

York profiles: Irving Layton

Flamethrower poet starts crusade for Jesus

By TED MUMFORD

Irving Layton, the "62 year old flamethrower of Canadian poetry" and professor of English at York, is embarking on a new project.

"I'm serving notice to Christians that I'm about to reclaim Jesus," says Layton. Furthermore, "just as I told Canadians in the 40's that sex is here to stay, now I'm telling Jews that Jesus is here to stay."

Layton feels that Christians, who have overglorified Jesus, and Jews, who have kept him "hush-hush", can be reconciled and made to realize that "Jesus was a remarkable man and a great prophet". In this way, the strife between the two religions may be ended forever.

Layton intends to publicize his ideas through his lectures, poems, readings and articles. He does not expect it to be an easy crusade.

"The most dangerous thing you can do is present your fellow man with the truth."

An example of the above axiom: on his return from a recent trip to Germany, Layton declared that a Nazi-type government would never re-emerge there. Soon after, a swastika was painted on the front of his house, his wife received a phone

call threatening the life of their son, and menacing letters arrived in the mail.

Despite the abuse he expects to receive from both Jews and Christians, Layton is unafraid. "I couldn't render a better service to Canada, or the world, for that matter," he says.

The controversy will be nothing new to Layton, whose literary career has been marked by running battles with the press and chest-thumping proclamation and denunciations.

Layton was born Israel Lazarovitch in Rumania in 1912. In his first year, his family moved to Montreal. They lived on St. Elizabeth Street, in the city's Jewish "semi-slum".

Young Layton attended Alexandra Public School and Baron Byng High School, where he started writing poetry. He was expelled two months before matriculation for refusing to apologize to the master of the school.

(To sidetrack briefly, when Layton was in his first year at Baron Byng, poet Abraham Klein was in his final year and politician David Lewis was in third year. Layton was followed by Mordecai Richler, who portrayed the school in his novel The Appren-

ticeship of Duddy Kravitz.)

In fact, the Jewish enclave in Montreal is probably the most productive literary group in Canada, with a list of one-time residents including Layton, Klein, Richler, Leonard Cohen, Seymour Mayne, Henry Moskovitch, Adele Wiseman and Miriam Waddington. Layton suggests this productivity arises from the fact that "there were three solitudes, instead of the two, as Hugh McLennan says".

But after being "persecuted by the best on a grand historical scale", these Jewish writers cannot fit into the Canadian literary syndrome of being victimized by the Americans or the wilderness. "It's so out of keeping with the Jewish ethos, it's enough to make me laugh!" says Layton.

After Baron Byng came Horn's Cafeteria. "where I really got my education. It was a hangout for communists, socialists, anarchists, and erotics of one kind or another."

Here Layton learned about the works of Theodore Dreiser, Shaw, Marx, Lenin, H.G. Wells, Sinclair Lewis and Jack London "all of which had been studiously kept from



Dong Tindal photo

Poet and York professor Irving Layton

me throughout high school."

After a spell of hanging around Horn's Cafeteria and St. Lawrence Boulevard, Layton was still undecided about a career. He went back to school, choosing MacDonald College, because the fees were cheaper than those at McGill. He obtained a BSc in agricultural science, and then spent a year in the army.

The turning point in Layton's life

was his decision to go to McGill for economics and political science. Here he met John and Betty Sutherland and Louis Dudek, who introduced him to the poems of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and Dylan Thomas.

The work of these modern poets was a revelation to Layton, who had been writing in the style of Tennyson

• (Continued on page 14)

beth tikvah drama guild 3080 Bayview Avenue
Presents (South of Finch)

one flew over the cuckoo's nest
By Dale Wasserman
Directed by Reva Tward

8:15 p.m. **HELD OVER**
Adults \$3.50 Saturday, March 22
Students \$2.00 Sunday, March 23

For tickets call 226-2261

Love at first sight...
It only took a few lifetimes to happen

Joseph E. Levine presents
"Toute Une Vie"
(And Now My Love)
a film by Claude Lelouch

Joseph E. Levine presents "And Now My Love" A film by Claude Lelouch
With Marthe Keller Andre Dussollier Charles Denner
Carla Gravina Gabriele Tinti Charles Gerard Gilbert Becaud
Screenplay by Claude Lelouch and Pierre Uytterhoeven
Music by Francis Lai A co-production Les Films 13—Rizzoli Film
Prints by De Luxe An Avco Embassy Release

STARTS FRIDAY **INTERNATIONAL CINEMA** **DAILY 7:00-9:00**
YONGE AT MANOR RD. • 489-3800 SAT., SUN. FROM 2 P.M.

INTENSIVE HEBREW COURSE

If you are:

- going on Aliyah
- going to Israel for a year or summer
- just into learning hebrew

SIGN UP NOW!

- beginners
- intermediate
- advanced

4 NIGHTS A WEEK FOR 4 WEEKS!

Time — 7:30 — 10 p.m.
Days — Monday — Thursday
Dates — May 12 — June 10
Fee — \$10.00
To Enroll — Call Linda 667-3647/8, 638-2229

A PROJECT OF
VOLUNTEER COMMITTEE
STUDENT MOBILIZATION
FOR ISRAEL

Sponsored by Student Zionist Org., Jewish Student Federation, Keren

Hatarbut Aliyah Dept.

STARTS FRIDAY, MARCH 21st

COLUMBIA PICTURES Present the movie ...

"TOMMY"

in
★ **QUINTAPHONIC SOUND** ★

Directed by **KEN RUSSELL**

Music by **THE WHO**

starring
ELTON JOHN
ANN-MARGRET
ERIC CLAPTON
ROGER DALTRY
JACK NICHOLSON
TINA TURNER
OLIVER REED

961-6303
Varsity
IN THE MANULIFE CENTRE BLOOR & BAY