

Poet no longer solitary figure

# "Belonging to writers' union like joining the Kiwanis"

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and the other romantics taught in high school. Soon Layton began writing seriously, and his first book, *Here and Now*, appeared in 1946.

With Dudek and John Sutherland, Layton worked on the *First Statement*, a literary magazine that "pretty well established modern poetry. We attacked the status quo, the establishment, current mores, and above all, anti-eroticism."

Around this time, Layton found that he had a hard time even giving his books away, so he donned the role of public exhibitionist, making fiery public appearances and outrageous statements, and generally pretending to be someone else.

He succeeded in drawing attention to his work but many people became preoccupied with his eroticism rather than his craft.

Layton feels his reputation for being a dirty old poet grew out of the inhibitions that Canadians have about sex. "North Americans are born voyeurs...they suffer from impotency." He adds, "I am to the Canadian public as Marilyn Monroe was to the American public... a sexual symbol."

In the 50s, Layton and Raymond Souster established the *Contact Press*, and Layton edited two books, *Love Where the Nights are Long*, and *Canadian Poems 1850-1952* (with Dudek).

Layton has taught since 1946. From then until 1960 he worked out of Herzliah High School, occasionally teaching at various Jewish community institutions. In 1950 he started conducting night courses at Sir George Williams University, and later became poet-in-residence.

In 1968 Layton moved to the University of Guelph as poet-in-residence, coming to York as professor of English the following year.

It is ironic that 30 years ago Layton was starving for publicity, for today he has too much for comfort. He is constantly demanded for readings, discussions, seminars, media and public appearances all over the map.

He does his best to reply to a "Niagara" of phone calls and letters. Between these duties and his three courses at York (Introduction to Poetry, Poetry Workshop, and a fiction course), Layton has time to write only in the summer.

Does he still try to grab the public eye? "On the contrary, I'd be delighted if they left me alone... It's a pity I'm not a stammering poet. I'm a producer's dream."

He laments the fact that his campaign to make peace between Jews and Christians will bring him even more publicity. His current

vulnerability to public demands is one of the reasons he will probably be leaving York in the next one or two years.

In 30 years of writing, Layton has produced 27 volumes of verse and one of prose. He received the Governor General's award for *A Red Carpet for the Sun*, but he feels that at least four other of his books (*Balls for a One-Armed Juggler*, *Periods of the Moon*, *A Laughter in the Mind*, and *In the Midst of My Fever*) should have had the same honour. Layton has also received three

Canada Council grants and a Doctorate of Civil Laws from Bishop University.

Layton has seen Canadian interest in poetry grow steadily throughout his career. "Once upon a time a poet was a solitary figure; now belonging to the writers' union is like belonging to the Kiwanis."

"I suspect poetry readings have replaced churchgoing. The poet is a kind of a surrogate priest. People looking for consolation and uplift now look to the poet."

Layton has been married three

times, and has two grown children, Max and Naomi, and a youngster, David. Naomi is a professional classical guitarist, Max is about to have his first volume of poetry published, and David is a budding sculptor.

In closing, two comments from Layton: "I have not the slightest doubt that I shall rank with the greatest mortals of English poetry: Shakespeare, Donne, Byron, and Yeats," and "I'll be remembered for my ideas, not for walking down the hall with my fly open."

## Hart House excels with *Coriolanus*

By IAN BALFOUR

The production of Brecht's *Coriolanus* currently playing at the University of Toronto's Hart House theatre is an admirable one.

It is surely somewhat odd that someone would choose to present the English translation of a German adaptation of an English play, but there are some significant alterations, both of focus and language.

*Coriolanus* is one of the most political of Shakespeare's plays, and the one which most explicitly deals with a theme central to Brecht as a Marxist, the class struggle. Brecht naturally emphasizes this aspect.

Before embarking upon any Brecht production, one must first come to terms with the theoretical foundations of his epic theater.

Director Wolfgang von Stas opts for a more Shakespearian than Brechtian approach to the play. Characters never step out of their roles to speak directly to the audience and lights are dimmed for scene changes, in keeping with the Aristotelian theatre of illusion.

Von Stas, however, contributes some alienating effects, most notably in the battle scenes where the action is presented in tableau fashion, the effect of the soldiers frozen in poses being sculptural or photographic in nature.

The acting of the principal characters is very solid. John Cartwright as *Coriolanus* is convincing in his portrayal of this complex tragic hero. *Coriolanus* is torn between his ties to family and state; his character is paradoxical in that he strives for glory but shies away from praise, he despises the com-

mon people but it is only through them that his life has meaning. Cartwright is able to capture the complexities and subtleties of the character in fine fashion.

Rex Southgate is particularly outstanding as Menenius, the one-time friend and mentor—though ultimate antagonist—to *Coriolanus*. Southgate has great stage presence; often he seems to control the very energy of the performance.

Of the other principals, only Frances Baker as *Coriolanus'* wife Virgilia is somewhat disappointing. Her characterization lacks depth, tending to be more melodramatic than tragic.

As for the technical aspects of the production, all are satisfactory, particularly Eric Binnie's minimal but highly versatile set.

The play will run at Hart House until March 22.



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