The Horses of Realism: The Layton-Pacey Correspondence

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I

On November 3, 1954, Desmond Pacey addressed a letter to Contact Press, inviting the poets Louis Dudek, Raymond Souster and Irving Layton to submit their recent work for a review article on Canadian literature. Early in 1955 Pacey and Layton met in Montreal, and so began a long friendship and an invaluable correspondence, documenting the development of Canadian poetry and criticism after World War II, and the development of a major critic and a pre-eminent poet. The correspondence is also rich in personal drama, recording the triumphs and setbacks in the careers of both men, the tensions in their friendships, their often conflicting views of poetry, of Canadian poetry in particular, and of the role of the poet and the critic in contemporary society. There are discussions of literary figures past and present, heated arguments on current social and political developments, an exchange of bawdy jokes, some brutally frank criticisms of each other's work, and equally frank praise. The tone varies from jocularity to bitter disappointment, from anger to tenderness, from occasional weariness to surges of excitement upon fresh intellectual discoveries.[1]

The correspondence continued until shortly before Pacey's death in 1975. Layton contributed 531 letters to the correspondence, Pacey 270. Some of Layton's letters are only short notes hastily written on post-cards, but many run to seven and eight pages. In a surge of anger or elation, Layton would send long letters to Pacey on successive days, or even two letters and a post-card on the same day, accompanied by poems composed

[1] Layton's letters to Pacey are held by Mrs. Mary Pacey in Fredericton, New Brunswick. A copy of the collection is temporarily housed in the Harriet Irving Library, University of New Brunswick. Pacey's letters to Layton are in the Layton Collection, Norris Library, Concordia University, Montreal. I am grateful to Mrs. Pacey and Irving Layton for permission to examine the correspondence, and to Seymour Mayne who initially directed me to the correspondence.

for the occasion.[2] Pacey's correspondence was more regular, usually more directly in response to the most recent barrage of Layton letters and poems. There are some lapses in the correspondence, "cooling off" periods after a particularly heated exchange, and the correspondence generally falls off in 1966 and again in 1968, when there are increasingly frequent references to telephone calls and personal meetings.

Very quickly a strong sense of literary kinship developed between the two correspondents. In the first edition of *Creative Writing in Canada* (1952), two years before the correspondence began, Pacey enthusiastically reported that "Canadian poets of the forties were all decidedly leftist in politics and experimental in verse form." He discussed the work of Dudek and Souster and looked forward to great things from them; but Layton is hardly mentioned. Two years later, however, Layton begins to emerge as the leading voice among the left-wing poets, "the most blunt and powerful of the Contact Press poets." By the summer of 1956, Layton is established, in Pacey's hierarchy, as the foremost poet currently publishing in Canada. In his review of *The Bull Calf and Other Poems,* Pacey notes "occasional lapses into self-pity" but acclaims Layton's "fierce pride of race" and his "great rolling lines of unashamed rhetoric." In "A Group of Seven Poets" (1956), Pacey's review of recent work by Phillis Webb, Anne Wilkinson, Raymond Souster, Leonard Cohen, Wilfred Watson, Fred Cogswell and Layton, the argument seems designed to illustrate the considerable pre-eminence of Layton; he is "a life affirming poet" with "honesty and energy and an infectious vitality."[3] In contrast to the cool reception of Layton's work by A.J.M. Smith and Northrop Frye during the early 1950s, and the apparent "aesthetics of distaste" they maintained in the 1960s, Pacey's response after 1954 was ungrudgingly enthusiatic.[4]

The 1950s had begun, it seems, with a lull. There was a pervasive feeling among poets and critics that the "ferment" of the 1940s that had produced so many promising young poets, particularly in Montreal, had settled to a facile, world-weary *ennui.* John Sutherland's essay, "The Past Decade in Canadian Poetry," set the tone:

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[2] For example, Layton wrote one letter on February 5, 1950, two letters on February 6, and another on February 7. See also March 30 and 31, 1959.

[3] Pacey, *Creative Writing in Canada,* first edition (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1952) 141; "English Canadian Poetry, 1944-1954" *Culture* 15 (1954); "Review of *The Bull Calf and Other Poems,*" *Fiddlehead* 29 (1956): 30-31; and "A Group of Seven Poets," *Queen's Quarterly* 63 (1956): 436-43. See also *Essays in Canadian Criticism 1938-1968* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1969) 101-121.

[4] See Seymour Mayne, Introduction, *Irving Layton: The Poet and His Critics* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978) 1.

> How suddenly it all changed! The First Statement Press had no sooner published *Other Canadians,* "An Anthology of New Poetry in Canada, 1940-1946," which I furnished with a bristling, defiant introduction, than the whole purpose and driving spirit of the "new movement" were in a state of decay. We had barely rushed to the side of this challenger of tradition, holding up his right——or rather his left——hand in the stance of victory, when the challenger laid his head upon the block and willingly submitted to having it removed.

Similarly, Louis Dudek, in "Ou sont les jeunes?" observed that "our younger poets are getting grey about the temples." At a time when the poet should have more to say than at "any other time in history," Dudek wonders, "Why are the young poets at a loss for words?" In his later introduction to the chapter "Signs of Reaction, New and Old" in *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* (1967), Dudek dates the lull from 1948, when poetry in Montreal "began to show distinct signs of self-doubt and re-orientation."

Pacey seems to have concurred. In "English-Canadian Poetry 1944-1955," Pacey maintained that the year 1949 had "brought a sudden ominous pause" in the "triumphant progress" of Canadian poetry since World War II. He observed that most of the newer, younger poets were professors, that they seemed to write with "less conviction" than the older poets of the 1940s, and that, "at the moment," they seemed "confused and uncertain." Layton maintained that the 'lull' was largely the invention of John Sutherland, who had simply stopped publishing poems by Canadian poets.[5] Nevertheless, Layton was acutely aware that, as the decade established itself, a shift of literary forces had occurred, that the old *Preview* vs. *First Statement* groupings no longer occupied the literary centre. New names, a new 'centre', and a new critical theory had appeared in Canadian literature. Some of the names that became more prominent were Roy Daniells, Phyllis Webb, George Whalley, Wilfred Watson, Douglas Le Pan, D.G. Jones, Eli Mandel, James Reaney and Jay Macpherson. Toronto began to rival Montreal as the centre of poetic activity, and Frye's archetypal criticism had virtually superceded the Eliot-inspired New Criticism, which the First Statement group had so ardently opposed. Thus, when the correspondence began in the mid-1950s, both Pacey and Layton were consciously regrouping. Pacey was on the lookout for a

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[5] See *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada,* eds. Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1967) 119, 142-144, 113, 160-169, and 146.

strong voice that would realize the promise of the 1940s, and Layton, who had hardly recovered from his falling out with Sutherland, certainly welcomed new alliances.

In the forties and early fifties Pacey and Layton were social realists, and this does suggest a broad basis for their literary affinities, most apparent in their opposition to the emerging "mythopoeic schools" of the 1950s. On December 12, 1961, Layton described himself and Pacey as "the horses of realism," ranged against the fastidious formalisms of Frye and Smith. Indeed, since the defection of Sutherland, Pacey had become the major critic in Canada urging the strong impact of contemporary social and historical developments upon literature. In "Canadian Literature in the Fifties" Pacey argued that "the tendencey of our recent poets to emphasize, in Northrop Frye's phrase, 'the formal elements of poetry,' may well be associated with this desire to escape or evade the baffling complexity and frustrating inadequacy of their own time and place." Reviewing Wilfred Watson's poems in "A Group of Seven Poets," Pacey found him "pretentious, self-consciously clever, pedantically erudite," but, worst of all, his work manifests "a denial of life." The mythopoeic poets may be "brilliant as all get-out," but to Pacey such brilliance put a false glitter upon a moribund literary coterie.[6] However, neither Layton's nor Pacey's criticism is distinguished by the rigorous application of a literary theory or critical method, and their most prominent literary terms suggest a more impressionistic criticism. Reviewing the second edition of *Creative Writing in Canada,* Eli Mandel observed that "in the context of his book, quality usually means something like a 'sincere,' 'honest,' or 'intense' response to a social and physical environment. However obscure the relations between literature and society may be, the shaping force of literature, Dr. Pacey would have us believe, is society." Mandel seems a little impatient with the lack of rigour and precision in Pacey's method, and Pacey's broad groupings of modern poets into mythopoeic and social realist leaves Mandel decidedly "uncomfortable, especially when it makes George Johnston sound like Fred Cogswell and Margaret Avison like James Reaney."[7] Although Pacey places Cogswell and Johnston in a third group, a "regional" school, Mandel's point is apt. Pacey's divisions do not adequately represent significant differences within each group, nor do his terms fully account for his strong preferences. The correspondence illustrates that, above all, Pacey demanded of the poet a gargantuan appetite for life, a frank celebration of the senses,

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[6] "Canadian Literature in the Fifties" (1961), in *Essays in Canadian Criticism 1938-1968,* 203. See also 112-121.

[7] Eli Mandel, "Creative Writing in Canada Reviewed," *Fiddlehead* 53 (1962): 61-64.

the courage to affirm the contradictory, painful aspects of life, and the courage to risk bad taste, reckless partisanship, transparent rhetoric, even sentimentality, to expose the sources of his own vulnerability and to display his strength. All these Layton provided in abundance. Pacey was delighted by the poems in *The Blue Propeller,* by "the energy, frankness, honesty and healthy earthiness which makes your work such a refreshing change in the stolid literary atmosphere of Canada." He praised Layton's "downrightness, force, and faith in the creative spirit." From the beginning he took Layton seriously as a craftsman, but he particularly admired his work because it was "so damned hard to be apathetic about."[8] For his part, Pacey's letters demonstrate his willingness to render himself vulnerable to the impact of poetry, to accept the challenge of the poem with intrepid gusto. These were the qualities that Layton, for all his antipathy to critics and academics, found refreshing, and they are qualities that are consistently related to their discussions of realism. There is an historical and ideological content in their 'realism', but also a prominent psychological and emotional content.

Early in the correspondence there is a heated discussion on the relative claims of poetry and criticism. In a letter dated September 7, 1955, Pacey argues that criticism, "when it is doing its job properly," is "creative"; the critic, like the poet, makes order out of chaos. His work "differs in *degree,* not in *kind* from the creative activity of the poet." The poet takes "the stuff of experience and (not reduces but) lifts it to order, to meaning, to clarity, to poignancy, to passion." Similarly, the critic "takes the stuff of his experience—individual works of art—and lifts it to order, to meaning, to clarity, etc." Pacey concedes that "the degree of order achieved" by the critic is less than that achieved by the poet, because the critic is concerned "with secondary rather than primary experience." Pacey then argues the role of the critic as a mediator between the poet and the audience: "After all, art at its best is a dynamic relationship between artist and audience—and the most sensitive, trained, receptive fraction of the audience is the critic." He then subtly extends the role to include a kind of supervisory function: "If he the critic says 'here you fail in clarity, or in power, or in passion' the artist had better listen and search his soul." Finally, Pacey claims that "Coleridge was just as creative when he wrote his Shakespearean criticism as when he wrote his poems."[9]

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[8] Pacey, Letters to Irving Layton, February 13, 1955; June 16, 1955; June 24, 1955; July 22, 1958.

[9] Pacey, Letters to Irving Layton, September 7, 1955; November 3, 1955.

Layton would have none of this. To compare the critic's "experience" of literature the poet's "experience" of life trivializes tha poet's ecstasy and suffering, the emotional and psychological "risk" that goes into the making of a poem. Pacey's argument, Layton maintained, struck at the pillars of the poet's authority—that he speaks directly out of his personal experience with passion and honesty, refusing the meditation and the consolation of acceptable, domesticated forms of reality. Moreover, Layton sensed in Pacey's argument, particularly the argument for the critic's supervisory function, a certain condescension. The poet begins to appear somewhat childlike, "a happy, lecherous nature boy," one whose thoughts and judgements about his work or about the world he so passionately engages must be taken with a grain of salt, weighed and sifted by the more objective, mature judgement of the critic.[10] Pacey replied:

> I didn't think I twisted your words when I said you spoke as if poets could do no wrong. . . . I still insist that poets often make mistakes and that mere critics can often point these out to them. . . . Anyway, you've missed *my* main point if you think it is that contemporary critics have as their main function correcting the errors of contemporary poets. I see that as a very minor role of the critic, and I quite grant that it doesn't often or significantly happen. The critic is creative when he detects a pattern or order or meaning in the literary history or the individual poem of the poet. He re-creates if you like.[11]

The argument continued to simmer throughout the correspondence, with Layton maintaining that the critic, for all his erudition, has no intuitive sense of what is significant in current events, no way of taking the pulse of the age. He can only hope to follow, at one remove from reality, where the poet leads. The poet is "one who knows what the essential things of his age are, what is dying and what is coming to life, what approaches on cat feet from afar." In another letter, in response to Pacey's accusations that he had become an arrogant windbag, Layton concedes that in part his "arrogance" is a "protective device to conceal . . . a certain shyness," but "in larger measure it's the triumphant affirmation of the poet's role in a world that's gone deaf, dumb and blind."[12]

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[10] Layton, Letters to Desmond Pacey, August 22, 1955; October 30, 1955.

[11] Pacey, Letters to Irving Layton, November 9, 1955.

[12] Layton, Letters to Desmond Pacey, May 21, 1961; April 30, 1956.

One feature of Layton's work that Pacey certainly did intuit was its strong affinity with the poetry of W.B. Yeats. There are frequent comparisons between the two poets—their tragic vision, their heroic affirmation, the triumph of laughter and gaiety over despair, their earthy vitality, and their stature as "public" poets. On December 6, 1956, Pacey wrote to Layton: "You really write with authority now, with that sonorous finality that Yeats attained in his later work." Pacey often quoted from a letter by Yeats to Dorothy Wellesly, "Bitter and gay—that is the heroic mood," and he claimed this as "our motto." In his published criticism of Layton's work, Pacey regularly made the same point. His review of *The Bull Calf and Other Poems* (1956) notes a "ripe bitternes" and assured tone "akin to that of the later Yeats." In 1967, reviewing *Periods of the Moon,* Pacey again maintained that "throughout the book Layton exemplifies what Yeats called the heroic mood." Layton emphatically endorsed these Yeatsian analogues. On November 7, 1956, he wrote:

> After all the guff Smith, and now a new offender, Margaret Avison, have written about Wm C. Wm.'s and Pound's influence on me, it's enough to restore my faith in the intelligence of people when someone like you comes along and speaks of my affinity with Wm. B. Yeats, At Last! I wrote Smith a long time ago that my favourites among the poets were Isaiah, Blake, and Yeats.[13]

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[13] See Desmond Pacey, "A Group of Seven Poets" (1956) in *Essays in Canadian Criticism 1938-1968* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1969) 112-121; Letters to Irving Layton, November 26, 1956; December 6, 1956; July 4, 1957; November 21, 1957; November 22, 1957; March 10, 1959; March 6, 1959; Review of *Periods of the Moon, Fiddlehead,* 71 (1967): 69-72. Irving Layton, Letters to Desmond Pacey, November 7, 1956; November 9, 1956; March 12, 1959; March 21, 1959; March 30, 1959; March 31, 1959; July 8, 1962. It is striking how frequently echoes of Yeats occur in Layton's poetry and prose. Layton's stilts in "Whatever Else Poetry is Freedom" may be compared to Yeats's in "High Talk"; the rhythm and language of Layton's "The Skull" may be compared with Yeats's "The Fisherman"; and the following passage from Layton's "Ruminations" with Yeats's "A General Introduction for my Work":

> *Layton:* There is always a difference between the man who goes into the washroom and the man who writes a poem. There is a difference between the man who chews his meat, picks his teeth, pats his infant's head, and the fellow who goes into the privacy of his room and writes a poem about the day's activities. In a sense the poet is the fuller man, or the completer man, more in control of experiences and events, because art is a kind of control and a kind of evaluation of experience.

> *Yeats:* A poet writes always of his personal life, in his finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it be, remorse, lost love, or mere loneliness . . . He is never the bundle of accident and incoherence

Pacey had a very high regard for Yeats. In *Creative Writing in Canada* and *Ten Canadian Poets,* Pacey recoils whenever he detects the influence of Eliot or Auden. When a poet or a poem is described as "Eliotic" or "Audenish" it usually means that Pacey finds it half-baked, derivative, mere self-conscious posturing. But when a poet or poem is described as "Yeatsian" the term is intended as high praise. His criticism of Smith perhaps best illustrates the point. "Son-and-Heir" and "The Face" are "clever but superficial imitations of Auden," and "Calvary" and "Bird and Flower" are insincere Eliotic exercises. But at his best, "Smith, like Yeats, makes use of intellectual symbols and of taut, tense rythms; and he shares Yeats' ideal of the hard, aloof, aristocratic poise amidst the contemporary chaos and commercialism. Like Yeats also, he attempts, though less successfully, to combine the bitter and the gay, to be at once really responsible and apparently irresponsible."[14]

One aspect of Yeats that undoubtedly attracted Pacey was his belief in the importance of a national literature. The Yeatsian inscription in Pacey's collection of *Essays in Canadian Criticism 1938-1968* is particularly appropriate:

> "Cosmopolitan literature is, at best, but a poor bubble, though a big one. Creative work has always a fatherland. There is no fine nationality without literature, and . . . no fine literature without nationality."

In the letters, Pacey's nationalism becomes almost poignant when he seems to plead with Layton not to leave Canada. On February 24, 1960, when Layton seemed to be considering a move to the United States, Pacey cautioned him that "no Canadian writer has ever left Canada and remained a good writer." On May 10, Pacey was relieved that Layton had decided to return. On several occasions Layton again threatened to abandon Canada to its impregnable philistinism, but on July 8, 1962, he assured Pacey that "actually, I love this country and would never think of leaving it for another," and he even confessed that "few poets have been treated more kindly than I've been, both by the critics and the general public." A few years later, on April 12, 1967, when Layton was preparing to leave Montreal, Pacey was

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> that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn
> as an idea, something intended, complete.

See Layton *Collected Poems,* 316 and 491; *Taking Sides,* 188; W.B. Yeats, *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1965) 485-486, 167; *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961) 509.

[14] *Creative Writing in Canada,* 2nd ed., 137; *Ten Canadian Poets,* 208-211.

again apprehensive that he might leave Canada altogether, and pleaded with him, "This country's worth fighting for."

When Pacey discusses his own work in the correspondence he is usually rather modest, but in response to Layton's criticism, which is often severe, he emphatically defends the integrity of his work. On May 6, 1957, in response to Layton's comments that his recent reviews lack penetrating insight, Pacey concedes that, "unlike Frye," he cannot come up with "brilliant answers" to the problems of Canadian literature; he can only offer "honest" assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of Canadian poets. Earlier in the correspondence (April 2, 1956), Layton had encouraged Pacey to inject more gusto, a more aggressive energy, into his fiction, complaining that the earthy, ebullient personality he had come to know was entirely absent in the stories. Pacey replied that although he was "full of wild enthusiasms and sudden despairs, I can't write like that. . . . When I start to write I immediately wear a mask of sympathetic tenderness." In a later letter, he suggests that his stories, quite unconsciously, form a pattern, that they are all "studies in vulnerability."[15] Although Pacey often complains that Layton tends to jump on him "with both feet," he does not retreat into a shell but continues to send Layton drafts of his stories and criticism, often with an almost boyish enthusiasm.[16]

In 1956 and 1957 Pacey was working on *Ten Canadian Poets.* As he discussed each of the chapters in progress, his letters convey the sincerity and integrity of his criticism, the breadth and thoroughness of his research (soliciting old correspondence, re-examining old issues of *The McGill Fornightly,* etc. and the manner in which his criticism seems to emerge directly from a personal encounter with the poetry. The chapter on Pratt was clearly the easiest for Pacey. The sense of triumph over adversity, of affirmation in spite of dark imitations, these were qualities that made any complaints against Pratt's language and verse forms appear minor. On July 4, 1957, Pacey wrote to Layton, "I'm glad you met Pratt: he is everything that you say, and has a kind of oak-like honesty and openness that wins you at once. . . . But I do know that he is a man who has suffered, and that his cheerfulness is a triumph of the human will over disaster." The chapter on Birney, however, proved one of the most difficult for Pacey.

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[15] Letters to Irving Layton, November 9, 1955 and April 3, 1958.

[16] Layton reviewed *The Picnic and Other Stories* in *Fiddlehead* 39 (1959): 41-43. He noted that in the best of the stories, Pacey has explored "existence's dualism and ambiguity, its perplexing character of good-evil." The stories may lack "vigour, complexity, verbal sparkle," but they "do command reflectiveness, sensitivity, painstaking observation, and a tough good-humoured determination not to be taken in by current shibboleths and catch cries." This accurately summarizes his comments in the letters, except that he often expresses more impatience with the lack of "vigour, complexity, verbal sparkle,"

As a preeminent representative of the "native tradition" in Canadian poetry, as an acute social critic, as the poet who, perhaps more than any other, had ranged over the whole of Canadian history and geography, Birney belonged in Pacey's pantheon. Pacey had written on Smith and Scott and formed strong convictions on their strengths and weaknesses in terms of their social realism or their abnegating formalism, and he had contributed an enthusiatic introduction to Livesay's *Selected Poems.*[17] But Birney's work failed to draw a strong response from him. On March 22, 1957, he confided to Layton that the Birney chapter was going badly, that there was a "weariness" in the poetry that failed to inspire him. A week later, however, he is beginning to find more interest in Birney, and by April 2, he has discovered "real merit" in the poetry and the chapter is virtually written.

The chapter on Klein presented different problems. While he warmed to Birney slowly, he had always responded enthusiatically to Klein. In "English Canadian Poetry, 1944-1954" Pacey had designated Pratt and Klein as rivals for the position of English Canada's "greatest living poet." However, when Pacey sent Layton a draft of his Klein chapter he received a somewhat condescending reply. On December 12, 1956, Layton claimed that Pacey had merely heaped vague, uncritical praise upon Klein. Klein's career, according to Layton, required a much sharper psychological analysis:

> Klein's story is a tragic one of Cariolan pride—and failure. . . . He was compelled to earn his bread in a profession which he despised, and to see men less brilliant than himself gain honours and wealth which that society only too readily confers upon the unscrupulous, the superficial, and the aggressive. . . . There is a strong, wayward, bohemian streak inside him, the strong, desire to kick over the traces, all this conflicting with an equally strong Hebraic sense of responsibility and familie ties. . . . for the homosexual, the failure, the man who had turned his back on family obligations, he had scant sympathy. . . . The failure of Klein is the failure of a man too frightened by his environment, by fate, if you will, to be the moving poet that the charitable fairies attending his birth had intended him to be when they placed those lavish gifts of intellect, imagination, and impulse in his unpropitious cradle.

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[17] Pacey, Introduction, *Selected Poems* by Dorothy Livesay (Toronto: Ryesrson, 1957).

Pacey thanked Layton for his comments, but he was "hurt" by his scornful condescension. By March 1, 1957, however, he is again confident that his chapter on Klein is "honest, perceptive and certainly more comprehensive than anything published hitherto." On March 12, in opposition to Layton's repeated claims that Klein lacked a sufficient vision of evil, Pacey again declares his admiration for Klein's "tremendous effort to affirm in the face of chaos." 'Apreciation' and 'criticism' were very closely related in Pacey's work.

II

After 1958 the correspondence often becomes distinctly acrimonious. Occasionally the acrimony is diffused by wit or sincere praise for each other's work, but on other occasions a touch of censure finds its way into the praise: for example, on July 16, 1958, Pacey seemed pleased with *A Laughter in the Mind:*

> You seem to be at the top of your form throughout. Moreover, the poems wear well. Many of them I have read before, yet I re-read them with pleased excitement. It's a very varied book of course, but I think you have been equally successful with the tender and thoughtful poems on the one hand, and the gay and rollicking ones on the other.

Layton, however, resisted what he thought to Pacey's increasing emphasis upon the "tender," an attempt, Layton sensed, to persuade him to moderate his savage rhetoric. There are also occasions when the exchange is sharply critical while the tone is jocular. In the late 1960s, Layton was avidly reading the classics of Greek and German philosophy. Pacey mocks his middle-aged attempts to "get educated," and suggests that with his dense metaphysical poetry he has become immersed in "the cold cream element." In another letter Pacey pokes fun at Layton's success as an "academic" and threatens that when he next comes to Toronto he will "sport with Aviva in the shade" while Layton "turns the dry pages of ancient tomes."[18] But such exchanges barely manage to diffuse the tension that easily flares into anger throughout the 1960s.

In the course of the decade Pacey was appointed to more and more senior positions at the University of New Brunswick,

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[18] Letters to Irving Layton, October 1, 1960; November 29, 1970."

while he felt increasingly isolated from the literary centre. Layton, who had been struggling on the periphery, suddenly found himself at the centre of critical and public attention. *In The Midst of My Fever, The Cold Green Element,* and *The Bull Calf and Other Poems* had all drawn favourable reviews, even from A.J.M. Smith and Northrop Frye, and *The Improved Binoculars* contained the enthusiatic introduction by William Carlos Williams; but it was *A Red Carpet for the Sun* (1959), published and promoted by McClelland and Stewart, that thrust Layton's work into public and critical awareness. In the decade that followed, Layton held the attention, sometines adulation, of a considerable public through his appearances on television and radio, through controversial statements in the popular press, and through his poetry. He found himself a celebrity and he enjoyed the role. Pacey, however, began to see Layton's success, and his apparent courtship of success, as dangerous to his work, encouraging him "to write too much, too easily," and pandering to his public's craving for mere naughtiness and cheap titillation (December 1, 1958).

In March, 1959, layton sent Pacey his poem, "Because My Calling is Such." Pacey took the occasion (March 10) to attack Layton for his posturing and self-indulgent egotism: "Don't tell me you're going to retreat from your honesty into this kind of fakery——that your goddam poetry is so mysterious and important that for it you'd jettison the love of woman." He concludes, "Because the great Frye has said you're good, everything you write is *ipso-facto* excellent. Balls!" He accuses Layton of becoming a "stuffed shirt," and allowing himself to be exploted by McClelland and Stewart. On October 21, 1959, he wrote to Layton congratulating him on becoming a "lion," but confessed that he liked him better as "a flea-bitten terrier." Layton's puzzled response, on October 24, is indicative of his view of the function of poetry and of the role of the poet. Vulgar acclaim, with resort to promotional gimmicks, appeared much less repulsive to him, and much less dangerous to his integrity, than the measured, decorous approbation of academic critics:

> All this is good for poetry in this country. A poet has at last broken the sound barrier! You ought to rejoice that one of *us,* and that one your own devoted friends, turned the trick. What's more, much of your criticism helped me to do it. You're a funny dog! You yelp and wag your tail excitedly while I'm battling the waves and gasping, but when you see me nearing the beach you let your tail droop and you let out the most mournful howl my ears ever heard.

A few years later (October 11, 1964), Layton again triumphantly reported the success of a reading tour together with Birney, Leonard Cohen, and Phyllis Goglieb, a tour that had been vigorously promoted by McClelland and Stewart and filmed by the National Film Board. He joyfully claimed that, as popular symbols of Canada, poets were now "running neck and neck with Mounties." Pacey scoffed at all the hoopla, calling the tour "the McClelland and Stewart travelling circus."[19] In December, 1962, Pacey met Kingsley Amis in Cambridge, and had found him smug and conceited, reduced to predictably shocking declarations, lack-lustre cynicism, self-conciously out of fashion, but still trying to milk his early success. On June 19, 1963, following a flurry of public appearances by Layton on television and in the press, Pacey comments:

> I see you are still emitting a steam of platitudes about poetry, professors and penises. You are rapidly becoming the Kingsley Amis of Canada.

The acrimony between the two correspondents is again evident in an exchange on Layton's introduction to *Love Where the Nights are Long.* Layton's dismissal of the love poetry of the Cavalier poets as "insincere frippery" seemed to Pacey merely self-serving and ignorant: "Your're a great big bluffer and it's time someone called your bluff." Pacey maintained that the only poet in *Love Where the Nights are Long* who has "a real gift for amorous verse" is Leonard Cohen: "Your own love poems are seldom your best—they are either too rhetorical, or too diffused, or too laboured."[20] One might have expected Pacey to rejoice in the soaring rhetoric of Layton's "Introduction," and to have found at least some pleasure in Layton's bold declaration of the unique merit of Canadian love poetry. That Pacey chose instead to belabour Layton's comments on the Cavalier poers, and then wrinkle his nose at Layton's own love poetry, illustrates the tension in the correspondence at this point.

The end of the 1950s also marked the end of Layton's friendship with Dudek. Pacey witnessed the quarrel with a mixture of sadness and anger. On February 4, 1959, he wrote Layton that his "fulminations" against Dudek and his wife Stephanie were "unworthy" of him: "I'm sorry to see your creative energy being diverted into these literary squabbles which are so futile. Get on with the poetry and let your fellow poets get on with theirs." Layton maintained the quarrel was not simply a matter of personal animosity or petty rivalry:

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19 Pacey, Letters to Layton, November 25, 1964.

20 Letters to Layton, March 12, 1963; March 27, 1963; April 30, 1963.

> My quarrel with Louis is a literary one; it's the same sort of thing I had with John Sutherland. I reject his point of view as vehemently as I did John's and for the same reasons. If it were to prevail it would stifle creative activity in this country. . . . My quarrel with Stephanie is of the same kind I have with all psychologists who step heavily into the field of literature. I detest the whole kaboodle. . . . I frankly regard her kind as a real danger to poetic activity.

The following day Layton wrote *two* letters to Pacey, defending his conduct in the quarrel. He maintained that some of his fundamental convictions about poetry were at stake:

> What then do I see in Stephanie and Louis? In Stephanie, the psychologizing attitude that wishes to reduce every poem to a fragment of autobiography, of case history. That regards poets as gifted but crazy poeple. . . . Louis's 'embodiment' is more complex. . . . There was always in him a moralistic, puritanical streak: no more than John Sutherland was he ever able to open up to literature as pure experience. He must always, alarmed or confused, send for the generalizing intellect to let him know how he ought to feel when confronted by the novel and the dionysian. All my conscious life I have fought this attitude towards art, towards poetry. . . . I'll fight anyone who exalts reason above imagination and intuition; anyone who refuses to see that the creative process is supra-rational. It's the fellow whose fires have gone out or who never had any who wishes to pretend that the moralizing and generalizing intellect is supreme. In out time the creative fires are being leveled down on all sides, with all the little people happily lending a hand: social workers, psychologists, university professors . . . and the thousands of good-natured philistines who demonstrate again and again that while they may care for art, they can also live without it.

To Layton, Dudek's understanding of the role of the poet and of the poetic process seemed fundamentally contrary to his own understanding of the prophetic function of poetry. It was reductive, it subordinated the creative process to scientific rationalism, and it undermined the poet's claim to truth, his authority as a teacher, based on his unique perception and experience of reality. Layton's tendency toward "moralizing" was as strong as Dudek's, but Layton insisted that, for the poet,

moral knowledge came directly out of the creative experience, while Dudek increasingly demanded that such knowledge must first pass muster befor an enlightened, liberal understanding of psychology and society.

There was certainly also a good deal of personal acrimony involved in the quarrel. Dudek's dismissal of some of Layton's finest work as "pure rubbish," and Layton's caricature in "Mexico as seen by the Reverend Dudek"[21] seem unnecessarily vindictive, and do little to serve the cause of Canadian poetry. On the other hand, neither of them ever entirely lost sight of the merits of the other; for example, in a letter to Pacey, January 13, 1971, Layton complained that Dudek had been given a "raw deal," being excluded from Geddes's *15 Canadian Poets:* "Dudek has range and substance that the younger poets don't even try for."[22] Undoubtedly, however, there were important issues at stake. It is unthinkable that either poet would have allowed view so fundamentally opposed to his own, especially considering each poet's stature and influence, to go unchallenged.

III

The change in Layton's public reception after 1959 was accompanied by equally dramatic changes in his poetry and criticism. From as early as 1954, the characteristic themes of "social realism" became less and less prominent in Layton's work, and by 1959 the term seems quite inapt. Nietzsche and an emphasis upon the "dionysian element" became much more prominent than Marx and images of porletarian resistance. The main target of his fury is "gentility," and the term becomes more and more encompassing. Under this heading he attacks academic criticism, "culture," "literature," "formalism," "invalidism," "prudery," all of which he regards as symptomatic of a pervasive intellectual and moral torpor. Throughout his career as a poet, Layton maintained, he had been confronted by "a genteel academicism and a faded romantic sensibility which politely questioned the poet's creative role in society." In his "Foreward" to *The Laughing Rooster,* Layton is convinced that the greatest threat to the poet comes "from those who wish to appear his friends and allies. . . . They're the ones who wish to bracket the poet between Culture and Education and fob off their cerebral theories as having equal authority with the experiences of the

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[21] *Collected Poems,* 300. The poem first appeared in *Moment* 1 (1960), under the title "Mexico as seen by Louis the Lip."

[22] *Engagements,* 56 and 116-117.

poet."[23] From this perspective he sees enemies almost everywhere. On one occasion his fierce defence of the poet acquires the mythical dimensions of an avenging angel, avenging all artists who have suffered while complacent philistines prospered, both psychologically and materially:

> When I spit into their eyes, Desmond, I do so foi all the poets, for all the gifted and talented who've had to eat the bread of humiliation from the fat-assed, prostituted many: the cowards, the lunk-heads, the well-heeled philistines, the spiteful dullards whom wealth has given the upper hand over those least able to defend themselves. I am a dangerous man, a madman if you wish, because I think I have been chosen by Time and Fate, to avenge all the indignities they ever suffered: the suicide of Chatterton, the pauper's grave of Mozart, the madness of Holderlin. I'd say this in the strongest feeling I have: it colours almost everything I write and think. It's the clue to my short stories and to many of my poems.[24]

In a letter on October 7, 1963, he suspects that professors, clergymen and critics "exist largely for the purpose of blunting the poet's impact."

Pacey seemed, at first, a little bewildered by the attack on gentility. From the perspective of orthodox social realism, Layton's fury seemed to be misdirected:

> I don't think the phrase genteel tradition has very much relevance in a Canadian context. I feel that there's only a tiny minority in this country that cares for literature at all and that for good or ill it is concentrated in the universities. The university people are not 'genteel' in any very significant way, and they are mainly left-wing politically (Carlyle King chairman of Sask. C.C.F., Frye used to be a Marxist and is still well to the left etc. etc.) They are your allies—and the enemy is big business and philistinism generally. . . . You shouldn't be wasting your satirical gifts on the Fryes and Paceys, or even on the relatively stuffy Woodcocks and Whalleys, but should be directing them against the politicians who are exploding hydrogen bombs and holding up the

23 *Engagements, 56 and 116-117.*

24 This quote is from an undated letter filed after the letter dated June 23, 1962. It was probably written before the end of the month or in the first week of July.

> national health scheme and the Canada Council etc. etc.[25]

This letter, however, does not exactly resound with conviction, and it had no influence upon Layton. He either scorned these issues or took up the opposing side. What engrossed him were quite other questions. At the conclusion of his "Foreword" to *A Red Carpet for the Sun,* he wrote:

> Dionysus is dead: his corpse seethes white-maggoty with social workers and analysts. Not who is winning the Cold War is the big issue confronting mankind, but this: will the Poet, as a type, join the Priest, the Warrior, the Hero, and the Saint as melancholy museum pieces for the titillation of a universal babbitry? It could happen.

Similarly, in the "Forword" to *The Swinging Flesh,* he regards the extinction of the Dionysian element as the crucial issue of the age:

> What engrosses the mind, what troubles the spirit of the creative writer today are not the inequities and malfunctioning of the so-called capitalist system. These are in the process of being rapidly eliminated. His anxiety, his concern, to be quick about it, is something else: it is that for the first time in the history of the world man's reason is abolishing the law of historical development through strife and opposition. The Promethean idea of the twentieth-century is that men, collectively, can control their destiny. But—and here's the rub—they can do so only at the sacrifice of the Dionysian element which is the beginning and assurance of all creativity.

Layton never slakened his claim to 'realism', but there remains little evidence of the left-wing social-realism of the 1940s and early 1950s. Layton now has a scornful confidence that contemporary society is quite willing and able to take care of the dispossessed, of economic inequities, and capitalist exploitation generally. He is also confident that society can take care of its "culture," that it is willing and able to provide subsidies and prizes. At least, these are not the pressing concerns they were formerly. Similarly, with the arrival of the 'sexual revolution,'

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[25] Letters to Irving Layton, October 29, 1956. This is a relatively early letter, and Pacey's understanding of "gentility" developed considerably. The evident naivete of the letter, however, particularly coming from a sympathetic critic like Pacey, indicates the magnitude of the problem that Layton was attacking, and the magnitude of his achievement in making a deeper understanding of the term more current.

with the liberalization of the censorship laws, and with the new wave of films, pop art, post-modern literature, all with their apparently raw, primitive energy, the priggishness and unoffending formalism of the 1950s were no longer such formidable forces. Layton's attack upon gentility shifted accordingly. During the early 1950s it had focussed primarily upon the aesthetic effect of gentility, upon "the miserable devitalized stuff that passes for poetry in this country."[26] In the 1960s the attack focusses upon its moral effect. It identifies a moral philistinism that is immune to shock or anger, that perverts the poet's moral outrage into merely an aesthetic performance, and renders human suffering acceptable as a mark of political sophistication. "Gentility" became the key term in Layton's attempts to account for organized evil on the scale of the Holocaust and the Siberian labour camps, perpetrated or condoned by supposedly enlightened, civilized, progressive societies.

It seems that no sooner had Layton won some of the public and critical acclaim that had long been due, particularly from left-leaning, anti-establishment fellow travellers, than he took up a series of positions that appeared decidedly reactionary. Marxism became coupled with Christianity as a "sour, boring joke."[27] On issues ranging from women's liberation to the Vietnam War he was consistently on the 'wrong' side. As early as November 7, 1956, he confided to Pacey that he found himself questioning his "socialistic beliefs," that he had begun to find socialism and capitalism "woefully inadequate terms." By February 18, 1959, he had rejected them outright, together with modern aestheticism:

> I feel that all the old concerns are dead—the aestheticisms of Eliot, Yeats, Gide, Proust, equally with those of the anti-Establishment antics of the left-winging social realists of a decade and two ago. *Irrelevant,* that's the word. Irrelevant, irrelevant, irrelevant. As usual, the professors are caught napping, this time on the heavily annotated tomes of Joyce and Eliot, unaware that humanity has turned a sharp corner into a world where pity and sensitivity, or even ordinary decency, have no address. . . . Our condition is worse than that of the Romans—with no Christians in sight to redeem us. The 'Beat' writers are saying it, but not very well or very successfully, and they'll end up by destroying themselves rather than the conditions that produced them.

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26 Layton, "Preface" to *Cerberus*, in *Engagements*, 71.

27 *Engagements*, 105.

By 1961 he has nothing but contempt for the "flabbly socialists" and "decadent left-wing intellectuals." He finds a distrustful "puritanical strain" in the poets of the Left, and in this regard, he much prefers Roy Campbell to Stephen Spender. His praise is now all for the greatness of J.F. Kennedy, De Gaulle and Churchill. He approves entirely of Kennedy's handling of the Cuban crisis; he refers to him on one occasion as "truly a wise and noble prince." Then, in 1965, he is with "L.B.J. all the way," fully supportive of American imperialism in Vietnam. The tone is occasionally lightened when Layton reports that he is sending reams of poems and political advice to the White House, but so far "the silence is defeaning. Ah well . . ."[28]

Pacey watched his 'progress' with dismay. He finds Layton's adulation of the Kennedys, both Jackie and John, "silly," and demands to know with reference to Yeats, why Layton must assume "the ass's mask of an insufferable braggart." He denounces Kennedy as a capitalist and imperialist. Layton he denounces as an outright fascist, although the denunciation is softened a little when he signs the letter "Pinky Pacey." He compares Layton on the Cuban crisis to the aging Wordsworth's conservative stance on the First Reform Bill, and concludes that Layton has become a typical "romantic conservative."[29] Layton resists both terms. What Pacey regards as his conservatism, Layton argues, is rather his direct apprehension of the pulse of reality, the result of his acute sense of the forces of history. He allows that if Byron and Blake were romantics, then he is one too, but denies any inclination toward a romantic nostalgia; his "historical realism" is prophetic, looking to the present and the future.

During the early 1960s Layton became increasingly impatient with the modern poet's failure to address "the moral and psychological dilemmas of his time." In the "Foreword" to *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler,* dated September 11, 1962, Layton releases the full force of his contempt:

> What insight does the modern poet give us into the absolute evil of our times? Where is the poet who can make clear for us Belsen? Vorkuta? Hiroshima? The utter wickedness of Nazism and National-Communism? There is no poet in the English-speaking world who gives me the feeling that into his lines have entered the misery and

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[28] Layton, Letters to Pacey, November 7, 1956; February 18, 1959; January 10 1961; April 21, 1961; April 29, 1961; October 7, 1963; March 21, 1965; May 8, 1961; January 5, 1962.

[29] Pacey, Letters to Layton, March 6, 1961; March 24, 1961; March 27, 1963; April 24, 1961; April 26, 1961; May 8, 1961; and January 5, 1962.

> crucifixion of our age. His psychology, pre-Freudian; his political thought, pre-totalitarian; his metaphysicas, non-existent, his well-meant babblings originate in a bourgeois-Christian humanism totally unable to account for the vileness enacted by men and women of this century. . . . The modern poet has been an empty windbag and a chatterer. No wonder anguished people turn from him in amusement, boredom, or pity. He has nothing to say worth listening go. . . . The truth is this: instead of remebering they are prophets and the descendants of prophets, the poets have swapped roles with entertainers and culture-peddlars.

Unlike the novelists, the playwrights and the film-makes, the poets have willingly rendered themselves superfluous to their society, "pleased if someone overhears them and recommends them for a travelling fellowship or a university post."[30] Layton's letters during February and April, 1962, seem a rough draft of this "Foreword." On February 3, 1962, he enters upon the theme almost casually, begging to differ with Pacey's estimation of Margaret Avison's poetry:

> I don't however share your enthusiasm for Avison——her work simply leaves me unmoved. . . . I find it clever lattice-work; the feelings and thoughts are stale; it's the language and *apparent* modernity of technique that fools you into thinking them otherwise. . . . The truth is, I don't like the way most Canadian poets use language; nowadays I want poems to be like a steel dagger, unsheathed and gripped for the plunging.

The letter of February 16 generalizes more boldly and accumulates more conviction:

> Too much that is being written today in verse leaves me with the feeling of its "peripherality," its remoteness from that reality which must always be the springboard for the imagination. It just doesn't seem important enough for all the breathlessness and frantic gesturings that accompany the utterance.

By April 28, Layton's anger and conviction have crystalized. The letter illustrates Layton's constant emphasis upon realism, upon the didactic or prophetic function of poetry, upon its centrality in human affairs, even as the occasions for such a function

30 *Engagements*, 104-105.

seemed to become increasingly elusive. These themes are not new, but they acquire greater urgency and an almost naive simplicity, while they become charged with an increasingly complex vision of the savegery of twentieth-century civilization. Although the letter still lacks the poised fury and rhetorical sweep of the "Foreword," it has brought Layton into position, not only for an attack upon his contemporaries, but for the coming offensive of his own creative energy:

> More and more I grow dissatisfied with the poems I read: they appear irrelevant and inconsequential. Compared to the novelists and playwrghts, the contemporary poets are simply nowhere; still blabbermouthing about 'Love' and 'Dear' etc. etc. and in the same old vein. They don't say a helluva lot that's new. For the greater part, they've remained stuck fast in Christianity (Eliot, Auden, Thomas) or if they break away from that swamp, go on to mouth ridiculous puerilities about 'Art' and 'Tragic Visions' and 'Social Credit.' They're pre-Freudian and pre-Marxian; and unlike their European contemporaries, have not assimilated Nietzsche. Most of the stuff written today is adolescent drivel. There's no reason why any intelligent man or woman should spend more than a minute scanning it. I'd like to write poems that a surgeon or an attoney-general could read and appreciate. Poems that come out of the lives and emotions of contemporary persons. To hell with 'Literature' and the 'literary sensibility', and all the academic palavering and head-shaking that goes on in the name of 'culture' and 'poetry'. What I really want is a blend of realism and imagination, an enhancement of the actual, and by the latter I don't mean the dried-out emasculated version of it that pedants entertain in their tiresome brains.

The correspondence is, of course, laden with comments and anecdotes of contemporary poets and critics. At one point (June 24 and November 9, 1955) Pacey defends Frye against Layton's attacks in terms that Layton could not easily dismiss; he informs Layton that privately Frye has a "gift for obscene invective" and that as a student Frye was "legendary" for his sexual exploits. On other occasions Pacey tends to endorse Layton's strong likes and dislikes; for example, he finds Reaney's *Suit of Nettles* to be mere "childish pedantry"; he finds Hugh Maclennan better as an essayist than as a novelist; and during the winter of 1961-62 there are several comments on Callaghan's work—all of them negative. Callaghan is "all soft

mush right through," and he is compared very unfavourably to the self-exiled Norman Levine.[31] Pacey keeps an approving eye on the development of younger poets, particularly Cohen, Purdy, Alden Nowlan and Patrick Lane. On June 3, 1964, however, he complains that the material he has been collecting from younger poets for *The Literary Review* is disappointing: "Where are 'les jeunes'? . . . The stuff I got from Boxer, Coleman, Pearson, Davey, Bowering, etc. would make us look like laughing-stocks abroad." On February 1, 1967, he also finds that Leonard Cohen's poetry has "fallen off of late," but *Beautiful Losers* has "complexity and ingenuity of allusion and symbolism." Pacey's comments invite extensive analysis in relation to contemporary criticism and the development of individual poets.

Layton's comments on his contemporaries vary from humorous one-liners to intriguing, often revealing anecdotes. His contempt for the *Tish* poets and their Black Mountain progenitors again illustrates the strong didactic thrust of his poetics:

> The Tishites have been screwed by an excessive interest in prosody and by the influence of Olson, Creeley, and Levertove. However, had Davey, Bowering, et al been true poets they would have assimilated the influence and eventually found their own voice levels. But a poet *is* a teacher, and these have no doctrine in them. The desire to make fastidious bric-a-brac, all the coquettings with words and line-placements will not conceal the empty heart. If a man *urgently* wishes to improve the lot of his fellow-man, the quality of their lives, he'll discover or invent the means of reaching them——always pre-supposing he has the necessary talent with words, without which, of course, his good intentions will count for nil.[32]

Several comments on F.R. Scott in the correspondence reveal Layton's strong antipathy toward Scott's work. On December 12, 1956, Layton wrote to Pacey: "His love poems are among the saddest that I have ever read, telling of abnegation and restraint and withdrawal: no gaiety here, no release." Layton seems to be repelled by Scott's reductive rationalism, by his subjection of 'instinct' to 'will,' but it is clear that Scott is also implicated in Layton's attacks upon "flabby socialists." On June 6, 1964, Layton complained to Pacey that he could find "no feeling for life in the man." He is the personification of "that gray, rationalistic good-

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[31] Letters to Layton, November 9, 1955; June 10, 1959; September 12, 1960; October 30, 1961; December 21, 1961; July 11, 1962.

[32] Letters to Pacey, June 6, 1964.

y-goodiness that has undone the C.C.F. and now the N.D.P." He has "a deep fear of life, a distrust of its unpredictable upsurges." Because he lacks a "feeling for life" he lacks insight" "Whenever F.R. Scott takes up a political position, all one has to do is to take up the contrary one and be proven right in the long run." In another letter Layton describes an occasion in Scott's home, where Smith was also present. When Layton read his poem "Elegy for Marilyn Munro," Smith wept openly, declaring it "the greatest poem written in this century." But Scott "demured mildly." Layton modestly observed that the century still had thirty-eight years to run.[33]

On Pacey's side, the correspondence ends tragically. The first evidence of Pacey's illness appears on January 15, 1969. On October 9, 1972, Pacey is recovering from three recent operations. At the same time he is immersed in UNB politics. On January 10, 1969, he is in a dilemma whether or not to take on the job of Acting-President at UNB (one recalls that during the sixties and early seventies university presidencies were not universally coveted). By 1970 he has taken the job. In February 1972, the position is to be filled permanently, and Pacey is clearly the leading candidate but, on December 18, 1972, he writes that he has been "ditched" in favour of a younger man: "I am probably at the lowest point in morale that I have ever been." Pacey had served the University long and loyally, as a teacher, scholar and administrator, apparently with wisdom, and undeniably with astounding energy.

On Layton's side, the correspondence ends on a pitch of visionary fervour. On August 25, 1973, Layton sent Pacey a postcard from Greece. He had finished *The Pole Vaulter* and was please with it, satisfied that it could well be his last book: it "sums up everything." On December 14, 1973, however, writing from Indonesia, he remarks upon his continuing creativity, and then, in a little over a week, from January 7, 1974, to January 15, he sent Pacey seven long letters. The are all written from Australia, at an apparently feverish pace, and convey a sense of elation and terror. Some of the themes are familiar, the scorn for anti-Americanism, for "gutless Stalinoids" and "leftist twirps," countered by his admiration for Orwell and Solzhenitsyn. Other themes, though not new, emerge from a fresh perspective, particularly with reference to the Yom Kippur War and its meaning for the destiny of Jews, whose history of suffering is now set in judgement over European civilization: "My contempt and hatred for Europe is something that I shall take into the grave with me."

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[33] Letters to Pacey, September 17, 1962.

What is most striking in these letters is that they provide an almost frightening glimpse of the turbulent creative energy that was about to burst from Layton in the later 1970s, beginning with *For My Brother Jesus.*

In spite of many bitter, even brutal arguments, the quarrels between Pacey and Layteon during the 1960s never led to a falling out. This demonstrates the remarkable capacity for friendship of both men, and also their fundamental agreement on the function of poetry. Pacey shared much of Layton's scorn for modernist purity in language and form, and supported his purpose, if not always his methods, to take poetry out of the confines of 'high art' into the impure atmosphere of public debate. Pacey also shared much of Layton's scorn for "modern invalidism." For Pacey, as for Layton, acute sensitivity and exquisite suffering were insufficient motives for poetry. He demanded that the poet "triumph over adversity," and it is this sense of triumph, Pacey maintained, that set the work of Pratt, Klein, and Layton apart. He demanded honesty and fidelity to personal experience, not just ideological consistency or formal virtuosity. The value of Pacey's friendship to Layton lay primarily in that avowed "honesty," his opennes to the impact of poetry, and his readiness to take Layton seriously at every turn. He was not one of Layton's most perceptive critics; Eli Mandel, Seymour Mayne, Wynne Francis, and Milton Wilson have demonstrated a sharper understanding of Layton's poetry. In fact any extensive analysis of Layton's poetry by Pacey is conspicuously lacking, and he seems to have shied away from some of Layton's major poems like "Cain," "A Tall Man Executes a Jig" and "Osip Mandelshtam (1891-1940)." Nevertheless, Pacey provided crucial support in Layton's turbulent career, as both antogonist and ally. In comparison, even an admiring critic like Wynne Francis can maintain that the "ideas" or "targets" of Layton's poetry are relatively gratuitous for an enjoyment of his world:

> We may wince, and perhaps we should, as we note our resemblance to certain of the rotating targets (most of them are crude effigies but some are realistic portraits); but we can also, since it is poetry, enjoy the expertise and panache of Layton's performance.
>
> Layton himself is too serious about his role as a prophet to relish such an approach to his work. Nor will it satisfy those who wish either to take him to task for his half-baked ideas and mis-

> guided opinions or to applaud him for his blunt truths and moral courage.[34]

Pacey clearly was one of "those," and as such he was invaluable to Layton. He enjoyed Layton's performance, but he also took him "to task." He regarded Layton's ideas and opinions as worthy to be challenged, and he responded with "Dionysian" relish and a kind of fearless sincerity.

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[34] Wynne Francis, "The Farting Jesus: Layton and the Heroic Vitalists," *CV II* 3.3 (1978): 49.