,
> sadder yet to be one with a limp phallus (402)

he observes in "Mahogany Red", in one of many references to his supposed "atheism", which read mostly as if he means "relativism" or lack of ultimate purpose (compare "Côte Des Neiges Cemetery", "Gratitude", "Elegy for Strul", "One Last Try at a Final Solution", and many other poems). The limp phallus confirms the "atheism" as also does the lady's garish red hair. A genuine feeling for the woman, present in the poem, is overburdened by Layton's contemplation of *carpe diem*. Similarly, poems such as "The Way of the World", "Undine", "Dionysus" and "Diversion" (the tones of which suggest that he has also learnt from the Roman poets) have a curious, silvery air of detachment. Yet "A Strange Turn", also concerned with passing time and missed opportunity, an occasion on which the sexual roles are in a way reversed, comes through as fully and poignantly real:

> Ah, if my flesh were but firm, not loose,
> And I were young, how she'd ride and ride! (190)

Another poem, nearly as moving, in which the woman is dominant, is "For My Green Old Age" (297). In both pieces, behind the poignancy, held in balance with it and thus allowing the poem to reverberate, is Layton's other sense of woman, as man-devourer, emasculator, of whom a full-scale portrait is given in "Woman in the Square" (144). Yet another poem on time and sexual love, "Dans Le Jardin" (216), in which the lovers together are "uncoupled by the coming night" contains its sensuality in a cool formalism which orders great depths of feeling. Where these poems work it is because of the sense of emotion recollected, of a measuring of experience, a somewhat different manifestation of which is the fusion of feeling and calculation in "The Seduction" (288).

Among the later poems we range from the Yeatsian "I pray my last days on earth be mad/ with sexual desire" (530), to the deepening pessimism of the image of time as a wolf who claws to death the lover's lady (576), and the bitter declaration that "women are repulsive mammals/ without souls" (518), whereas earlier they had been imagined as "the waters where ends all sin" (351). Towards woman as towards all experience Layton displays the full spectrum of attitudes. His devourers, they are also his earthly salve; all beneficence, yet they are soulless. Desirable beyond measure, they are to be cast off contemptuously after use. Truly Protean (as George Woodcock observed), has Layton integrated the many elements of himself, as poet and man? Rather than unacknowledged law-giver, he is the poet in search of his wholeness; but his sense of selfhood seems to be of a reactive self, contingent upon circumstance.

Nowadays we are largely indifferent to our poets, and those few of us who are not tend to demand that, to expect serious attention, a poet must offer us a new-imagined world, fruit of a large vision and a large commitment. At the very least we look for a distinctive voice, a "determining personality". In these terms, Layton cannot be said to have a large vision, for his poems are the occasions of a somewhat chameleon personality, which has obvious enough limitations. No single work of his is on a large or profound scale; but what of his commitment? Obviously, his life has been devoted to poetry, and in no small way. His efforts and his personality have broken through thick barriers of social convention and inhibition. Both his work and his belief in it have been salutory in establishing and developing the poetry of his own country, and to that poetry he has contributed a fair number of beautifully made, memorable poems. A prose volume would be a useful companion to the poems, for the various lively prefaces to Layton's books are themselves an important document in Canadian poetry.

Many facets of his work have not been dealt with here: his poems about, and to, other poets; his Jewishness, and the way it has developed since the six-day war and his extensive travels in Europe; his feelings about the "sunless Presbyterians" of Canada and the fact (usually overlooked) that Europe doesn't come off any better; influences on him of other writers and thinkers, particularly the often-noticed influence of Nietzsche; his use of symbols (by no means systematic, but nonetheless present); his many moving animal poems (written about perceptively by a number of critics); his liking for a mandarin use of language; his wit and his skill at epigram (and his misfires at it); his religious sense — pro-personal and anti-institutional; his exploitation, or perhaps exploration, of surrealism; the specific successes of his wide-ranging employment of traditional

forms, and inventiveness in both pastiche and parody; his use of myth and classical allusion; the sensitive lyricism of his recollections of boyhood; his penetrating satire and pervasive irony, and the increasingly overt political poetry of his later period; his feeling of the inertia of our society, and its protective device of rationality; his elegies, which include some of the most moving moments in his whole *oeuvre*. No attempt has been made to comment on his "best" poems separately and as such, but these would include "Boys Bathing", "Halos at Lac Marie Louise", "For Aviva, Because I Love Her", "The Predator", "Seven O'clock Lecture", "The Cold Green Element", and probably a dozen others.

That solid paragraph listing what I have not dealt with, suggests that I could have written a completely different essay on Layton's work and, oddly enough, I expected to. I would like not to have been so negatively critical, for he is the kind of poet for whom one has a great deal of sympathy and fellow-feeling. My list of omissions suggests a richness I have not captured, in both man and poet. Confident as he is, this is not to say he is never daunted by Nobodaddy or the grave. Perhaps the most engaging thing about him is that he will come right back and cock a snook (or snook a cock!) at both. He is a man for whom poetry has been the manner (and maybe it is all in the manner) of his living. Wakening into the poem, as in "Early Morning in Cote St. Luc", his senses are immediately engaged by "the white/ table under the willow tree/ a fragment of edge" (as in a Vlaminck painting), by the mantis, the professor ("his collection/ of tomes, slowly yellowing/ into favour"), by the sweetly-dreaming children, but finally by the question of his own place in the scheme of things, and a place for those like him:

> How to make room
> in my mind for these
> and the black bitter men —
> my kin —
> the inconsolable, the far-seeing? (109)

For all his misanthropy and inconsolableness, his characteristic posture is, as he said of the idealized Roman woman, "kicking . . . epitaphs out of the way" (375), though with his features increasingly a darkened frown.

NOTE

[1] Eli Mandel. *Irving Layton.* (Toronto: Forum House).