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# The Mountain Came to Him: Situating Irving Layton in the Context of Black Mountain Poetics

**by Zachariah Wells**

> *In order to give the reader some sense of the history of the period and the primary alignment of the writers, I have adopted the unusual device of dividing the poets in five large groups, though these divisions are somewhat arbitrary and cannot be taken as rigid categories [...] The first group includes those poets who were originally closely identified with the two important magazines of the period,* Origin *and* Black Mountain Review*, which first published their mature work.*
>
> —Donald Allen, "Preface," *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960*

The "somewhat arbitrary" tendency of anthologists to group writers by nation has generally been taken for granted as necessary for reasons of expediency and economy.[1] Anthologies need borders as much as countries do or they lose definition. Donald Allen's decision to include only citizens of the United States in *The New American Poetry* could therefore easily go unchallenged, but there is a compelling case to be made for an exception. Although he was a Canadian, Irving Layton's involvement in the two Black Mountain organs Allen names was more significant than some of the poets Allen does include, such as Denise Levertov and Larry Eigner. Allen's failure to include Layton, however, is hardly the sole reason for the lack of serious writing on Layton's Black Mountaineering. Canadian critics have, consistently but inexplicably, given short shrift to Layton's collaborations with Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, Cid Corman and others.[2] Even Layton's more serious critics tend to stop short of the 49$^{th}$ parallel when discussing the poet's achievements.

Layton's involvement with Black Mountain came at the crest of both his own early career and those of his American contemporaries, Creeley and Olson. Moreover, the Canadian's contribution to the new American poetry was great. Not only did he regularly publish poems in *Origin* and *Black Mountain Review*, but he was featured in one issue of the former (*Origin* 14) and edited another (*Origin* 18); likewise, Layton was, at Creeley's invitation, a contributing editor of *Black Mountain Review.* Layton also published a book *(In the Midst of My Fever),* again at Creeley's

request, with Divers Press, and his first selected poems, *The Improved Binoculars*, with Jonathan Williams' Jargon Press, both of which had strong connections with the Black Mountain school. Layton was, in his own words, "adopted as the white-haired *boychick* by the Black Mountain boys" (qtd. in Wiens 18). Why this was so *is* difficult to determine, not merely because Layton was Canadian, but because his poetics are not easily squared with Black Mountain aesthetics. Whereas Olson and his projectivist cohorts stressed the importance of departing from established, or imposed, poetic traditions, Layton could, reductively but not inaccurately, be thought of as a traditional formalist in his approach. Also, whereas "Projective Verse" emphasized the importance of ego-less, "objectist" creation, Layton's egoism was already a prominent facet of his poetic persona in 1953. His role in the Black Mountain movement, therefore, does much to problematise commonly-held notions of that group's doctrinal coherence, even at its very core. Moreover, silence about Layton's Black Mountain involvement amounts to the reduction of cognitive dissonance, which manifests all too often in critical discussions that take as given the oppositional binary of "avant-garde" vs. "conservative." Individual artists' aesthetic practices tend to be more nuanced than their statements of belief or affiliation would suggest. Layton's welcomed presence points out that Olson and Creeley's "open verse" operates more as a positioning device, as an index of heterodox views and anti-establishment alignment, than as a rigid methodological guide to poetic praxis. For all the "establishment" qualities of his verse, Layton was hailed as a rebel by his American colleagues. The fact that he was a Canadian not even allowed to enter the U.S. (Faas 72)—and therefore unable to accept an invitation to teach at Black Mountain College—gave him all the more credibility as an outsider.

Layton's Canadian critics have had a hard time understanding his appeal to Black Mountain's core members. Wynne Francis, in an otherwise thoughtful and comprehensive study of Layton's life and work, ignores his Black Mountaineering all but completely. Francis Mansbridge writes that "Layton described himself as 'a reactionary at heart,' but it's hard—from the vantage point of forty years later—to see why his poetry should have been so enthusiastically embraced" by Black Mountain (67).[3] Similarly, Elspeth Cameron tells us that "Creeley's response to Layton's work was amazing. Creeley's poetry was not at all like Layton's" (209). She is correct,[4] but makes no attempt to resolve this apparent puzzle.

The warm reception that Layton and his poetry received from the American poets is somewhat baffling, but not as insoluble as Mansbridge and Cameron suggest. A constellation of similar interests and stances first

compelled Robert Creeley to write to Layton on February 17, 1953, praising the Canadian's poetry and offering to publish a book for him (Faas 3). Probably most significant of these commonalities was a shared ambivalence vis-à-vis the canon. The matter of tradition is often cited as a puzzling incongruity in Layton's partnership with Creeley and company. Cameron, for example, points out that Creeley's forms were "cool, sparse, condensed" and "technically experimental" (210). This is, if rather vague, a generally accurate assessment, as heavily enjambed poems like "A Counterpoint" demonstrate:

> Let me be my own fool
> of my own making, the sum of it
>
> is equivocal.
> One says of the drunken farmer:
>
> leave him lay off it. And this is
> the explanation.
> (Allen *The New American Poetry* 78)

Layton, by contrast, often employed inherited patterns of metre and rhyme in his work, as in this stanza from an early poem, "Mrs. Fornheim, Refugee":

> Very merciful was the cancer
> Which first blinding you altogether
> Afterwards stopped up your hearing;
> At the end when Death was nearing,
> Black-gloved, to gather you in
> You did not demur, or fear
> One you could not see or hear.
> (*Red Carpet* 4)

Layton, Francis tells us, "regard[ed] the new directions taken by contemporary poets as deadends [sic]. He prefer[red] to associate himself only with the greatest poets of a tradition running from Homer to Yeats" (151). Creeley himself noted that Layton was "closer to an english [sic] 'tradition,'" than himself, which heritage Layton used "as a point of departure" for his poems (Faas 12). And Cameron finds it odd that Creeley would have admired Layton's work for its roots in the very tradition that the Black Mountain movement blamed for the sad state of American poetics (210).

Both critics' assessments, however, are overly reductive, as they are based on too rigid an understanding of the somewhat arbitrary labels "avant-garde/experimental" and "formalist/traditional."[5] If Creeley had an appreciation for Layton's use of metrics, it was because he was himself invested in existing rhythmic models. George Butterick observes "how well grounded Creeley was in the inherited literary tradition," and

> how several of Creeley's poems owe their success to a purposeful variation of traditional beginnings, and how even in his most personal lyrics he might introduce other men's words, mostly in an effort to find an alternative to the dominant and oppressive forms of the day. (119)

Butterick qualifies the above by saying that Creeley's inscription of traditional forms often serves the ends of parody (124), but that "it is the more sober and deliberate adjustment of tradition that marks Creeley's accomplishment: not simple irony or parody, but a dexterous mastery of all effects, as the occasions arise" (129).[6] Creeley never adopts inherited forms chapter and verse, but neither does he throw them out with the bathwater of his poetic inheritance.

It is precisely this spirit of experimental adaptation that Creeley admired in the work of his Canadian friend:

> [...] it is that you can use these forms with a tenseness, and thus a 'rightness,' utterly the issue of your own emotions [...] I like your poems, anyhow, because you do damn well invest formal or traditional metrics [...] with your own immediate presence. And you also experiment, within this area, to such an extent that you make a lot of so-called 'avant-garde' types look that much the sicker. (Faas 6-7)

Thus, for both Creeley and Layton—who likened restricting oneself to inherited verse patterns to using "the snotrag of someone else" (Faas 24)—traditional forms were not ends in themselves, but means towards the authentic expression of the poet's own thoughts and emotions.[7] Their respective means of negotiating this common heritage were, for the most part, radically different, but their outlooks were remarkably similar.

A shared perspective on form was not the only point of connection between Layton and the Americans. Content, including attitude, mattered just as much—which should not be surprising, since form, according to Olson, via Creeley, "IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT" (Olson 387, emphasis in original). The Black Mountain concern with form was, by extension, a concern with the social, political, intel-

lectual, cultural climate of the Western world. Layton, in top form on New Year's Day of 1954, a crucial year for him and Creeley, articulates it thus:

> We've discussed it many times, and I know he [Louis Dudek] feels about you and what you are doing to make this a more civilized planet to live on pretty much as I do. All of us: Olson, Rexroth, Blackburn, Corman, Souster et al. share a common outlook, a common philosophy, a kind of angry secularism, a poetic down-to-earthness which I think the healthiest thing to have come out of the war and as a result of it. (Faas 84)

Poets on both sides of the border were concerned with what they perceived to be a pervasive atmosphere of genteel academicism and the ubiquitous influence of post-war mass consumer culture. They saw the bulk of poets—particularly those in the New Critical school of Eliot, Cleanth Brooks, *et al.*—as comfortably yoked in the harness of the university, detached from society, detached even from themselves, failing to engage meaningfully with anything. As Layton put it:

> The kind of commodity-oriented civilization which huge mass increases in population are forging requires efficiency and conformity to carry on: imagination, spontaneity, individualism are so much sand in a smooth-running machine. The pistol is aimed at all our heads. (Faas 123)

Layton's response to this threat, and to the complacency with which it was regarded, was scathing invective and satire, Olson's was intellectualized anti-Eliot program-poems like "The Kingfishers,"[8] Creeley's a sort of deep, meditative emotional introspection. The colour and shape of the pearls these men made were different, but the sand that irritated them was the same.

Black Mountain's response to the poetics of Eliot was to reinscribe the human body in poetry and poetics. In "Projective Verse," Olson's prime concern is with the accurate representation of the writer's "breath." He shifts the emphasis away from the controlling mind that would seek to dominate reality with synthetic forms of metre and metaphor, to the more organic, spontaneous operations of "the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE / the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE" (390). Layton, too, felt that the inscription of the body was essential, although his approach had more to do with direct, bawdy representation than with Olson's prosodic praxis, as in "Anti-Romantic":

You went behind a bush to piss.
Imagine Wordsworth telling this!
About Lucy? And Robert Bridges
About his dear lass?

The poets are such bad liars.
Damn them and all their admirers.
The stars, the moon, for all their talk's stone—
Coynts, not always clean.

Yes, and they've solid interests
In mournful birds, in clouds, in mists.
Did La belle Dame sans Merci a-shit?
Keats nowhere says it.

But read the Oxford Book of Verse
By whatchamacallit, and curse:
Second-rate thoughts, weakness, groans, laments,
And soft sentiments.

You, Love, fat, fat-assed, pissed away.
The odour was that of cut hay;
The flood came toward me with brown mirth.
O waterfalling earth! O Light!

(*Red Carpet* 202)

Unabashedly ribald, Layton opposes his brand of scatological realism to the bad lies and soft sentiments of the Romantics and their heirs.[9] He tells Creeley that

> the shits and pisses [...] are a necessary antidote to the prevalent gentility and false idealism [...] It is for our time that the paradox is reserved that the soul must be saved by the body, the highest by the lowest; and men's equal claim to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness justified by their common possession of an anus. (Faas 221)

Such candid physicality, articulated in everyday slang, was well-aligned with the Black Mountain agenda items of corporeality, locality, reality, and specificity; Layton's voice, as Eli Mandel has observed, was to the Americans "vulgar and *therefore* poetic" (16, emphasis in original). Of Eliot's contemporaries, D.H. Lawrence was preferred by both Layton and Creeley over the New Critics' poets, due to his emphasis on physicality and sex and

his contempt for the "beastly" bourgeoisie.[10] Although Creeley's voice was reserved compared to Layton's—and he was generally more concerned with the representation of specific emotions than he was with biology—sex and other bodily functions were nevertheless important planks in his poetic platform, as we see in "Something":

> I approach with such
> a careful tremor, always
> I feel the finally foolish
>
> question of how it is,
> then, supposed to be felt,
> and by whom. I remember
>
> once in a rented room on
> 27th street, the woman I loved
> then, literally, after we
>
> had made love on the large
> bed sitting across from
> a basin with two faucets, she
>
> had to pee but was nervous,
> embarrassed I suppose I
> would watch her who had but
>
> a moment ago been completely
> open to me, naked, on
> the same bed. Squatting, her
>
> head reflected in the mirror,
> the hair dark there, the
> full of her face, the shoulders,
>
> sat spread-legged, turned on
> one faucet and shyly pissed. What
> love might learn from such a sight.
> (*Selected Poems* 53)

The tone of this poem is far more sedate than "Anti-Romantic," but Creeley's emphasis is strikingly similar to Layton's: the insistence on the literalness of "loved"; the playful puns on "embarrassed" and "turned on"—

the latter emphasized by enjambment; the use of words like "pee" and "pissed"; and the conclusion, reminiscent of Williams' red wheelbarrow upon whose concrete specificity so much depends. Wordsworth would not write this of Lucy, but Creeley, more strictly empirical and averse to ideals, must.

Although the affinities that existed between Layton and his American colleagues are surprisingly manifold, it is the things that distinguish him from the College,[11] and the debates he entered into with its members, that round out and complicate his contribution to, and later eschewal of, Black Mountain poetics. At the heart of his disagreements with Creeley and Olson are the issues of the inscription of the self into poetry and the role of the poet vis-à-vis his or her subject matter. Olson, in "Projective Verse," outlines an ideology he calls "objectism," which

> is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature [...] and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For a man is himself an object, whatever he may take to be his advantages, the more likely to recognize himself as such the greater his advantages, particularly at that moment that he achieves an humilitas sufficient to make him of use [...]. If he sprawl, he shall find little to sing but himself [...] if he stays inside himself, if he is contained with his nature as he is participant in the larger force, he will be able to listen [...]. (395)

Olson's program is to "hunt among stones" ("The Kingfishers" 8), to purge the poem of the poet's ego, to inscribe the self as an archaeologist or archivist would, collecting and cataloguing objects,[12] as in "As the Dead Prey Upon Us":

> O souls, in life and in death,
> awake, even as you sleep, even in sleep
> know what wind
> even under the rearend of the ugly automobile
> lifts it away, clears the sodden weights of goods,
> equipment, entertainment, the foods the Indian woman,
> the filthy blue deer, the 4 by 3 foot 'Viewbook,'
> the heaviness of the old house, the stuffed inner room,
> lifts the sodden nets
>
> (Allen 31)

Olson's speaker here presents the reader with a list of juxtaposed objects that are supposed to be significant in and of themselves; the poet does not interfere by imposing his personal interpretation of their abstract 'meaning' in the poem; he presents them as objects, not as symbols. There is an element of this in Layton's work as well, as in a poem like "De Bullion Street" in which an observing speaker paints a streetscape. But Layton, unlike Olson and Creeley, is not content to let the objects in his poem speak for themselves: "The corner mission and the walled church grow / Like haemorrhoids on the city's anus," and "Here private lust is public gain and shame" (*Red Carpet* 11). Layton, as poet, must pass judgment.

Sabrina Reed, in an attempt to make sense of Layton's involvement with and later departure from the Black Mountain poets, claims that Layton, in the early work that first attracted Creeley, was aligned with objectism's doctrine of ego-less creation. Later, she tells us, "he began consciously to reject Creeley and Olson's elimination of the ego" (Reed 236). But there is precious little proof that Layton ever agreed with this aspect of his colleagues' program—and plenty of evidence to the contrary.[13] Reed plots the careers of Layton and Creeley as arcs on a graph, starting and finishing at different points, but contiguous for a brief and blissful period. This makes her argument for Layton's relatively brief contact with Black Mountain appear logical, but she has begged the question in order to arrive at this answer. Throughout his correspondence with Creeley, Layton stresses the importance of the poet's personality, the smell of which had "gone out" of contemporary poetry collections with their "antiseptic unity" (Faas 8). Layton's program was, in this regard, antithetical to Olson and Creeley's from the beginning, as his goal was not to uncover immanent truth in the rejectamenta of society, but to "dominate reality" with his personality,[14] to make sense of the world's "fertile muck" with his imagination, which is that of a myth-making "fabulist" ("The Fertile Muck," *Red Carpet* 126).

Related to this issue of self-inscription is the question of descriptive representation and figurative language. Charles Olson warns that the "descriptive functions generally have to be watched, every second, in projective verse, because of their easiness, and thus their drain on the energy which composition by field allows into a poem" (390). Furthermore, Creeley argues against the "great preoccupation with symbology and levels of image in poetry insisted upon by contemporary criticism" ("Olson & Others" 410). Layton, as both realist and fabulist, was fond of descriptive functions and of symbology. This became a vexed question early in his epistolary friendship with Creeley. In response to a query by the American

regarding the "self-ironical" subject of his poem "Vexata Quaestio," Layton wrote that its "subject or theme" was "Hebraism vs. Hellenism; modern man torn between the Hebraic/Christian impulse toward good and the Greek impulse toward beauty and self-expression" (Faas 9). Creeley, unimpressed by the explication, responded by telling Layton that "You don't ever want to speak for 'Everyman,' when you can speak so damn finely for yourself" (Faas 13). This disagreement was mild and a matter of differing exegetical emphases—both men thought the poem a good one—but it highlights a rift that would become a ubiquitous undercurrent in Layton's exchanges with Black Mountain.

Layton often expressed his displeasure with aspects of Black Mountainology. Although he respected Olson for his views and for his part in shaking the dust off of contemporary poetry, Layton had little time for the man's writing. He called Olson's poetry "prose wrapped up in curlers" (*Wild Gooseberries* 61) and his prose "abominally affected & opaque"[15] (Faas 23). Although he generally held Creeley's writing in higher esteem,[16] Layton was not shy in voicing his distaste for Creeley's more experimental Olsonian "strateg[ies] of syntax":

> Reading you and Olson at your worst I sometimes have the feeling I'm looking over the shoulder of one of my students taking notes: everything but the barest essentials, clues, reminders, tags and signposts. But what in the fucking hell is the good of a signpost if there isn't a bloody road to be seen anywhere? [....] Nobody talks like that. Then what's the point of writing like that? (Faas 168)

Again, the issues of form and subject intertwine. Olson's theory was that revolutionary thought had to be scripted in revolutionary syntax. Somewhat oddly, he saw Layton as an embodiment of the same notion: "the syntax is of [Layton's] own making, not something accepted as a canon of the language in its history" (qtd. in Cameron 217). Layton would not have seen it quite that way; he consistently downplayed—which is not to say denied—the importance of technical experimentation in favour of oppositional content: "The point is that what I say is NOT TRADITIONAL" (*Wild Gooseberries* 42, emphasis in original). Technique was not an end in itself for Layton, but the means by which to make his messages as effective as possible.

Layton's point was also that Olson was not saying anything particularly novel or inspiring. He had a hard time understanding what Olson was actually getting at in his prosodic manifesto. Creeley's capitulatory explanation that open verse was "a disposition of the mind, rather than a formal meth-

odology" did not do much to clarify its meaning to Layton (Faas 28). To him, the poetics did nothing for the poetry, except perhaps drag it down, as he once complained to Cid Corman:

> Olson and the others [...] think they've gotten hold of something new (it isn't, it's as old as Wordsworth) about getting poetry close to speech [...] [N]o one [...] ever talks the way they write. It's phony, and affected, from the word go [...] I am not interested in poems as the exemplification of any particular theories, and I couldn't be less interested in poetic fads: what I want is good poems. (*Wild Gooseberries* 22)

Layton was attracted to Corman and Creeley because he thought that they were good poets, just as they had been attracted to him, even though he did not employ "open" composition practices. Layton ultimately rejected Olson because he failed to measure up where he thought it mattered most: in the poems. The two younger poets' continued faith in Olson's poetics, combined with Layton's increasing celebrity in Canada,[17] had to be significant factors in his drift from Black Mountain and his denigration of the College in the seventies.

Layton's involvement in Black Mountain, though significant, was tenuous. The mutual attraction between him and the movement's key figures had more to do with common enemies than with any profound sympathies or resemblances. Layton could only be said to have adhered to the haziest tenets of "Projective Verse," and even then only incidentally and haphazardly. What Layton did possess was a "projective" personal presence and poetic dynamism which acted like a magnet on the imaginations of Olson, Creeley, and Corman. Furthermore, the applause of an enthusiastic audience, not to mention the fruitful exchange of ideas about poetry and society, was music to Layton's ears, since he was used to critical neglect and censure in Canada. Even if the ego was not something that Creeley and Olson wanted inscribed in their poems, the egoism of a self-proclaimed *übermensch* and bona fide outsider like Layton was just the sort of adrenaline injection their college needed. Layton's ego-intensity and Olson's "Projective Verse" served similar aims—both breathed a confidence in revolutionary fervor so crucial to the establishment and efflorescence of an avant-garde movement.

## Notes

1 Likewise, for the sake of expediency and economy, I will not go into other factors (e.g. nationalism, cultural identification, etc.), the existence of which I acknowledge, but which are not of particular relevance to the present discussion.

2 One exception is Sabrina Reed's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "The Place of American Poets in the Development of Irving Layton, Louis Dudek, and Raymond Souster." The collected correspondence of Layton and Robert Creeley does much to redress the lacuna, but its existence makes the critical quiescence all the more puzzling.

3 Mansbridge misses a great deal here. Not only does he seem to be unaware of the proper definition of "reactionary," but his notion that it is harder now to understand Layton's link with Creeley, Olson *et al.* than it would have been in the 1950s is absurd, particularly since he quotes here from the Layton-Creeley correspondence, which in itself sheds much light on an otherwise obscure topic—an irony rendered all the more poignant by the fact that Mansbridge is the editor of Layton's letters. It seems to me that Mansbridge uses this "difficulty" as a convenient excuse to move on to other, less vexed, topics.

4 One has cause to doubt that the validity of this observation is based on anything more substantial than chance, since Cameron goes on to generalize, "Olson also wrote tough, short, tight little poems" (210), which is a baffling summary of his style.

5 Francis' offhand dismissal is a tad misleading, as her focus is on the big picture of Layton's development, in which context there is considerable justice in saying that Layton saw contemporary experimentation as a dead end. This broad perspective, however, obscures and unreasonably diminishes the importance of Layton's involvement with Black Mountain. Since Layton's career and poetics were nothing if not protean, to borrow George Woodcock's term, flirtations with this school or that are at least as worthy of attention as any synthetic picture of the poet's entire career. With a poet so frequently self-contradictory and versatile as Layton, most either/or accounts obscure as much as they reveal.

6 In particular, Butterick cites the general influence of Campion's short lyrics, echoes of Byron in "The Bed," and Creeley's use of ballad metres in such poems as "Ballad of the Despairing Husband" and "The Three Ladies."

7 Or, as Creeley puts it, "Tradition is an aspect of what anyone is now thinking,—not what someone once thought" ("To Define," Allen 408).

8 *The Maximus Poems* are also relevant. As Reed states: "While Maximus maintains his individuality, the populace has been corrupted by mass production" (Reed 205).

9 Elsewhere, Layton is effusive in his praise of Keats and Wordsworth. His critical writings—and indeed his poetry—are far too contradictory to be of any use in drawing simple conclusions about his ambivalent position *vis-à-vis* the Romantics (or any of his influences, for that matter). Creeley and Olson's positions are likewise hazy. A discussion of these anxieties of influence could fill a book, so I will not attempt to probe them too deeply here.

10 Creeley states this more unequivocally than Layton: "Lawrence was *on* it, the sexual, was standing exactly on that ground. Hence [...] my own mentor, finally the only one I can have" (qtd. in Butterick 126, emphasis in original). Still, Layton's critical writing and correspondence is peppered with references to Lawrence's influence on his own work.

11 Here, I do not mean to suggest that the individual members of the Black Mountain movement existed as some kind of homogeneous unit; rather, that Layton's reservations regarding projectivist doctrine were more pronounced than those of other Black Mountain writers.

12 Cf. William Carlos Williams' doctrine: "No ideas but in things" (qtd. in Tomlinson 12).

13 It is also not true that Creeley felt the need to impose ego-diminishment on Layton. Reed claims that Creeley "consistently criticized Layton when he talked of himself as a poet or of the poet's role in society" (249). While Creeley never adopted or endorsed his friend's didactic approach—stating that he was "not here to bring enlightenment or a resolving of human wills, [but] to tell you what happens as best I can" (qtd. in Reed 222)—his praise for such didactic works as *The Long Peashooter*—a book Layton dedicated to him—was effusive nonetheless (Faas193). *In the Midst of My Fever*, the book of Layton's that Creeley published early in their friendship, contained such ego-saturated poems as "The Birth of Tragedy" and the title poem, in which the speaker's fever is "large / as Europe's pain" (1-2).

14 By way of contrast, Creeley is explicit: "Insofar as *I* is a vehicle of passage or transformation, its powers are clear. Realized as will or personality, that 'mealy seal' as Olson called it, the power vitiates as soon as the energy necessary to sustain it exhausts itself" ("Inside Out" 563).

15 Later, Layton would claim, "I've at last seen the light re Olson's prose" (Faas 192), but Layton's mercurial shifts in temperament are legendary, and this one statement does little to balance the scales.

16 Much later, Layton would make disparaging remarks about "Robert Creeley dron[ing] inaudibly some of his skinny poems" (Sherman 12). It seems to me that this is an example of Layton's typically hyperbolic polemical posturing. He was reacting to the prominence of the TISH poets in the mid-seventies, whom he saw as Canadian Black Mountain copy-cats. To discredit TISH, what better tactic than to discredit Black Mountain?

17 A phenomenon which would have, at least, been delayed considerably, had it not been for the support of Creeley, Olson, Corman, William Carlos Williams, and Jonathan Williams. For all of the genuine affinities between Layton and the Black Mountain poets, it is hard to deny that his interest in them was precisely commensurate with their interest in him, particularly when he was having a hard time being taken seriously as a poet in his own country.

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