Irving Layton's Televised "Public Poetry" and *The Pierre Berton Show*

by Joel Deshaye

Irving Layton was, and still is, interpreted too narrowly as a poet who wrote books, without enough regard for his role as a critic and his performances on television and radio. Layton was the first Canadian poet to establish a reputation for himself through television, in addition to radio, newspapers, public readings, and books—a reputation, specifically, as a combative personality and strident debater. His appearances in the mass media started in the mid-1950s, a decade after he indirectly introduced himself in his 1945 book *Here and Now* as "[t]he Zeitgeist's too public interpreter, / A voice multiplex and democratic, / The people's voice or the monopolists'" (n.p.). When he began appearing on the CBC's *Fighting Words* programs on radio and TV, he began to fulfill his own prediction that he would become "too public" and embody such a contradictory voice. He also began to imply that he was worried about being typecast and redefined so that his role as "interpreter" would disappear beneath his publicity. This concern in relation to the effects of the mass media was not Layton's alone; it had special relevance at a time when television was about to become nearly ubiquitous and globally transformative. Across the ocean in Europe, Martin Heidegger wrote that a "world picture" was developing and that he was referring not to "a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as picture" ("Age" 129).[1] Later theorists adapted Heidegger's essays about pictures and technology to our televisual societies, and together their arguments help me to historicize Layton's self-reflections, in conversation and poetry, about his place on television and radio.

Heidegger and Layton might seem to be a mismatch in the context of the former's "Nazi connections" (Fry, "Introduction" 17) and the latter's Judaism, but they had affinities as thinkers and contemporaries—not least of which is the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche. Tony Fry states that Heidegger believed technology to have "an impetus of its own beyond any direct control of the 'will to power'" ("Switchings" 24). In this Nietzschean context, Heidegger is germane to Layton and vice versa—Layton who gave one of his definitive poems the title of a book by

Nietzsche, "The Birth of Tragedy" (1954). As with the later "Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom" (1958), "The Birth of Tragedy" can be read a manifesto declaring Layton's poetic ideals of freedom of expression and integrity of the self. Although the effects of technology on these ideals are multifarious, depending on the kind of technology and its technical sophistication, Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology" (1954) proposes that modern technology is a deterministic threat to human freedom and self-knowledge, so that "*precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself, i.e., his essence*" (27, emphasis in original). Neither Heidegger nor Layton had an entirely negative opinion of technologies such as television,[2] but they both saw technology as potentially posing an existential problem. Layton's televised readings of his poems on *The Pierre Berton Show*—a heretofore unexamined situation—demonstrate that television affected how he wrote, what he wrote, and how he "encounter[ed] himself" as a "too public interpreter." And many of his published works can be misunderstood if they are not recognized as partly dislocated from their other real or imagined homes in the mid-century electronic mass media, where Layton also lived.

According to Heidegger, because television can deliver moving pictures and sounds from point to point without delay, or through editing can produce fast or slow motion, TV is the technology that shrinks "[a]ll distances in time and space" (qtd. in Dienst 106) and thereby establishes nearness. Such intimacy can also be understood as a lack of separation between televised people and their audiences. Layton, to some extent, enjoyed the idea of reducing separation. On *The Pierre Berton Show* with Leonard Cohen in 1964, Cohen suggested (ironically—for he did not then or afterward believe that Canadian audiences were large) that for "the vast Canadian audiences" television was "that grey window of their living room," and Layton corrected him: "Bedroom." He and Cohen were enjoying the attention of the cameras while reflecting on their sex appeal. For Layton, however, the intimacy of poet and audience was a potentially threatening aspect of his own stardom. In an essay on Layton's fame, Brian Trehearne argues that "Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom" ironically decries the effects of an audience's scorn. The audience's rapprochement with the poet is equally serious. In the poem, Layton's speaker walks on stilts partly to remain far from an imaginary crowd, and he cries, "Space for these stilts! More space or I fail!" (*A Wild Pecuiliar Joy* 56). Although Layton does not explicitly refer to TV in this poem, we can read it in the context of the ability to transmit poetry through an emerging technology of nearness whose broadcasts were as inevitable as the "waves" that King Canute foolishly

tried to resist. Heidegger writes that "[t]he peak of this abolition of every possibility of remoteness is reached by television [...] which will soon pervade and dominate the whole mechanism and drive of communication" (qtd. in Dienst 106). Because a poet must communicate, even if only with him- or herself, this prediction is both dire and hopeful—hopeful, because all poets need an audience, but dire because television is more pictorial than verbal, and poets want to communicate through language.[3]

The panicked desire for "[m]ore space" in "Whatever Else Poetry Is Freedom" can be partly explained in the existential terms that Heidegger introduced in *Being and Time* (1927). Heidegger's prediction about nearness, which Richard Dienst elaborates in *Still Life in Real Time: Theory after Television* (1994), has ramifications on how people relate to themselves in the television era:

> For Heidegger "distance" remains a function of a certain mode or motion of presence and hence of Being. "Nearness" characterizes the state of a relationship between Being and a being: the key site is "Dasein," an untranslatable noun that Heidegger uses to indicate an entity [...] of being that is not yet informed of its Being [....] (107)

Dasein is not exactly "consciousness" or "subjectivity" (Dienst 107); Heidegger himself explains that *Dasein* is "[t]his being which we ourselves in each case are and which includes inquiry among the possibilities of its Being" (qtd. in Dienst 107). It can be understood as the existentially questioning, promising self. In the context of television, does the "abolition of every possibility of remoteness" enable existential questioning? Can it help someone achieve self-knowledge and self-determination? We might expect television to be a medium through which a public persona veils the "essence" of the self from viewers. Layton himself does this often, symbolizing himself through King Canute and a cast of others throughout his work. TV, however, might also be less a "window" (as Cohen suggested) and more a dispiritingly honest mirror. *The Pierre Berton Show* gave Layton an opportunity to reflect glumly on how publicity had changed his writing. Television can help one to see one's self, but it is so deterministically public that the consequence of this way of seeing might be to "fail" existentially—to be incapable of changing what one sees in oneself, and what others see.[4]

Layton had reason to be ambivalent about his public persona and stardom. He thought that he had created a "BOOM" (*Wild Gooseberries* 63), all caps, in the mid-1950s. He was, or soon would be, correct. In the decade that began with his first television appearance in 1956, Layton appeared

eight times on CBC Television—not tremendous numbers, but almost once a year. This number was small in comparison with his appearances on CBC Radio: forty three times in the same period, while he was also appearing much more often in newspapers, journals, and magazines, either as the writer or the story itself. At the time, a popular arts show on CBC Radio or TV could regularly attract 30,000 listeners or viewers per episode (Naves 44).[5] Relative to other poets—and to philosophers such as Heidegger, who did some radio broadcasts for Hitler (Fry, "Introduction" 17) but appeared only once on television (Dienst 124-25)—he had high levels of exposure in the mass media. This helped him to innovate a new function of the 'poet as critic' in and of the mass media, and thereby encourage some of the social changes that he thought would improve modern life. His exposure also made him a star, certainly relative to other poets (and novelists, for a time) but also quite legitimately in a world of mass media without Internet, satellite, or cable that was much smaller than that of the present. He therefore enjoyed many of the perks and suffered some of the troubles that stardom in general is known to entail, including the "identity confusion" (Rojek 11) that Layton may have anticipated with his "murdered selves" (*WPJ* 35) in "The Cold Green Element" (1955)—a life-or-death identity crisis that becomes existential in the context of Heidegger's philosophy. Multiple selves or personas might be a psychologically troublesome yet creative feature of Layton's poetics, but in the context of television they have another dimension. The debate format of *Fighting Words* demanded that Layton restrict himself to sound bites—a poor substitute for the reflecting facets and balanced inquiries of poetry—and had to produce contrary points of view, even if that meant changing sides and rendering himself merely opportunistic and inconsistent as a commentator.

Fighting Words and *The Pierre Berton Show* differed insofar as the latter welcomed some of Layton's poems, but they were similar venues insofar as they encouraged Layton's networking and self-promotion. Berton was one of Layton's contemporaries and a peer. Berton "was among Canada's best-known writers and was particularly well regarded as a serious popularizer of Canadian history" ("Pierre" par. 1). His popularity was established in part with "polemics" ("Pierre" par. 2) such as *The Comfortable Pew* (1965) and *The Smug Minority* (1968). As an outspoken celebrity and writer, Berton had much in common with Layton, and in 1964 he called Layton "an old friend" of his show. Layton might have understood that Berton and others (such as Nathan Cohen of *Fighting Words*) were creating situations in which he would be expected to play a certain role—to offend, stimulate, amuse. As a consequence, Layton might garner appreci-

ation from his peers, but he might not be developing as he would like. In the Heideggerean sense of encountering himself, Layton would encounter on TV an image that enlarged his public identity, but threatened to define his Being or at least his being. In effect, by joining Berton, Layton was contributing to his own typecasting.

Whenever a clique or school or thought forms around a writer, there is a risk that interpretations of him or her might narrow. But understandably, the exclusivity and prestige that accrues thereby must still remain an attraction. *The Pierre Berton Show* was hardly a "school" or a "clique," but it was involved in the contemporary postwar realignment of the literary and popular cultures connoted by those words. In 1964, both Layton and Cohen appeared twice on the show.[6] Cohen was popular because of his book *The Spice-Box of Earth* (1961) and had spent part of 1964 filming the National Film Board documentary called *Ladies and Gentlemen... Mr. Leonard Cohen* (1965), which was released the following year. It was planned as a film about Cohen, Layton, Phyllis Gotlieb, and Earle Birney, but the result focused almost entirely on Cohen—with the exception of a clip from *The Pierre Berton Show* where Birney and Gotlieb can be glimpsed before the director blocks out everyone but Berton, Layton, and Cohen. Layton and Cohen had a friendship that was mutually promotional and at least a little competitive.[7] On their other appearance on *The Pierre Berton Show* in 1964, Berton called the duo a "team" and "one of the greatest acts in town," the "town" being the city of Montreal. This sort of teamwork is similar to that described by Aaron Jaffe in *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005), which explains how T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound worked out their reciprocally supportive agendas. Modernist writers in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada understood networks very well, but Berton, Cohen, and Layton used theirs to reach a popular audience that was sometimes deliberately alienated by so-called high modernists such as Eliot.

Layton and Cohen's mutual promotion in 1964 involved a book tour with Birney and Gotlieb, and on *The Pierre Berton Show* Layton reflected on how publicity was affecting his writing, leading it to become a "public poetry." Berton begins with a general question: "What concerns you the most at the present time?" Layton answers, "the survival of the poet." The aforementioned film omits most of what Layton had to say about this issue, but Layton worried aloud in more detail on *The Pierre Berton Show* that an integral part of his identity as a poet would be lost if his public continued to grow. He said that poets must "preserve the self in a world that is rapidly steamrollering the selves out of existence and establishing a uni-

form world." Heidegger had a similar concern: "uniformity becomes the surest instrument of the total, i.e., technological, rule over the earth" ("Age" 152). Layton understood himself to be typecast, defined in part by the public that he was entertaining on television and radio, and that his freedoms of expression and self-definition were thereby limited. Speaking of the public and his book tour on this occasion in 1964, Layton says to Berton,

> I'm wondering whether this is supposed to be Canada's answer to the Beatles. I don't think we've been as amusing as the Beatles but we've had some fairly good audiences. But it's been borne in on me that there's a tremendous difference between the kind of poetry I am reading to the public and the kind of poetry that I feel is really serious poetry coming from the very depths of myself. And it's begun to bother me because I am in a sense writing a public poetry or reading a public poetry because it's easy to understand the public I witness [or "eyewitness"]. I can throw in a couple of jokes and make them laugh. As a matter of fact, Pierre, somebody came over to me after one of the readings and said, "You and Cohen are the Bob Hopes of Canadian poetry."

Layton is not only putting himself in the company of more widely known celebrities here, the Beatles and Bob Hope. He is also criticizing what he calls "public poetry" and recognizing a difference between the superficial poetry that involves "a couple of jokes" and the "really serious poetry coming from the very depths" of the poet's self. Berton tells Layton that he is admitting to having become, as the critics had claimed, a "personality" instead of a "poet"—"a great ham." But Layton responds by saying, "I don't want that, you see. [...] The kind of poetry that I want to write is different from the poetry that I am reading [aloud to my audience]." Meaningfully, *television* is the medium through which he communicates his desire, and we might wonder if he was spontaneous in saying so. If his conversation with Berton prompted this revelation, then TV was partly responsible for teaching Layton about himself—a possible encounter between his different selves, if not between "Being and a being." But any epiphany for Layton here was grim. He implied on this occasion that his so-called public poetry was becoming as "uniform" as the "world" in which he performed, including the public to which he condescended through the description "easy to understand." If Heidegger were to comment on Layton's typecasting, he might note that *typecasting* is a technological threat, the word itself a metaphor of a mechanical process; Layton's own metaphor was that of "steamrollering," as if a machine were flattening and hardening the otherwise changeable material of the self.

Notably, steamrollers usually treat asphalt instead of more natural materials, and this metaphor contrasts strongly with some of Layton's other metaphors of the self, while remaining true to an ideal that we might call selfish fluidity or flux. Layton conceived of the self as a container for natural oppositions—hatred and love, life and death—and he conceived of opposition as an integral part of his art. His speaker in "The Birth of Tragedy" says that in him "nature's divided things" "have their fruition" and that "I am their core. Let them swap, / bandy, like a flame swerve. / I am their mouth; as a mouth I serve" (*WPJ* 1). One of my theories about his internal opposites is that they came from the outside, from his two main publics—the popular and the literary. Although these publics came together in the early 1960s, they began to separate again in the 1970s when attention to Layton was growing only in the less literary contexts. He then had to write two different kinds of poetry: the casual, disposable, controversial, *popular* kind associated with celebrity, and the serious, classic, difficult, *literary* kind associated with fame. For a poet who aspired to unify opposites in poems such as "The Birth of Tragedy," these categories were not easily reconciled and were a factor in his uneven critical reception. He had trouble in addressing his publics simultaneously, so he swung back and forth and thereby established his controversial persona of the devil's advocate.

Sometimes, Layton changed sides almost immediately, and I suspect that this was partly the result of how he understood television. On the occasion in 1964 when Layton and Cohen were on *The Pierre Berton Show* alone, Berton's first question to Layton was, "Are you a sissy?" Layton, seeming a little surprised and not impressed, answers: "Uh, I hope not." Berton then comments on his leonine appearance, and Layton says that anyone who believes he's *not* a sissy should beware when he lets his "hair down." Although he tells Berton that poets always "frighten the pants off the academics and the establishment and all the respectable people," he also says that there is "a vested interest now in the literary tough guy that I'm kind of tired of." As a result, he says, "I am a sissy." But he also says, "And I do maintain quite seriously now that your true poet is in opposition, radical opposition, to most of the conventions and customs of society, because that's what we want poets for. It's no question of their being tough guys or nasty guys or bohemians or anything at all like that."

Is he a sissy or not? At any opportune moment, usually in front of a camera or microphone, he can be either. He would prefer to be both simultaneously, but this duality is not easily conveyed on television unless it is plainly satirical. Poetry, however, is the kind of performance that enables

Layton to be both at once, thanks to the subtlety of language. TV, on the other hand, has an off / on switch; the televised image draws attention away from verbal subtlety, which is too easily undetectable, and therefore not worth trying, in that medium. Layton *did* try, however, and so I do not mean to suggest that his TV appearances lacked nuance; I mean only that his so-called public poetry, and his contrarian attitude, were partly the results of an attempt to be fit for television—not to resolve opposition but to emphasize it and thereby draw more attention to his causes. And the very large public of TV, which was being adopted in the 1950s in Canada faster than anywhere else in the world (McKay 65; "Canadian Broadcasting Corporation"), probably seemed to have the greatest potential to enact social change—to do good or bad on a large scale. Layton was concerned about the effects of mass media but also wanted to use it for his own purposes.

In 1967, for example, after visiting Germany in 1966 to do a series of readings and lectures (Cameron 386), he appeared on *The Pierre Berton Show* again, but with a more overtly political intention than he had in 1964. Berton introduced the show by focusing on "that controversy" that Layton had started when he returned from Germany and penned "nice things" about it in *Maclean's* magazine in November, 1966 (Cameron 497n)[8]. Among others, two journalists in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle Review* responded to the article, objecting to Layton's attitude partly because of recent German elections that were influenced by neo-Nazi sentiment. The journalists were critical of Layton for having not been more critical—certainly an unusual allegation to make of him. Elspeth Cameron provides an extensive footnote (497n) listing the many articles and editorials motivated by Layton's *Maclean's* piece and his rebuttals to his detractors. Cameron remarks upon Layton's penchant "[t]o take the opposite side in political matters" (387), and this is an observation more significant than it might seem. Layton has a reputation for being simply mean in his political arguments, but his essay about his trip to Germany is nothing of the sort—it is passionate but quite balanced and journalistic—and I have heard him on radio and TV offering comparatively polite and delicate statements in response to the brashness of others such as Hugh Garner. As devil's advocate, he could be angelic. To explain his forgiveness of Germany on this episode of *The Pierre Berton Show*, Layton began with a quotation from his article in *Maclean's*—a statement that was both diplomatic and controversial: "It is precisely my Jewishness that makes me disavow hatred and revenge" (*TS* 116).

When the conversation moves to Layton's initial feelings about arriving in Germany, he says more about his prose writings and admits to a less noble attitude—a change implying that Layton wrote differently for different literary forms and media. Berton asks him how he felt to land in Germany, and Layton answers that he tried to describe it in the *Maclean's* article. He says he was "almost resentful" and then, yes, he admits, "I was resentful." He had seen prosperity and happiness in postwar Germany and it bothered him, but he then asserts that he had adjusted his view so that he could see the goodness there. He says that Germany had "dark shadows behind the eyes" "but on the whole" was trying to move on. The Germans he met seemed content and were hospitable to him: "The people appeared to be peaceable and affable." He then remarks, "All this was so heartening to me, who had lived for so many years in the shadow of Naziism, that I sat down and in a moment of exultation wrote what I thought was a very lyrical letter to the people back home telling them this is what I saw." He says that he felt "compassion" for the Germans. Because he was a Jew he recognized the vilification of young Germans who were assumed to be Nazis when they were, and should have felt, "quite guiltless" of the crimes of their forebears. "As a Jew," he says, "I plead with Jews to learn the lessons from their own history and not to visit on the younger generation the sins of their parents." Given the chance to refer to his prose, he adds nuance—also humility—to his position.

If his opening statements in the mass media are untroubled, but in his prose writings he admits resentfulness, we have to wonder about his poetry. Some of Layton's poems about visiting Germany are considerably less adorned with nicety than his statements on *The Pierre Berton Show*. In "Das Wahre Ich" (1964), for example, he claims to reveal "the real me," which is the translation of the words "Das Wahre Ich" into English. In this poem the speaker says, "We are twenty years removed from war" (*Collected Poems* 318), and the woman in the poem tells him "she was a Nazi; her father also" (*CP* 318). The woman and the speaker are unfailingly polite and even happy in each other's company, until a crucial moment: "Her face is sad and thin as those mobiles / moving round and round in the small wind / my voice makes when I thank her" (*CP* 319). Whereas she perhaps feels guilty that he treats her kindly, the speaker painfully realizes—"a thrill stabbing into [his] mind"—that he wonders if she is imagining him dead, foolish to have been "compassionate" (*CP* 319). The "thrill" seems to be positive—a selfish gladness that she feels deservedly guilty and her pleasure is spoiled, but it might also be that he realizes he is stereotyping her as someone who wants to see him dead. Either or both

might be valid, and that is how the poem ends—with moral ambiguity and a brutally honest view of potential prejudice and hatred. The message of this contemporaneous poem, which was *not* read on TV,[9] is more visceral and extreme than the message of his prose, which in turn is more ambivalent than many of his remarks about Germany on television. Ambivalence might be a strategy for unifying opposites—like irony, it can sustain two opposite meanings—and it might also reveal an inconsistency of Layton's messaging; however, its presence in a book and not on TV also suggests that Layton was attempting to strategize, to choose carefully when and where to say what. This is self-fashioning *par excellence*, even if Layton's decisions sometimes seem to have been based on guesswork.

Was (and is) "the real me" of Layton's "Das Wahre Ich" unseen on television but evident in his published poems? We may recall Heidegger's statement in the context of modern technology: "*nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself.*" One reason to support this theory is that we come to understand much of the world and each other through images first—a Baudrillardian precession of simulacra. Layton created an image based on personas in his books, and he played a role on TV, but we cannot assume that one performance was more authentic than the other simply because of the medium. Nevertheless, we might *generally* assume that his televised poetry is likely to be more public than private, and, if the public-private distinction is germane to authenticity, then we may also suppose that his more private poems are at least potentially more "real." Articulating some of the nuance here, Roland Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida* (1981) that

> the age of Photography [and by extension television] corresponds precisely to the explosion of the private into the public, or rather into the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private: the private is consumed as such, publicly [...]. But since the private is not only one of our goods (falling under the historical laws of property), since it is also the absolutely precious, inalienable site where my image is free (free to abolish itself), as it is the condition of an interiority which I believe is identified with my truth, or, if you like, with the Intractable of which I consist, I must, by a necessary resistance, reconstitute the division of *public* and *private*: I want to utter interiority without yielding intimacy. (98)

The final clause of this quotation is highly relevant to Layton. In "the age of Photography" or "the world picture," the "necessary resistance" might be a recourse to print. And so Layton, facing the prospect of reading poems aloud on *The Pierre Berton Show*, might have decided against examples

that would create too much "publicity of the private"—privacy being not merely sexual or secret but emotionally risky and on the page visible to fewer eyes.

The difficult resentfulness of "Das Wahre Ich" helps to situate Layton and his attitude historically. It partly explains Michael Greenstein's interpretation that, in this poem and "Ex-Nazi," "Layton as would-be victim freezes time and faces the post-Holocaust world" (par. 5). According to Greenstein, Layton imagines himself as stuck in the past and not entirely willing to recognize that times have changed. We have seen, however, that Layton's remarks on television were quite progressive. They contradict what Greenstein's image of "[frozen] time" suggests, especially when Layton goes on to tell Berton about his Jewish critics and Jews who survived the Holocaust:

> In a word, I'd say that the reaction [of the critics] has been, to me, rather disappointing. Maybe I was expecting too much. Certainly from those who suffered from Hitler and his thugs and bullies, their reaction was quite understandable. Pierre I talked to many of them who came from the death camps. In 1945 and 1946, 1947 at the Jewish Public Library, I saw their tattooed wrists and their tattooed shoulders. I know all that they have gone through with my mind [...]. Nobody wants one grave experience to become merely history. And this is what they don't want to let happen when somebody like myself comes along and says, but there is change. This is a different Germany.

Layton's claim to "know all that they have gone through with [his] mind" deserves to be challenged (the imagination being ill-equipped to realize and thereby "know" sheer horror, raw physical pain, and absolute despair), but let us focus instead on a different issue. His concept of history here is simple. He argues that history happens when there is change, and the past is increasingly distant and too easily forgotten. Greenstein is right that Layton temporarily stops the flow of history in "Das Wahre Ich"—and this is precisely what Layton tells Berton that he is against. On TV he claims that he does not want to be stuck in the past, but on the page he implies that he is.

To contrast Layton's televised argument about German progress with "Das Wahre Ich" is raise questions about history in the era of television. Should we be surprised that Layton would try to focus on the present rather than on history in the medium often alleged to be ruining attention spans? Eamon D'Arcy observes:

> New technologies [...] are still inextricably linked to an idea of "progress," which is linear and fundamentally irreversible—technological change is almost by definition an "advance." It is therefore difficult to conceive of any movement backwards, any regression. Television always constructs a situation which is "frontal" in that there is no eluding it. (in Frye 109)

The medium itself might have encouraged Layton to minimize the past, but more likely his experience as a debater and frequent contrarian on *Fighting Words* had taught him that controversy would draw attention to him and his writing—in addition to his political opinions at the time. (He later became much more militant in supporting Jewish causes.) "Das Wahre Ich" was not on TV. Had it been, it might have *appeased* not *provoked* his Jewish critics, though it might have been read as a critique of a prejudice of some Jews too.

"Das Wahre Ich" is too "serious" to be an example of Layton's public poetry, but it is also too free in its verse compared to some of the poems likely to fit the description of public poetry. What *was* Layton's public poetry, and was it on television? No one will be surprised to hear that Layton's television appearances rarely involved his reading or reciting any of his poetry (though he often read his poems on CBC Radio, as itemized in the *Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Authors*); however, Layton's appearance on the 1967 episode of *The Pierre Berton Show* was an exception because he read three poems. The second of these, "Deadalive" provides the best contrast with "Das Wahre Ich" and establishes the extremes to which his other televised poems seem to respond.[10] "Deadalive" is dedicated to Charles Lazarus, one of the two journalists from the *Review* who attacked his essay in *Maclean's*:

> You say I sold myself for a song.
> For that lie, let your days here be few:
> My soul is not on the auction block
> Where bought and sold are the likes of you.
>
> There was a Lazarus who dead, rose
> And warmed his members with food and drink;
> You, Charles, a greater miracle show
> For your dead mouth sweats, you live yet stink.

"Deadalive" is some of Layton's public poetry, seemingly intended for the mass media instead of books. It is much closer than "Das Wahre Ich" to what we might expect from television. Nevertheless, Layton published

many poems like "Deadalive" over the years, in books such as *The Laughing Rooster* (1964)—the most exasperating of Layton's books in my opinion—and *Periods of the Moon* (1967). From the latter, here is a very short poem akin to "Deadalive" that is certainly another example of his public poetry:

> "For the Editor of the Jewish Canadian Eagle"
> For having said I extenuated Nazi crime
> May you dance from torment till the end of time
> And your agonized shadow fall nowhere but on slime
> (114)

"Deadalive" and the poem above are throwaways, with little beyond the historical context of Layton's political squabbles to recommend them. They also have an end-rhyme scheme that forces the syntax into needlessly difficult arrangements. Formally, they have a pattern that gestures toward the technical (or technological) uniformity that Layton disliked. Although many of his other throwaways are in free verse, the two above—with the same origin *vis à vis* his *Maclean's* piece—are so bad as formalist poems that the forms themselves underscore Layton's insults to editors, as if they deserved no more than mass-producible drivel publishable only because of Layton's star power.

Commenting on "Deadalive" and the first of the three poems he read, "For the Stinker who called me an Apologist for Nazi Crimes," Layton says: "I definitely am demanding an apology." But his way of demanding it and the TV's way of transmitting it are more like the unfortunate equivalent of a modern political attack ad. The circumstances of mass media and celebrity have their own demands, and Layton partly complied. This was 1967, but many readers of Layton will be familiar with a number of his bad poems from earlier years that they might think of differently knowing that those poems might have been intended in part for television or radio.

As for the first poem read by Layton on the broadcast, "For the Stinker who called me an Apologist for Nazi Crimes," it initially appears to be one of Layton's public poems: nasty, brutish, and short (to misappropriate Thomas Hobbes). In the reading, Layton addresses by name the other *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* journalist, Peter Lust (Cameron 386).[11] He begins by reading aloud,

> I would like to take him and beat
> the living daylights from his eyes,
> who loosed the deadly spirochete

that lives on mob-approving lies
(*Periods* 106)

The next quatrain concludes the poem by stating that the speaker wants to "mock for all time the name of lust [*sic*]" (106). Seeing and hearing Layton read the poem after he described its context and mentioned Lust the man, a viewer would easily understand it as an insult. But an attentive viewer might *also* realize that the poem shows some of Layton's disdain for the public, typical in his poetry, which appears in the reference to the "mob" or crowd associated with "lies" in the fourth line of this quatrain.

Though clearly derogatory, the poem is surprisingly complicated—not entirely made with a simplified view of TV and broadcasting in mind. In both of the two stanzas, Layton's use of the term *spirochete* (a bacterium known to cause syphilis) is unexpectedly obscure. But the viewer could guess the meaning because he qualifies it as "deadly" and ends the poem with a fairly obvious sexual insult toward a man and his lineage: the exhortation to "mock for all time the name of lust." In the second stanza, Layton suggests that, by writing the poem and then reading it on air, he sends a spirochete of his own to infect Lust and cause impotence:

May another spirochete bring
to his brain rot, to his skin crust;
and his blackened tool, a loose string,
mock for all time the name of lust
(*Periods* 107)

The metaphoric implication is that Layton's poem itself is an infectious bacterium, and if it is to be effective in mocking Lust it must infect, not Lust, but the masses. This means that the poem is not very different from the "mob-approving lies," though a mob is no more likely than Lust to appreciate an outbreak of a sexually transmitted infection. That the speaker furthermore 'screws' the crowd in reading the poem adds some comedy unlikely to be noticed immediately. The poem, on air, lasts only about twenty seconds. Whereas today we can watch television highlights online, we must remind ourselves that in 1967 a television broadcast was much more temporary than the printed word. To mock Lust "for all time," the poem must be *read* again and again in perpetuity; it cannot only be heard.

It is strange, then, that Layton's throwaways often end up in books and not on TV, and on TV he reads a relatively bookish poem. What we can take from this, though, is that Layton's poems sometimes acquire otherwise lost nuances when we understand them in the context of television—

even if they almost always exist only in print or, to a much lesser extent, on commercial recordings such as *Irving Layton at Le Hibou* (c. 1962).

In fact, Layton read not only one bookish poem but two on the same 1967 episode of *The Pierre Berton Show*, with further symbolic and metaphoric implications about television. Layton ended the unpredictable sequence of readings with what Berton calls "a very sensitive poem" that has little of the temporary political controversy of its precedents. Instead, it has much of the gravitas of "Das Wahre Ich," and it might have ever-so-slightly gladdened Lust and Lazarus to know that Layton was willing to acknowledge on air the horror perpetrated by Germans. In "Rhine Boat Trip," the speaker tells of "the ghosts of Jewish mothers," "their ghostly children," the "murdered rabbis," and concludes with two stanzas that invoke both myth and history:

> The tireless Lorelei
> can never comb from their hair
> the crimson beards
> of murdered rabbis
>
> However sweetly they sing
> one hears only
> the low wailing of cattle-cars
> moving invisibly across the land
> (*Periods* 22)

The word "Lorelei" refers both to a massive rock on the edge of the Rhine and to a legendary siren said to inhabit the rock ("Lorelei"). Although a siren is usually represented as a bewitching and fatally attractive woman, the comparison here between her siren's call and the loud "wailing" noises of the train's "cattle cars" is chilling. Greenstein has a usefully formalist interpretation of the "wailing" and the motion of the speaker's boat:

> The aesthetics of leisure and scenery in the first half of each stanza is undercut by the lingering tragedy of past frenzy in the second half culminating in the noise of the cattle-cars opposed to the serenity of the boat on the river. [...] The absence of punctuation imitates the smooth gliding of the boat on the river and allows the past to flow into the present as spectres of absence witness what the poet sees. (par. 6)

As in "Das Wahre Ich," the speaker might be stuck in the past, which "flow[s] into the present," but he or she is (or perhaps they are) also commenting on how the past remains with us. The speaker's boat trip parallels

the usually invisible history of transportation to the death camps through a landscape rich with architecture such as castles and food such as grapes.

We might wonder if some trait of the mass media obstructs the transmission of history, but in this case the "low wailing of the cattle-cars / moving invisibly across the land" is not unlike a radio wave. Radio, of course, was enormously useful to Adolf Hitler and his propaganda, and here Layton symbolically places himself in a history of mass mediated points and counterpoints,[12] reminding his viewers that the Holocaust is not merely in the past but also makes waves in the present. Even though Layton does not refer to himself once in this poem, he was supposedly riding the waves on the boat trip *and* on the broadcast. He is on a wavy line that we could think of as technological or historical. Although I referred above to D'Arcy's statement about new technologies "inextricably linked to an idea of 'progress,' which is linear and fundamentally irreversible," here Layton does *not* seem biased toward the present and its novelty, but toward the past and even toward myth. "Rhine Boat Trip" moves "backwards" through history and symbolically (as a poem mediated by new technology) reacts against the "idea of 'progress,'" while Layton himself argued that Germany had progressed. Layton on TV was neither amnesiac nor archaic; he used TV to remember history, but he sometimes indulged in diatribes that were of no historical consequence, or small consequence.

At the end of "The Age of the World Picture," Heidegger proposes an alternative to these latter minor debates, implying that we should understand that modernity entails a "struggle of world views" (135) such as humanism and science—or, as they are often construed, free will against determinism. Layton seemed to like prolonging minor debates, but he and his poems surely also engaged in the "struggle" that Heidegger identifies. Following Heidegger, the struggle can be inferred from concepts or images that rely on contrasts between "the gigantic" and "the increasingly small" ("Age" 135):

> We have only to think of numbers in atomic physics. The gigantic presses forward in a form that actually seems to make it disappear—in the annihilation of great distances by the airplane, in the setting before us of foreign and remote worlds in their everydayness, which is produced at random through radio by a flick of the hand. ("Age" 135)

Needless to say, radio *and* television broadcasts have this effect. In "Rhine Boat Trip," the Lorelei are (or is) not actually a mythic woman but an enormous rocky landmass that imposes itself over the river and any boat upon it. The Rhine itself, where Layton's speaker (and presumably Layton) trav-

elled by boat after arriving by airplane, is one of those "foreign and remote worlds" even if it is more mythic than quotidian. Layton's role in bringing the Rhine to Canada through television—and along with it a cultural memory of the Holocaust—is evidence of his historical conscience. As Fry suggests, "[t]he televisual has become a marker of existence and a delimitation of the world of concern—that is, if 'it' is not seen 'on' television 'it' is not important, thus 'it' does not exist, be 'it' war, famine, festival or flood" ("Switchings" 31). In the sense of validating the poet's shared human experience, "Rhine Boat Trip" is a humanistic poem. It transforms something potentially too small into something gigantic. Although "Deadalive" probably did not warrant similar aggrandization, "For the Stinker who called me an Apologist for Nazi Crimes" has at least some imagery and metaphor to recommend it, even if it has none of the emotional and intellectual resonance of "Rhine Boat Trip." Both poems are obliquely self-reflexive as mass-mediated poems and thereby save Layton's role as interpreter from the metaphoric "steamroller" that he mentioned. They "preserve the self" without being self-centred, especially in the self-effacing "Rhine Boat Trip."

But, again, this is more a *reading* and less a viewing or listening. It is crucial to remember that Layton used his *writing* on this episode to complicate our understanding of his opinion, which originally seemed simply contrarian—that is to say, as if he held an opposing view rather than two contradictory views simultaneously. In fact, he saw from both points of view and attempted to express this fact at the right times in the appropriate media. His judgment, however, was not always perfect. Layton included far too many of his egotistically public poems in his books, but they can serve to remind us that he was dealing with opportunities and dilemmas—his poems on television and other waves—that no other Canadian poet had experienced. Simply to read Layton's poems is not enough; we need to be aware of his, and their, life off the page. To fail to do so is at least as grievous a mistake as deciphering his work only in relation to his public persona.

Compared to his poems that attack his critics, "Rhine Boat Trip" has a much broader ethical scope, and it is far less coloured by Layton's public persona. Is it therefore a private rather than public poem? One wonders if a private poem can avoid the use of the personal pronoun "I."[13] Following Barthes, perhaps an I-less private poem evokes "interiority" without "intimacy." Heidegger might approve, because existential questioning—to go within, to find what reserves are there—remains a shared and perhaps even defining human action, but not one that is always idiosyncratic. Regard-

less, public poetry in Layton's sense of the term is concerned with the "I" of the surface rather than the "depths" he mentioned to Berton in 1964, and he implied that at the very depths of himself he was conflicted. Speaking at the Irving Layton Symposium in Ottawa, Brian Trehearne suggested that Layton's "raised voice is compensatory of some lack."[14] "Rhine Boat Trip" dispenses with the "raised voice" or the public persona to hold to the deeper, historically sensitive, communal, self-effacing "I"—a private self whose ethical position is often confused by the public persona.[15] In the public poetry, the raised voice might *cause*, rather than compensate for, the lack. The motivation to raise the voice might simply be Layton's desire to gain a larger public through television. This desire did not, however, overwhelm Layton's ethics to the extent that is sometimes assumed by readers distracted by his public poetry.

So Layton the contrarian and seeker of controversy sometimes contradicted himself, deeply, as much as anyone else. His performance on *The Pierre Berton Show* could have been harder to watch—for instance had he read "Das Wahre Ich" (because of its agonizing recognition of hatred) or "For the Editor of the Jewish Canadian Eagle" (because it is so obvious). "Rhine Boat Trip," however, accomplishes a goal similar to that of "Das Wahre Ich" in the context of the show's discussion of the post-Holocaust world. One of Berton's final statements on this episode was this assessment of Layton: "You're not, whatever you are, an apologist for Nazi crimes." Whatever indeed—Layton *was* hard to define, as his 1967 appearance on *The Pierre Berton Show* demonstrates. Certainly, we can see how he used this episode of TV to be controversial at first glance and far more measured on second. Initially, Layton offended many people by being too forgiving or, in their view, naive. But viewers could hardly find "Rhine Boat Trip" offensive in the way that his vituperative poems are offensive. That it appeared on air is an example of Layton's occasional attempts to moderate his public persona and refuse to be defined merely by controversy—or by simple opposition. He might have been "too public," and willing to speak from one corner of his mouth for the "people" and from the other for the "monopolists," but he was ultimately not duplex but "multiplex." It is this word of his that best defines him as a poet, critic, and performer. Among other reasons, the term is apt because he was and is a multimedia figure, mediated not only by the page but also by radio, film, and television. His televised poems show that he was thinking creatively about his multi-mediated position. To understand Layton well, we should acknowledge his sense of multiple publics in the media, even if he tended to disparage them as a singular public that diminished his sense of self.

Notes

1 Heidegger was initially responding to photography and film in the late 1930s, but he published "The Age of the World Picture" in the early 1950s when television was the new and soon to be most important technology of pictures.

2 Heidegger accepts that technology has a "saving power" ("Question" 28-9) related to its threat, and Layton in his early appearances on television and radio was optimistic, temporarily, about the effect of mass media on politics. I consider some of these appearances in *The Metaphor of Celebrity: Canadian Poetry and the Public, 1955-1980* (2013).

3 Worth mentioning perhaps is that both essays by Heidegger relevant here—"The Question Concerning Technology" and "The Age of the World Picture"—quote Friedrich Hölderlin, contextualizing technology and pictures through poetry.

4 Preferring to avoid explicit answers, Dienst has many related questions, e.g., "Is it possible to think a purely metaphoric visibility, a visibility without viewers?" (109). To see oneself is this kind of "purely metaphoric visibility."

5 *The Pierre Berton Show* was originally a CTV, not CBC, program, but the CTV was the CBC's main competitor at the time, and the show seems likely to have been syndicated for broadcast on CBC TV. On the "Television" page of the Pierre Berton website, www.pierreberton.com, the summary indicates that *The Pierre Berton Show* aired on CTV with no mention of the CBC (par. 2), but the Layton fonds at Concordia University indicate the source of the broadcasts as "Montreal, QC: CBC TV," and Berton's biography at the Canadian Communications Foundation, affiliated with Athabasca University, claims that the show was "seen nationally in syndication" (Lansdell, par. 3).

6 The Layton collection at Concordia University does not specify the day of the broadcast(s), only the year, and so it is possible that the occasions I refer to as separate were actually the same occasion. I am led to believe, however, that they were separate occasions, partly because of the separate archival records and partly because Layton and Cohen appear with others on one broadcast and not on the other. Because these television broadcasts at Concordia are only available on audiotape, not videotape, I could not see the clothing of the panellists, which would probably indicate whether the recordings were made on the same day. The CBC's sales archivist, Paul McIntyre, explained to me that no archival records for the show were kept at the CBC because of its provenance on CTV; the CTV's sales archivist, Jennifer Baird, told me that CTV does not have rights to *The Pierre Berton Show* (which remain with Berton's estate) and has no archival materials or broadcast records older than four years.

7 I have previously written about Cohen and Layton's friendship and literary rivalry in "Celebrity and the Poetic Dialogue of Irving Layton and Leonard Cohen" (2009).

8 This article in *Maclean's*, or part of it at least, is reprinted in *Taking Sides* (1977), Layton's "collected social and political writings."

9 "Das Wahre Ich" was originally published in *The Canadian Forum* in May, 1963 (Mansbridge 107); then in *The Laughing Rooster* (1964), and again in 1965 in Layton's *Collected Poems*, so he had the option of reading it on *The Pierre Berton Show* in 1967.

10 Layton never included "Deadalive" in any book, though he did publish it in the February 10, 1967 edition of the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle Review*, as if it were more appropriate to the mass media than to a book (though admittedly the circulation of this journal is unknown to me).

11 The *ABCMA* indicates that Layton had been on CBC TV with Peter Lust on 12 December 1966 to discuss "the possibility of a Nazi resurgence in Germany" (Mansbridge

173), so the two of them had already discussed at least the context of their disagreement. He first published the poem in *Intercourse* in 1966 (Mansbridge 110) and then included it in *Periods of the Moon*.

12 Layton and Cohen had mentioned their role as propagandists on the 1964 episode of *The Pierre Berton Show* on which they appear alone with Berton (not with Birney and Gotlieb). To Berton and Cohen, Layton says, "I'm happy about being a propagandist, because I think that every poet *is* a propagandist. The question is how he goes about his propaganda." He refers to Milton, Yeats, Eliot, Shakespeare and Hamlet as other propagandists. Cohen then interrupts to say, "This is *The Pierre Berton Show*, and it's a perfectly happy and wonderful occasion but it isn't *Hamlet* and that's just the point I'm trying to make. Now Shakespeare may have been a propagandist and he did it through *Hamlet*—more power and honour to him, but our reputations and our thoughts are not going to land up in the Pantheon because of our appearance on *The Pierre Berton Show*." Before Layton can respond, Berton changes the subject, but I would guess that Layton was more convinced than Cohen of the potential of television and radio to transmit poetry (and establish "reputations"). Cohen obviously chose a different mass medium—recorded music—and was far more successful over time.

13 At the symposium in Ottawa that led to this special issue, Esther Frank remarked to me that Layton would avoid the use of "I" because the Holocaust was *collective*—a shared trauma. Although trauma can be lived out in public and articulated publicly, it is, like pain, one of the most subjective and thus private experiences and feelings.

14 See Trehearne's "Layton as Ethical Subject: The Later Poetry and the Problem of Evil" in this issue for the full context of this remark. [eds.]

15 It even dispenses with what I call the "private persona" in *The Metaphor of Celebrity*—the persona that is not such an obvious performer and yet invokes biographical details (often the author's real name).

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