

THE POETRY OF IRVING LAYTON: A Scatological Dimension

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A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montréal, Québec, Canada

February 1985

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ABSTRACT

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Irving Layton is notorious for the excremental diction and imagery found in his poetry. Essentially a moralist, he uses scatology in order to shock his reader into an awareness of the human condition.

In the scatological tradition, scatology is used for satiric and non-satiric purposes. Since Layton uses both literary modes, his spectrum of writing ranges from the humorous and vituperative to the profoundly philosophic and religious. In his poetry, a constant struggle occurs between the dual realities of body and spirit, life and death, creation and destruction.

Layton builds upon the scatological tradition by extending himself into the 'eschatological realm'. He is preoccupied with the cosmic process, and he believes that we are in its destructive phase. His beliefs about the end of history and his apocalyptic vision surface in numerous poems.

Inherent in many of the poems containing excremental imagery is the theme of 'eternal recurrence'. Good will always exist, but so will evil. Layton asserts that love and art are the agents of redemption that allow us to transcend this reality.

To my parents, to Nick, and to Professor Wynne Francis

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

(The following is a list of abbreviations of the titles of Irving Layton's books, as they appear in this thesis:)

HN.....	HERE AND NOW/ 1945
NIP.....	NOW IS THE PLACE/ 1948
BH.....	THE BLACK HUNTSMEN/ 1951
C.....	CERBERUS (with Louis Dudek, Raymond Souster/ 1952
LCW.....	LOVE THE CONQUEROR WORM/ 1953
MF.....	IN THE MIDST OF MY FEVER/ 1954
LP.....	THE LONG PEA-SHOOTER/ 1954
BP.....	THE BLUE PROPELLER/ 1955
CGE.....	THE COLD GREEN ELEMENT/ 1955
BC.....	THE BULL CALF AND OTHER POEMS/ 1956
MK.....	MUSIC ON A KAZOO/ 1956
IB.....	THE IMPROVED BINOCULARS/ 1956
LM.....	A LAUGHTER IN THE MIND/ 1959
RCS.....	A RED CARPET FOR THE SUN/ 1959
SF.....	THE SWINGING FLESH/ 1961
BFOJ.....	BALLS FOR A ONE-ARMED JUGGLER/ 1963
LR.....	THE LAUGHING ROOSTER/ 1964
CP.....	COLLECTED POEMS/ 1965
SP.....	THE SHATTERED PLINTHS/ 1968
PM.....	PERIODS OF THE MOON/ 1967
SEL.....	SELECTED POEMS/ 1969
WBB.....	THE WHOLE BLOODY BIRD/ 1969
NP.....	NAIL POLISH/ 1971
CP.....	THE COLLECTED POEMS OF IRVING LAYTON/ 1971
LLM.....	LOVERS AND LESSER MEN/ 1973
PV.....	THE POLE-VAULTER/ 1974
FMBJ.....	FOR MY BROTHER JESUS/ 1976
UP.....	THE UNCOLLECTED POEMS OF IRVING LAYTON 1936-59/ 1976
TC.....	THE COVENANT/ 1977
TD.....	THE TIGHTROPE DANCER/ 1978
DFM.....	DROPPINGS FROM HEAVEN/ 1979
FMNH.....	FOR MY NEIGHBOURS IN HELL/ 1979
LPIL.....	THE LOVE POEMS OF IRVING LAYTON/ 1980
EORN.....	EUROPE AND OTHER BAD NEWS/ 1981
GB.....	THE GUCCI BAG/ 1983 1984

CHAPTER I

SCATOLOGY: A LITERARY CONTEXT

In Canada we have no tradition of brawling, irreverent poets -- no Villons and Rimbauds. Only that of a bunch of squares. We need wild-eyed poets to remind us constantly that the sober men of learning or business enterprise come and go, their voices silenced by death forever, but a lyric that despair or love gave birth to will last as long as there are humans left on this planet to read and respond. We need them badly to shout down the chorus of voices now rising from the white-muffled throats of cultivated ladies and gentlemen as these are directed by the erudite flourishes of the critic's baton in praise of poetic Spam. Above all, we need them to remind us that poets are neither scholars nor gentlemen, but creatures with an indiscriminating appetite for life, for whom 'good taste' is something to wipe one's unstodgy behind with.¹

Throughout his poetic career Layton has often been criticized for his use of four-letter words, especially those having to do with excretion and excrement. Of the critics and academics who have thus censured him, Layton says they "squirmed each time [such words] were used as if no decent, patriotic, monarchy-loving Canadian ever made love or had a bowel movement... Since I revered the body and saw no need for hypocrisy in these matters I was assailed with a viciousness only outraged virtue can summon. They even convinced themselves that my occasional use of four-letter words offended the sensibilities of this country's delicate lumberjacks, mechanics, fishermen, and farmers..."²

One of Layton's fundamental purposes therefore, in using scatology, is to express his conviction that the body and its organic functions are sacred and that they can be ignored or despised only at great risk to the

health of the individual and of society. Part of a poet's obligation, in Layton's view, is to combat the puritanical prejudices inherent in the genteel tradition.

In this respect, Layton defies comparison with other Canadian writers. Eli Mandel and Seymour Mayne both assert that as early as the fifties, Layton was responsible for introducing a change in the Canadian sensibility through his persistent use of 'disrespectful verse and trenchant satire.'³ Mayne writes, "those who are caught up by gentility, and the Genteel tradition have no understanding of the beauty and terror of the creative process."⁴ The creative process entails creation and destruction; poetry, therefore, is not only about the sublime or the exalted, but also about the basic realities. Layton repudiated the genteel tradition in Canada because of its failure to come to terms with such aspects of human experience. In fact he has found few poets to emulate in either Canada or the United States. His literary affiliations are closer to the European prophetic tradition. Mayne points out that Layton was always, to some extent, concerned with Jewishness and the Hebraic ethic; and that in his later years he identified strongly with the "angry and moralist prophetic tradition."

Wynne Francis notes that Layton sees himself as a modern-day prophet:

...one to whom it is given to see deeply into the evils of his day; one who feels driven to use all the talent and all the rage at his command to chastise his fellow humans, to exhort them to mend their ways, even though he is haunted by the morose conviction that human kind will never change. This vocation to prophecy removes Layton from the context of contemporary writing but admits him to a company which he prefers, that of the Old Testament prophets and their modern counterparts such as Blake, Carlyle, Nietzsche, Lawrence and Yeats. It is with

such a lineage in mind that Layton can best be understood.

Few critics have seriously examined the function of Layton's "four-letter" words. It is my contention that he employs scatology for both literary and moral purposes. I propose to examine these diverse functions first in the light of the literary tradition explored by Jae Num Lee in SWIFT AND SCATOLOGICAL SATIRE; then, on the evidence of Layton's own work, I shall demonstrate how he extends this tradition into the realm of eschatology.

Lee traces the history of scatology in continental writings from Aristophanes to Rabelais:

Aristophanes employs it as a device of ridicule in humorous oblique satire, Catullus and Martial mainly as a device of personal satire, Juvenal as a means of strongest condemnation in attacking personal and social vices, and Dante as an instrument for denouncing and castigating various sins through full use of its conventional association with sin and its power to nauseate the reader. Rabelais exhibits more variety in the use of scatology than his predecessors; in fact, his uses include almost all the ends which scatology has previously served: humorous satire, ridicule, oblique satire, direct denunciation.

After establishing the tradition, Lee proceeds to study its English exemplars from Skelton to Pope, as a prelude to his study of Swift.

Lee's conclusion is that scatology is used for non-satirical and satirical purposes. Non-satirical scatological writing is principally found in popular literature and is considered prankish, flatulent, and stercoraceous; satirical scatological writing serves important thematic purposes as a device of ridicule, condemnation, and criticism. Lee divides the satirical uses of scatology into four categories: personal satire, socio-political satire, religio-moral satire, and intellectual

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satire.

With Lee's categories in mind one may extend the scatological tradition beyond Swift to include such writers as Swinburne, Rossetti, Beardsley, D.H. Lawrence, Frank Harris, James Joyce.⁷ Among more contemporary writers Leo Marx cites Henry Miller, Faulkner, Salinger, Ellison, Tennessee Williams, William Carlos Williams, O'Connor, Burroughs and Norman Mailer.⁸ The scatological dimension of Layton's work puts him clearly in this tradition.

In his use of scatology for non-satirical purposes Layton's sole intention is to provoke laughter. He does not, however, write 'dirty jokes'; inherent in the rationale of the dirty joke is that the joke is an attack on the listener: "The joking level is always the hostile and anal-aggressive, no matter how disguised it may be as humour, and no matter what the subject of the joke."⁹ Layton, by contrast, has a healthy, earthy attitude towards anality; he writes about it with a hearty openness. His non-satirical scatological poems, though not numerous, are examples of broad wit and bawdy humour.

Bawdiness may be expressed in erotic as well as excremental imagery. Shakespeare's bawdiness, for example, is most often erotic; Swift's is usually excremental. Layton's bawdiness oscillates between these two poles.¹⁰

Scatology is effective especially because it is shocking. Layton employs frankly erotic and excremental diction to fight sexual, cloacal, and verbal taboos. He exposes the genteel reader's ambivalence towards anality. Mayne writes, "Layton is taking advantage of the taboo for shock value as well as restoring four-letter words to a more healthy and unrepressed expression."¹¹

Like Layton, Norman Mailer believes that society suffers from an anal fixation, and that as a result no one speaks publicly of anything connected to excretion or excrement unless euphemistically.¹² "The obsession with many of us with scatology is attached to a disrupted communication within us, within our bodies."¹³ Man basically suffers from a rupture with his primal self. Mailer, says Leo Marx, advocates the use of scatology because it serves "as a therapeutic and regenerative medium. It helps to restore a sense of proportion, self-regard, even sanity. To speak religiously, [Mailer] imputes to the use of obscenity a kind of redemptive power, and not merely for individuals. It is capable of redeeming basic cultural resources."¹⁴

The non-satirical uses of scatology are of relatively minor interest. Far more common and serious is scatological satire. In this realm a comparison of Layton's poems with those of other writers in the tradition may offer some insights and lead us to a consideration of what may be called the scatological dimension of Layton's vision.

I have chosen examples from the writing of Catullus, Swift, Yeats, and Miller so that I may compare and contrast them with Layton. Similarities can be found among these writers in regard to their use of scatology. The intention, however, is not to engage in a detailed account of the possible influence of these writers on Layton, but simply to adapt the insights gained from them in order to throw new light on Layton's work.

Gaius Valerius Catullus produced one-hundred and sixteen long and short poems. The short poems are noted for their excremental diction. In those poems, Catullus curses and defames personal and political foes, as well as 'pseudo-gentility'. Lee writes, "Catullus employs scatology as a weapon of personal satire in attacking indivi-

duals of apparently little public importance. Though he uses more prurient language than scatology, when Catullus resorts to the latter, it becomes a formidable means of personal satire characterized by inspiring tone and revolting physical references.¹⁵ Similarities can be drawn between Catullus and Layton in respect to their mutual use of imprecation. Note the following example:

Catullus Then you shall suffer, with feet tied up
 And mullet and radishes stuck up your arse (XV)¹⁶

Layton To expiate this
 In Hades he'll kiss
 The clotted black arsehole of Satan
 "Simon O'Bowd" (UP 1976)

Catullus and Layton both delight in cursing their 'detractors' or critics. Excremental diction is used in these poems for shock value:

Catullus I'll fuck you both right up the ass,
 Gay Furius, Aurelius,
 For saying I'm not chaste, what brass!
 Because my poems aren't. Thus
 You miss the point; my poetry
 Is simply not the same as me.
 But all my verses really owe
 Their wit and charm and all their salt
 To spicy, merry, sexy flow
 Of words that even stir uphalt
 And hairy grand-dads - no young crew --
 Whose stiffened loins can hardly screw,
 Well, read my poems; If your brass
 Insists my verse makes me like you,
 I'll fuck you both right up the ass.
 (XVI)

Layton Before writing a review
 it is advisable
 to take the eyeballs
 out of one's arsehole

 It is also wise
 on occasion to remember
 art and englishery
 do not consort well together

And that although
here's the logical place
for the literary castoffs of Britain
to acquire status

Their behinds at once beslobbered
by spruce anglophiles
imploring to lick
ANY Englishman's piles.

"Georgie, Am I Concrete Enough?"
(BP 1955)

Or note the following poem, "The Poet on His Detractors,"

"I piss on them
from a great height
if they're lucky
some drops
will fall
on*them
and make them 'immortal'"
(FMNH 1979)

Layton has become controversial because of such biting attacks on critics and foes. These attacks become more shocking when they are replete with scatological imagery.

As recently as 1984, Layton wrote a poem after the manner of Catullus:

You, Cat, fell for a patrician whore
who scoured the alleyways after dark
looking for an Ethiop's
 hanging ballocks;
fascinatingly evil she was, also witty,
for when told to her face
 she loved cock dearly
she burst out laughing;
'You said a mouthful.'
Still, compared to that broad
your uncle's saddled himself with
 in Verona
Lesbia's a vestal virgin
Listen, that jerk your uncle
has got himself a real lulu

this time
 one eye is without sight
 and every morning she startles him
 awake
 with trumpeting
 Caesar's legions might envy,
 so dismal is her stomach.
 And her teeth -- it's the truth, man --
 are dissolving in her mouth
 like long icicles
 Simply wearing away from her gums
 like the shoreline of Calabria.

 That's not the end of it, Cat
 Piles ring the darling's asshole
 like a mare's halter
 And a flaming herpes
 makes penetration
 a risky business.

"EPISTLE TO CATULLUS" (GB 1984)

Layton uses scatology in the poem to present the victim in as horrid an image as possible. He comically and satirically portrays the woman startling her lover every morning with explosive 'trumpetings'. Her physical diseases are emphasized in order to accentuate her ugliness and moral diseases. The vigorous rough-talk of tavern-goers is captured in the poem, and the vulgarities, so blatantly used, re-create a Catullan manner. Layton rarely indulges in such scatological frivolity. This poem is simply an exercise in coarse wit and humour.

Swift uses scatology extensively in his writing. Unlike Catullus however, his use of scatology is rooted in an excremental vision. The term 'excremental vision', was used in 1954 as the title of a chapter in Middleton Murry's book on Swift. Norman O. Brown in LIFE AGAINST DEATH, says that the credit for acknowledging the significance of the excremental theme in Swift belongs to Aldous Huxley. Brown, however, denounces Murry's and Huxley's interpretations of Swift's scatology. "Even Huxley and Murry, though they face the problem, prove incapable of seeing what

there is to see. After admitting into consciousness the unpleasant facts which previous criticism had repressed, they proceed to protect themselves and us against the disturbing impact of the excremental vision by systematic distortion, denunciation, and depreciation."¹⁷ Brown insists that Murry and Huxley adopted a moral and intellectual stance of superiority and that this clouded their understanding.

The excremental vision is grounded in realism, and in the belief that life and death, beauty and mire, joy and pain, are inextricably bound. For Layton, it is also a celebration and affirmation of life.

In Swift and Scatological Satire, Lee writes that viewed in the context of literary tradition, Swift uses scatology almost always for satire. He is never sensational, and in all cases he emphasizes a moral point:

Though Swift is traditional in his use of scatology as a satiric device, he is unique in English literature in the way he uses scatology as a weapon of attack against major targets. In general, while others resort to scatology intermittently, Swift --- without squeamish apology --- turns it into a formidable weapon in a consistent attack. If he does apologize it is to capitalize on our sense of shame concerning our animal body. No other English satirist employs this device with so much flexibility or force. His full exploitation of the various possibilities of scatology to serve his diverse purposes is a measure of his artistic skill.¹⁸

Lee describes Swift's scatology as moral and humanistic:

Often Swift not only provokes our boisterous laughter, but also forces our acceptance of the truth of our animal nature so that we may not be ashamed

of our true selves, including our inescapable animality. In this respect Swift is a true humanist who attempts to free us from our prejudices and the futile denial of our basic nature; the more heartily we can laugh by means of scatological humor, the more completely we accept ourselves as mortal beings. For such a purpose a true humanist does not shy away from scatology. On the contrary, he is almost obligated to use it.¹⁹

Brown does not seem to agree with Lee's humanistic interpretation of Swift. He says that the anal function for Swift "becomes the decisive weapon in his assault on the pretensions, the pride, even the self-respect of mankind."²⁰ Lee says that Swift exposes the truth about our animal nature so that we may be ashamed of our true selves and Brown argues that Swift attacks man so he might become ashamed of himself. The anal function in man becomes a question of guilt and shame.

The anal function in man for Layton is not shameful. The human body is revered by the poet and he can write about sexual or excremental functions with equal ease and frankness. The body is sacred, and this sacramental view distinguishes Layton's excremental vision from Swift's.

Both Layton and Swift, however, deliberately use the shock of realism to deflate romantic idealism and to expose excessive gentility:

Swift Nor wonder how I lost my wits;
 Oh; Caelia, Caelia, Caelia shits
 "Cassinus and Peter"

Layton You went behind a bush to piss,
 Imagine Wordsworth telling this:
 About Lucy? And Robert Bridges
 About his dear lass?
 "Anti-Romantic" (RCS 1959)

Both writers hold the premise that order and beauty come from dung, i.e. chaos. Both exploit the irony of the fact that the good and the

beautiful are inseparable from evil, disorder, and ugliness.

Swift Such order from Confusion sprung,
 Such gaudy Tulips rais'd from Duſk.
 (The Lady's Dressing Room)

Layton Out of Nature's immemorial dung
 come flowers and stars.
 (Like a Mother Demented)

The holy and profane are indissoluble, Swift writes:

For the Upper Region of Man, is furnished like the Middle Region of the Air; the Materials are formed from causes of the widest differences, yet produce at last the same substance and effect. Mists arise from the earth, Steams, from Dunghills, Exhalations from the Sea, and Smoak from fire; yet all clouds are the same in Composition, as well as consequences: and the Fumes issuing from a Jakes, will furnish as comely and useful a Vapour, as Incense, from an Altar. Thus far, I suppose, will easily be granted me; and then it will follow, that as the face of Nature never produces Rain, but when it is overcast and disturbed, so Human understanding, seated in the Brain, must be troubled, and overspread by vapours, ascending from the lower Faculties, to water the Invention, and render it fruitful. ²¹

Just as Layton reflected the styles of Catullus and Swift in his excremental poems, so did he adapt Yeat's "CRAZY JANE POEMS". Francis suggests that Layton is fond of the description of himself as a "Yiddish Yeats". "He shares a number of thematic concerns with the mature Yeats-- a devotion to heroic values, an anti-Christian and anti-bourgeois bias, a consuming passion for vitality and virility, an antinomian vision of reality." ²²

In Yeat's CRAZY JANE POEMS, excremental imagery is juxtaposed with

erotic imagery. The central figure, Jane, is an earthy, fertile and heroic individual, while her shadow, the bishop, is the embodiment of constipation and sterility:

The Bishop has a skin, God knows,
 Wrinkled like a foot of a goose,
 Nor can he hide in holy black
 The heron's hunch upon his back...
 "Crazy Jane and the Bishop"

The bishop is devoid of sensuality and of life. He is repressed, wrinkled, old, and sterile. The church does not allow him to marry and forbids him to acknowledge his physical self. Lacking this 'wholeness' or unity, he is living a death-in-life.

In Yeat's poem 'Crazy Jane Talks With The Bishop', Jane's libertine conduct is denounced by the Bishop. He instructs her to "live in a heavenly mansion / Not in some foul sty," to which she replies:

'Fair and foul are near of kin,
 And fair needs foul,' I cried.

A woman can be proud and stiff
 When on love intent.

But love has pitched his mansion in
 The place of excrement.
 For nothing can be sole, or whole
 That has not been rent.

"Crazy Jane Talks With the Bishop."

As fair and foul are interrelated, so are the holy and the profane. Befittingly, love's mansion is pitched in the place of excrement. Note Layton's adaptation of the poem:

"If I wed it won't be a ghost
 But a man with a tool,
 A large upstanding one," I cried,
 All thrust and quivering muscle!

Only such a man, dear Bishop
Can make my heart full.

"Crazy Jenny Talks to The Bishop" (FMBJ
1976)

He is suggesting, like Yeats, that Jane's heart will become 'full' or 'whole' when there is totality in the sexual act. She cannot marry a spirit or a 'ghost', but a man. Both Yeats and Layton advocate a 'marriage' between the physical and spiritual. Excrement as a symbol, suggests this duality. It is chaos and disintegration, and equally creation. It is both an end-product and the fertilizer which stimulates growth.

Physical and spiritual oneness is explored by James K. Bowen in "Consummation, Completeness, and Crazy Jane: Totality Through Union." "The sense of wholeness growing out of Jane's recognition that there can be no completeness without a total synthesizing of opposites is central... to the poetic structures of the CRAZY JANE POEMS and to Jane's nature as well..."²³

Francis describes Layton as an Heroic Vitalist and notes that his closest parallels among contemporary writers are Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Ted Hughes:

Layton shares much with those writers. His premises are Heraclitean; his weltanschauung is Dionysian; his eroticism phallic. He puts a high value on freedom, creativity and sexual love. He has a reverence for great men and a compassionate contempt for the mass of mankind. He abhors systems, abstractions and all forms of repression. He is committed to power as a principle of health and growth--personal, social, political and cosmic; and he sees chaos and destruction as components of the creative process on all levels. And finally he shares the Heroic Vitalists' passion for a virile life on this earth and their 'consequent' vigorous repudiation of traditional Christianity. Reaching beyond the good and evil of Christian morality. Layton, like all such writers, is concerned with the good

and the bad, the noble and the life-denying qualities
of human conduct. ²⁴

Layton and Miller are similar in several respects. Both writers glorify the body and exalt it as the sacred reality. In TROPIC OF CANCER, Miller writes, "I have nothing to do with the creaking machinery of humanity [civilization]... I belong to the earth!" ²⁵

Miller often compares himself to an organ of the body, be it 'prick' or 'big intestine'. "I not only think about food all day, but I dream about it at night;" ²⁶ or, "he feels the remnants of my big prick. I have set the shores a little wider, I have ironed out the wrinkles. After me you can take on stallions, bulls, rams, drakes, St. Bernard's ..." ²⁷

Layton's poem 'Fiasco' is after the manner of Miller:

So enlarge that savoury hole
'Twould lust, for telegraph pole
Make misers journey to hold
Within it their bags of gold
Whole armadas there to sink

(FMBJ 1976)

Layton and Miller both compare the world to 'cunt'. In L'Envoi', Layton writes, "World, you old smelly cunt / it's been great knowing you; / knowing sun, moon, stars, beautiful women / waves and graves."

(FMBJ 1976) ²⁸ They both share a healthy acceptance of life's processes, and this is why they 'bounce in the stink': Norman Mailer writes:

Miller bounces in the stink. We read TROPIC OF CANCER, that book of horrors and feel happy. It is because there is honor in the horror and metaphor in the hideous. How, we cannot even begin to say. Maybe it is that mood is vastly more various, self-regenerative, hearty, and sly than Hemingway ever guessed. Maybe mood is not a lavender lady, but a barmaid with full visions of heaven in the full corruption of her

beer breath, and an old drunk's vomit is a clarion call to some mutants of the cosmos just now squeezing around the bend.²⁹

Mailer is suggesting that the hideous and ugly are not necessarily different from the beautiful. In fact, he says that there may be honor in the hideous.

Good and evil are inseparable, as are chaos and order. Man can transform 'raw experience' into palatable art, but he must not be divorced from reality.

Numerous further parallels could be drawn between Layton and the above-mentioned writers, but it suffices to say that he shares the scatological dimension with many predecessors and contemporaries.

Layton totally affirms man's physical organic condition. D.H. Lawrence writes that it is, "through the recognition and complete acceptance of one's physical organic condition in its totality (that includes the physical, corrupt and shameful as well as the mental, spiritual and conventionally moral) that freedom and energy in the body and spirit can be achieved. Out of the mud rise the lotus and the swan." 30

Layton's earthiness is steeped in Hebraic vitality and he passionately celebrates life. He disagrees with those who regard the excretory organs as shameful, because in his view they are a natural part of life. He exposes man's ambivalence towards anality, which stems from the realization that excretory organs are linked to sexual organs; and he shocks people into an awareness of their repressed, puritanical nature.

Freud explains man's aversion to the excretory organs as follows:

Above all, the coprophilic elements in the instinct have proved incompatible with our aesthetic ideas, probably since the time when man developed an upright posture and so removed his organ of smell from the ground; further, a considerable proportion of the sadistic elements belonging to the erotic instinct have to be abandoned. All such developmental processes, however, relate only to the upper layers of the complicated structure. The fundamental processes which promote erotic excitation remain always the same. Excremental things are all too intimately and inseparably bound up with sexual things; the position of the genital organs--INTER URINAS ET FAECES--remains the decisive and unchangeable factor. The genitals themselves have not undergone the development of the rest of the human form in the direction of beauty; they have retained their animal cast; and so even today love, too, is in essence as animal as it ever was. 31

For Layton, there is no incompatibility with excretory or sexual organs. He argues that those who express disgust in the bodily functions negate life. He insists that revulsion with the excretory organs suggests fear of the evolutionary process.

In his excremental vision, which is but one facet of his overall vision, he glorifies man's excretory and sexual organs because they symbolize the polarities of life and death. For Layton, the excremental process has sacramental significance.

A childhood experience Layton earnestly recounts, involves the ritual lighting of the Sabbath candles. This event took place in the kitchen where the Menorah was placed on a table that was covered with a 'white' tablecloth. As a child he would watch his Jewish Mother bless the Sabbath candles. He was inspired with the mysticism and spirituality emanating from the glowing candles. Concurrently, he was jolted out of his mesmerized state by the flushing sounds coming from

the toilet which was located next to the kitchen.³² For Layton, from then on, the physical and spiritual were indivisible, and sacred. In this respect, he extends the scatological tradition to an eschatological level.

NOTES

- ¹ Irving Layton, The Laughing Rooster (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), p. 10.
- ² Ibid., p. 10.
- ³ Seymour Mayne, A Study of the Poetry of Irving Layton (Ph.D. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1972), p. 113.
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 122.
- ⁵ Wynne Francis, "The Farting Jesus: Layton and the Heroic Vitalists," Contemporary Verse II (No.3, 1978), p. 46.
- ⁶ Jae Num Lee, Swift and Scatological Satire (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), pp. 21-22.
- ⁷ Theodor Rosebury, Life on Man (New York: The Viking Press, 1969), Rosebury approaches the subject of scatology from a scientific perspective and devotes an entire chapter to THE GREAT SCATOLOGISTS.
- ⁸ Leo Marx, "'Noble Shit' : The Uncivil Response of American Writers to Civil Religion in America," The Massachusetts Review (Drew University, February 22-24, 1973), p. 739.
- ⁹ Gershon Legman, Rationale of the Dirty Joke: An Analysis of Sexual Humor, 2nd ser., (New York: Breaking Point, 1975), p. 814.

10 Bawdy Humour: Erotic and Excremental

But that is not so;
my mind
is evenly balanced
on the two buttock cheeks
of my beloved
...
(Sutra CP 1971)

Critic
Says Jasper Shittick:
"Though the world doesn't know it,
Our Pratt's a major poet."
He is: if Jasper Shittick
Is a Major Critic.
(The Literary Life LCW 1953)

¹¹Seymour Mayne, A Study of the Poetry of Irving Layton (Ph.D. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1972), p. 160.

¹²Frank Muir, An Irreverent and Almost Complete Social History of the Bathroom (London: William Heinemann, 1982), pp. 146-147.

Numerous euphemisms have been used in reference to 'defecation'.

The 'bathroom' for instance had many appellations:

"The children of Israel went to the 'House of Honour'
The Ancient Egyptians went to 'The House of the Morning'
Monks went to the 'Garderobe' (our modern cloakroom)
'The Necessarium' (later the 'Necessary House') or
The 'Rerodorter' (literally 'room at the back of the
Dormitory') The Tudors went to the 'Privy' (A Place of
Privacy) or The Jakes (Jack's Place. Perhaps the origin
of the American 'John'). The Seventeenth Century added
'The Bog-house' (this became a word much used by build-
ers and was the technical term preferred by most
architects until the early years of this century). When
one expression became too familiar, our more genteel
ancestors found themselves a new one."

Victorian society used hundreds of evasive words and phrases to denote this sacred place. They also had a different vocabulary for different classes. The Aristocracy used 'lavatory', the Middle-Class 'loo', and the Working Class 'toilet'.

¹³Leo Marx, "'Noble Shit': The Uncivil Response of American Writers to Civil Religion in America," The Massachusetts Review (Drew University, February 22-24, 1973), p. 739.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 739.

¹⁵Jae Num Lee, Swift and Scatological Satire (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), p.11.

¹⁶Reney Myers and Robert J. Ormsby (trans.), Catullus: The Complete Poems for American Readers (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1970).

¹⁷Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press,

1959), pp. 179-180.

¹⁸Jae Num Lee, Swift and Scatological Satire (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971), p. 123:

¹⁹Ibid., p. 122.

²⁰Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), p. 179.

²¹Ibid., p. 196.

²²Wynne Francis, "The Farting Jesus: Layton and the Heroic Vitalists," Contemporary Verse II (No. 3, 1978), p. 49.

²³James K. Bowen, "Consummation, Completeness, and Crazy Jane: Totality Through Union," Research Studies, vol. 39 (1971), p. 147.

²⁴Wynne Francis, "The Farting Jesus: Layton and the Heroic Vitalists," Contemporary Verse II (No. 3, 1978), p. 46.

²⁵Henry Miller, Tropic of Cancer (London: John Calder Publishers Limited, 1963), p. 254.

²⁶Ibid., p. 69.

²⁷Ibid., p. 5.

²⁸For Shakespeare, as for Miller and Layton, the 'pudend', is at once physical and mystical, esoteric and material.

Eric Partridge, Shakespeare's Bawdy: A Literary and Psychological Essay and a Comprehensive Glossary (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968).

In Tropic of Cancer, Miller often compares the world to 'cunt'. "When I look down into this fucked-out cunt of a whore I feel the whole world beneath me, a world tottering and crumbling, a world used up and polished like a leper's skull." (p. 248).

29 Norman Mailer, "Henry Miller: Genius and Lust, Narcissism,"
American Review, vol. 24 (1976), p. 7.

30 R. E. Pritchard, D.H. Lawrence: Body of Darkness (London:
Hutchison & Co. Ltd., 1971), p. 25.

31 Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical
Meaning of History (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press,
1959), p. 187.

"Repression weighs more heavily on anality than on genitality.
Psychological and psychoanalytical theorems on the genital function
have become legitimate hypotheses in circles which will not listen to
what Freud has to say about anality, or to what Swift had to say."
pp. 179-180.

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Personal interview with Irving Layton, 24 November 1984.

CHAPTER II

LAYTON'S SATIRICAL USES OF SCATOLOGY

In this chapter I will examine Layton's satirical uses of scatology under four thematic categories: personal satire, socio-political satire, religio-moral satire, and intellectual satire.

I. Personal Satire

In the tradition of scatology, personal satire is used to attack and to defame an individual's reputation. Excremental diction is scathingly employed in these attacks on personal foes. Layton has written many poems that conform to this tradition.

In the Catullan manner, Layton's poems are frequently characterized by invective, imprecation and vituperation. For example in numerous poems, he retorts to women who jilt their lovers,

Your tits, may they grow red and tight as boils
And be without cure from healing serums,
That when you hold your babe to give him suck
They spurt thick pus between his toothless gums.

"Archilochus Curses the Woman who
Jilted Him"
(PV 1974)

To detractors who misrepresent Layton, he writes:

I would like to take him and beat
the living daylights from his eyes
who loosed the daily spirochete
that lives on mob-approving lies
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.

"For the Stinker Who Called Me an Apologist for
Nazi Crimes" (PM 1967)

And to critics who misjudge him or fail to appreciate his work, the
following diatribe is directed:

One day you'll butter your bread with my excrement
And pour libations to one another with my staling

Gentlemen, may you choke on both.

"To the Gov-Gen's Poetry Awards Committee for
1971-1972" (LLM 1973)

Layton vituperates with the passion of an Old Testament prophet.
He inherited this skill from his mother. In the "Foreward" to A RED
CARPET FOR THE SUN he declares, "Moreover, she had a gift for cadenced
vituperation to which, doubtless, I owe my impeccable ear for rhythm."
In an elegy to his mother, "Keine Lazarovitch 1870-1959" (SF 1961), he
writes: "She had loved God but cursed extravagantly his creatures / For
her final mouth was not water but a curse, / A small black hole, a black
rent in the universe, / Which damned the green earth, stars and trees in
its stillness / And the inescapable lousiness of growing old. / And I
record she was comfortless, vituperative, /...

'Constipated' people are subject to Layton's verbal abuses. They
are the passion-less who live without the true thrust and vigour of life.
Such people fear life and death and therefore recoil from the excremental
vision. The stench, the mess, the chaos of the destructive cycle offends
them.

"Woman in the Square" (CP 1971), is about the constipated nature of
a prim and smartly dressed woman who has a fixation with her 'white'
glove. "It is hard to believe she ever ate green things / celery,

lettuce, or the stems of young onions, / it is hard to believe flowers grow for her / in the same innocent way they do for others." The woman's life is too mechanical and unnatural. Since she does not eat greens, she cannot relieve her 'constipation'. Constipation is akin to sterility as the healthy flow of excretion is to fertility. The allusion to the 'white glove' suggests that the woman's womb is barren; therefore, the evening "slides like a furtive homosexual."

A similar theme is evident in the poem, "At Desjardins" (CP 1971). An executive and his 'middle-aged harpy' consume in a death-like way, their restaurant meal. The waitress gives them some life, in the form of a glass of water, as well as her best wishes for a 'quick digestion'. They are 'moneyed-louts' and not even worth cursing. "What amorous, / open-eyed poet / could be bothered / cursing them? / Look at them. / When all is said, / aren't they cursed / enough, my friends / As is?" He especially exposes the woman's duplicity: "a hunk of powdered / and perfumed meat, / waiting for him / to clean his plate / and drop dead."

Of a 'constipated' middle-class lawyer Layton writes: "He's really / do you see it now? / an immaculately dressed dung beetle / Revelling / in everyone's bourgeois shit / and straining.... straining hard / to leave his royal name / lying on top of it." ("13" GB 1983) To a librarian who tore up his book of poems goes the following torrent of curses and maledictions: "For this act of yours, the ligatures / Pest-corroded, your eyes shall fall / from their sockets; drop on your lacquered desk / With the dull weight of pinballs." ("Letter to a Librarian" CP 1971)

II. Socio-Political Satire

In the forties and fifties, Layton purposefully set out to shock

his Canadian audiences into an awareness that puritanical and repressive sexual mores were unhealthy. He described Canadians as being prudish and overly genteel. In his poems of social satire directed against Canadians, there is a definite moral concern.

He satirizes the 'puritans' for their aversion to 'obscene words'. Note the following 1954 recipe for a young poet. In an ironic vein he exclaims:

....
 Resolve before ink you try
 That your books may not remaindered lie;
 Think only of kudos and a name
 And failing greatness, acquire fame:
 Assiduously learn the art to please
 The pimps in the academies--
 Their friendly syrop on the radio
 May help to sell a book or so;
 (I mean to give them no offence,
 For these are pimps with a difference,
 And allow this as their best excuse--
 They pimp, it's true, but for some muse!)
 Yes, be wise, plagiarize: above all,
 Avoid ambiguous words like 'ball'
 Or 'ass' or even harmless 'cans':
 They give offence to puritans,
 And robust males to whom a virgin
 Is dearer far than any sturgeon.

.....
 Refinement be your aim to melt the sort
 Who take their verse as they take their port
 Entirely by label and repute

.....
 For critics with a nose of a setter
 For verse that's dead--the deader the better

.....
 Or one who because his heart is pure
 Will not affect to use 'manure'
 Instead of that four-letter word
 That is less often seen than heard

.....
 "Prologue to the Long Pea-Shooter" (LPS 1954)

He has broken verbal taboos by exploiting 'four-letter' words in his poetry. He concludes in the "Prologue" that his poetry will be read by

future generations, even though it is criticized for its 'bawdiness'. He insists that he has brought a 'lustre' to Canadian letters which never existed before. Verse in Canada was "lacking spirit and a bore, / genteel, dull, and quite anemic," until Layton liberated and invigorated it.

William Carlos Williams commented on Layton's diction and on the fact that he has "written profusely, pouring out his verses without check. That is the way to write, correcting oneself in the act of writing, the words, held as it were, in solution, latent, eternally in process of being formed. No constipation here....". "He has an unrivalled choice of words; an unusual vocabulary and the ability to use it...He uses as much slang as suits his fancy or his need, and no more. He is not bound by the twentieth century if he does not find its language fitting to his purpose, and defies anyone who would bind him to that use."¹

Layton uses excremental diction to break verbal and social taboos, and to shock readers into reality. Robertson Davies argues that he jolts the reader into experiencing the subject matter at first-hand:

He is so upset with people who see life second or third hand that he writes with savagery and he employs excremental imagery which prudish people do not digest... Layton's bawdiness is meant to jolt Canadians out of their dullness.... Much of his comment on his fellow-countrymen is invective, and those of us who share his wish that Canada should wake up from its snuffling, anti-Dionysian slumber find his vigorous outpouring of scorn refreshing. He seeks to confute the Philistines, not by persuasion but by direct attack and accusation.... If he were only scornful, dirty and abusive, however, he would not be a poet. These things are only his manner; what is his matter? It is a high-colored, abounding delight in the physical world.²

In the "Preface" to THE LAUGHING ROOSTER (1964), Layton claims as his 'birthright', his ability to continually shock and sting his audiences:

I was originally going to call the present collection "Poems in Poor Taste", but at the last moment decided against the blatancy of the advertisement. It's more fun seeing shocked reviewers point out my weakness for plain speech and honest feeling to their innocent readers; to learn from them with the publication of each book of mine how once again I have offended their Victorian notions of decency and good taste. I wouldn't miss that thrill for anything in the world. I've come to expect it as mine by birthright and prerogative.

Layton especially castigates Canadian philistinism, puritanism, prudery, and gentility. He bitterly attacks those people and institutions that repress man's human nature. In "Ice Follies" (NIP 1948), he mocks those Canadians who state "you cannot say shit too often....", and similarly in "Canadians" (BP 1955), he criticizes his countrymen for 'bridling' at words such as 'arse'. He says, "poetry, ain't for the likes of these, / curd-faced coofs with the brain of geese, / Who think the stuff, by geez, / Is an old man's smell from elbow to knees." They are eunuchs, removed from reality.

These sober blokes need a catharsis
Or broken metatarsals

Layton prescribes a 'catharsis' for Canadians, which in the excremental idiom is a purging of the bowels, a relief from constipation; and in the Greek classical sense, a release of emotion. The two meanings for him are interchangeable. It is the therapy he recommends for the chronically repressed and constipated.

In "Second Thoughts on the Armada" (LR 1964), Layton juxtaposes

the philistine and the non-philistine. He writes, that in Spain, "where there's no liquor commission / no excited little Baptist / no clean-jawed methodist, / no Anglo-Saxon / with dirty sex on his brain, / I never saw a single drunk." He proceeds to compare the Spanish to Calgarians and Torontonians:

back home
 In Calgary on a Saturday night
 the drunks drop like flies
 on their moral sidewalks
 in Toronto seething with alcohol
 and Baptist virtue
 They vomit and fall....

He denounces the hypocritical 'virtues' of the moral majority and concludes that it would be more decent to revive Philip II from 'immoral' Spain, than to endure the repressions of boorish Canadians.

"Never in Rosedale" (FMNH 1979), captures the raucous spirit of a town in Greece: "Mithymna is a bawdy village / The fruit and vegetable vendors / Admonishing their customers / to take care of their tender little cunts". Layton declares that never in his most rampant dreams could this scene ever take place "among the creamed matrons of Forest Hill / and Rosedale."

The philistine or smugly conventional attitude lacks exuberance and creativity. In the poems dealing with middle-class morality, the tension between Eros and Thanatos is absent. Layton struggles with the polarities of life and death, creativity and destruction, good and evil. Eli Mandel writes, "So it is with the polarities of Layton's poetry. The tension of male and female, literature and prophecy, father and mother, goddess and witch, eros and thanatos, love and hate, Hebrew and pagan, thought and instinct--all are versions of the god's birth, his

death either in perfection or castration, his rebirth."³ The middle-class, whom Layton attacks so vehemently, lack this instinctual tension.

In the "Introduction" to LOVE WHERE THE NIGHTS ARE LONG (an anthology of love poems by Canadians), Layton says:

Isolated from one another by the fears and repressions engendered in a materialistic society almost wholly given up to the worship of money and status; hoodwinked by egomaniacal poltroons among politicians and business executives; and robbed of their birthright of joy and intensity by any prude or long-faced puritan that can shake a finger at them, Canadians plead for compassion as no other people on earth. This is a cold country in more ways than one. The drag of middle-class mores is strongest here, for the mitigating forces of population, culture, heterogeneity are not sufficiently present to free the individual from the entangling coils of life-denying creeds and the inhibiting ideologies and customs of the dominant ethnic groups. He's caught early and stays trapped till the end of his days.⁴

Layton adds, "We prefer the safe, the conventional, the unimaginative-- the dull-plodders whose fires were quenched long ago by hapless and thoroughly beaten schoolteachers and by repressed parents who think sex is strictly for the birds. Yes, this is a cold country. Cold with the snow and frost that have entered into the bloodstream and packed ice around the heart; cold with fear, ignorance, repression, and denial."⁵

To counteract this philistinism, he offers in his own poems, what Francis calls "a veritable troupe of Dionysian revellers -- satyrs, nymphs, fauns, inebriates, gamblers, rakes and roués, some modern, some bearing Greek or Roman names -- all of whom engage in some form of self-abandon and thumb their noses gleefully at respectability, prudery, repression, and self-righteousness."⁶

In LIFE AGAINST DEATH, Brown links excrement with the fear of

death, with repression of instinct, and with the obsession with money. Layton attributes these negative values most frequently to the middle-class. It is the members of this class who become the prime targets of his excremental abuse which may take the form of imprecation, invective, satire, or irony.

Devotion to money is characterized as an anal trait. Brown writes: "things which are possessed and accumulated, the property and the universal condensed precipitate of property, money, are in their essential nature, excrement."⁷ Hoarding money becomes an 'evil' because the action is pre-meditated. Thinking and hoarding are akin to constipation, because a spontaneous action is apprehended and analyzed. "Thinking is after all only a means of preventing a squandering through action, so that thinking is only a 'special expression' of the tendency to economize and as such has its origin in anal eroticism."⁸ Brown says that money, "reflects and promotes a style of thinking of modern science --- and what can be more rational than that?"⁹ Layton attacks the middle-class precisely because of this tightness, and rationalism. Accumulating money amounts to accumulating excrement. This greed for money becomes the symbol of death-in-life, and the fear of losing this wealth, or of sharing it, results in withdrawal from life. The numerous poems that suggest these themes are extremely rich in excremental diction.

One such poem is "Sagebrush Classic" (CP 1971); the link between excrement and money is made, appropriately, in the gambling, neon-capital of the world, Las Vegas:

And letting fall, "All life's a gamble,"
I assailed the desert's lush casinos
With craps, blackjack, and even keno.
Swift slung it: civilization is faecal.

[my italics]

So take a flyer. Which I did. Fickle
 Or foolish one's luck; though I'd poems to show,
 Was tanned-handsome, my movements deft and slow,
 Some bunko-artist raked my dimes and nickels.
 All's shit. Luther protesting from a can,
 Down-to-earth dealer dealing twenty-one,
 Who clued me into a richer idiom.
 Result? I can curse better. Caliban,
 Roll those bones. At the end comes fuckface death
 -- Shows a pair of goose eyes on a green cloth.¹⁰

The excremental diction in the poem relates to money and gambling. Note the use of gambling terms such as 'craps' and 'blackjack'. The image of the 'bunko-artist' raking dimes and nickels is reminiscent of a hoarder. He is complacent in the assurance money gives him, as he rakes towards himself, the money that others have gambled away. He is equivalent to a bank, accumulating the wealth in a very calculated and organized way.

'All life's a gamble' implies that chance and fate are predominant in one's life. The healthy spirit will gamble, risk, take chances, and "live dangerously", as Nietzsche puts it. Luther is shown to 'protest from a can'. He plays 'twenty-one', a card game; he gambles, and posts his 'twenty-one' manifestoes on the door of the Wittenburg University. Layton flings his verbal attacks, which are in the form of curses, satire, and invective, as Luther did.

Finally, Caliban represents the ugly, deformed, and brute energy, which is 'powerful' excrement and the source of new life. Caliban gambles as he 'rolls those bones'.

In "Fortuna et Cupidas" (LLM 1973), luck, eros, and desire, mark men's destinies:

Appetite and chance, luck and desire
 together make a man's fate
 not the foolish lines on his palms nor the conjugation
 of stars in space rule his lot
 but these intangible bars infrangibly up and down

on which if he pleases he can graph his days
 until he falls from their arching bough
 like a ripe fruit to rot or burn

But a man's ball spins merrily merrily
 in the roulette wheel of sexuality
 at last come to rest in a gay groove
 red black black red fifteen or fifty-one
 to the bored indifferent croupier it is all one
 scramble your gamble, ramble and gambol
 the appointed groove hole slot is always there
 waiting for the balls to come tumbling in

The bored and indifferent croupier is like the hoarder in "Sagebrush Classic", and is also like a 'god', who watches others live their lives. In "Fortuna et Cupidas", Layton again correlates gambling images with excremental ones. Man gambles until his 'roulette wheel' stops spinning. Then he will fall like a ripened fruit and he will return to the earth that bore him. In this poem, the 'appointed groove hole slot', of the gambling table is symbolic of the womb and tomb.

"Judgement at Murray's" is one of Layton's most recent poems containing excremental imagery. In this poem he conveys how life is a swindle, a waste, (excrement) through the protagonist, who herself is physically wasting away:

The frail aristocratic woman
 arthritis or cancer devastates
 stumbles before she sits down.

For now
 she's safe from the sharp knives
 the cold throws at old and young alike.
 Seventy years' accumulated spite
 gravers her laugh. She knows what she knows.
 The words dropping from her loose lips
 are not meant for the other diners.
 Therefore the death she carries inside her
 like a foetus, for the dark shade nothing will drive
 from the wall, the vein in her forehead
 throbbing as though about to burst.
 This could be her last chicken leg;
 the smeared plate she'd love to fling

At the stronzo that keeps staring at her,
 the last object her eyes look upon.
 She has stopped babbling to herself
 And I can almost read her thoughts
 or imagine her reciting them aloud:
 "Had the charlatans not fixed on pills
 to still the wind in my cancered stomach
 I'd make known my judgement on the swindle
 life is that weaves weddings and holocausts
 while God's creatures bark like frightened mongrels
 in the dark. Yes, poor Emilia who ran off
 with a bum, to spite your mother for a whim.
 Yes, my dear adaptable son who'll soon be here
 to chauffeur me home.

I'd let one
 loud enough to tear my wasted hams apart
 and wake your father from his craven sleep."

February 2, 1985
 Montreal

The aristocratic Italian woman delivers a dramatic monologue on life as she is dying. Her 'judgement' if only she could pronounce it, is that life is a 'swindle'. She has gambled and has been cheated out of a happy life. She left a sunny and exuberant home to live in a cold and repressed country. She is wealthy and unhappy. Her children lack warmth and individuality, and her husband is in a deep and 'craven' sleep. He has withdrawn from life and is complacent. He does not risk or gamble anything because he does not confront life. She is dying of cancer and she regrets taking the pills that the 'charlatans' or phony doctors' prescribed to stop the boisterous noises in her stomach, because otherwise she would let loose all of her repressions and awaken the slumbering sleeper by farting loudly. In this excremental image of gambling, loss, empty wind and empty chatter, death overshadows the persona who meditates on life.

Layton uses olfactory imagery to evoke moral corruption. This will be examined more closely in the third chapter. However, in the poem

"Westminster Abbey" (PM 1967), the stink refers to money and decomposition.

Class distinction is carried to the grave as Layton describes the monuments to such 'great historical figures' as Edward the Confessor, Queen Elizabeth, Earl of Buckingham, John Dryden...

.....
 And there was a stink
 and for the first time in my life
 I saw clearly what was meant by the English Tradition
 how it is a slice taken out of Death
 and made homey and negotiable like currency
 a way of increasing real estate values
 by squeezing caskets, urns, busts, memorials
 into every last available inch of space
 and I also saw that this can go on for ever
 as long as the supply of famous corpses doesn't run out

And there was a stink
 and I saw the Englishman
 is not passionate and grand and mystical
 About Death as the Spaniard is
 but sentimental, prosaic, and therefore matter-of-factly
 seeks profit by its existence
 as he does from lucky deposits of coal and iron
 in his right little, tight little island

And there was a wink
 and I saw the practical English
 had stationed pious policemen everywhere
 to keep fire and flood out and Death in,
 and I bent down to listen
 to Thomas Hardy under my feet
 who informed me in a low confidential whisper
 that all the insurance documents
 (since life is a tissue of ironic accidents)
 on this curious indoor cemetery
 this sprawling profit-making mausoleum
 are religiously kept in some other vault
 remote from here

Where there is no stink

The property owned by the 'dead inhabitants', is as lifeless as they are.
 Profits are ironically made in a mausoleum selling 'death', and death
 itself is protected from 'natural disasters', such as fire or flooding.
 Life is not to intrude upon the silence and timelessness of Westminster

Abbey, the eternal bank.

With equal vehemence, Layton attacks the North American technological and capitalistic world, where the consumer is deliberately kept confused, and where he is stripped of individuality. The consumer is frustrated and brainwashed into believing that he cannot be satisfied without hoarding. This 'moneytheism' is exploited in several poems. In "Homo Oeconomicus" (BFOJ 1963), he writes: "a heaven of consumer's bliss / where never the seed of Adam / shall cry for conscience or freedom / but huge coupons to get and spend / on products produced without end, / and ... from everywhere comes up the stench / of technology's 'massenmensch', / Not a man really, but a tool". Layton laments that the masses are repressed and enslaved. They follow, in an anesthetized fashion, the 'barked commands', or the 'radio's screech'. They are devoid of sensuality, creativity, and freedom. Layton fights on the side of love, freedom, imagination, individuality, dignity, and creativity. He feels that if those values are in danger, they must be defended.

Excremental diction abounds in poems about dictators, politicians, and totalitarian regimes. In "Nature's Sculpture" (FMNH 1979), Layton reduces dictators to the level of excremental objects:

'Sir', the turned on Czech said
 still jabbering after the class
 of nature's sculpture
 by water or wind,
 'each time I relieve myself
 I turn to see
 whether I've dropped the face
 of Lenin or Stalin'

'There are times, Sir,

only Rodin excels me.

Similarly, in "Two Communist Poets" (FMNH 1979), he asks, "How does Leninism strike you now / how do you like its stink / as if moves its mountainous pile of shit / to cover the world / and to silence men of spirit / and independence."

In "Malediction" (TD 1978), he curses Hitler's final solution, in the style of Catullus: "may the just earth expel your remains / from its disordered bowels / like vomit, like black excrement." In another poem, "Flora" (EOBN 1981), Hitler is "an ailing bag of excrement".

Finally, in "Not With a Whimper" (FMNH 1979), he realizes that evil will always exist, and that he cannot rid the world of 'thugs and dictators':

I'm sunbathing

At this very moment
Fidel is scratching his balls
and farting;
someone is having his fingernails
pulled out
for political reasons;
the Russian goons are railroading
Shcharansky to Siberia
and a fly is courting sudden death
circling my big toe

BANG

O uncaring sun
that generates roses and lice
if only it were that easy
to rid the world
of thugs and dictators

Totalitarian leaders are depicted as filthy and evil, because they terrorize and repress the masses with their ideologies, the media, and the secret police. Layton's most vicious bombardments are exploded in the faces of these men. In these poems, the reader becomes aware of

an ambivalence in Layton's use of excremental imagery. He attributes sacramental significance to 'excrement' when it is used to denote healthy processes. However, when he describes the nature of evil, or evil men, excremental symbolism connotes filth and obscenity. What Layton reflects in his ambivalence, is the confusion that all human beings feel towards good and evil. Good cannot be understood without evil, yet deep-down, all human beings yearn for a world free of evil; yearn for a return to the Garden of Eden.

III. Religio-Moral Satire

Layton is a moralist, and his poems serve to rouse in man an awareness of his greed, avarice, false-pride, and evil nature. His religio-moral satires are instrumental in exposing man's folly and in deflating his sense of importance. Like Swift, he reduces man to a scatological metaphor, when he wishes to remind him of his evil nature.

Layton explores our dual nature and forces us to see the other side, the dark side which we usually hide or repress. He sees anything that inhibits the cycle of birth, growth, fulfillment, death and re-birth, as being evil. He frequently uses excremental diction in relation to this theme. He writes, "I love my Creator because He created me--or Adam--out of dirt and blew the spirit into that dirt. For me this is the central riddle of human existence, and I quarrel in my writing with both those who exalt the spirit only, and those who would debase us only to earth." ¹¹

Excrement reminds healthy people of their mortality, says Layton in the poem "Shit". In accepting death as part of the natural cycle,

one embraces life more fully. Those who recoil from the excremental vision, recoil from life. Shit is vitally necessary:

In healthy people
a daily reminder
of their mortality

Of where they come from
and where they're going

And that equity
is built into the world
since no one's muckpile
casts a larger shadow
than his grave

Also the first and last rungs
in Jacob's ladder

The philosopher's stone
Michelangelo's nightmare
Beatrice's other face

(DFM 1979)

'Shit' reminds man of his common bond with all men. Inhibited people do not accept this part of their nature, and hence, shit becomes a 'taboo' subject. Layton persistently attempts to break such taboos.

In the "Preface" to CERBERUS (1952), he claims:

The best part of any man today is the hell he carries inside him; and...only poetry can transmute that into freedom, love, intelligence...The ironic method is to define this 'hell' by its opposite, the forces high-pressuring us into conformity or atomic dispersion: or more specifically 'middle-class' morality, suspicious of all enjoyment and neurotically hostile to the release of art and sex; and gentility, the gilded and gelded pseudo-culture of flourishing bankers and brewers.

Numerous poems depict this 'pseudo-culture', a life of repression, constipation, and sterility.

'Middle-class is being dead to the adventure / of sights, sounds and smells; is forgetting Truth / selects for its spokesmen madmen and

epileptics, / never a banker or topflight executive." ("Definitions" EOBN 1981) He attacks those who deny their natural instincts, "Blaise Pascal, grown early sick / of genius, turned ascetic / and fastening a girdle on / Fitted with spikes of iron / Punctured his erring skin / If appetite stirred in him." ("Discourse on Christian Love" LR 1964) Existentialism is ridiculed in "A Grotesque Pair" (BFOJ 1963), as Layton mimicks Sartre, "(Ho ! he's a wise man who tells us plainly / The world's absurd if flesh is born to die.)" because to him Layton, dying is part of the sacred cycle of life. It is not absurd, but perfectly natural. He repudiates Platonic philosophy and homosexuality. For him, heterosexuality brings delights "no faded pederast ever knew, no / nor Christian anchorite / or monk and inflamed priest / writhing nakedly / in their cold religious cells / before an icon of the Madonna / suckling the Babe / on her white and rounded breast." ("Plato Was an Asshole" FMNH 1979)

Boredom prevails on "Queen Street" (FMNH 1979), where life is linear not cyclical, and uneventful, and where "a merchant displays a new toilet bowl / to give the day's politics / meaning and shape."

Several other poems satirize the church and established religions for their involvement in repressing art, imagination, freedom, and creativity. In "Fiat Lux" (RCS 1959) he writes, "do not, son, / the Sabbath dishonouring, / switch on the lights, the black beard said, / for with a quiver from His bag of cloud / God kills in a revenging wrath." He can be humorous and crude as he spoofs priests for their 'empty chatter or wind', which means their pedantic preaching. In "To The Priest Who Kept My Wife Awake All Night, Farting" (NP 1971)

he writes, "Some use a primitive gong, others a bell: / This devout
priest does equally well / To call his parishioners to early Mass /
By loud insistent trumpeting⁷s of his ass."

Christianity, and especially the doctrines of St. Paul are de-
nounced:

The work of an epileptic
and of one
who was probably impotent

The Pauline religion
of love
made man
ashamed of his instincts.

More kind, anglosaxon
commercialism
has left him
with no instincts to be ashamed of.

"Processed" (CP 1971)

In the sixties, Layton set out to shock Canadians into reality
about totalitarianism, communism, collectivism, and the dangers to the
human spirit. In the seventies he attempted to shock his countrymen
into an awareness that Christianity was responsible for the victim-
ization of Jews throughout history. He sardonically claims, "Your
stoutest most selfless partisans in Europe / laboured nearly two-
thousand years / to twist your Cross into the Swastika / that tore
into our flesh like a fish-hook." ("For Jesus Christ" FMBJ 1976).

In FOR MY BROTHER JESUS (1976) and THE COVENANT (1977), he set
out to reclaim Jesus for the Jews. He renders Jesus as a feasting
and fun-loving Jew, and attributes earthy qualities to him. In
restoring Jesus to the Jews, he symbolically returns him to all of
mankind. Because he sets Jesus up as a model for all men to follow,
he liberates the repressed puritans. Layton, the prophet-poet renews

the Covenant with God, by establishing Jesus as the logical successor
in the hierarchy of prophets.

In various poems we read of a Jesus who is feasting, making love,
and even 'breaking wind':

Sometimes when I'm in a church
 or a cathedral
and I see the green constipated face
of my brother Jeshua
I find myself wondering aloud
whether the saviour of all mankind
 ever broke wind
-if only once in his troubled life--
and if he did
 was it a loud noise
or loosed among his adoring disciples
one of those deadly SBD's (Silent But Deadly)
whose divine authorship
not even Judas could detect
 and pin on him.

"Son of Man" (TC 1977)

The poem is not as pointlessly excremental as it might seem. Layton
wishes to free Jeshua from the confines of Christianity. Constipation
or repression is relieved only through a 'catharsis' or an outburst
of emotion. He liberates Jesus from all stifling stereotypes and
brings him back to life. In an earlier poem about the Hebrew prophets
Ezekial and Jeremiah, we find a prototype:

...
you are bored-- I see it -- sultry prophets
 with priests and nuns
(What coarse jokes must pass between you!)

...
Yet cheer up Ezekial and you Jeremiah
 who were once cast into a pit;
I shall not leave you here incensed, uneasy
 among alien Catholic saints
but shall bring you from time to time
 my hot Hebrew heart
as passionate as your own, and stand
with you here awhile in aching confraternity.

"On Seeing the Statuettes of Ezekial and
Jeremiah In the Church of Notre Dame" (BC
1956)

Jesus, like the prophets before him, is "A life-loving, feasting, quick-witted Jew / Who like myself and my cousin Heinrich / Dangled between your legs a Jewish prick...", and therefore Layton reclaims him as sane exuberant Jew, "Come back, long-lost brother, come back to us. / Turn away from the scrofulous paintings / by sick Europeans who have limmed you / As French, Italian, Polack, and German / or -- foul parody -- fair-haired Englishman." ("Jeshua" FMBJ 1976). In the poem "The True Picture" (FMNH 1979) Jesus is not 'painted' as French, German, or English, but as Jewish:

I'm going to paint you
 With your white robe parted
 And your circumcised cock showing
 Caught in the fringes
 Of your talith.

Layton breaks another taboo. He paints the picture of a 'god' in human terms and to this 'deity', he ascribes sexual and anal characteristics.

In "Xianity" (TC 1977) he relates the repressed nature of the followers of Jesus, "the mutterings of beard-counting hysterics.../ The snufflings of joyless misfits and cripples / fearful of death, / more fearful of life.../ The 'miserables' of the doomed dregs / in every large metropolis of the world? / The hosannahs of the conformist hordes / stinking of money and respectability?" He transforms Jesus into a 'warrior poet' in "King of the Jews":

Your hand free from Roman nails
 and the stink of priestly incense
 I see you, my famous brother,
 curving your sensitive fingers
 around the deadly grenade
 shaped like a pomegranate
 before you hurl it
 with shouted curse at the enemies,
 of your beleaguered people

And I see you brought to Mount Zion
 Where Herzl sleeps under a mound
 circled by green Torahs;
 and their jubilant cries, their hallelujahs
 shattering dome and steeple
 with one thunderous voice
 acclaim you, O lion-hearted Jeshua,
 warrior poet, king of the Jews.

(TC'1977)

Layton humanizes other 'Christian figures' and reclaims them as well. In the poem "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary" (TC 1977) he transforms Mary, into the Jewess Marianne, whom he compares to his mother. He immediately dispels the Christian notion of the Immaculate Conception, and renders her as human as Jesus. He repudiates the silent madonna-image, and wonders, "What was your chicken soup like? / Your GEFILTE fish", or whether she ever broke wind or cursed, "but did you blow an obscene SHOFAR / and add a loud Judean curse / as my mother did". Mary gave birth, not by divine intervention, but, "with an assist from a lively Judean cock."

Layton 'humanizes' the deities, and equally attempts to deal with man's temporality. Poems such as "North and South", "A Roman Jew to Ovid," "Opium", epitomize man's existential dichotomy. In these poems, Layton grapples with the fact that man is part of nature and forever attempting to transcend it. He writes that man is a "unique thing / in the cosmos: a soul / forever tethered to an asshole." ("Opium" TD 1978), or in "Questions" (CP 1971), that "man is the only animal / who sings / and has haemorrhoids..."

In "A Roman Jew to Ovid", a Roman Jew addresses the pagan poet of love. Layton intimates that tension exists between the body and the spirit or, sensual pleasure and conscience. "She joys in my reviving

spirit / While I disdain her for reviving it; / Tell my quiv'ring soul
 hers the blame / And reproving her excuse my shame. " Layton exposes
 how a repressed individual deals with temptation. His body is willing
 but his soul, conscience, and sense of morality forbids him to, betray
 his wife and indulge in sexual pleasure His ethics constrain him and
 therefore his body is in conflict with his soul. In the poem the
 persona struggles with mental and spiritual constipation. His Jewish
 conscience is at war with his pagan sensuality.

IV. Intellectual Satire

Layton is clever and humorous in most satirical poems, but bitterly
 caustic in poems dealing with evil men. Intellectual satire
 as opposed to personal, socio-political, or religio-moral satire, is
 dark and sardonic rather than light and witty.

Academics, intellectuals, critics, poets, philosophers, and the
 literati, are also the subject of Layton's excremental abuse. Of
 Canadians, he writes: "and I say your Bible-belters and yokels / with
 an M.A. or Ph.D. in Literature / Should be in a thriving zoo or circus."
 ("The Canadian Epic" DFH 1979). Of Pablo Neruda, he asks, "but where
 was your shit-detector / when it came to Stalin / and his evil- smell-
 ing crew? / His bloodied hands stank to heaven / yet you took the
 stink into your lungs / and didn't cough once. Or retch. / Why ? Did
 the Georgian smile / on that human shitpile / fool you?" ("Where was
 Your Shit-Detector, Pablo?" DFH 1979).

Poets who find a haven in the University are criticized for being
 'insulated' from reality: Layton writes, "frankly, I am disturbed to

learn that over ninety-percent of the poets now writing in this country are attached to the universities. I do not think this is a healthy condition, though I am at a loss to say how it might be remedied. Some way must be found to keep budding young poets alive and excited in this large untrammelled world of ours, there to learn the heartbreaking meanings of suffering, joy, lust, guilt, and love: anyway, to experience them at first hand even if he never quite makes out what the whole show adds up to." ¹²

In "More Canadiana" (BP 1955) Layton spoofs the writers who pretend to account for the poetic process without having understood or experienced it. "A palsied castrato-blind, deaf, / Flaunt in bordellos new styles of love!"

In "Calibrations" (DFH 1979), "Though quaint schoolmen / dribble on about myth symbol and archetype / and the many masks of W.B. Yeats, / bad one-star movies / are the only cultural indicators / worth attending to."

Refinement and culture do not necessarily improve a man's comportment. In "Breakdown" (BFOJ 1963) Layton shocks us into realizing this: "I knew him for a cultivated / gentleman, / a lover of operas / and a Latinist / who had annotated the De Amicitia / to the acclaim of scholars." His human nature is still neanderthal: "as we passed the blind woman sitting alone / on one of the benches / he stopped suddenly before her / and plunged two pins / one into each cheek." When the woman shrieks from the terror and pain, the 'gentleman' announces that he does not understand her anger, since his ancestors would have pierced her with javelins. Human nature has not been refined. In short, man has progressed only to more sophisticated forms of destruction. Man's

intelligence has led him to develop nuclear warfare so that he can self-destruct.

In the poem "Sheep" (LM 1959) he describes the 'sanctimonious' nature of 'fine and sensitive sheep':

Amazed? No, but look at those fine musician's faces again;
More particularly, the ebony line of the mouth
 curving long and thin.

Do you see it? Would you not say that's the smile
You've caught and watched on the face of someone
 who, while he's too meek to defend himself,
Sees through and despises your guile?

I'll tell you something else about sheep
You haven't noticed, see them as much as you wish
 in your sleep;
They're neither-this-nor-thats, half and halves if you prefer.
 standing wrapt like a philosopher:
Their itchy, bulky, dung-matted, grey-dirty fleece
 yet, look down-what feet! the trim feet of a dancer.

And, there's also this: they're practical, prudent.
Or they seem so, yet they also somehow contrive to appear
 gullible and vacant.
Here again, is that unsatisfactory, disdain-making quality:
 that of the half-and-half, the in-between.

Sheep, who symbolize people, appear to be 'refined',
with their musician's faces, and trim dancer's feet. However, they
are cynical: "They crouch on their mat of dung or with the poise / of
a philosopher seek / The rough part of the post which they know well /
To scrape against it their purloined fleece and fell; / Staring, warily,
staring, wearily staring, with a mien / silly and gentle-and cynical."

'Toilet Bowl' images recur in several poems. In "The Mildewed
Maple" (FMNH 1979) Layton pursues his attacks on the literati and their
'ivory tower' homes: he writes, that a "dionysian / at a gathering of
WASPS / is a fox in a chicken coop, / who will persuade / joyless
ulcers / to leak their griefs / into the manufacture / and sale / of

bumpaper / and instruct them / how to distinguish poems / from the drippings / of a defective toilet bowl." The toilet bowl is an image of the critic, and the drippings are the critic's reviews. Layton implies that the critic does not experience life first-hand, and that he uses the toilet bowl to flush life and reality away. In the last stanza, the critic "reviewing the COLLECTED POEMS / lets his voice rise / to a high, revealing falsetto: / So much dung to clear away / before, reaching Layton's / impressive monument." The critic does not create but he controls. The technological invention of the 'flush toilet' symbolizes middle-class repression. What we do not wish to see or acknowledge i.e. the truth about ourselves, we simply flush away. In interpreting a literary piece, the critic gives us but a few 'drippings'. The remaining excrement, he decides not to show.

Layton exposes those who tend to 'intellectualize', because in so doing they lack spontaneity, and often disregard emotional considerations. Rationalism does not guarantee human compassion or understanding. Nothing can disguise the vileness in man; not expensive attire, not education, not refinement, nor culture. Layton intends to shock his reader into realizing this as he reveals the hypocrisy in those who misuse their intellect.

NOTES

- ¹ Seymour Mayne, ed., Irving Layton: The Poet and His Critics (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1978), p. 53.
- ² Ibid., p. 81.
- ³ Eli Mandel, Irving Layton (Toronto: Forum House, 1972), p. 28.
- ⁴ Irving Layton, ed., Love Where the Nights Are Long (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962), p. 12.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 99.
- ⁶ Wynne Francis, "Layton and Nietzsche," Canadian Literature, No. 67 (1976), p. 27.
- ⁷ Norman O. Brown, Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University, 1959), p. 253.
- ⁸ Ibid., p. 253.
- ⁹ Ibid., p. 234.
- ¹⁰ Luther protesting from a can "Sagebrush Classic" (CP 1971), "Luther with his freedom from hypocrisy, his all-embracing vitality, and his all-embracing faith, records the scene of his crucial religious experience with untroubled candor. It was in a tower of the Wittenburg monastery, where the privy was located. Ibid., p. 203.
- ¹¹ Seymour Mayne, ed., Irving Layton: The Poet and His Critics (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1978), p. 129.
- ¹² Irving Layton, The Laughing Rooster (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), p. 10.

CHAPTER III

ESCHATOLOGICAL USES OF SCATOLOGY

"Only from rot
are new shining worlds begot"
(GB 1983)

In the first chapter of this study I briefly traced the literary history of scatology in order to establish the context in which Irving Layton's work could be compared and contrasted. I stated that he did at times indulge in scatological frivolity, but that this was rare. His main purpose in using scatological diction was to express his excremental and sacramental views.

In chapter two, I explored Layton's satirical uses of scatology in four basic areas: personal satire, socio-political satire, religious-moral satire, and intellectual satire. I ascertained that Layton is essentially a moralist who uses scatology for a didactic purpose: to shock his readers into reality.

This third chapter will focus on how Layton builds upon the scatological tradition, by extending it into the 'eschatological' realm. As the spiritual is contemplated through the physical elements integral with the human condition, so too does the pun serve to illustrate how scatology for Layton is inseparable from eschatology.

While Layton's celebration of love and sex has attracted much attention, insufficient consideration has been given to his concern with the total life process. As an analogue of the cosmic, the life process entails both creation and growth as well as destruction and disintegration.

Layton believes that we are in the disintegrative phase of the cosmic process. Eschatology is precisely that discipline dealing with the doctrine of last things: chaos, the end of history, death, destruction, the Coming of the Messiah. In a cyclical cosmology, the end time repeats the primordial time; out of disorder arises order.

Excrement is the fitting image at this stage of the process, because it is not only the final product in the digestive process but also the fertilizer needed for new growth. Numerous poems of philosophic, artistic, religious, and apocalyptic significance contain examples of this use of scatological imagery.

Death is the natural culmination of life. Layton writes, "a Hebrew, I worship the Divine in extraordinary men, know that everything ripens into decay and oblivion...The genitals of a Casanova, the brains of an Einstein -- the eternal flux atomizes them with the same grand indifference..." ("Note," A LAUGHTER IN THE MIND 1959) He has written several poems that deal with the decay of nature, of the individual, of society and of the cosmos. In them, he laments death, praises life, but understands their cosmic function.

Of the decay of fruit (nature) he writes:

In the sun
The chokecherries are a deep red
They are like clusters of red jewels

....
They are too regal to eat
And reduce to moist yellow pits.
I will let the air masticate them

And the bold maggot-making sun,
So I shall hardly notice
How perfection of form is overthrown

"Red Chokecherries" (CP 1971)

Death involves the disintegration and breaking down of forms, and is necessary in order for new life to occur.

Of the decay of bodies (human beings) he writes:

...
 Now I see only your wasted physique
 time and bugs have diminished
 and the fantastic vitality
 it once housed
 ebbing into the surrounding space
 minute by minute,
 a mere pulse on the pillow...
 a flutter...
 and then you are still for ever,
 ...

"Elegy For Strul" (SP 1968)

or in "Elegy For Marilyn Monroe" (BFOJ 1963), "Good-bye Marilyn /
 Sleep, sleep peacefully tonight / one poet at least will remember /
 your brightness / the unique fever in your form, and face / (O
 insuperable filament, now black, now ash!) and love you always."

In numerous poems, Layton depicts how everyone 'ripens to decay': "Yet
 the boy's shelled head / And the hardiest flesh / Must go to grass /
 The virgin lie with her goldfish." ("Rembrandt" CP 1971) Nature is
 indifferent. Einstein's brain decays, Casanova's genitals rot away,
 and Philosophers turn to sod. "His stomach cancer-riddled, turning
 sod / Upon the Sisters' white linen, canvassed God / The Essences and
 Immortality!" ("When It Came To Santayana's Turn" CP 1971).

Of the decay of civilizations (society) Layton writes:

O Egypt, marbled Greece, resplendent Rome,
 Did you also finally perish from a small bore
 In your back you could not scratch?

"Cain" (LM 1959)

Civilizations rise and fall in the eternal flux of the cosmos. Nothing escapes nature....

Of the decay of meteors (cosmos) he says:

Stars moulder and rot at a slower rate
or blaze suddenly into blackness
only to bud again on God's unfolding arm
"Of Leaves and Loves" (GB 1984)

Finally, not even God is spared, He too is decomposing:

God was slowly decomposing
decomposing year by year, leaking away.
Little remains of him now
except a faint odour that might be found
in the better Churches of the city.
"Me, the P.M., and the Stars" (IB 1956)

Layton is an earthy and sensual poet who glorifies the human body and who revels in the senses of sight, touch, taste, sound, and smell. Olfactory imagery figures prominently in relation to his use of scatology.

Many of his 'cemetery' poems refer to the 'odour of mortality'. He points out that an awareness of death intensifies the feeling for life. He often juxtaposes love and death: "and this, dear girl, / is the family plot of Pere Loisel and his wife / whose jumbled loins in amorous sweat / Spawned these five neat graves in a semicircle." ("Côte des Neiges Cemetery" LM 1959). In the poem, the smell issuing from the 'poor' is wholesome, but "away from the markings of the poor / on slope and summit the statuary is vain / And senatorial (now the odour's, a high-pitched note, piercing the brain) / Where lying together are judge and barrister / And some whose busts look on a shrunk estate."

In the poem "The Smell" (WBB 1969) Layton writes:

Try as hard as he might
to be a hero or perfect lover,
the smell of dung
always pursues him

He is dizzy with running:
yet run as fast as he can
past temples and fruit trees
when he stops for breath
the smell is always beside him.

...
Everything smells of shit.
It surrounds him like a fog
surrounds the lights of the sea-coast;
even the gardens and lanes
are smeared with it,
especially when they are golden sunsets
...

In this poem, 'shit' and 'death' are linked. Both elements are the end-products in the cycle of life (or ingestion). Layton writes that we cannot turn up our noses at the stench of excrement because like death, it is a 'natural' part of life. We cannot escape such realities. The smell of 'mortality' lingers in the nostrils of the persona. Not even the delicate scents from nature's fruit trees can relieve the victim from 'sniffing death'. The 'smell', either of excrement or of death, is a constant reminder of our temporal selves.

Sexual and excremental imagery is also linked in the poem because the 'smell' is traced to the 'Old Man in the Sky':

Give it up, Old Man of the Sky.
He has smelled you out too

You, before all others;
you, the first whiff
that came out of his trouser leg
and made his nose
go like a rake over everything.

The 'whiff' from the trouser leg is life-giving, excremental, and a reminder of mortality. Sex and excrement are bound, as creation and destruction are. These elements, Layton intimates, spring from the same 'divine' source, and are therefore sacred or holy as in "Holy Stink-finger" (LLM 1973): "Rabbi / Why is it / each time / I touch the beard / of God / my fingers / smell peculiar?" The smell, which is 'peculiar' comes from the genitals or the organs of creation, but also from the rectum. In these poems, the nose is a symbol for curiosity and search for meaning. It is also a symbol for the affirmation of human existence.

Moneytheism and evil smells are correlated by Layton. Olfactory imagery is used to evoke moral corruption in "Westminster Abbey". The refrain, "And there was a stink" connotes the stink of money. He compares the coldness and lifelessness of hard currency to that of the grand and majestic English mausoleum:

...
 And there was a stink
 and for the first time in my life
 I saw clearly what was meant by the English Tradition
 how it is a slice taken out of Death
 and made homey and negotiable like currency
 a way of increasing real estate values
 by squeezing caskets, urns, busts, memorials
 into every last available inch of space
 and I also saw that this can go on for ever
 as long as the supply of famous corpses doesn't run out
 ...

In "Flowers He'll Never Smell" (CP 1971) he compares a deceased millionaire's luxurious casket to a 'black and shiny cadillac', and the stink emanating from the rich man's corpse is unbearable. Layton has no compassion for 'the putrefying slob', only pity. The millionaire is criticized by the poet because he "made money and power his Gods / when there were 'flowers to pick' / Fresh cuntholes to probe."

Layton is ambivalent in his depiction of 'foul smells'. In some poems, all smells are evidence of an 'apotheosis of life'. In others, a distinction is made between 'good and evil' smells. The 'stink' of human evil for instance, is unhealthy and the most loathsome of all. Layton recreates a Dantesque inferno in several poems where olfactory imagery concerns evil-doers. He writes: "the stench of decay and corruption almost makes me retch, / ... Mussolini, Franco, Hitler, Stalin / the vomitous stink they left behind / that stays in the memory of men till history ends," ("Bravo Death, I Love You" TD 1978), or in "Fornalutx", "the terraced hills made one think of hell: / I have in mind Dante's famous rungs. / Excrement, not brimstone was the smell / When the foul air entered in our lungs." (LR 1964) The 'excremental hell' is also depicted in "He Saw Them At First" (CP 1971):

He saw them at first, from a distance

some with their limbs in boiling excrement
 some who were stung incessantly by insects
 some who danced on fiery bricks
 whose explosions under their soles
 made them kneel over into cauldrons
 of boiling water from which they emerged
 with horrible grimaces on their lobster-red faces
 they heatedly told one another were smiles
 some whose bodies bubbled like over-heated tar
 and lustful women whose vaginas were nests
 from which mice scampered out from time to time
 to dry themselves before the burning bricks

He saw commissars, fatbellies, asslickers, frontmen,
 chippies, peddlers of dope; and coming closer,
 he saw some who were pinched, some manacled, some
 whipped by devils, some with their heads stuck
 in pails filled with ice-cubes as if they were
 bottles of champagne: the more shameless among them
 begging pity for the wounds and mutilations
 they displayed

...

Man's inhumanity to man is evil; the smell of this is nauseating.
 Scatology is not obscene; power, greed, avarice, and evil are. Layton
 writes:

Everywhere,
 the stink of human evil

Godlike men
 in their zenith
 are cut down by rifle fire

Urbanites pluck trophies
 from their stricken Air-god
 (128 killed);
 around the smoking limbs
 break into ritual dance

A fruit clerk smiling &
 exposing two gold teeth
 brags he severed
 the arms of a Russian infant

"Everywhere the Stink" (CP 1971)

Layton satirizes North America's pre-occupation with 'cleanliness'. In a poem called "Deodorants", he remarks that there are no disinfectants strong enough to cleanse the world of filth and evil: "but what disinfectants are there / for crazed animals / leaving everywhere their reek / of bloodshed and malevolence." (DFH 1978) He invariably prescribes laxatives and disinfectants in order to rid the world of evil and he also attempts to use deodorants to remove 'foul smells', but to no avail.

Layton desires a sacramental 'purification' for mankind. He wants to corrode evil into oblivion, because then, new order can be restored in the world. His mission as 'prophet-poet' is to imagine the worst, and to warn his fellow-man:

Because he is a prophet, the poet must take into himself all the moral diseases, all the anguish and terror of the age, so that from them he can forge the wisdom his tortured fellowmen need to resist the forces dragging them down

into the inhuman and the bestial.

...
The stink in his soul is not only that of burning flesh, of decomposing bones. It is also the stink of self-guilt. At last he knows the truth about himself and of what he's capable. Nevertheless, so perverse is the human being, he cannot but be pleased with the outcome, even with the entire titanic drama that made possible his unique distinction. More than anyone before him, twentieth-century man had extended his being into the realm of evil.

"Foreword" 'BALLS FOR A ONE-ARMED JUGGLER'"
(1963)

He wants to relieve man of his 'constipation' or guilt, through a catharsis. In the poem, "Whom I Write For" (BFOJ 1963) he hopes to startle people out of their passivity and 'anesthesia'. He wants them to feel as though he had been 'ripping' off their skin, or scalping them, or, " feel as if I had slammed / your child's head against a spike; / and cut off your member and stuck it in your / wife's mouth to smoke like a cigar." Such writing is designed to be therapeutic and purgative, an intention which he shares with Henry Miller. Miller claims, "one reason why I have stressed so much the immoral, the wicked, the ugly, the cruel in my work is because I wanted others to know how valuable these are, how equally if not more important than the good things...I was getting the poison out of my system. Curiously enough, this poison had a tonic effect for others. It was as if I had given them some kind of immunity." ¹

Like Miller's, Layton's scatology has a 'tonic effect'. The poisons or 'bottled-up' emotions are momentarily released and expelled. Layton's excremental diction serves as a purging of the bowels; an elimination of the waste products and toxic gases.

D.H. Lawrence said, "knowledge, true knowledge, is like vaccination. It prevents the continuing of ghastly moral disease..."

We have got to take the disease into our consciousness and let it go through our soul, like some virus. We have got to realize. And then we can surpass." ² Layton is acutely aware of the filth and evil in the world. In order to awaken his readers to the terrible reality and significance of this state of human affairs, he employs violent and obscene images. In acknowledging the existence of 'filth and evil', in imbibing it, he relieves himself and flows with the tide. Layton's poetry produces immunity for the reader from the frightful disease known as evil.

In TROPIC OF CANCER, Miller comes to the conclusion that life is a 'turd'. Widmer Kingsley writes:

The anti-miracle kills off illusions, history, morals, and all the false claims of purpose that obscure immediate reality. In this spiritual--rather than literal--primitivism, self-definition and "exhilaration" comes from moving with the 'tide' of life and from seeing horrendous and hilarious reality in absurd images; the excremental vision becomes comic nihilism; our ideas are so far from our realities that the free and alien spirits can rejoice in the refuse of our jungle life, and laughingly live. ³

Layton expresses a desire in his poetry to hasten civilization into decay. In "Florence" (FMBJ 1976), he hastens the ruin of a sick and decaying culture: "Tomorrow I'll take an axe to all the famous statues / of beefed up pagans, back them with one blow / and razing the Uffizi and the Pitti Palace / Dump rubble and fable into the putrid Arno." Layton recommended a laxative to repressed and constipated individuals in the last chapter. Now he is recommending one to society. He progresses from a concern for the individual, to a concern for civilizations. He understands the necessity

of 'exploding civilization':

What shall we do with it ?
 This so much shit,
 This culture turd ?
 Describe it
 With fascinating wit
 Make a filigree out of it .
 Neogothic tunnels -
 Exchange relations in excrementis ?
 Or explode this yield
 With white sticks of dynamite ?
 Explode it.
 Shovel it away, I say.
 Merde.

"Flaubertism, Trillingism, or"
 (LP 1954)

Poetry like excrement has corrosive value: "Good poems should rage like a fire / Burning all things, burning them with a great splendour, ...out of rubbish burning and burning comes / Mozartian ecstasy leaping with the flames." ("Esthetique" CP 1971)

Layton uses excremental imagery to 'eliminate' or 'purge' politicians, evil, and warmongers from the body. He relieves himself of evil, and the elimination of such 'toxins' is important to the general health of the body.

In my mind as I squat
 I've wiped out Kosygin and Brehznev
 and given the outnumbered Czechs
 two-hundred divisions with which
 to drive the Russian louts back
 to the stables they were let loose from,
 and before the last grunt I complete
 the morning's lofty inspiration
 with an amnesty for all the Greeks
 in all the prisons Papadopoulos
 has made especially large keys for...

"Climbing Hills" CP 1971

As a 'prophet-poet', Layton exhorts mankind to mend its ways. In the tradition of Hebrew prophecy, he reveals an apocalyptic vision

in the poem "The Coming of the Messiah":

...
 The Messiah will come
 only after every inch of earth has been stained with human
 blood
 only after every lake, river and sea has been polluted
 with the corpses of butchered men and women
 the air is made thick with the moans of victims
 expiring with indignity and extreme pain
 only when all nations have tumuli of slaughtered humans
 on which he can step as he makes his way to his seat
 on the highest mountain

The Messiah will come
 when the maimed and mutilated, the weeping and suffering
 in all lands, in every valley, mountain, and plain
 agnize the universal heritage of evil,
 turning curse into blessing,
 and redeemed,
 embrace joyously their common tie,
 their bond and brotherhood
 in death, in dying

"The Coming of the Messiah" (CP 1971) 4

Only after the world is totally destroyed will the Messiah come,
 because destruction precludes creation. In the poem, Layton
 describes an 'excremental hell', where 'corpses' of butchered men and
 women' abound. The Messiah will 'save' them, and turn curse into
 blessing. Death is 'joyous', --- because it is followed by salvation
 and renewed life.

A recurring excremental image which is used effectively by
 Layton, deals with the cycle of ingestion, digestion, assimilation,
 and elimination. In his use of excremental imagery, he expresses the
 biological realism of life. The cyclical process begins with ingestion;
 food is broken down and digested, and consequently assimilated

into the body. (This is a metaphor for the creative process.) The elimination of waste products is equally important; it purifies the system. Excrement is the final product in a process involved with the 'breaking down of forms'. The potential for creativity is inherent in this symbol of nothingness, chaos, and raw energy. Layton frequently juxtaposes the image of ingestion/digestion/elimination, with the poetic and cosmic processes. The natural culmination of the biological process is elimination, even as death is the natural culmination of life:

Like a mother demented nature caresses
her children before she chokes them to death;
she raises tall palmtrees and whirlwinds to crack them:
Only by continually devouring herself does she endure.

Out of her immemorial dung come flowers and stars,
come gracious ladies with tiny troutbones between their teeth
or goose-fat on the tips flirtatious tongues
with animal perfumes on their cool sultrous wrists.

At a later hour, the gracious ladies fall into the earth
where graveworms nibble all day long on their delicate parts,
unaware of how fallen breasts and vaginas once gave birth
to mediocre poetry, to ecstasies and sighs

"Like A Mother Demented" (SP 1968)

Nature stoically endures by continually 'devouring' herself. Out of excrement, chaos, decomposition, and 'immemorial dung', come flowers and stars. In the poem, Layton ironically notes that gracious ladies are born from 'immemorial dung'. They perpetuate the life process by giving birth and by dying. At a later hour; the 'gracious ladies' return to the earth. Graveworms assume an erotic role as they feast on 'fallen breasts and vaginas'. They are oblivious to the fact that such private parts once gave birth not only to mortals but also to art. Both nature's fecundity and the destructiveness are evident in the process.

Layton frequently has recourse to the imagery of ingestion, digestion, and elimination, in terms of transformation, metamorphosis, or transfiguration. As an illustration of this process:

See
 this redsnapper ?
 It's fins once moved
 in blithe sea-currents
 now
 I'm going to eat it
 and turn it into shit

And see
 this pineapple
 pale yellow and juicy
 on my plate
 ditto
 though once it sat
 bulbous
 in dignified silence
 between green-leafed spikes

My boy
 not yet eight
 lifts fork and knife
 and turning away
 from my leer
 let's fall:

'It's a kind
 of magic, isn't it Dad ?'

"Magic" (LLM 1973)

In the poem, the young boy is enchanted with the transformation of food into excrement. He views this metamorphosis as being mysterious and sacred. Shit is not taboo, but precious and sacramental. It represents chaos and raw experience, components which are essential in all art. The poem reveals Layton's philosophy about art. Experience is the raw food or energy which is 'magically' or 'chemically' changed into poetry. The poet is instrumental in 'forging' beauty and order from ugliness and chaos.

In another poem, "The Transfiguration", a woman... is "gross and

smells unwashed / and has the face of a natural breeder", but his imagination and vision enables him to see her differently. "Why did I have a sudden vision / of her entering a mysterious transfiguring grotto / where, if I followed, a laughing slender goddess / would embrace me and it would be she?" Equally, in using his 'x-ray' eyes he can see the good in 'excrement'.

The poet can transcend reality through love and imagination. He can see beauty and life even in something as lifeless as excrement. "Love, I kiss your navel and my x-ray eyes see / fisheyes wink in your dissolving entrails, / and when I write my lying poems know I am using an anodyne from which the fastidious man recoils." ("Like a Mother Demented"). The squeamish, fastidious, or constipated individual recoils from life, the poet accepts it wholly, albeit with tragic joy.

"End of White Mouse" is about another transformation. Layton writes of a miniature white mouse that is released in a cage with a viper. The viper, representing the East or Russia, ("I do not know what Chinese dragons eat / but 'vipera russellii' in cages must be fed,") swallows up the West:

And I broke into laughter
for this absurdity
and for the mouse's juices soon to begin
rummaging the length and roundness of the viper
for the flesh and fragile bones commencing
their inevitable transformative cellular dance.

"End of the White Mouse" (NP 1971)

His laughter is Zarathustran as he grapples with the nonsense of the event. The process is endless as Layton symbolically becomes the viper or the transforming poet: "suddenly when I was resting on the doorstep / I felt a tremor in my head and frame / as if a whole world had moved inside me." The end result of this digestive tremor is the poem itself.

In the eschatological concept is the reproduction of the origin of the world at the end of the world. Out of chaos or disorder, comes the cosmos or order. The symbolism of eschatology can be defined in terms of 'eternal recurrence'. Events are ritualistic repetitions in the creation of the cosmos.

Layton expresses his faith in the cosmic process. In "Eternal Recurrence" (NP 1971) he writes:

Even that leaf as it falls
Will one day fall again
Be sad, be gaily crimson
And flutter while a bird calls

And the bough on which he sits
Lengthen into the dark
While my staring eyes mark
How between the trees your shadow flits

And in my mind image of your face
Vain and angry as you said
Your words and turned away your head:
They will come again, the pain and grace

A million years hence; and from that bough
The same bird calling
The same crimson leaf falling
And I writing and weeping--then as now

Numerous poems contain eschatological themes. In "New Shining Worlds"

(GB 1984), he claims: "only from rot / are new shining worlds begot".

In "Boschka Layton 1921-1984" (GB 1984), he reaffirms his faith in the cosmos and in poetry:

Because each act of creation is a miracle
that happens again and again
until it becomes familiar as an autumn leaf
or a ripening appletree in full sail

Ordinary miracles to pry open the eyes of the blind
happen every day. Yet my deep faith holds:

sun, wind, rain, and the dark nights will change
my Boschka's cinders to deathless apples and poems

Francis writes the following about 'eternal recurrence':

In the light of his Dionysian faith Nietzsche entertains the hypothesis of Eternal Recurrence which postulates that everything that happens happens again and again forever albeit in cycles (Great Years) which span periods of time longer than any known history. (Layton's "Eternal Recurrence" (1971) is a quite literal rendering of this concept. More subtle are "Orpheus" (1955) and "If I Lie Still" (1963).) The idea was not original with Nietzsche and at first he found it abhorrent because it implied no end to pain, suffering and death. His Dionysian faith however assured him that by the same token life, creativity and joy also recur eternally.⁵

Layton's faith and optimism is grounded in reality. He writes:

Lord, I understand the plan, the news is out:
I kill him, he kills me, change and change about,
And you ever in the right; and no wonder
Since it's no great matter⁹ who's up, who's under.
Teuton or Slav, Arab or suffering Jew--
Nature, Justice, God--they are all one to you.
The lion breeds the lamb and the antelope
As evil breeds good; darkness, light; despair, hope.
"The Graveyard" (SP 1968)

Creation, nature's fecundity, and destruction, are part of an eternal cycle; in this perspective, questions of good and evil are extraneous.

In "Cosmic Religion" (DFH 1971) he writes:

Only when I learned Nature
was as turbulent as I
and mirrored my own unrest,
did I embrace as All High
the Divine Scatologist
whose poised compassion and calm
I saw was the Buddha's smile
on the face of nullity
encompassing earth and sky
ringing the One and Many

The 'Divine Scatologist' is 'beyond good and evil'. The words 'divine' and 'scatologist' are used oxymoronically, implying that the 'almighty high' and the 'excremental low' are one. Layton is in harmony with the

cosmos. In accepting this, he is poised and tranquil.

Cosmic Indifference to good and evil is also the subject of the poem "Holocaust" (CP 1971) In the poem, a man wipes away thousands of insects that are produced daily on the cold marble counter-top in his kitchen. "Godlike he / observes for a few moments this ridiculous parody / on human existence; sponge in hand. No angel parts / the ceiling to shout, "Hold!" / And with one rough sweep he wipes away this living smear of fig-jam (including one or two artists and philosophers / who have separated themselves from the frothing / brown mass) and restores to the marble top its / cold ironical surface."

CONCLUSION

Layton struggles with the tension between his excremental vision of reality, and the redeeming qualities of love and art. Love and art allow man to transcend his tragic human condition, but only temporarily. Art is a form of transcendence, but perishable. Just as fruits ripen to decay, so, too, does art. The poet ritualistically dies with every poem he creates. Art repeatedly crumbles back into reality and therefore, life is the cyclical and infinite reality.

Art also crumbles and falls back into life as the water-lily's brightness crumbles into the pondscum that surrounds it. Though art transcends pain and tragedy, it does not negate them, does not make them disappear. Whatever its more fervid devotees may think and write, poetry does not exorcise historical dynamism, macabre cruelty, guilt, perversity, and the pain of consciousness.

"Foreword" 'A RED CARPET FOR THE SUN'
(1959)

In poem after poem, Layton writes that art and culture do not humanize people. Artists have not succeeded in stopping genocide or world wars:

All the noble lines of poets
did not make Hiroshima and Belsen
not to happen,
nor will they keep back the coming holocaust
"For My Friend Who Teaches
Literature" (CP 1971)

In "The Poetic Process" (CGE 1955) he writes:

In any case I'm adjusting
My organs to the future. Lies ?
No: Language. The great days of Liz
Are mere Marlovian bombast:
The truth is dung, bubonic plagues my italics
And London's a stinking midden;
The maids unwashed and credulous,
The men coarse, or refined and corrupt
Reading their folios...

Layton echoes Yeats as he reconciles the opposites, and determines that "death's akin to art":

And though your scheme confounds theologian's wits
All come and go sired by the opposites;
And they decree: he who slays and he who's slain
Leave on your excellent world no crimson stain.

The tragic warring creatures that here have breath
Are reconciled in the partnership of death;
And death's akin to art, and artists please
To the measure they have stilled the contraries.

Energy must crackle on a silent urn,
Nothing catch fire though Jerusalem burn,
And the lion poised on the poor bok to spring
Hold in his furious jaws no suffering.
Motion and rest, love and hate, heaven and hell
Here cease their 'Punch-and-Judy show: all is well.
There is no pain in the graveyard...

"The Graveyard" (SP 1968)

Eschatology encompasses the opposites; the physical or material (scatology) and the spiritual. It is also concerned with the end of time, thus, death, which precludes life. Death's akin to art says Layton, because both are the end-result of experience, life and chaos. In the last stanza of the poem, a soliloquy is delivered by the poet who is philosopher, sage, visionary and prophet. In the graveyard he says all life ceases, motion and rest, love and hate, heaven and hell, all expire. The poet, however, accepts and 'rejoices'.

Excrement as a symbol comprises good and evil, creation and destruction. It is Layton's "Fertile Muck", the chaos of experience, from which art arises. "How to dominate reality? Love is one way; / imagination another." ("The Fertile Muck" BC 1956)

Excrement has regenerative qualities. Layton compares it to poetry. In "Seven O'Clock Lecture" (MF 1954), poetry is the symbolic fuel or energy that keeps the universe moving. Poetry is, "the

necessary glory of dung, / immortal coal of the universe".

Wynne Francis provides us with Layton's cosmic vision in the
Preface to THE DARKENING FIRE:

The Heraclitean premises of the vision postulate a universe of antinomial flux of which the basic element is fire; a world of becoming in which strife and tension are the mark of vitality and growth, flaccidity and rigidity the sign of dissolution and death. The nature of the dialectic involved is monistic and most resembles Nietzsche's much misunderstood will-to-power, but all levels of experience are grounded in reality-- what Layton calls THE FERTILE MUCK. The cosmic process is eternal; history is cyclical; but man, though trapped in these dialectics, may sanctify each moment of his existence by a joyous acceptance and celebration of life. 6

Only from rot
are new shining worlds begot

NOTES

¹Norman Mailer, "Henry Miller: Genius and Lust, Narcissism", American Review (No. 24, 1976), p. 7.

²R.E. Pritchard, ed., D.H. Lawrence: Body of Darkness (London: Hutchison & Co. Ltd., 1971), p. 112.

³Widmer Kingsley, "The Apocalyptic Comedian", Henry Miller (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1963), p. 24.

⁴In such prophetic poems, Layton's eschatology compares to that found in the Old Testament. He anticipates freedom in the midst of bloodshed and slavery, and salvation in the midst of chaos and alienation. Layton recounts the experience of the Exodus and becomes the prophet of hope and liberation. This vocation to prophecy has been consistent throughout his poetic career.

⁵Wynne Francis, "Layton and Nietzsche", Canadian Literature, No. 67 (1976), p. 30.

⁶Irving Layton, The Darkening Fire: Selected Poems 1945-1968, Preface by Wynne Francis (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), p. xi.

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