STUDIES

Layton as Ethical Subject: The Later Poetry and the Problem of Evil

by Brian Trehearne

> *Who dares disdain an answer to the ovens? Any answer.*
> —Leonard Cohen, "Lines from My Grandfather's Journal"

Irving Layton's later poetry, which might be defined for discussion's sake as the poetry published after the *Collected Poems of Irving Layton* in 1971, is an obstacle for those who wish to see a reversal of the critical neglect he has suffered in the last twenty years. The principles and value of Layton's denunciations of Holocaust evils will remain central to any project of recuperation, as other articles in the present collection make plain. Invested as my work has been in the brilliance of Layton's masterpieces of the 1950s and early 1960s, I have always defined the later poetry by its irregular descent from those heights of accomplishment. In *The Montreal Forties* I particularly valued the major poems for their articulation of an egoist, vulnerable, permeable, processive, and multiple selfhood that drove and embodied the poetry's poetics of post-Imagist juxtaposition, verse fragmentation, incoherence, and anti-rationalism. The forces arrayed against the poet-persona's self-affirmations—Time, mortality, audiences, "the eyes of old women"—were shown to be vital constraints on the poem's whirlwind concatenation of often Surrealist images. The poems' mockery of closure—"So whatever else poetry is freedom," he says for the third time, as if the hypothesis were proved—and their disdain for "rhetoric, the trick of lying / All poets pick up sooner or later" were among the virtues of the masterpieces, and they are lacking in the later work. But they are *aesthetic* virtues. How useful can they be in guiding our responses to a late poetry that calls upon us primarily as *ethical* subjects?

The lack of such virtuosity in the later poetry is an important matter, but it is of secondary concern next to that poetry's rhetorically emphatic embrace of dualistic, antithetical, and absolutist modes of thought and analysis. The younger Layton's Nietzschean responses to dualism, to the "antinomies" of life and death, creativity and violence, good and evil, are thoroughly legible after sixty years of criticism, and they ground the

visionary texture of his major works. They fuel the beauty of paradox in "The Birth of Tragedy," where stone can flower in a garden made for gods (rather than *by* them) whose chief task is to condone our "passionate meditations," a garden where madmen are defined by their quietude.[1] In "The Cold Green Element" the speaker is both vital and dismembered "in the grass"; he is in a condition of "mourning" that sounds like pure joy; he is a visionary, yet he is easily "misled"; he is the worm in the "throat of a robin," singing most powerfully at the instant of death; he is a swimmer in grass, an old man among young boys (*WPJ* 45). It is impossible to read such poems responsively without being forced to some degree out of the rational mind that relies on just such polarities for epistemological comfort. The vision's indebtedness to Friedrich Nietzsche is of course deeply etched in "The Birth of Tragedy," as the poet-persona cries, "In me, nature's divided things— / tree, mould on tree— / have their fruition [...]" (*WPJ* 15). It is the same visionary ethics of "A Tall Man Executes a Jig" that can recognize in a "violated grass-snake" "The manifest of [Nietzsche's] joyful wisdom" and that can, in that poem's triumphant final scene, bring the living man and the dead snake together to "transform [...] all" (*WPJ* 92; 93).

The later poems appear at best silhouettes—an art of black and white—when they are held up against the bright light of such a compelling vision. I once wrote that "if the complexity of subjective and objective exchange hardens into a me-them opposition, much will have been lost to Layton's poetry" (*Montreal* 231), but in fact such an ossification begins in about 1959, when the prefaces to his collections start to indulge condemnations of a universalized evil in humankind.[2] The "Note" to *A Laughter in the Mind* in that year remarks that "Those whom the vanity of religion or megalomania has persuaded to a belief in their immortality are capable of every sort of cruelty. They will disembowel, castrate, torture; no form of mutilation or viciousness is too exquisite for them [...]" (*Engagements* 81). The "Foreword" to *A Red Carpet for the Sun* corrects Aristotle by proposing that "it isn't reason but cruelty that distinguishes our species. Man is not a rational animal, he's a dull-witted animal who loves to torture" (*Engagements* 83). Of course, both these prefaces exempt the joy-loving *Übermenschen* who overcome their innate human brutalities, but Layton's certainty of such exceptionalism merely clarifies the growing dualism of his ethical judgment at this time.

That Layton wrote "A Tall Man Executes a Jig" soon after penning those first excoriations of human vileness helps us to feel the ethical contest that poem wages. Indeed, the germinal observation of the present argu-

ment was simply that Layton would never be able to say to the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust what his Tall Man says with such bluntness to the "violated grass-snake" in the sixth sonnet: "Your jig's up; the flies come like kites." Just before uttering that sardonic truth, "the man wept because pity was useless" (*WPJ* 92). Those who appreciate this crown of unrhymed sonnets as the crowning of Layton's genius must feel acutely its dissonance with the restoration in the Holocaust poems of an absolute antithesis between good and evil: especially their ready alignment of their speakers with sympathetic or even pitying goodness and the Nazis with an evil with which the observer shares absolutely no complicity. Of course we all share the later poetry's revulsion and pity—which, in those poems, Layton certainly hopes is not "useless." Few could expect Layton to have *felt* otherwise about the "violated" dead of the Holocaust, but it is possible to wish he had *written* differently of them, because his greatest art trains us in an anti-rhetorical poetics with no room for the decrial of evil *only* in others.

Nowhere is the late poetry's dualistic sensibility better exemplified than in "For 7515-03296," published in *The Tightrope Dancer* in 1978. The speaker contemplates the "naked loveliness" and "slender arm with its tattooed figures" of a lover or friend who is "a distinguished graduate of Auschwitz." He equates Auschwitz with "mankind's incurable viciousness," a sentiment that returns to grant the poem its closure: "I curse without ceasing into the sweet empty air / and feel my loathing for mankind grow as vast as the sea" (*WPJ* 146). The phrase *without ceasing* is the giveaway here; it suggests the poet's own need to affirm his adequate (because absolute) sympathy with the survivor. To reach this culminating outcry, however, he must first claim a "heart [...] torn apart / by love and loathing, gratitude and disgust, / by reverence and rage [...]." This is a condition Layton's earlier personae never express; *their* hearts are the joyful repositories of such antinomies, but now there is a great deal that the poet's heart simply cannot negotiate. Such power as "For 7515-03296" earns has nothing to do with a rich display of processive selfhood in the speaker or with the dramatic enfoldment of irreconcilable antinomies in his outcry; and again, it can hardly be surprising that this is so. The earlier Layton had not given himself the particular historical and ethical challenge that this poem takes up—though *why* he did not, for so long after the end of the war, remains a compelling question.

Paradoxically, the condemnation of *all* mankind—of which he is presumably a member—for the "dateless horror" of Auschwitz makes it impossible for the speaker to admit the least complicity with the evils evoked by his friend's tattooed wrist. The persona's stagey self-exculpa-

tion is a marked retreat from the ethical frontier Layton charted in his earlier animal poems, in many of which, such as "Cain," he is concerned to admit, dramatize, and satirize his *own* desire to "kill and kill / Again" any helpless brother creature that sits still long enough within rifle range (*WPJ* 70). In the later poems, on the other hand, the rejection of any shred of complicity enables a range of unsatisfying caricatures, for instance of all Europeans as "decadent, inert / enough energy remaining / only to suffer / evil" ("Europe 1976," *WPJ* 147), and of all contemporary persons as Holocaust deniers, as in "To the Victims of the Holocaust": "Your terrible deaths are forgotten; / no one speaks of them any more" (*WPJ* 149). In the latter poem the speaker underscores, once again, his own exceptionalism—he is one who *remembers*—but also admits to a lack of content for the denunciations he wishes to utter. Astonishingly, he must ask the dead to become active and vocal precisely where he cannot be:

> My murdered kin
> let me be your parched and swollen tongue
> uttering the maledictions
> bullets and gas silenced on your lips.
>
> Fill, fill my ears with your direst curses.
> I shall tongue them, unappeasable shades,
> till the sun turns black in the sky.
> (*WPJ* 149)

The unanswered invocation is familiar in A.M. Klein: the post-war North American Jew is still able to speak, but only because he lacks the experience he wishes to put into words.

Klein's recognition in "Meditation upon Survival" that it is the *victims* who are made "monstrous" by the monstrosities of the camps is echoed in Layton's "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik." The speaker imagines Nazis who have lived on into the 1980s "buying sausages, perhaps / Xmas toys for [their] grandchildren," and asks, "Why not? Since power's the world's standard / it's your victims, not you, / who feel besmirched and guilty" (*WPJ* 198). We know we are to reverse that "Why not?" as surely as we are to dismiss his summary of the Holocaust in "The Final Solution": "History was having one of its fits—so what?" (*Pole-Vaulter* 16). Neither poem's rhetorical question—and they are purely rhetorical—indicates, obviously, the least diminution of the evil of the Nazis. In "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" the speaker goes on to denounce those ageing SS guards for "letting Mozart ravish [their] souls," and the scandalized tone makes plain that, for

this speaker, there *ought to be* an insuperable ethical gulf between those who can enjoy the *aesthesis* of music and those who can do pointless violence to others. The only figures who can bridge that duality in these late poems are the Nazis themselves, and it is a sign of their evil. But remember that in "Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom," this particular duality is overturned joyously, if shockingly, when the speaker celebrates the "blackened eye" he gave "[his] Kate," a brutalism that he partly justifies by having made of it "an incredible musical scale" (*WPJ* 65).

The comparison might shock, but there is no difference of kind between these two treatments of what he elsewhere calls "aesthetic cruelty" (*Fornalutx* 50), only of degree. The later speaker takes up a position at the opposite ethical extreme from those he condemns and absconds from the troubled conflation of experiences and paradoxical desires by which Layton once defined the very principles of his art. What is more, the later poems seek to awaken us with *rhetoric*, and we know what a younger Layton thought of rhetoric's relation to truth in poetry. As ethical response the expression of horror at "aesthetic cruelty" appears to be dissonant with the Nietzschean project that most of us have celebrated, with Wynne Francis's help, in Layton's early poetry, a critical problem that may justly preoccupy his contemporary critics.

The arguments so far have been worked out in my graduate seminars over twenty years, and whatever slight impact those courses may have had cannot have been salutary for Layton's posterity. I recapitulated them in 2011 in a podcast interview with Nigel Beale on his "Biblio File" website. Anna Pottier, Layton's last life-companion, heard them there and posted a comment that was one of the prompts of the present discussion (the paper's epigraph being the other). Her comment was blunt:

> [...] the sharpest intake of breath on my part was hearing that [Layton's] Holocaust poems were his weakest because [here she paraphrases me] "...it suddenly became an "us", us being the Jews, vs. "them", being the killers..." [or] words to that effect. Irving was adamant about waking people up to the FACT of the Holocaust. He'd often quote Primo Levi (an Italian survivor who eventually took his own life out of sheer despair, presumably, at the complacency and denial he saw). Levi's phrase which Irving took to heart, went something like, "I know there is a difference between those who were killed, and those who did the killing."
>
> Ergo, I'm baffled by what nuance there should have been, what moral or socio-psycho-political leeway he should have accorded Hitler, Eichmann, Goebbels, et al. Very curious.

Pottier's remarks shook me, chiefly by exposing the tin ear that had so long allowed me to propose aesthetic judgments of the later poetry as *sufficient* judgments, and to ignore the ethical urgency with which Layton at last addressed himself to the Holocaust. The young scholars I was training were encouraged by me not to reflect on but to ignore the fundamental *agon* of ethical and aesthetic judgment that Layton hoped to expose. Somehow, I had come to ignore Levi's urgent ethical "difference," so intent was I on judging—not historical atrocity—but poetic merit.

The ethical criticism I am eager to encourage in Canadian modernist studies at the present time demands better than this from its practitioners. In what follows I want to expose a number of fault lines in my claims thus far about Layton's later poems, with the aim of developing an ethically enriched model of response to their goals and achievements. First of all, my description of Layton's decline presumes that the late poetry can be characterized effectively by reference to the Holocaust treatments. Although Layton himself justifies the move in "The Lyric," from *For My Neighbours in Hell* (1980), when he asserts that "the lyric poet / invents his own world" but concludes, "Mine's made / from charred bones, / the smiles of fair-haired / humans / looking at them" (3), we certainly need to test just how general the dualistic and rhetorical poetics I have noted are to the later poetry. This obligation gives rise in turn to an editorial problem. The claims advanced thus far derive almost wholly from poems reproduced in the expanded edition of *A Wild Peculiar Joy* in 1989, and years of teaching from that volume have led me to break my own cardinal critical rule, that we should not "study [...] poets by analysing the canon largely *as they have passed it on to us*" (*Aestheticism* 5). The discussion is enriched, though not wholly re-directed, by many poems—and a few *stronger* poems—that Layton did not include in that volume.

That Layton's *ethos* became complacent in a rhetorical philosophical dualism remains inarguable. The catalogued Holocaust aphorisms of 1980's "The Burning Remnant" are capped with a vision of "the Eternal Goy / and confronting, troubling / and astonishing him / [...] the Eternal Jew" (*FMNH* 21). His advice to his heirs in "Lines for My Grandchildren" is to recognize that "there are only two kinds of people / masters and slaves"; the poem closes with his hope that his descendants learn to "kill without pity and remorse" (*Pole-Vaulter* 48). The discourse here is only superficially Nietzschean; it is the flatness of the rhetoric, its inability to recommend any action to the world's "masters" other than killing, that shows the utterance to be a formulaic reflex. One wonders whether Layton cared to square his grandfatherly advice with his more authentically ago-

nized condemnations of Nazi atrocity and aesthetic murder. Such dualistic and absolute judgments are so general to the later volumes that he appears to have forgotten by about the age of sixty the Nietzschean conviction that "whatever gives value to [...] good and honorable things has an incriminating link, bond, or tie to the very things that look like their evil opposites; perhaps they are even essentially the same," as the philosopher put it in *Beyond Good and Evil* (6).

There are, however, though one must look hard for them, a few late poems not in *A Wild Peculiar Joy* that sustain the richer Nietzschean energy that "overcomes" dualism in a complex ethical and aesthetic vision, or at the very least that allow the represented antinomies a less hierarchical closure. Instances of the latter include a 1979 poem dedicated to his daughter Naomi, "Father and Daughter," whose speaker marvels at his adult daughter's decoration of her home with "a Matisse or an illuminated painting / her own hands have made": "wherever my eyes fall," he says, "they alight on something that gives pleasure / and reminds one of eternity." To this he contrasts (clearly speaking for Layton himself) his own extremist vision of human vileness:

> A cynical aging Jew
> who knows much about men's
> incurable viciousness and brutality,
> their sodden penchant for evil,
> I marvel at a serenity
> that has endured wars and holocausts,
> at a faith that finds goodness
> the heart and core of this universe
> —at this curious product of my own loins!
> (*DFH* 32)

Layton's poems on women in his family are always among his most emotionally precise and sensitive,[3] so it is unsurprising, and also touching, that the antithetic ethical-aesthetic visions of father and daughter are allowed to stand, neither synthesized nor ranked, in the poem's moving closure:

> I grow more savage with the affrighting years,
> my poems more bitter and scornful
> so that they are stones I scatter
> in fusillades of mockery and hate:
> my daughter each time I see her
> has another illuminated rose on the wall
> (*DFH* 33)

The poem's quietly deployed antitheses speak to a rare willingness on the part of the older poet to overcome, or at least to suspend, his late judgment that all dualities must lead human beings to violent conflict. Its formulaic recapitulation of his conventional hatred for mankind receives a very rare rejoinder and is, in this poem's unforced closure, and in Naomi's home, beautifully silenced, for a while.

Also left out of *A Wild Peculiar Joy* was the striking poem "Salim" from *For My Brother Jesus*. Arguably a depiction of a man living "beyond good and evil," it is noteworthy, despite its Orientalism, for a sustained impersonality of treatment as its ethical darkness gathers. Early lines have a familiar ring: Salim "can live off European women anytime / [...] He has a wild energy they're all hungry for, / their civilized men having mislaid it in offices / and classrooms [...]". Salim might have read his Nietzsche, too: "'Work,' he laughs, 'that's *pour les esclaves*' / and taps his brow as if he were a philosopher." But I believe any half-smile will be wiped off our faces by the poem's conclusion:

> Free of devitalizing scruples and morals,
> he moves like a panther,
> his Algerian silver rings and bracelets, his earring
> as defiant and alive as the smile he flashes on me
> when he recounts his enjoyment
> of the two Maroc fourteen-year-olds
> he had that afternoon,
> their cunts tight '*comme des poulettes.*'
>
> (*FBJ* 120)

The speaker's utter lack of comment on Salim's pedophilia is doubly troubling when we remember that Layton is ready in almost every other poem of this period to tell us where evil resides and what we ought to think of it. Having just read "Father and Daughter," for instance, we naturally want to know: is Salim proof of "men's / incurable viciousness and brutality" or an exception to it? Is he an *Übermensch*? Is there any sustained ethical vision to be found among these late poems? To be sure, I *suspect* that the older Layton wants us to be shocked by this low-aspiring hedonist and to find him evil, and not good, rather than "beyond" such polarities, but that is because I am eager, like most readers, to square my own ethics with the poet's and have been able to do so in most other instances of reading. Nothing in the poem's closure, however, makes the speaker's ethics apparent. "Salim's" impersonality is surprisingly disciplined, and its absence from *A Wild Peculiar Joy* exemplifies that volume's tendency to exclude the few

later poems that avoid the sharply dualistic judgments of the Holocaust pieces.

Such eccentric and uncollected poems as "Father and Daughter" and "Salim" are the exceptions that prove the rule of Layton's late dualism and drama of ethical judgment. They cannot much mitigate *A Wild Peculiar Joy*'s formulaic reiterations of the later ethical dualism. In "The Slaughterhouse" (1979) we are told to "make certain / the cleaver is yours / and the bared throat someone else's" (*WPJ* 181); in "Descent from Eden" (1983) the ageing poet admires

> [...] happy mortals,
> oblivious of neglect and humiliation,
> of all that humans
> hold in store for other miserable humans;
> to abuse, betrayal, insult
> and the raging fires of egotism
> in which all must finally char.
> (*WPJ* 247)

A few things are notable in the passage: first, how many of these familiar vituperations culminate in an image that is easy to associate with the Holocaust (as "char" here inescapably recalls the ovens); second, that "raging fires" are not now the symbol of those who "dance with desire," as they were in "For Mao Tse-Tung" (*WPJ* 76), but of egotists (and egotism is an *evil* in this formulation); and third, that such catalogues regularly occur in poems addressed to favoured friends, admired artists, and desired lovers, the inspiration of whose presence is unable to forestall the vision of humankind's despicability.

Barely audible under this pattern of vilification are two poems in *A Wild Peculiar Joy* that are remarkable for referring to the Holocaust in passing without triggering either misanthropic catalogues or even explicit condemnation. In falling autumn leaves splashed with crimson, "The Haemorrhage" (1976) coolly symbolizes "Dynasties, civilizations [that] flutter past me / in a rain of blood: those that were, those yet to be, / Europe bleeding to death with its murdered Jews. Finis" (*WPJ* 148). There is arguably more power in that one word "Finis" than in any other Holocaust "curse" we've heard so far. Consider also "Reingemacht" (1981; the title means, roughly, "cleansed, purified"). The speaker insists, "I tell you I smell burning wood. / I see and hear sizzling flesh, the hissing oils and fats [...] A hideous smell of gas covers Europe from end to end." Yet these pointed references are swallowed up in the totality of this poem's particular apoc-

alypse, in which "The cities of the plain are burning. / London. Berlin. Vienna. Warsaw. Moscow," and the speaker can conclude, simply, about this second flood, "I see no tossing ark" (*WPJ* 272). (Perhaps there is, after all, *some* likeness of tone here to the Tall Man's cold comfort to the grass snake.) It is my conviction that the cool impersonality and tough-minded refusal of easy closure in both these poems—that is, their more disciplined modernist qualities—are more provocative of historical reflection than the black and white dualisms of the dominant Holocaust vision. One implication of my reaction, however, is that Layton represented the Holocaust most powerfully when he folded it into the whole history of human atrocity rather than singling it out as a unique event. This question of Auschwitz's exceptionalism has been, of course, long-vexed in Holocaust studies.

So an editorially thoughtful reading of Layton's late dualism affirms its generality to his work of the seventies but highlights a handful of exceptions, some of which are also exceptional poems, though their value was no guarantee of their selection for *A Wild Peculiar Joy.* A second complication of my initial judgment of the later poetry is that Layton himself had a role in creating any Canadian reader's expectations and reception of Holocaust writing. In the "Foreword" to *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* in 1963 he had called for "the poet who can make clear for us Belsen[,] Vorkuta[,] Hiroshima" (*Engagements* 104). Less familiar in that "Foreword" is its insistence on universal complicity: "the stink of self-guilt" is "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!" (*Engagements* 107). In the "Foreword" four years earlier to *A Red Carpet for the Sun* he had specified that we should not hope for an art that will somehow overcome, alleviate, or absolve anyone of the suffering it depicts: "Though art transcends pain and tragedy, it does not negate them, does not make them disappear [...] poetry does not exorcise historical dynamism, macabre cruelty, guilt, perversity, and the pain of consciousness" (*Engagements* 85). And in the "Foreword" to *The Shattered Plinths* in 1968 he recognized

> that a new element was ushered into the human situation with World War II, with the slave camps of Communist Russia and the extermination camps of Nazi Germany. With the terroristic bombings of Hamburg and Cologne. Hiroshima [...] It is this new and terrifying fact that utterly invalidates ninety-nine per cent of the world's literature of the past and rolls a stone over it that nothing will ever again remove, at least over that part of it that sought to humanize people by trying to make them conscious of the evils of injustice and

> misery. The poet today labours under the constraint of finding other means. (*Engagements* 128)

Taken together, such remarks encourage readers to value a Holocaust literature in which the writer recognizes complicity on all sides, including his own (in the last quotation Layton excoriates Germans, Japanese, Russians, British, and Americans equally); from which we expect no redemption, whether for victims, murderers, poets, or readers; which does not try to renew our humanity by making us "conscious of [...] evils"; and which must avoid instant "invalidation" by finding wholly "other means" than poets have found in the past. Our responses to Layton's own Holocaust poems may rightly be driven by these tough-minded standards.

A third fault-line in my initial judgment of those poems is that it inevitably but unreflectively assesses Layton's accomplishment in the grim light cast by his friend Leonard Cohen's *Flowers for Hitler* (1964), for which the 1963 remarks from *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler* may have been cheerleading. Clearly, Cohen sought "other means" in what he called, in a letter to Jack McClelland, "a Jew's book about Hitler" (Nadel 121). Cohen's method ridicules, even explodes, the history of rhetoric, poetic forms, calls for sympathy or identification, and the very notion of evil; in the language of his later song "The Captain," it shows the impossibility of finding "a decent place to stand / in a massacre" (*Stranger Music* 342). Nowhere in Layton do we feel the fearful shiver that sounds at the end of Cohen's "It Uses Us!":

> Kiss me with your teeth
> *all things can be done*
> whisper museum ovens of
> a war that Freedom won.
> (51)

For those who read Cohen's *Flowers for Hitler* as a pivotal text in Canada's emerging post-modernism, its appearance necessarily reconfigured the meaning of Layton's modernism; thereafter, Layton was arguably writing in what Edward Said identifies as a "late style," that is, the style of "a kind of self-imposed exile from what is generally acceptable, coming after it, and surviving beyond it" (16).

If Layton's Holocaust poems "come after" in this sense, it may be because Cohen's book gives us such a finely grained gloss upon Theodor Adorno's remark that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (*Prisms* 34).[4] "It Uses Us!" exemplifies, to me, what barbaric poetry might look

like. Layton's recognition of the year before that the poet who "will make clear for us Belsen" must reject "ninety-nine per cent of the world's literature of the past" is in sympathy with Adorno's radical insight and with Cohen's practice. But barbarism might have many literary expressions, and not all will look like Cohen's; we might well ask, with more compassion, whether Layton's poetry does not itself suffer a barbarizing reduction in his volumes of the 1970s as it struggles with the Holocaust subject matter.[5] Taken in this sense Adorno's remark works to Cohen's credit and Layton's discredit, largely on the issue of intentionality, but the poets' situations and styles might be equally well framed by its predictive power.

My invocation of Adorno, however, gives me concern. In introducing Layton's *Fornalutx* twenty years ago I asked, "should the monstrosity of a Hitler be the root henceforth of all ethical inquiry?" (xxv). It was an ignorant question at the time, and I remain at best an intolerant reader of Adorno, but in one legitimate perspective the mass academic circulation of Adorno's remark has given Hitler retroactive power to determine the freedoms of western literature, and with it Layton's freedoms, and I am concerned that *my* estimation of Layton's poetry might have been furtively shaped by Adorno's view—even if it was shared, in a peculiarly bitter irony, by A.M. Klein—that the Holocaust is an "unspeakable" subject[6] that altered poetic discourse in essence and forever. In this theory, Layton's failing was to attempt direct speech and plain condemnation of a subject that was susceptible to neither.

Giorgio Agamben's riposte to Adorno in *Remnants of Auschwitz* helps us to lift this yoke, a little, from Layton's neck. In a slender book the project of which is no slighter than the effort to "clear away almost all the doctrines that, since Auschwitz, have been advanced in the name of ethics" (13), Agamben simultaneously rejects the implication that the Holocaust cannot be spoken *and* sets down the paradoxical conditions of any such speaking:

> [...] those who assert the unsayability of Auschwitz today should be more cautious in their statements. If they mean to say that Auschwitz was a unique event in the face of which the witness must in some way submit his every word to the test of an impossibility of speaking, they are right. But if, joining uniqueness to unsayability, they transform Auschwitz into a reality absolutely separated from language, if they break the tie between an impossibility and a possibility of speaking that, in the *Muselmann*, constitutes testimony, then they unconsciously repeat the Nazis' gesture [...] (157)

The *Muselmann* is that camp prisoner whose suffering has taken him beyond speech, beyond all human dignities, and in one sense beyond the human: yet Agamben insists that "*the one whose humanity is completely destroyed is the one who is truly human*" (134). He develops what he calls Primo "Levi's paradox"—that only the *Muselmann*, folded into an ethical space from which he cannot speak, can be "the complete witness" to Auschwitz (qtd. 82)—into a recognition of a possible Holocaust art spoken by survivors that acknowledges at every turn that "Whoever assumes the charge of bearing witness in their name knows that he or she must bear witness in the name of the impossibility of bearing witness" (34).[7]

Agamben's commentary on the ethics of Holocaust witnessing certainly helps to loosen the knots of our discourse upon Layton's later poems. In no poem I can think of does he seem to doubt his right to speak, although we have seen in "To the Victims of the Holocaust" his admission that he does not himself have the *content* of testimony and must call on the dead to "fill [his] ears with [their] direst curses" (*WPJ* 149); I will return to the poem in my concluding remarks to follow up such dissonances. Agamben's insistence that "After Auschwitz, it is not possible to use a tragic paradigm in ethics" (99) might well give us pause when Layton opens "For 7515-03296" by noting the survivor's eyes, as "dark and tragic as history" (*WPJ* 146). And the dignity of utterance in his Holocaust poems flouts Agamben's discussion of human dignity and its dismantling in the camps: the *Muselmann*, he says, "is the guard on the threshold of a new ethics, an ethics of a form of life that begins where dignity ends" (69). Such meditations highlight the challenges to Holocaust representation in Layton's late poetry. On the other hand, Agamben's refusal to consider the Holocaust "unsayable"—"But why unsayable?", he demands: "Why confer on extermination the prestige of the mystical?" (32)—should give equal pause to any critic who would hold Layton to a tacit expectation of sufficient *saying*. We may continue to debate the merits of his poems as acts of witnessing, but in a refreshed ethical context illuminated by the difficulty, possibility, and value of even partial success in such utterance.

Agamben also helps me to think more carefully about the later Layton's relation to his own early Nietzscheanism. I have suggested that the dualisms of the later poetry display a dismaying fall from the Nietzschean grace of the poet's dance in the master-works, and I will return to that matter directly, but Agamben first draws our attention to the impossibility of *amor fati*, love of one's fate, for Holocaust witnesses. Kurt Van Wilt's 1978 article "Layton, Nietzsche, and Overcoming" was for me a vital supplement to Francis's "Layton and Nietzsche"; his articulation of the Nietzschean

ideal of *amor fati* greatly enriched my sense at that time of the ethical life of the *Übermensch*. *Amor fati* is interlocked with Nietzsche's vision of the "eternal return"; in Agamben's rendering,

> Against the impotence of the will with respect to the past, against the spirit of revenge for what has irrevocably taken place and can no longer be willed, Zarathustra teaches men to will backward, to desire that everything repeat itself […] The eternal return is above all victory over resentment, the possibility of willing what has taken place, transforming every 'it was' into a 'thus I wanted it to be'—*amor fati*. (99)[8]

As Agamben makes clear, "Auschwitz [...] marks a decisive rupture" (99) in these Nietzschean demands, which put intolerable imaginative pressure on Jewish witnesses who contemplate their own fates and cannot possibly will the recurrence of the camps. "For the victims, the temptation is great" (100) to fall instead into Nietzschean *ressentiment*, which "[...] is born from the will's impossibility to accept that something happened, from its incapacity to reconcile itself to time and to time's 'so it was'" (Agamben 71). I think it crucial that we not be deceived by the robustness of Layton's public persona and the volume of his rhetoric into thinking that this exemplary Jewish Nietzschean would not have faced similarly disabling pressures when he brought all the dynamism of his philosophical education to bear on the Holocaust subject.

There are in fact no grounds upon which one could argue that these late poems sustain the *amor fati* that pipes the last jig of the Tall Man. Not even the neutral rhetoric of "Eternal Recurrence" indicates a *love* of fate: "the smoke clears over another Stone Age, / over cave dwellers and humans with painted skins: / cannibals devour each other's kidneys and brains" (*WPJ* 274). But rather than pursue a reading of these poems for an alternate expression of *ressentiment*, let us consider Agamben's perceptive refusal of such an entrapment of the survivor between an outrageous demand of *amor fati* and a disabling and debasing *ressentiment*. On the one hand, Agamben cites the Holocaust memoir *At the Mind's Limits* of Jean Améry, who reclaims the force of resentment from Nietzsche's intonation of its contemptibility:

> My resentments are there in order that the crime become a moral reality for the criminal […] a forgiving and forgetting induced by social pressure is immoral […] Man has the right and privilege to declare himself to be in disagreement with every natural occurrence […] in the particular case under question, by nailing the criminal to his deed. (qtd. in Agamben 100)

On the other hand, Agamben draws from Primo Levi the reasoning that "*One cannot want Auschwitz to return for eternity, since in truth it has never ceased to take place; it is always already repeating itself*" (101). Fusing the two refusals, Agamben situates survivor testimony in a new post-Nietzschean ethos:

> It is no longer a question of conquering the spirit of revenge in order to assume the past, willing its return for eternity; nor is it a matter of holding fast to the unacceptable through resentment. What lies before us now is a being beyond acceptance and refusal, beyond the eternal past and the eternal present—an event that returns eternally but that, precisely for this reason, is absolutely eternally unassumable. Beyond good and evil lies not the innocence of becoming but, rather, a shame that is not only without guilt but even without time. (102-03)

Certainly this is opaque if it is meant to clarify a new Holocaust poetics. But clearly we need not hear Layton's hatred of the "fate" of the Jews in the key of Nietzschean *ressentiment*: not even if he himself seems to flirt with such a reading in the poem "Civilizations" (1980). In that poem it is "weak" poets who "compose lovely verses" while "Powerful men take what they can"; all this has been arranged by a "barbarous god / that one root / for beauty and evil made" (*FMNH* 74). Obviously Layton meant to attach *ressentiment* only to "weak" poets and had no idea of including himself in their number; his own unlovely verses, in the musculature of their absolutism, might instead be intended as the utterances of a rival *Übermensch* whose "will to power" is driven in part by outrage.

A second vein of Nietzschean thought pertinent to Layton's later poetry is opened for us by Brian Leiter's discussion of "the logic of Nietzsche's critique of morality." Leiter's formula for the species of morality that Nietzsche condemns—for he does not condemn all[9]—is "morality in the pejorative sense," and chief among the aspirations of any such destructive morality is the alleviation of human suffering: "what unifies Nietzsche's seemingly disparate critical remarks," Leiter says "—about altruism, happiness, pity, equality, Kantian respect for persons, utilitarianism, etc.—is that he thinks a culture in which such norms prevail *as morality* will be a culture which eliminates the conditions for the realization of human excellence" (136, emphasis added). This is because for Nietzsche, as Leiter clarifies, "*suffering* is positively necessary for the cultivation of human excellence" (137). A morality designed to alleviate human suffering, successfully enforced, would siphon away what Nietzsche saw as the fuel of the *Übermensch*'s flourishing.

In some poems Layton appears to read Nazi ideology as an extreme case of "morality in the pejorative sense." If this idea shocks, it is perhaps because we are not used to hearing the word "morality" with the invited Nietzschean disgust. To pursue such an idea we will of course have to stipulate that Nazism was *eager* to inflict suffering outside its own "moral community" and was indifferent to all forms of human flourishing and excellence that were not Aryan. The racial laws and the genocide itself are legible as an effort to seal off the Nazi body politic from contaminations, to fix its "health" in a condition beyond challenge; to save it, in essence, from having to face what it conceived as a form of suffering. One of Layton's claims against atrocity in the late poems highlights the camps' destruction of a people who embodied human excellence. This is the preliminary judgment of "After Auschwitz" (1969): "Lampshades / were made from the skins / of a people / preaching the gospel of love [...]" (*WPJ* 150). It is implicit in the catalogue of Jewish identities that fills "For My Sons, Max and David," for instance, "The Jew who sends Christian and Moslem theologians / back to their seminaries and mosques for new arguments / on the nature of the Divine Mercy," or "the Jew in whose eyes can be read the doom of nations / even when he averts them in compassion and disgust" (*WPJ* 151). And it is surely the case in his celebrations of Israeli militarism that he assumes Jewish suffering to have tempered the "New Jew"[10] to new kinds of human excellence, as in "Israelis":

> The pillar of fire: their flesh made it;
> It burned briefly and died—you all know where.
> Now in their own blood they temper the steel,
> God being dead and their enemies not.
>
> (*WPJ* 153)[11]

We may recognize in such poems at least the superficies of Nietzsche's disdain for any "morality"—ideological, ethical, or racial—that works against the expansion of human excellence in the highest men and women. This feature of the philosopher's thought appears to have become doctrinal for the elder Layton as a means of repudiating the Nazis' estimation of their own "excellence"—with its spurious claims of a Nietzschean inspiration—as a destructive "morality" in a long history of anti-Semitic rationalization.

As for the newly dramatic dualisms of Layton's late vision, and in particular the stark, absolute opposition of murderer and victim in the Holocaust poems, it seems obvious that these late speakers are not now positioning themselves *within* the "dynamic and chaotic process of cre-

ation and decay, of overpowering and becoming overpowered, of suppressing and being suppressed" that Nietzsche understood to be the organic basis of life and the will to power (Horstmann xxv). In the great works to 1963 we always know where Layton's speaker *stands*: in his garden; on a road next to a flattened toad; beside a cloud-reflecting lake; in a field surrounded by "mountains, purpling and silent as time" (*WPJ* 92). To stand in these places is to be suffused with and dispersed by the "dynamic and chaotic process" that they symbolize. Where are the speakers of the Holocaust poems? Of course they must look on from without, both spatially and temporally, at two removes or more from the atrocities they condemn.[12] They cannot be subject to the forces they depict; they are not vulnerable, permeable, or indefinite. They appear to have found that "decent place to stand" that Cohen's Captain told us could not be found "in a massacre," though we have no idea where it is or how they got there.

But must they have done so naively? They earn, by such distance, *rhetorical* authority: it is only by moving to such a groundless position that these speakers make denunciation possible. Indeed, we might choose to credit them with a *deliberate* self-fixity, and the barbarous style that it entails, that enables an otherwise impossible scale of speech. Nietzsche asserts in *Beyond Good and Evil* that "even the knower, by forcing his spirit to know *against* its own inclination and, often enough, against the wishes of his heart (in other words, to say 'no' when he would like to affirm, love, worship), this knower will prevail as an artist of cruelty and the agent of its transfiguration" (121). I stress that an "artist of cruelty" is not the same as a cruel artist. Nietzsche's idea of a No-saying to which an artist may drive herself *against her inclination* clarifies and helps to justify the dualist judgments of Layton's Holocaust speakers.

John Richardson recently argued that in ethics Nietzsche is "strongly pulled in both monist and dualist directions" (37). The monist Nietzsche, says Richardson, rejecting as we have seen the *ressentiment* that splits the ethical world into good and evil, makes "the more radical claim that everything has the *same value*. For Nietzsche that value is 'good,' so that everything is good, and indeed even equally good" (3). This position demands that the strongly willed person, and now we get closer to our purposes with Layton, say "Yes to even the most repellent parts or aspects of life" and, in the spirit of *amor fati*, "will the recurrence of even the most loathsome" facts (7) and "the most terrible and questionable qualities of life" (*Will to Power* 1050, qtd 9). On the other hand, Richardson observes that "Life indeed requires us not just to 'say no' but even to hate and fight against some things, as Nietzsche himself obviously did [...]" (10). Paradoxically,

the quality Nietzsche says *No* to most vehemently is "value dualism" (3) itself. "The question," Richardson rightly observes, "is how can Nietzsche 'say Yes' to life—not just in the aggregate but also in every individual—yet also go on and *say no*" to "so many things?" (29). This is very close to the question I have asked here of the ethics of Layton's later poetry.

Richardson finds the answer in Nietzsche's "perspectivism," which Rolf-Peter Horstmann glosses thus: "[...] we have no reason whatsoever to believe in any such thing as the 'sense' or the 'value' of life, insofar as these terms imply the idea of any 'objective' or 'natural' purpose of life." Nevertheless "human life is value-oriented in its very essence – that is, without adherence to some set of values or other, human life would be virtually impossible" (xvi-xvii). As Charles Taylor has always emphasized, we proceed necessarily by valuations.[13] For Nietzsche, Horstmann adds, "there must be some value-creating capacity within ourselves which is responsible for the values we cherish and which organizes our lives" (xvii), and we may not say No to any such natural, spontaneous human drive. Nor should we, perceiving this duality between unavoidable ethical perspective-taking and a world without intrinsic value, devalue individual judgments as "merely" perspectival. Nietzsche states sardonically

> [...] that life could not exist except on the basis of perspectival valuations and appearances; and if, with the virtuous enthusiasm and inanity of many philosophers, someone wanted to completely abolish the 'world of appearances,'—well, assuming *you* could do that,—at least there would not be any of your 'truth' left either! (*BGE* 35)

Now all this means that the enraged No-saying of Layton's Holocaust poems—a perspectival valuation of catastrophic events that we can all share in any case—need not constitute a debilitating contradiction of his Nietzschean recognition of the "dynamic and chaotic process" (Horstmann xxv) in which all "divided things" are understood to be equally good. In fact, it has been *my* dualist failing until recently to suppose so. Nietzsche's monist ideals do not paralyze the *Übermensch*'s powers of choice-making and reaction, or deny his privileged access to "the immediate *succession of opposites*, of antithetically valorized moral states of soul" that Nietzsche identifies as the true charisma of the saint (*BGE* 46). Instead we might say of Layton what Richardson concludes to be true of Nietzsche: "[...] his ultimate allegiance is to the monism, and the dualist excoriations of his opponents as 'anti-life' were recognized, in the back of his mind, as rhetorical and polemical" (37-8).

The "rhetorical and polemical" qualities of Layton's Holocaust poems are self-evident, but I wonder if we have as yet an adequate criticism in Canada for the recognition and judgment of polemical poetry, and of rhetoric in poetry. Perhaps we have been too long charmed by Yeats's modernist (and dualist) aphorism that "we make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry" ("Anima Hominis," in *Essays* 492). If Nietzsche helps us to understand rhetoric as the expressive style of perspectival judgments, and assuming we share Layton's estimation that the Holocaust cannot be approached without such judgments, then we may well want to valorize an emphatically rhetorical mode of Holocaust poetry *quarreling with others* alongside Agamben's desired art predicated on a negotiation with the very impossibility of an adequate testimony and witness. A much younger Layton admired in George Bernard Shaw and Ezra Pound "the excellence of anger and pugnacity in the service of human values" ("Shaw, Pound, and Poetry," *Engagements* 37); it's been a long time since anyone praised Layton himself in those terms.

Such a criticism might return to "To the Victims of the Holocaust" to observe a number of variations in its rhetorical stance that complicate and contest my reduction of the poem in earlier remarks to an act of caricature and a conscious lack of needed content. Layton's identification of the Holocaust-deniers he condemns in the poem is strikingly inconsistent. In the opening stanza the six million deaths have been "forgotten" and, as I noted earlier, he claims that "no one speaks" of them now; but in the second stanza the Holocaust is *remembered* and *spoken of* but its factuality denied: now those same deaths "are pure invention, a spoof." In the fourth stanza apologists for the European right are "*ignorant* [that Jews] were changed into soap and smoke" (emphasis added), a condition quite different from forgetting or denying; whereas in the fifth stanza the speaker feels sure that "Tomorrow / some *goy* will observe you never existed," a radical anti-Semitism that extends the Nazi efforts of extermination rearward to erase the Jewish fact of human history altogether. Now it is arguable that these shifting targets of the speaker's attack serve to disperse the poem's impact. But a more generous initial judgment might credit Layton here with a desire to encompass *all* the discourses that work against a sufficient consciousness of Holocaust atrocities in modern culture, and to equate them for their evil. Alternately, we might choose to think here of a speaker who is himself bewildered by the ethical vacuity around him—"I live among the blind, the deaf, and the dumb," he cries; "I live among amnesiacs"—and who replicates the incoherent arguments of his opponents because he cannot comprehend them (in either sense of that word) in his

poem. Both interpretations underscore the sensitive ethical consciousness of the speaker; the former reading takes him for a deliberate satirical ventriloquist of his enemies, whereas the latter evokes Layton's early clown personae, baffled and endangered by human behaviour, but responding almost helplessly with their own passionate enthusiasms, which threaten to dismember and disperse them in turn.[14]

In and among these variant condemnations, Layton shifts the tonal register of his poem freely. At one point he shrugs, "That's how the wind blows," a purely rhetorical move that recalls the rhetorical questions—"Why not?" and "so what?"—we encountered earlier. This is the same voice that spoke earlier in the poem of "tattooed forearms" as a "novelty" and of Jewish deaths as a "spoof." Such gestures seem calculated to make us trust the persona as a hard-bitten realist, one who can speak with Stoic grimness about grim matters; they are there too, I suspect, to fend off charges of pity-mongering from fellow Nietzscheans. In sharp contrast to such sardonic gestures is a stanza that has always struck me as a sincerely voiced and profound aetiology of Holocaust denial: "More corrosive of human pride / than Copernicus or Darwin, your martyrdoms / must lie entombed in silence." The stanza reminds us that, whatever the face and voices of Holocaust denial, a psychology of offended egotism drives them all.

These shifting registers, from a Juvenalian mockery of those he condemns to utterances of directness and great ethical clarity, bespeak a persona whose judgment of Nazi viciousness and its present-day denial is absolute but who either eschews or cannot sustain a prophetic intonation; at least occasionally, he is down in the mire of corrupt language use and shares its complicity with the vacuity of contemporary ethical judgment. "To the Victims of the Holocaust" is indeed fixed in a dualistic ethics that "says no" emphatically to an evil that Layton thinks to be beyond all admissions of complicity. But vocally and rhetorically, the poem is far more fluid and uncertain of the verbal situation it has engaged than may at first appear. And it is this fabric of rhetorical instability that truly prepares the ground for the poem's conclusion, in which (as we saw) he must ask the dead themselves to speak their own curses *through* him. Although he promises to reproduce these "till the sun turns black in the sky," the closure is in fact equally powerful if read as an admission of his own prophetic failure—a closure Agamben might even want to honour for its recognition of "the tie between an impossibility and a possibility of speaking" (157).

It will be a matter of personal judgment whether Layton should be credited here with a deliberate strategy of vocal insufficiency or faulted for a

poem riddled with inconsistencies and vitiated by historical distance while claiming an absolute ethical judgment of its material. The former judgment might help us to renew Layton's reputation and assert the value of these late poems, predicated as it is on his command of a new poetics rising to the complexities of its intransigent material. But the latter judgment, calling upon our readerly responsiveness to a poetics that must fail even before speech has begun, might do more to reshape our estimates of the older Layton's *ethos* both as poet and as public figure. I earlier quoted Agamben's intuition that "Beyond good and evil lies not the innocence of becoming but, rather, a shame that is not only without guilt but even without time" (103). His estrangement of the profound sense of shame among survivors, to which Levi attests, from the survivor's guilt that Agamben calls "a *locus classicus* of literature on the camps" (89) is a vital move. We might henceforth, in the light cast by Agamben, choose to see Irving Layton as a figurative survivor of the Holocaust, in much the same logic by which we have come to understand Klein so; certainly, the case of Klein is proof that an ocean's distance from the camps is no guarantor of invulnerability, and as to historical generations they were only three years apart.

Perceiving such a consciousness in Layton would foment, surely, a new critical compassion for the manner of his late poems. I have always heard Layton's raised voice as *compensatory* for some felt lack or thwarted need; Nietzsche says, "Let there be no doubt that anyone who *needs* the cult of the surface this badly has at some point reached *beneath* the surface with disastrous results" (*BGE* 53). I see no evidence in any of his writings that a sense of *guilt*, such as Klein expresses so movingly in "Meditation upon Survival," might motivate the extremes of style and rhetoric in Layton's Holocaust poems; but we need to remain alert to the possibility and complex meaning of the survivor's "shame" in the dark places obscured by the robust rhetoric of Layton's late poems. "Auschwitz," says Agamben, as if echoing Cohen, "is the site in which it is not decent to remain decent, in which those who believed themselves to preserve their dignity and self-respect experience shame with respect to those who did not" (60). "Profound suffering," says Nietzsche, "makes you noble; it separates" (*BGE* 166); and Layton knew himself a stranger to the "nobility" of those whose great suffering he wished to write down. Perhaps we hear something like Agamben's idea of shame,[15] then, in the closing lines of "To the Victims of the Holocaust," when the speaker finds that he must ask the dead for the content of their suffering to fill his otherwise empty curses. If we do hear that faint note of shame, we should listen soon after to the clearer tones of this surprising quotation from Nietzsche: "Whatever is done out of love

takes place beyond good and evil" (*BGE* 70). A full response to the entanglements of love, pugnacity, shame, and the persistent will to power in Irving Layton's late poetry would give us a richer valuation of this striving Nietzschean poet as he and his poetry made their way into old age.

Notes

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1 In *Selected Poems: A Wild Peculiar Joy* (1989; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2004), 15. Hereafter cited as *WPJ*.

2 Indeed, I suspect that it is partly Layton's need at this high point of his fame to treat his audience as malign, self-hating ignoramuses, a reification we might understand, in light of Joel Deshaye's work, as both an enabling move and a consequence of his celebrity, that opens the flood-gates to the dualistic ethos of the later poems.

3 See for instance "Berry Picking," "Keine Lazarovitch," and "Song for Naomi," all in *A Wild Peculiar Joy*, as well as the uncollected "Divorce" (*Droppings from Heaven* 42), a much more powerful tribute to his wife Betty Sutherland than the "Boschka Layton: 1921-1984" that made it into the selected volume.

4 In Sandra Wynands's translation the entire passage reads: "Even the most extreme awareness of the disaster is in danger of degenerating into blather. Cultural criticism is confronted with the final phase of the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and this also influences the realization that articulates why it became impossible to write poems today." (208). Wynands implies my subsequent sentence's point without stating it.

5 Said's special notion of the "late style" of the ageing artist is again salient: "where one would expect serenity and maturity, one instead finds a bristling, difficult, and unyielding—perhaps even inhuman—challenge" (12).

6 Cf. Klein, *The Hitleriad* 30: "With wounded whisper and with broken breath / Speaking the things unspeakable, and the unspeakable name!"

7 Agamben often speaks as if the saying of the Holocaust will be done by survivors who did not pass through the ethical vacuum visited upon *Muselmanner*, and for much of the book one wonders if any *Muselmanner* in fact survived the camps. Movingly, Agamben closes *Remnants of Auschwitz* with many passages of testimony from surviving *Muselmanner*. Their durable voices trouble Levi's paradox—*Muselmanner* can return to speech and with it Agamben's thesis that "the remnants of Auschwitz—the witnesses—are neither the dead nor the survivors, neither the drowned nor the saved. They are what remains between them" (164). The sense of this is clear enough, but it also seems apparent that some witnessing can be done from one side only of that antithesis: some of the drowned can themselves return to speech.

8 "What if some day or night a demon were to steal into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it you will have to live once again […] every pain and every joy […] in your life must return to you […].' Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon that spoke thus?" (*Gay*

Science 194).

9 Cf. *Beyond Good and Evil*: "morality" is really just "a doctrine of the power relations under which the phenomenon of 'life' arises" (20). Notably, Nietzsche calls the noble man's "contrast between 'good' and 'bad'," which "amounts to one between 'noble' and 'despicable'," a "type of morality" (154).

10 Although Cohen makes much of this concept in the second section of *Beautiful Losers* (171-2), it has a more immediate meaning for Layton's poem in the iconic figure of the *sabra*, the militant and militarized young Jew born in the new Israel after 1948 and free of the self-defeating exilic sensibility of Israelis who had arrived as European refugees.

11 I grant the significance, of course, of other late depictions of the post-war Jew that suggest he is permanently debilitated by his people's suffering, as in "Twentieth Century Gothic": "The same human carnage flows through his veins as mine, / yet I turn from him in sadness and dismay. He's one / of God's white mice in whose damaged bodies / vaccines are made for the select few [...]" (*WPJ* 290). There are too many subtleties here for full articulation: the speaker of "After Auschwitz" goes on to call the "gospel of love" the particular "folly" of the Jews; the "white mice" allude to Layton's "End of the White Mouse," in which a speaker's "Zarathustrian" scorn for the death of a lab rodent is revealed hours later to have been showily theoretical, when the fact of his mortal kinship with the "dancing, prancing little" mouse is driven down upon him as he reseeds his lawn (*WPJ* 119).

12 "The Improved Binoculars" (1956) intriguingly anticipates such problems of standpoint in the Holocaust poems, but in it the persona's distanced placement—signaled by his need for binoculars if he is to witness atrocities—is clearly associated with his disturbing *lack* of ethical engagement.

13 See *Sources of the Self*: "I want to defend the strong thesis that doing without frameworks is utterly impossible for us; otherwise put, that the horizons within which we live our lives and which make sense of them have to include these strong qualitative discriminations [...] stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood" (27).

14 I am alluding here to my readings in *The Montreal Forties* of poems such as "The Cold Green Element" and "Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom"; see pp. 217-20 and 230-32 respectively.

15 "We can therefore propose a first, provisional definition of shame. It is nothing less than the fundamental sentiment of being *a subject*, in the two apparently opposed senses of this phrase: to be subjected and to be sovereign. Shame is what is produced in the absolute concomitance of subjectification and desubjectification, self-loss and self-possession, servitude and sovereignty" (107).

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