

KLEIN'S DROWNED POET

CANADIAN VARIATIONS ON
AN OLD THEME

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RAYMOND KNISTER must be the best-known drowned poet in Canadian letters. Writer of pastorals and herald of imagism, cut off at the age of thirty-three and recovered from Lake St. Clair after three days of dragging, he is Canada's ideal portrait of young Lycidas waiting for a pastoral elegy. He still seems to be waiting. Dorothy Livesay describes his last swim in a Memoir, her own poetry is haunted by images of diving and drowning, and she has dedicated a long poem to Knister. But she provides us with no more than elegiac allusions; there is no full-dress elegy,

Following after Shelley
Or wordcarvers I knew
(Bouchette; and Raymond, you).

Even James Reaney, his successor as a Southern Ontario farm-poet, when he introduces Knister as one of the minor geese of *A Suit of Nettles*, allows him no meed of a melodious tear. In the April eclogue Raymond himself may sing of the land's rebirth out of the ice age, and also (by analogy) of the flood, the ark and the released birds, but there is no successor to Reaney's early poem on Lake St. Clair. In October, after Raymond has finished his superb autumn song (which is as appropriate to Canada's biographer of Keats as his spring song was to the author of "Feed"), he simply drops out of *A Suit of Nettles*. All we get in November is a series of four impersonal elegies from four different points of view. When the reader turns the pastoral wheel of the book for a second time, it is his own responsibility if Raymond's first appearance, with spring from the Flood, seems somehow fresher than before.

Maybe for a Canadian poet to be elegized as drowned, he should either not be dead at all, or at least not literally drowned. Such, at any rate, seems to be the

moral of the best recent examples I can think of: John Sutherland's poem on E. J. Pratt, and its successor, Miriam Waddington's elegy on Sutherland. I'm not sure just what moral to draw from George Johnston's Edward (that remote Canadian relative of Edward King), who was drowned and elegized in *The Cruising Auk*, only to reappear as large as life a year or so later in *The Atlantic Monthly*. But Raymond Knister's successful rivals have rarely been Canadian. The usual drowned poet in Canadian poetry is anonymous or international or archetypal—or Shelley.

HE MAKES an unmistakable and substantial appearance in two familiar showpieces of nineteenth-century Canadian poetry: Charles G. D. Roberts' "Ave!" and Duncan Campbell Scott's "The Piper of Arll". Roberts' poem has been called by Desmond Pacey a pastoral elegy, but Roberts thought of it as a nativity ode on the centenary of Shelley's birth. Still, by calling it a pastoral elegy, Pacey quite properly draws our attention to the crucial importance of the drowned poet in "Ave!", and no one could fail to observe how the melancholy of "The Scholar Gypsy" and "Thyrsis" tends to qualify the essential vigour of its tone. It would be presumptuous to retitlle the poem "Hail or Farewell", but I would be quite happy to leave out the exclamation mark. Scott's "The Piper of Arll", on the other hand, is a sort of Pre-Raphaelite lyrical ballad, whose piper (poet, singer, artist, what you will, Scott was never one to separate the arts) sinks with his complete retinue: audience, palace of art, and all. The tone may be elegiac, but the poem's cycle is closed; in the end there is nothing to be mourned and no one left to mourn.

"Ave!" has often been praised—for its parts. The overwrought brilliance, the verbal inventiveness and ingenuity, the sheer excess of the whole thing, are remarkable and exhausting, whatever you finally think of it all. The usual complaint is that Roberts has failed to tie the piece together. The Bay of Fundy setting with which it begins and ends fails to connect with the scenes from Shelley's life (Sussex, Rome, the Bay of Spezzia, and so on) which dominate the middle of the poem. This complaint mistakes the central problem of "Ave!" for its chief fault. Shelley is a poet who binds English poetry to its classical and Mediterranean heritage; in "Ave!" he takes a further, posthumous step and becomes the intermediary who binds Roberts' work as a Canadian and Maritime poet to both its

romantic and its classical past. "Therefore with no far flight . . . to thee I turn," says Roberts in Stanza XI, as he turns from the Tantramar region to Sussex and Italy. Whatever meaning he can give to that "therefore" is the centre of his poem, the real justification for hailing Shelley's birth among the meadows and marshes of New Brunswick.

"The awful shadow of some unseen Power" which fell on Shelley in Sussex falls on Roberts in New Brunswick and is "strangely akin" to Shelley himself. In the first ten stanzas Roberts tries to paint the lost landscape of his childhood in terms of such kinship. His youthful companionship with the racing elements obviously echoes the "Ode to the West Wind", the star images which dot the poem from first stanza to last come (especially) from *Adonais*, and the "wide marshes ever washed in clearest air" have unexpected moments of kinship with the Mediterranean of *Epipsychidion*; the tide ebbing and flowing in the "long reaches" with "perpetual unrest" is explicitly made a symbol of Shelley's mind, just as the tumult of the flood is compared to the strife at the centre of "the great calm of his celestial art". And of course the nationalist of 1893 welcomes the poet of "Desire and Liberty". If there is any doubt about the extent of Roberts' literary allusions in "Ave!", there is certainly no doubt that he feels himself submerged in the Tantramar like Shelley in the Bay of Spezzia, so that from the thought of his own body, in whose veins "forever must abide / The urge and fluctuation of the tide", he can later turn easily to the moment when Shelley's body emerges from the sea and contemplates its own funeral pyre on the beach:

Back from the underworld of whelming change
To the wide-glittering beach thy body came;
And thou didst contemplate with wonder strange
And curious regard thy kindred flame

Roberts had fully prepared the way even for this last phrase by calling the Tantramar "untamable and changeable as flame".

After the lines on Shelley's apocalyptic funeral pyre, where the drowned body becomes a "heart of fire, that fire might not consume", Roberts suddenly turns back to Shelley's strange kinsman. In perfect sympathy, the "wizard flood" of Tantramar is now at the full and includes within itself everything from "every tribute stream and brimming creek". Roberts chooses this climactic moment to give the "sovereign vasts" their full personification. Tantramar

Ponders, possessor of the utmost god,
With no more left to seek.

But (unfortunately) the poem cannot end here. Shelley's fulfilment may be out of time, but the wizard flood's is not, and anyway Roberts preferred to have something left to seek. The burning bush of Shelley's heart must be reduced to just one more scarlet dawn. With the tide waning, and with "Dover Beach", "Sohrab and Rustum" and "The Scholar Gypsy" looming ominously at the back of his mind, Roberts decides on an Arnoldian conclusion by epic simile. The flood pondering its "utmost good" is compared to an embattled "lord of men" who has reached his "supreme estate" and now "ponders the scrolled heaven" from a solitary tower at night. He reads the signs of his fortune's ebb and, as the stars recede (like the tide), he descends to new war, while "scarlet dawns afar". As usual, Roberts has given us too much. After the rapid succession of radical images—drowned and burning poet, all-inclusive river-god, towered mage, embattled lord of men—we have little inclination left to guess that what the Tantrammar, risen out of a watery bed, sees from its lofty place of vantage may be yet another of Roberts' visions of Canada's promised land.

SCOTT'S SUBMERGED POET suffers from no such anticlimax or crowding off the stage, and is the protagonist of a far less pretentious poem. But, simple as it may be, "The Piper of Arll" is the sort of work at which critics prefer to throw a wreath of their favourite adjectives ("haunting", "delicate", "musical" and the like) and then lapse into silence. Its simplicity disarms and entrances, like the legendary gaze of a rattlesnake. Only Ralph Gustafson seems to have found his tongue long enough to call it "a ballad of the fatal possession by the world of the beauty which longs to be one with it." The phrase is apt. But this fatal possession works both ways: when the ship finally takes the siren-piper on board, the new freight sinks it; yet the piper is already dead, and the siren-ship has killed him. Their mutual possession kills them both.

Any such "allegorical" description is far less simple than the poem itself. More than any other Canadian poem I can recall, "The Piper of Arll" seems to be that much-discussed (but rarely seen) thing, a work entirely self-contained, literally about itself: a part-song about part-singing. In it (and a very few others, like "In a Country Churchyard") Scott escapes from the peevish nostalgia and spasmodic violence which are the personal sediment in his work as a whole. No doubt if we looked hard enough we might find "The Piper of Arll" resting in the limbo between Shalott and Camelot, which is where all good Victorian poems go

when they die. But the less said about the problem of the "responsibility of the artist" the better.

The setting, the characters and the action are what matters, and, of course, the music they compose, which is pretty schematic. To begin with, there's a pastoral cove in sympathy with the "heart of the ocean" and a hill with three pines which, in the flaring sunset, look like warriors coming home with plunder from a burning town. But water and hill are not kept apart; they even manage to encircle one another, for

A brook hung sparkling on the hill,
The hill swept far to ring the bay.

From cove and hill the poem goes on to introduce the actors: a piper (faithful, like the cove, to the "springs of God's ocean") and a ship (arrayed, like the hill, in the colours of the sunset). The ship's "pennon bickered red as blood" and, while the hills listen, the sailors sing for their lost home. The piper responds with "a tranquil melody / Of lonely love and hoped-for death". The crew's next tune is more sinister than the first: it mixes with the brook and stirs the "braird" on the hill. When these musical messages have finished signaling back and forth between piper and sea and ship and hill, the piper goes to sleep on the beach and the sailors around the mast. It's a full close.

So much for the slow introduction and the exposition of the main tunes. I take it, by the way, that no literary critic's musical analogies (like his Freudian ones) can ever be discreet enough, and I don't want to discuss the poetic equivalent of sonata form. But Belle Botsford, the professional violinist whom Scott married a year or two before he wrote "The Piper of Arll", would have found it an appropriate wedding present, even if she couldn't play it in public. In its own way it recalls the two most famous epithalamia in English, Spenser's and "The Ancient Mariner". Anyway, with the exposition over, the action begins. When the ship leaves at dawn, the piper awakes to despair. His lips violate his thought, and he actually breaks into speech. He casts down his mantle and, if he doesn't drown his book, he at least throws his pipe in the water. We are watching a kind of thematic metamorphosis. Then, when his frenzy has subsided, he picks up his broken pipe from the eddy and repairs it. Now the antiphonal method of the previous night miraculously turns into counterpoint, or as close to it as a single voice can get.

Again he tried its varied stops;
The closures answered right and true,
And starting out in piercing drops

A melody began to drip
 That mingled with a ghostly thrill
 The vision-spirit of the ship,
 The secret of his broken will.

As he continues to pipe this mingled measure on his new-found instrument, everything seems to come together for an immortal unison. "He was his soul and what he played", his will joins the world's will, the depth of song is at the heart of nature, artifice and unconsciousness are one. The piper has now sung his soul out and from this point on is forever still.

There is a pause and the music revives, but from the opposite direction. The ship approaches at sundown and sends a boat ashore, its sailors singing not their first nostalgic hymn, or even their second alien song, but the piper's original lonely tune, now with its "rhythm throbbing every throat". The boat picks up the piper's body and the sailors row back. Their voices are silent, and all we hear is the elegiac accompaniment (water music and fireworks music), with just an echo of the ghostly drops of the piper's last, immortal tune.

Silent they rowed him, dip and drip,
 The oars beat out an exequy,
 They laid him down within the ship,
 They loosed a rocket to the sky.

But there is no full recapitulation of themes, just a slow dying fall. The coda is absolute silence. In the last twelve stanzas, the reader and the poem are all eyes and no ears. Nothing in "The Piper of Arll" is better than the way Scott works this last sea-change, as the ship sinks to the bottom.

They saw the salt plain spark and shine,
 They threw their faces to the sky;
 Beneath a deepening film of brine
 They saw the star-flash blur and die.

Transfixed in their upward gaze, piper and crew are "empearled" in the heart of the sea, whose watery glow transmutes their eyes into one precious stone after another, from "ruby in the green / Long shaft of sun that spreads and rays" to "starry pits of gold" in the evening. But the last metamorphosis we see is the ship's: solid gem and tree of life in one, "the lost prince of a diadem".

A good many mythical skeletons lie below the surface of "The Piper of Arll". I have tried to imply most of them, without applying any of them, not even Eden and all that; nor have I thought that the many allusions to Shakespeare, Coleridge and others needed underlining. Both "Ave!" and "The Piper of Arll" exemplify in our post-Confederation poets what A. J. M. Smith has called their "belief in

the continuity of culture." But each is a pretty hard-won *tour de force*, and neither can be regarded as a stage in the continuity of Canadian poetry. In our poetry the next stage was anticlimax, and, whatever the various poets may have thought at the time, their work in the last two decades of the century now looks like an anthology without a history.

From a wide enough perspective, English-Canadian poetry still looks like that. The hundred-year landscape before 1918 is dotted with half a dozen nature sonnets, a few ghostly lyrics of the Canada goose-pimple school, a trace of pioneer or Indian nature myth (if you look hard for it) and a few longer poems that are either interesting because they purport to be distinctively Canadian or good because they so obviously are nothing of the kind. Even between the World Wars what emerges is two poets who are more like the poles of Canadian poetry than stages in its history: E. J. Pratt, chronicler of epic, clashes on the frontier between natural, human and divine; and A. M. Klein, ornate master of many traditions, at the crossroads of Jewish—and French-Canadian culture. The chances of writing good poetry for such an anthology are no doubt better than they seem. An ancestry of stray sports and withered shoots is at least uninhibiting. Since for the English-Canadian poet the background of English and American poetry is just an unearned windfall, he can discard or adopt it with a kind of timeless detachment. He isn't reduced to tacking on a piece or two; he can rework or subvert the whole design. Since the body isn't *his* dead past, it can be buried without ceremony; it can even start to look like a living present. If the poet happens to be Irving Layton, it may even do both at once.

But also if he happens to be Charles G. D. Roberts. In our anthology the nineties and the fifties refuse to be separated by history, despite the surface shifts in diction and imagery, despite the poetic wars and rumours of wars. "Ave!" and "The Piper of Arll" make themselves at home without much ado, let us say right next to *Europe* and *The Boatman*.

TO CALL KLEIN AND PRATT the poles of Canadian poetry is to suggest something in common as well as a world that holds them apart. Their diction often calls for the same critical adjectives: polysyllabic, technical, erudite, as well as colloquial or prosaic. Before 1940 even their versification might have seemed equally traditional: sometimes neat and sometimes expansive, but never

intricate or explosive. The discontinuous narrative forms which start with *The Witches' Brew* and end with *Toward the Last Spike* are the natural companions of the lyrical mosaics of *Hath Not a Jew*. They are both poets of "the beleaguered group". And no doubt in the end Pratt's "apocalyptic dinner" and Klein's "goodly eating / Of roast leviathan" come to the same thing. But, in the meantime, no reader could possibly confuse their wordplay or their quatrains and couplets, not to mention the immediate substance of things seen and hoped for. And to turn from Pratt's pre-war poems to Klein's is suddenly to leave the sea far behind, almost to forget that it ever existed. *Hath Not a Jew* must be the driest book in Canadian poetry. Whatever the swings of the pendulum between Egypt and Promised Land, the poet never gets his feet wet.

In this as in many other ways, Klein's last book of poetry, *The Rocking Chair and Other Poems*, differs from his first. The obvious differences—a new and explicit French-Canadian setting, fresh winds of style blowing through Montreal in the forties—are not necessarily the most valuable. We have been told that the influence of the Preview and First Statement groups in wartime Montreal served to release Klein, that it allowed him to move from the dead end of *Poems 1944* and the misstep of the *Hitleriad* to the new vitality of his fourth book. But this somewhat factitious shot in the arm had its disadvantages. More poems than "The Provinces" try to compete with Patrick Anderson, and "Les Filles Majeures" is the sort of thing that P. K. Page did much better. The value of the new setting is equally ambiguous. "The Rocking Chair", "The Snowshoers", "The Spinning Wheel" and other poems of the kind are brilliant but very detached; quaint genre-pieces by a contemporary and more elaborate Krieghoff. Klein's eye and ear are more alert than ever, and the book is full of superb exercises; but, although the places and people of Quebec (and occasionally other provinces) are painted in more detail than the towns and sundry folk of *Hath Not a Jew*, they are grasped with less force and concern. In other words, Klein's new regionalism is as much an inhibition as a release.

The richest and probably the best are those poems where Klein's first world seems to interpenetrate his second. He has never written anything lovelier or stronger than "Grain Elevator", beside which (as gloss perhaps) I like to place the best stanza of "Bread":

O black-bread hemisphere, oblong of rye,
Crescent and circle of the seeded bun,
All art is built on your geometry,
All science explosive from your captured sun.

Or maybe the best companion poem might be "Quebec Liquor Commission Store". The book is full of such interesting constructions and parodies of constructions: the anti-ark of "Pawnshop", the sound-proof jungle of "Commercial Bank", the "grassy ghetto" of "Indian Reservation", and even "Frigidaire", which compresses within its "slow sensational and secret sight" a whole Laurentian winter pastoral. The interpenetration of worlds and images is sometimes more than a little startling. Anyone who turns from Klein's novel, *The Second Scroll*, back to "Political Meeting" will greet the line "a country uncle with sunflower seeds in his pockets" with a shock of recognition, and for one awful moment see the shadow of Uncle Melech rising up behind the Camillien Houde who is his parody.

The book ends "at the bottom of the sea", but it has gone under water a few times before that. There's a lone bather who seems to be merman, dolphin, water-lily and charioted Neptune all together, although his sea is only a tiled swimming pool. Another poem ends with the rising "from their iced tomb" at break-up time of

the pyramided fish, the unclocked ships,
and last year's blue and bloated suicides.

But no catalogue of "immersion images" would prepare anyone for Klein's Lycidas when he finally appears at the beginning of "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape", an Orpheus dismembered into Bartlett's Quotations, buried on the library shore, unwept even by our brief custodians of fame.

Not an editorial writer, bereaved with bartlett,
mourns him, the shelved Lycidas.
No actress squeezes a glycerine tear for him.

And that beginning hardly prepares us for his last appearance at the end of the poem, crowned and shining (however equivocally) at the bottom of the sea, another "lost prince of a diadem".

Klein gives us a good many alternative portraits to examine on our way to the true one. First we must travel down the usual elegiac *cul-de-sac* and test the glory and the nothing of a name. But fame's spur has never seemed so blunt; and the series of unholy names (dots, votes, statistics) manage to suggest nothing less than a grim parody of the original creative spirit, the blasphemy of a nameless god:

O, he who unrolled our culture from its scroll . . .
who under one name made articulate
heaven, and under another the seven-circled air,
is, if he is at all, a number, an x,
a Mr. Smith in a hotel register.

What John Crowe Ransom once claimed for Milton's elegy ("a poem nearly anonymous") Klein is claiming for Lycidas himself.

From the poet as name, Klein's portrait-album turns to the poet as others see him, and, at greater length, as he sees himself—falling and rising "just like" a poet. His self-images range from "his mother's miscarriage" at the nadir to "the Count of Monte Cristo come for his revenges" at the zenith, or (to reverse the cycle) from an adolescent first exploring the body of the word to a "convict on parole" (Klein's puns are inescapable). Then he and his kind are portrayed as social beings, scattered about the country, cherishing their esoteric art, joining a political party, seeking and repelling love, multiplying within, alone and not alone. The next portrait strikes deep into Klein: the poet as citizen *manqué*, exile on a reservation. As if he were literally disinherited, cuckolded, displaced by someone else, this poet tries to guess his double outside the poetic ghetto, the man who has come forward to fill "the shivering vacuums his absence leaves". Then the album returns to fame in another form: the public personality the poet dreams of, which "has its attractions, but is not the thing".

Indeed, none of these portraits has much to do with the poet as writer of poetry, although they may be a clue to some "stark infelicity" at the bottom of the poetic process. The last portrait, superimposed on the rest in the sixth and last section of the poem, is another matter. This poet, seeding his illusions, is Adam the namer and praiser and prophet in one. He takes a green inventory, he psalms the world into existence, and then, from a planet of vantage, he takes "a single camera view" of the earth, "its total scope and each afflated tick"—world enough and time rolled in a book, or (if one remembers the first section) scroll. By this means, the drowned poet breathes and pulsates. Each item he praises is "air to his lungs and pressured blood to his heart" and when the list is complete he has resurrected his own drowned body as well as the world's. Or, if this seems too lofty a way of putting it, the next stanza speaks more simply of renewing the craft of verse, of bringing new forms and creeds to life, and thereby of paying back some of the air that is daily being stolen from his lung.

These are not mean ambitions. It is already something
merely to entertain them. Meanwhile, he
makes of his status as zero a rich garland,
a halo of his anonymity,
and lives alone, and in his secret shines
like phosphorus. At the bottom of the sea.

The phrasing of the last two stanzas is extremely tentative; the garland and halo of heavenly fame share their brightness with the death-blue shine of the

corpse; and Lycidas remains waiting "meanwhile". The ending will seem even more negative and ironic if we contrast it with the psalm-followed "drowning instant" at the end of Uncle Melech's liturgy, the last gloss of *The Second Scroll*. Of course, between the poet's multiple-portrait and Uncle Melech's composite photograph lies the establishment of Israel in 1949. But Klein's poem is still fundamentally affirmative. The poet is nobody, a mere cipher; but the zero is also the halo over his drowned head: zero as hero, or "Aught from Naught", as Uncle Melech would have put it. And, although his status as nobody may be his "stark infelicity", it may also be the poet's extinction of personality, the ultimate anonymity behind the ultimate poem. As if to emphasize the affirmative, Klein changed his title from "Portrait of the Poet as Zero" to "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" and thereby gave his favourite "microcosm-macrocosm" image pride of place.

Some of the details of the poem (the maps and charts, the images of exploration, the drowned body itself) in combination make it seem likely that Klein was remembering one of Donne's best-known hymns. But a reader of Canadian poetry might well be reminded of Klein's own early masterpiece "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens". What comes out of Spinoza's lens, as it magnifies one way and shrinks another, is a figure for God's relation to man and nature. Between microcosm and macrocosm stands God, the imminent lens or eye, the focus and burning glass of all creation. Klein's Spinoza translates this figure into theorem and into pantheistic psalm.

I behold thee in all things, and in all things: lo, it is myself; I look into the pupil of thine eye, it is my very countenance I see

The flowers of the field, they are kith and kin to me; the lily my sister, the rose is my blood and flesh

Even as the stars in the firmament move, so does my inward heart, and even as the moon draws the tides in the bay, so does it the blood in my veins

Howbeit, even in dust I am resurrected; and even in decay I live again.

Spinoza can reach a similar conclusion through Klein's alchemical or Cabbalistic images: cirque, skull, crucible, golden bowl, hourglass, planet, "macrocosm, sinew-shut". The "horrible atheist" proves "that in the crown of God we are all gems". The title of this early poem might just as well be "Portrait of Spinoza as Landscape". One might even justify calling the later one "Portrait of the Poet as Lens". Its poet portrait is also a poet-photographer. At first we are only told of "mirroring lenses forgotten on a brow / that shine with the guilt of their unnoticed world". But the last picture to be developed under water is that "single-camera view": man, world, and maybe burning glass, all at once.

I DOUBT if Irving Layton will ever improve on these binoculars. Nevertheless, more than one of his poems reads like a redevelopment of Klein's "Portrait". Layton belongs among those not uncommon poets who grow by discovering with surprise, delight and horror what their previous poems really meant and then writing new ones to prove it. The process can go on forever, as the images and themes renew themselves in poem after poem. At the beginning of one such series stands "The Swimmer", the poem which Layton placed first in his collected edition, *A Red Carpet for the Sun*, and which he has described in public as the poem that first persuaded him he was a poet. It has a lot to answer for if it turned this narcissus into a trumpet daffodil.

Layton has a good many favourite images for the poetic character. Some of his best poems try to fit them together. In "The Cold Green Element", although the drowned poet is the Alpha and Omega of them, a number of others are crushed between the two. The poem begins with the speaker in ignorance of what the air and its green satellite have in store for him, but Layton is at least willing to confront the undertaker with a vision of a drowned poet blown out of the western sea. He is blown out, however, only to become one of his *alter egos*, the hanged poet:

a great squall in the Pacific blew a dead poet
 out of the water,
 who now hangs from the city's gates.

From hanged poet he becomes lightning-blasted tree (Layton's vegetable world is usually more crucified than crucifying), a haloed and garlanded hunchback, a reflection in the eyes of the castrating female, sun-bloody catalpa leaves—a long list of "murdered selves" ripe for devouring, whose revival is hard to distinguish from a new murder, the fruit from the spent seed. Even the singing worm and crying boys to which the furies clear a path in the last stanza are presented as transitory and misleading; but from them the series of parallel portraits turns back to the beginning, as the poet (or some fishy ancestor) again swims "breathless" in "that cold green element".

As a rule, Layton's poet appears to us in two main settings: one is golden and bloody, but also blotched and blackened with shadow; the other is a cold green element, fertile or snotty, refreshing or suffocating, depending on which side up. "Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom" (another set of poet-portraits) ends with the poetic stave of an "aggrieved king" piercing the heart of the vampire shadow of the sun; his song of lust is an explosive resurrection of the body ("skin and glycer-

inc"); his staff is ultimately the staff of life, like Klein's bread and its captured sun. But earlier in the poem the poet-king is King Canute bidding the waves withdraw and greeting their inexorable approach with a clown's jest. The jest is no protection against the water-logged lung and equivocal halo of Klein's poet.

It was the mist. It lies inside one like a destiny.
A real Jonah it lies rotting like a lung.
And I know myself undone who am a clown
And wear a wreath of mist for a crown.

If there were any answer to that tubercular Jonah in the poet's belly, any link between Layton's golden and airy world and his cold green element, any metamorphic lung at the centre of things, the obvious image for it would be the frog or toad with which Layton has found such unexpected affinities of late. It first appears in "*The Poetic Process*" of 1955. But its real home is Layton's 1958 collection, *A Laughter in the Mind*, as the cover of the first edition makes clear. In one poem the poet identifies himself with "a huge toad I saw, entire but dead, / That Time mordantly had blacked"; in another a "frog sits / And stares at my writing hand" and he imagines it transformed before his eyes to "a royal maniac raving, / Whirlwind's tongue, desolation's lung"; this frog-prince legend also forms the climax of a more recent poem, "Because My Calling Is Such". Most successful of all is "Cain", where the frog (killed by the poet with an air-rifle) combines with a whole group of Layton's most obsessive themes: man as a murdering animal; the levelling of the chain of being; the brotherhood and even identity of murderer and victim, poet and enemy. In a whimsical aside, the death of the gasping frog is even compared to the fall of empires, including the Roman. If this aside heralds the next step in the history of the drowned poet, we can expect amphibious and internecine warfare on a large scale. But, of course, Canadian poetry has had all that before. And, if the finality of Layton's introduction to *A Red Carpet for the Sun* really means anything, I doubt if he plans to give us a succession of lyrical footnotes to *The Great Feud*.