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TIME AND GEOGRAPHY IN THE NOVELS OF MORDECAI RICHLER.

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, PH.D., 1978

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GRADUATE COLLEGE

TIME AND GEOGRAPHY IN THE NOVELS OF MORDECAI RICHLER

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Diane Elizabeth Ryan

Norman, Oklahoma

1978

TIME AND GEOGRAPHY

IN THE

NOVELS OF MORDECAI RICHLER

APPROVED BY

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

TO

Mike and Christine

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first became interested in the study of Canadian literature as an undergraduate student at the University of Montreal. The novels of Mordecai Richler especially fascinated me and I felt his work had not received the attention it should. I owe my thanks to several people who encouraged me to pursue this interest.

I am indebted in particular to Dr. Robert M. Davis for directing this study over the past three years. He managed to overcome the difficulties of communicating by mail and gave me invaluable criticism and much needed advice. I can never repay the genuine concern he showed in my work nor the many hours of time and effort he so willingly gave me.

I owe my thanks also to my husband, Mike, and my parents, George and Simone Pering. They have never hesitated to help me in any possible way in order to provide the necessary time to research and write this dissertation. Without their unselfish assistance, I might never have finished this study.

Finally, I would like to offer my sincerest gratitude to Ron and Linda Thornton. They have, on several occasions, opened their home to me so that I might complete my degree requirements. In addition, Linda's help in typing and proofreading this dissertation has been invaluable. Her friendship and encouragement have supported me during this study and her many efforts on my behalf are much appreciated.

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TIME AND GEOGRAPHY IN THE NOVELS OF MORDECAI RICHLER

INTRODUCTION

Born in 1931 in Montreal, Mordecai Richler is among Canada's best and best known writers. From the early fifties through the present he has worked in many genres: the novel, essays, reviews, film-scripts, short stories, a play and a children's book. He has written for such magazines as Life, London Magazine, Encounter, New Statesman and the New York Review of Books. But his most notable contributions to Canadian and for that matter literature in general have been as a novelist. During a period of some twenty years he has published seven novels: The Acrobats (1954), Son of a Smaller Hero (1955), A Choice of Enemies (1957), The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz (1959), The Incomparable Atuk (1963), Cocksure (1968), and St. Urbain's Horseman (1971). Several of these have been translated (The Acrobats, for example, was translated into five foreign languages). He has won the Governor General's Literary Award, an award presented to outstanding Canadian artists, for his book of essays, Hunting Tigers Under Glass (1968), and for St. Urbain's Horseman. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, probably his most widely read and loved book, was adapted for the screen and the film version of his children's book, Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang, should be released

shortly. Considering the sizeable body of Richler's work and the acclaim he has received for it, it is surprising that relatively little serious or lengthy study has been made of his writings.

Though he has spent most of his adult writing career abroad, Mordecai Richler is very definitely a Canadian writer. Both his fiction and non-fiction attest to his interest in the problems of Canadian national identity. Canada has never subscribed to the American melting pot theory and has been, like most colonial or neo-colonial peoples, slow in evolving an organic sense of community or cultural homogeneity. The discussion among commentators (Richler included) continues regarding the makeup of the Canadian national identity, if indeed one can be said to exist. Grappling with this problem, Canada's novelists have attempted to define and capture the nature of the land and its inhabitants. "On the whole," asserts F. M. Birbalsingh, "the fictional presentation of Canada by her novelists conveys the general picture of a vast land, sparsely populated, and occupied by scattered social groups that have little in common with each other. But there is some evidence that the social groups are gradually being united by a slow process of cultural evolution."[1]

Canada's earlier novelists concentrated their efforts on description of the land itself and the documentation of life in pioneer days. Most of these novels were set in the developing West, usually far removed from any main center. Even when the locale was a city, it did not possess the characteristics we associate with contemporary urban living. Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese (1925) is one example. It explores the loneliness within the individual lives of a family of pioneers on the vast, windswept prairie. As For Me and My House (1941) by Sinclair Ross studies the

varying effects of life in the drought belt of Saskatchewan on the consciousness of a man and a woman who long to escape from the taboos of their small prairie town. Frederick P. Grove's Settlers of the Marsh (1925) and John Marlyn's Under the Ribs of Death (1957) also treat life in the Canadian West with an emphasis on the land and the difficulties encountered by its inhabitants in trying to subdue it to their purposes. In addition, they are representative of the large body of Canadian art which is thematically concerned with the plight of the immigrant in a new land. Grove chronicles the brooding tale of Niels, a young Swedish immigrant who settles in the bush country of northern Manitoba. Marlyn's story tells of a Hungarian boy lost between the customs of his parents and those of the Canada to which he passionately desires to belong.

Richler belongs to this tradition, but his finest achievements, while displaying as keen an interest in the social environment as those of his predecessors, are of a somewhat different nature. Unlike them, he is an urban novelist from the eastern part of the country to whom the prairie experience is relatively unknown. When he uses the theme of man versus a hostile environment, it is not the land itself to which he is referring but the social conditions which preclude his protagonists' successful realization of their goals.

Montreal, the city in which Richler spent his formative years, is his Canadian setting. The choice of locale for one interested in studying the problems of an evolving Canadian identity is excellent. Montreal is Canada's largest city and the ethnic, racial and religious differences of her population have earned her a reputation as a truly cosmopolitan centre. Moreover, the clash of cultures between French and English, immigrant and native, Jew and Gentile is probably more pronounced in Montreal

than it is in any comparable Canadian city. By choosing to focus on his own neighborhood, the ghetto area surrounding St. Urbain Street in Montreal, Richler is able to incorporate a large number of these divergences into his work. As Montreal and her inhabitants form a microcosm of the Canadian experience, St. Urbain Street in its associations with the outside world becomes, in Richler's hands, a microcosm of Montreal. It is not surprising, given this setting, that Richler shares with earlier writers a deep interest and concern with the immigrant experience, But, whereas they used the immigrant himself as protagonist, Richler usually studies the lives of that generation's children and grandchildren and the way in which they are able to adapt to the demands placed upon them by the old world of their family and the new world of their peers.

Other Canadian novelists like Hugh MacLennan share Richler's concern for Canada's social environment but few are as successful as Richler is in fictionally representing it. MacLennan attempted in Two Solitudes (1945) to dramatize the conflict of the French and the English segments of the country. While his novel is intellectually stimulating, it is too much the embodiment of an idea. Because the characters are forced to carry heavy symbolic weight, they never come to life as individuals. They remain abstractions whose purpose it is to exemplify the Canadian problem. Such has always been the pitfall of a fiction too closely allied to the political-social environment from which it springs and Richler has wisely avoided it. His characters, while their individual lives might incorporate a social reality, never become mere instruments to prove that reality.

Richler's use of the Canadian setting and his thematic exploitation of the problems of national identity, especially in relationship to the immigrant experience, link him with Canada's literary past as well as

present. His non-fiction is, if anything, even more adamantly Canadian and has certainly earned him a high rank in Canadian letters. However, the nationalistic group of Canadian writers, scholars and reviewers regard Richler as a "professional Canada-knocker". They take offense at such statements of his as:

> There is a burgeoning and reputable body of Canadian work, but the hunt, and the academic hunters, still vastly outnumber the Indians. Indeed, it sometimes seems to me that never have so many university scalp hunters been out scouring the woods for so few Indians, returning to their typewriters to pound out highly exaggerated accounts of the game available. Not so much criticism as hyperbole, largely self-serving hyperbole, especially for those who have bet their tenure on Canadiana as a growth stock.[2]

Richler, in my opinion, exaggerates the situation in Canadian literary criticism today, but his exaggeration underlines his deep concern for the quality of work being released as representative of Canada. Richler would be the first to admit that Canadian writing has improved in the last twenty years but he resents the nationalistic fervor of those who overevaluate it. As a critic and reviewer, Richler usually manages to keep perspective and to judge a work in comparison not only to its Canadian counterparts but in relation to its place in the international literary world.

Richler's non-fiction also includes many pieces of a non-literary nature, the largest proportion of which treat sports and politics. While he is not an expert in these fields, the charm and personal insight he offers have made him well known as a journalist about Canada both within and without the country. He has written articles on such diverse topics as Expo 67, the separatism issue, Canadian ballet companies, hockey and baseball. The basic interconnection between Richler's journalism and fiction is one which has been noted by several critics.[3] He is at his best in both domains when he is writing from personal experience. This

often takes the form of reminiscence, of a memoir of past time actually lived through by the author.

At least as important as Richler's place in the Canadian tradition is his Jewish heritage. His grandfather ventured to Canada by steerage from a Gallician shtetl in 1904, following the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War and the pogrom in Kishinev. On arriving in Montreal, he acquired a peddler's license and a small loan from the Baron de Hirsch Institute and settled not far from Main Street in what was to become a ghetto. He had been a Zaddik, a rabbi who guided others in the study of the Talmud, and had written many books. These included a translation of the Book of Splendour (the Zohar) into modern Hebrew and many volumes of sermons, hasidic tales and rabbinical commentaries which were published in Warsaw and later in New York. Richler's uncle was also a Yiddish writer well-known in New York. Richler's generation was the first in which not one of the children became a rabbi. In The Street, Richler recalls the atmosphere of his youth:

> Our world was rigidly circumscribed. Outside, where they ate wormy pork, beat the wives for openers, didn't care a little finger if the children grew up to be doctors, we seldom ventured, and then only fearfully. Our world, its prizes and punishments, was entirely Jewish. Inside, God would get us if we didn't say our prayers. You ate the last scrap of meat on your plate because the children in Europe were starving.[4]

Orthodoxy was religious as well as ethnic:

> My grandfather was uncompromisingly orthodox. Switching on lights, tearing paper, were both forbidden on the sabbath. So late Friday afternoon it fell to one of my aunts to tear sufficient toilet paper to see us through shabbus; and one of my uncles had devised a Rube Goldberg type apparatus, the key part of which was a string attached to a clock that turned off the toilet and hall lights when the alarm sounded at midnight.[5]

Though Richler writes of these days of his youth with much humour, he acknowledges the impact they have had upon him both personally and

professionally. There are in his work copious references to the Talmud and the Torah as well as to religious precepts and Jewish ritual. While he does not consider himself a religious person, Richler bemoans the fact that religion has been modernized and that Jews, in trying to be Canadian, have forgotten the beauty of their own heritage: "It seems to me that the Jewish middleclass in their anxiety to prove themselves okay have taken the vulgarities of this bland, middle-class country as the desirable norm and in many cases have tried to go them one better".[6] But the influence of Richler's Jewish background is perhaps most apparent in his attitudes. In many ways he can be considered old-fashioned, for his writings always support the good and the decent man who is trying to uphold his principles against the invasion of forces from outside. Richler and his protagonists seek an adequate alternative to the systems of values, like organized religion, which they deem have little validity in the current contect.

Richler's choice of themes is also, at least in part, a reflection of his Jewish heritage. The first symbol of the Jew in Canadian fiction is that of the stranger. All of Richler's protagonists are exiles, whether in physical or psychological terms, and his implicit suggestion is that, after all, we are--every one of us--Jews. This theme of the alienated man in exile is not of course limited to Jewish or Canadian literature but it is perhaps more prominent here and I think explains the main currents of Richler's work. Moreover, the Jewish and Canadian influences at work upon him are in many ways allied as he himself has noted: "To be a Jew and a Canadian is to emerge from the ghetto twice, for self-conscious Canadians, like some touchy Jews, tend to contemplate the world through a

wrong-ended telescope, as witness what is still my most cherished Canadian headline: 1960 WAS A GOOD YEAR FOR PLAYWRIGHTS FROM OUTSIDE OF CANADA." He continues: "Like Jews again, Canadians are inclined to regard with a mixture of envy and suspicion those who have forsaken the homestead (or shtetl) for the assimilationist flesh-pots of New York or London."[7] Richler's novels deal in general with the national problem of achieving a Canadian identity out of the various cultural and racial divergences of the country and in particular, with the process of assimilating Jewish elements into this integrated Canadian culture.

Given the particularities of his Jewish and Canadian experiences, one might expect Richler's novels to be provincial and limited. But just as he is wary of the pitfalls inherent in being too Canadian, so is he aware of the pitfalls in being too narrowly Jewish-oriented. This concern places him somewhere between the Canadian Jewish and the American Jewish literary traditions. Jewish Canadian novelists have for the most part been very concerned with Judaism and this has given their work an inbred quality which has sometimes been limiting. Adele Wiseman in her novel The Sacrifice focuses in much detail on the atmosphere of a closed-in Jewish community that remains impermeable to outside influences. The work of Henry Kreisel and A. M. Klein is similar in its almost complete emphasis on strictly Jewish family life and customs. While their work is not without merit, it lacks scope and universality and so fails to equal that of their American counterparts, for example Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud and Phillip Roth. Richler, on the other hand, is less limited by preoccupations with Jewishness and his characters exhibit qualities of thought and feeling that are common to many men of whatever background. Still his work too, one would have to say, falls short of the best work of his

American contemporaries. However, Birbalsingh's claim that "It falls short of American standards because he works within an unstable and debilitating national ethos that severely inhibits creativity"[8] seems too exaggerated to be valid. Richler is working in a less defined national and ethnic tradition than his American fellow writers; perhaps this explains why he lacks their objectivity. While he may be too immersed in the facts close to home to achieve the distancing necessary to a masterpiece, one cannot place the blame for this entirely on the country. In the end, one must judge a writer by what he himself has accomplished and Richler has not created a character of the stature of, for example, Moses Herzog. Duddy Kravitz, though an improvement on Noah Adler of an earlier novel, lacks as Birbalsingh observes, ". . . the moral equipoise that would enable him to examine his experience with the wide-ranging awareness and depth of a Moses Herzog."[9] Of all Richler's protagonists Jake Hersh of St. Urbain's Horseman most closely approaches this goal.

Richler is only too aware of the problems facing the Jewish writer. He has published articles on Malamud, Bellow and Mailer and has had much to say about Jewish writers in general. His wide reading in the area and his knowledge of what has been done cannot help but have influenced his own choice of material and techniques. As he himself says: "These days it's not very risky to be a Jew. It is, however, becoming increasingly tricky to make out as an American-Jewish novelist and be original as well, the overriding fear being that everything has been said."[10] Though he comments somewhat disparagingly on what he sees as the main trends in Jewish American literature, it is interesting to note that these trends appear in his own work. He begins by saying: "The claustrophobic tenement background most of us escaped from in one city or another has been

caught exactly by Henry Roth, Daniel Fuchs and more recently, Alfred Kazin."[11] This background reflects Richler's own and that of his protagonists Noah, Duddy and Jake. He continues: "Such protest as we had in us was scorchingly made by Jerome Weidman, Budd Shulberg and Irwin Shaw. . . . "[12] At the same time, Richler regards the holocaust as the very core of most serious Jewish writing since the war: "It is what binds Malamud to Bellow, the one having made the moral gesture of The Fixer and the other continuing to write the novel of the survivor's reflections and self-justification."[13] For Richler personally the Germans are still an abomination and in his work one sees constant reference to the sufferings of the Jewish people in Jake, for example, who lives in constant preparation for the second coming of the Germans and relives the first coming through the journals of Joseph Mengele. Richler's novels, particularly St. Urbain's Horseman, share in yet another characteristic he finds common to Jewish writers:

> Undoubtedly, recent Jewish-American novelists have overreached each other in greedily assuming guilt for all the world's ills, making it intellectually fashionable (but boring and presumptuous) to argue that if contemporary man is alienated, no one is more alienated than the Jew.[14]

This problem is one Richler dramatizes in the person of Jake Hersh, the well-to-do, successful film director who feels he should not be allowed his peaceful, contented existence because so many in the past and in the present are undergoing horrors.

Richler's sometimes caustic tone when defining the shared concerns of the body of Jewish writers is probably due to his awareness of the danger of relying too heavily on this built-up tradition. He acknowledges, though, that the best of Jewish-American novelists speak in accents distinctly their own and differ widely in approach and singles

out Mailer, Malamud, Philip Roth and Saul Bellow as examples of such excellence. Still, always an internationalist at heart, he comments: "Ultimately, the family will be judged not by its self-advertised intrigues, quarrels, and jealousies, . . . but for its signal failure, for all the racketing so far, to produce one individual work of art as enduring as Ulysses."[15]

Richler's affinities with the American literary tradition are not restricted to the family of Jewish novelists. In an interview Richler said:

> I consider myself an American and the first modern novels I read were American. I read Dos Passos and Hemingway and Fitzgerald and Faulkner, and these are people who have influenced me a great deal. And of course my attitudes are American, and even coming here [abroad] is a north American convention, and I am not really much influenced by the young English novelists. And when I said that American novelists are more ambitious, what I mean is they work on a much broader canvas and with much more freedom because the society is much more flexible. They circulate on different social levels and they can write about them.[16]

Though American attitudes and literary figures were a primary influence on Richler's career, much of this influence came through Europe. After two years at Sir George Williams University Richler quit and left for Paris. In Paris he joined the community of expatriate American artists searching for the inspiration Paris had provided to their predecessors of the twenties. This was 1951 and Richler was to remain in France, travelling occasionally to England and Spain, for a period of two years. While in Paris, he published three very short mood pieces in a little magazine called Points.

Richler's Paris days are notable not so much for his literary production as for the influence they had upon him as an artist. As he puts it: "I was only a callow kid of nineteen when I arrived in Paris in

1951, and so it was, in the truest sense, my university. St Germain des Pres was my campus, Montparnasse my frat house, and my two years there are a sweetness I retain, as others do wistful memories of McGill or Oxford."[17] Among the as yet unknown writers in Paris at the time were Terry Southern, Alan Temko, Alfred Chester, Herbert Gold, David Burnett, Mavis Gallant, Alexander Trocchi, Christopher Logue, Mason Hoffenberg, James Baldwin, and the late David Stacton. Richler associated mostly with the New-Story group--David Burnett, Terry Southern, Mason Hoffenberg and Alan Temko. As Richler describes his experience, it was quite different from what one might imagine. The group was not knit together by political anger or a literary policy but by a shared sense of the ridiculous. All were hungry for success and recognition but feigned indifference. Rarely, if ever, did they discuss their work with each other. Instead, "We bounced an inanity to and fro, until magnified through bizarre extension, we had disposed of it as an absurdity."[18] The zany personality and the unrehearsed response took precedence over the discussion of ideas which would have made the participants feel self-conscious and stuffy. Dressed in T-shirts, blue jeans and sandals, absorbed by the Tarot and pronouncements about Coca-Cola culture, the group of expatriates had not yet been labelled beats. Life magazine took them for existentialists even if Jean-Paul Sartre didn't.

Richler's feelings at being in Paris were elation and joy and he says that what he found most difficult was the necessity of repressing them. He was excited by the freedom life abroad seemed to offer. Even though the group of expatriates did not divulge much concerning their own work, they enthusiastically passed copies one to another of anything by Genet or Samuel Beckett. They were curious about French writing, especially

Sartre, Camus, and above all Celine. Richler's first attempt at a sub-Celine novel was returned with a printed rejection slip. They were also self-consciously aware of the Twenties: "We knew the table at the Dome that had been Hemingway's and made a point of eating at the restaurant on rue Monsieur le Prince where Joyce was reputed to have taken his dinner."[19]

This whole literary and cultural ambience could not help but have a profound effect on the developing talent of the young man from Montreal. In a general way it served to expand his horizons beyond the fairly narrowly circumscribed area he had known during his childhood. This no doubt helped to prevent his attitudes and consequently, his work, from becoming too provincial. Specifically, it played a role in his later choice of locale and themes. While the primary and most convincing setting in his novels is the ghetto area surrounding St. Urbain Street, most of his protagonists share Richler's own desire to escape to a freer, more open world and several find their way abroad as he did. The action for The Acrobats takes place in Spain; Noah of Son of a Smaller Hero leaves for Europe at the end of the novel; and even Duddy, though he does not leave the country, abandons the traditional ways of life of the ghetto. Norman Price of A Choice of Enemies lives in an expatriate community in London, not unlike that of Richler's own Paris days, and the older Jake Hersh of St. Urbain's Horseman is a member of a similar community of more successful people. Jake's life is perhaps more closely parallel to that of Richler, who after a short sojourn back in Canada returned abroad to make his home in London.

Richler's early writings, in particular, testify to the importance of his Paris days. Critics have identified his first novels with

those of the beat generation of the fifties in America. Others have analyzed his first three novels in existentialist terms. But it seems to me that the most pervasive influence on the mind of the young novelist came from the American expatriate writers of the twenties, especially Hemingway. They wrote the first modern novels he read, and in a sense, his Paris days were an attempt to relive their experiences. Richler's borrowings were mostly from Hemingway in terms of idea, theme, language, and occasionally style. The Acrobats, his first novel, suffers most from this derivative quality but the effect lingers on through Son of a Smaller Hero and A Choice of Enemies. As he matures, he develops his own voice and window on the world and does not need to imitate others.

The mature Richler views his Paris days from the perspective of an adult and finds in them interesting comparisons. After reading John Clellon Holmes' memoir, Nothing More to Declare, he recognizes that the ideas and idiom, even some of the people, prevalent in the Village during the fifties were interchangeable with those in Paris.[20] He and his group he now sees were not true adventurers but followers of a romantic convention. He quotes Brian Moore who wrote in a review of Exile's Return for the Spectator:

> When one reads of the passionate, naive manifesto in Malcolm Cowley's "literary odyssey of the 1920's," the high ambitions and the search for artistic values which sent the "lost generation" to Paris, one cannot help feeling a touch of envy. It would seem that the difference between the American artists' pilgrimage to Europe in the Twenties and in the Sixties is the difference between first love and the obligatory initial visit to a brothel.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> . . . the young American writer abroad shows little interest in the prose experiments of Robbe-Grillet, Sarraute, and Simon; he tends to dismiss Britain's younger novelists and playwrights as boring social realists, and as for Sartre, Beckett, Genet, or Ionesco, he has dug them already off-Broadway.[21]

This characterization of the modern wave of expatriate artists does not, however, include the many untold and sometimes subtle influences that such an education in the world provides. It expresses the rather cynical reflections of a middle-aged writer but fails to capture the excitement and joy Paris offered to the mind of a nineteen year old boy. It seems to me that this was the beginning of an outlook that was to play a major role in his fiction and non-fiction alike. It opened up to him a cultural and literary heritage, both European and American, which he might have lacked otherwise. This mind set which can contemplate a work in relationship to its place in a literary or artistic hierarchy has been invaluable to Richler as a journalist, reviewer and novelist. I think it has helped him attain a degree of universality so many other Canadian artists never achieve.

Richler returned to Canada in 1953, after these two years abroad. He worked at a variety of jobs including one as news editor for CBC Montreal. During this time, The Acrobats was accepted for publication by Andre Deutsch and Richler went to London. Although he was to return to Canada, twice for a period of a year as writer in residence at Sir George Williams University and Carleton University, London was his home from this time until 1974. In 1974 he returned with his wife and five children to take up permanent residence in Montreal. His six novels subsequent to The Acrobats were written, then in Britain.

The student of Richler's writings in their entirety comes to see the striking fact that most of his work forms a continuum. Elements occur and reoccur, in isolation and in different combinations, both in the themes used and the structural elements employed. Taken as a whole, they form a unit and there is a development and progression from the

early novels to the later ones.

David Stouck's comments on Canadian art provide one way of approaching Richler's fiction. Stouck says that "While it is the special function of the imagination to make us more fully aware of life's potentialities, the Canadian imagination has traditionally been obsessed with the limitations rather than the possibilities of human experience."[22] Because of climate, geography, and historical forces, Stouck sees survival rather than freedom to be the dominating fact of Canadian art. The two recurrent images which he discovers in Canadian art are nature as hostile environment and the escapist image of a human refuge away from it all. Nature, rather than being in conflict with the artist, reflects the isolationist, pastoral desire of its creator: "The quest for pastoral retreat, . . . renders Canadian art non-dramatic, for the source of conflict remains outside the canvas or just off the page."[23] While the above generalizations have more direct reference to Canada's past than present and to artistic than literary endeavors they form an interesting perspective from which to view Richler's writings. One contention of this paper is that the freedom--survival polarity is an underlying and major thematic concern of Richler's and that an understanding of how it operates in his fiction advances our understanding of what he, as a novelist, is aiming to achieve.

If Richler writes, as he has stated, the novel of character, the freedom--survival polarity perhaps is best seen in relationship to the figures, major and minor, that he creates. All of them are to a greater or lesser extent aware of "life's potentialities", and hunger to achieve in their own lives a realization of potentials they know to exist within themselves. Andre of The Acrobats, for example, strives for a

personal fulfillment, an actualization of his potential through his art. Duddy, in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, seeks to make it materialistically and socially in the world outside the ghetto, the world which to his mind offers all of life's good things. Jake of St. Urbain's Horseman is the one major Richler character who feels that his time of potential has passed by. Although he is more successful in fact than any previous Richler hero, he thinks that he has not realized the ambitions and hopes he had for his life. Unlike the others, he looks backward to the past rather than forward to the future.

Each of the Richler heroes, then, (with some qualification for Jake), begins with a goal. He expects a better future than present and he is more illusioned than disillusioned. He has, in short, some sense of belief in a freedom which will permit fulfillment. The quest is, in several cases, a quest for freedom itself. Moreover, it often involves a search for self-identity, for a sense of order and a belief in a value structure comprehensive enough to rule one's life.

Because choice is intimately linked to freedom, the ability to choose then becomes an imperative and it is often the lack of choice or the wrong choice which destroys the Richler hero. As Noah Adler in Son of a Smaller Hero says to Panofsky: "If you choose not to choose then there is no truth at all. There are only points of view."[24] To define oneself, such a truth must exist, for as Andre Bennett of The Acrobats and others find out, self-identity cannot be achieved or maintained if one merely defines oneself against something. The positive element must be present and in this regard I think it correct to say that Richler is very much the moralist, a man to whom freedom and its incumbent choice are necessary to any successful realization of the goals of self-identity

and the formation of an overall pattern or guide for one's life. In fact, Richler maintains "that any serious writer is a moralist, and only incidentally an entertainer."[25]

At the same time, though, that he is concerned with "life's potentialities", Richler is obsessed, in the way Stouck claims Canadian artists are, with the "limitations of human experience". His characters continually find themselves come face to face with a hostile environment, with an environment which at every turn blocks the hero's path. Almost all perceive their present environment as suffocating them and precluding any sort of personal achievement of goals. The Jewish character, like Noah Adler or Duddy Kravitz, sees the world of the Jewish ghetto in this way. Whether Jewish or not, each character tries to escape the confinement of one world in order to find the peace and fulfillment which he believes another world offers. This might involve an escape to the world of the goyim as for Noah and Duddy or it might involve retreat from Canada to a Europe which is perceived as less decadent.

In either case, the pastoral retreat usually proves no less hostile and often is more so than the world left behind. The idyllic achievement of contented isolation from outward chaos is not Richler's usual fictional stance. His characters are, it is true, isolated, alienated outsiders, but they do not construct humble refuges in which they are perfectly comfortable. Nature or environment is in conflict with these characters, not solely reflecting their state. Richler's art is certainly of the dramatic sort and the source of conflict is on, not off, the page.

The freedom--survival, character--environment polarities described above are not unique to Richler nor to Canadian literature. They apply

to Waugh, to Hemingway, or to almost any other twentieth century novelist. Neither is Richler's emphasis on the individual in exile peculiar to him. Baumbach describes the hero of the contemporary American novel as the sensitized outsider who sacrifices himself for the redemption of others or performs a spiritual passage for his own salvation (or fails painfully in the attempt).[26] Howard Harper states a similar idea when he says that our best contemporary fiction has what Paul Tillich has called ultimate concern.[27] While the Richler protagonist does not usually sacrifice himself for the redemption of others, he does undergo a spiritual passage. The success of this quest is generally tentative for Richler never offers an easy solution to a difficult problem. Since the forties, as Eisinger has pointed out, the quest for the self has intensified. Richler is but one of the body of writers who has "had to examine the possibilities for literature in a universe of fragmented beliefs where a multiplicity of values or none at all had long ago replaced a unified world view."[28]

Richler's thematic concerns, then, place him squarely within the contemporary literary tradition. His uniqueness as a writer worthy of attention in his own right lies in his treatment of these themes and in the methods he employs to develop them. This study will focus primarily on the uses Richler makes of time and geography in his seven novels and how these in many ways parallel the events of his own life. The time period in which Richler is most interested and during which all his novels are set is from about the late 1930's to the 1950's. Thus, it corresponds to approximately his own first thirty years of life. Richler has always felt that his generation has accomplished little and has always been either too young or too old to take part in major world happenings. Their

childhood paralleled the Second World War. And by the time the sixties and its protests and alternate lifestyles emerged, they had become staid, middle-aged and successful. Many of Richler's protagonists (Andre Bennett, Noah Adler, Norman Price, Jake Hersh) feel the same way. Jake Hersh of St. Urbain's Horseman states it most eloquently:

> Wrong place, wrong time. Young too late; old too soon, was . . . the plaintive story of his American generation. Conceived in the depression, but never to taste its bitterness first hand, they had actually contrived to sail through the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the holocaust, Hiroshima, the Israeli War of Independence, McCarthyism, Korea, and latterly, Vietnam and the drug culture, with impunity. The whirlwind elsewhere.[29]

"The times had not used but compromised them."[30]

The effect which being a member of such a peripheral generation has on these characters is momentous. It is a major motivating factor in their quest for self-fulfillment. Because they do not have a cause worth fighting for, they desperately search for one. This search often leads them to an examination of the past and its ideals. Norman Price, for example, tries to achieve in his own life some measure of the dedication of his father who died as an army surgeon in Spain. Jake Hersh occupies a great deal of his time fantasizing on past events, especially those connected with his cousin Joey, the Horseman of the title. In short, the past is usually seen as a time in which issues were clearer and people more certain of what their beliefs were. The present, in contrast, does not seem to offer any answers to ultimate questions. Neither religion nor politics is viewed as a valid area to which to give one's allegiance but nothing has replaced these traditional structures around which people once organized their lives. If the past is idealized but not applicable to the current context and the present is unbearable, each Richler protagonist (with some qualification for Jake) looks to the

future for fulfillment.

Closely linked to Richler's use of time is his use of geographical location. Three of his novels (Son of a Smaller Hero, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, St. Urbain's Horseman) are set in and around the St. Urbain Street ghetto of his own boyhood. To these people the immigrant experience was fairly recent and Richler takes us through the generations--the orthodox grandfather (for example Melech Adler), the father who is uncomfortable in his role as dominated son (for example Wolf Adler), and the grandson who seeks liberation. Richler's own grandfather could very well be the model he utilizes to depict the older generation. He has never written enough about his father to evidence a parallel but his own life as a youth followed the pattern of rebellion and liberation he describes in Noah Adler and Duddy Kravitz. This rebellion allied with the search for a cause sufficient to base one's life on led Richler to Europe. It is not a coincidence, then, that in five of his seven novels the protagonists become expatriates and seek in Europe what they could not find at home. Four of his novels, The Acrobats, A Choice of Enemies, Cocksure and St. Urbain's Horseman, are set in Europe. The major figure in each is a Canadian expatriate, an expatriate who is usually involved (like Richler) in a career in the arts. Andre Bennett as painter, Norman Price as writer, Mortimer Griffin as publisher and Jake Hersh as film producer, all are attempting to achieve self realization abroad. Even Noah Adler of Son of a Smaller Hero, which takes place in Montreal, is about to set sail for Europe at the end of the novel. Europe represents to him as it had to the others the fulfillment of a dream. It is the land of opportunity, of possibilities, the land to which each of the

characters tries to escape a past and another world which attempted to confine them, to limit their potential. Duddy Kravitz does not fit this mold but he too rejects the environment which formed him and tries to enter the world of the gentile population of Montreal.

Naturally enough, the new world each character embraces fails to completely satisfy his needs. It proves disappointing and underlines to him the fact that his problem is not caused wholly by a hostile environment but that much is due to his own inner confusion. Nevertheless, the experience is valuable for only after trying out the life-styles of other groups can he form a synthesis which is personal and answers his unique requirements. He cannot obliterate his past because it is a part of him. He must come to terms with it and decide which aspects of it are of worth to him. Both personally and professionally, Richler went through a similar trauma. Having lived the middle part of his life as the expatriate unable to extricate himself from his ties to his homeland, he is aware of the problems confronting the expatriate abroad. He says:

> After thirteen almost uninterrupted years abroad, I now realized the move I had made with such certainty at the age of twenty-three had exacted a considerable price. Some foggy, depressing nights it seemed to me that I had come full circle. Many years ago my parents emigrated from Poland to Canada, to Montreal, where I grew up ashamed of their Yiddish accents. Now I had seemingly settled in London, where my own children (spoiled, ungrateful, enjoying an easier childhood than I had, etc. etc.) found my American accent just as embarrassing.[31]

At the same time Richler says that " . . . the short answer to those who have asked me why I've quit Montreal is I've never left. I always live there."[32] On one level anyway Richler did come to terms with his past for he was able to distance himself enough from it to use it artistically in his novels. But the past, in another form, was a barrier professionally.

In his early career it seems Richler tried to recapture through imitation in his own work the greatness of his predecessors, notably Hemingway. As the characters in his novels find out they must be their own persons, so too does Richler in his later novels experiment to find his own truly unique voice.

The themes of time and geography are central to Richler's novels and autobiographically relevant. I think Richler is correct when he said in an interview with John Metcalfe that "I'm still lumbered with the characters and ideas, the social concerns, I first attempted in The Acrobats. Every serious writer has one theme, many variations to play on it."[33] The form in which these themes are embodied is what has dramatically changed. Richler's early novels are traditionally realistic and like many nineteenth century novels can be approached via the theme of the upwardly mobile young man from the provinces. As Ian Watt describes it, time and movement in such novels are progressive and there is a qualitative difference between A, the character's starting point and B, his end point. The development and possible change in characters and situations is one presupposition of this kind of novel. George Woodcock convincingly places Richler in the Balzacian tradition, for Richler is

> . . . highly conscious like Balzac, of the interplay between an individual's will and the social and historical imperatives that bear upon him. Like Balzac he is trying to solve the problem of how to maintain a surreptitious freedom in a world that looks appallingly deterministic; like Balzac, too he is fond of tracing the careers of provincials adventuring in the metropolis, he has a strong sense of the importance of money and social prestige as motivating factors in present society, and he is inclined to link his novels together into a continuum (as Balzac was the first to do) by the use of the same environments--Montreal and London--and by the re-use of characters to suggest the continuity of themes.[34]

One important difference that separates Richler and contemporary realistic

writers in general from their nineteenth century counterparts is the usual lack of high optimism in their endings. Solutions reached are merely tentative and though characters undergo a spiritual passage, they do not live happily ever after.

From this characteristic mode of verisimilitude in character and action, Richler moved towards satire. Most critics see The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz as central in this shift. Novels previous to it (The Acrobats, Son of a Smaller Hero and A Choice of Enemies) are almost completely realistic while those following it (The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure) are predominantly satiric. St. Urbain's Horseman, in my opinion Richler's most mature work, attempts to combine these two strains and does so successfully. Richler sees the same sort of division in his work and explains it this way: "My own novels break down into two categories readily. There are the naturalistic novels and the straight satires and I find it refreshing to go from one to the other. I guess my ultimate interest is in the novel of character really."[35] But this shift in his work, he is quick to admit, was a gradual one. The ironic perceptions of the satirist were there from the beginning. Again, time and geography were crucial. The fact that Richler and others wrote for the most part of their homelands became a problem. Going home on visits became increasingly difficult as the gap between illusion and reality widened. The Montreal of Richler's youth was not the Montreal of the sixties or seventies. The satiric strain became more and more predominant the longer he spent in England because he became increasingly removed from his material, the Canadian setting and experience. As early as 1968, Richler gave this as one reason for the change in direction which had taken place in his writing and in that of others:

> After all, the writer who opts out of the mainstream of American experience, self-indulgently luxuriating in bohemia, the pleasure of like-minded souls, is also cutting himself off from his natural material, sacrificing his sense of social continuity; and so when we swung round to writing about contemporary America, we could only attack obliquely, shrewdly settling on a style that did not betray knowledge gaps of day to day experience.[36]

Satire with its caricature, implausibility of action, and fantasy in events was such a style.

Thus, the time and geography motifs explain much of what is important to any reader of Richler's works. They are invaluable as an autobiographical tool, as a thematic tool and as a structual tool. This study will examine Richler's seven novels one by one utilizing this tool as a method from which to best approach what I see as the underlying truth of Richler's fiction. I will attempt to demonstrate both the amazing sense of cohesiveness one gets from the whole as well as the development in stylistic technique and treatment of themes which makes Richler today one of Canada's major novelists.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ACROBATS

Richler published his first novel, The Acrobats, in 1954. At the time of its acceptance by the English publishing company, Andre Deutsch, Richler was twenty-three. The novel is interesting for what it promises rather than for what it delivers. Quite obviously the work of a novice, The Acrobats contains several of the worst qualities of first novels: it is derivative in content, oversubjective in point of view and technically flawed. Nevertheless, it lays the groundwork for Richler's later development and so is indispensable to the student of his work. For one thing, time and geography are important thematic and structual tools from which to approach this and later novels. Richler will continue to be interested in the time-related problems of generational divergences, of the present's lack of the certainty of belief of the past, and of the many effects a character's personal past have had on his development. He will also continue to use the expatriation theme to underline both the real and imagined differences between North America and Europe and their inhabitants. For another thing, the form Richler uses in The Acrobats as in all his realistic novels is one of the most traditional of fictional structures. This form traces the

progress of a sensitive young man, often an artist, in his journey from the confines of an inhibiting environment towards the freedom and independence which he sees as necessary to realize his potentialities or his desires for worldly success and recognition.[1] The cast of early Richler heroes is made up of Romantic idealists and the protagonist of The Acrobats, Andre Bennett, is no exception.

The setting of The Acrobats is Spain; the central matrix, parallel to Hemingway's fiesta at Pamplona, is the fiesta in Valencia. The plot revolves around the traditional motif of the love triangle. Andre Bennett, a young expatriate painter living in Valencia, is in love with Toni, a prostitute who works at the Mocambo Club, owned by Chaim, the philosophical Jew of the novel. Roger Kraus, decorated by Hitler and by Mussolini and captain of the Olympic bobsled team, is one of the figures of evil who abound in Richler's fiction. He, too, becomes interested in Toni and she, sensing his deep need to be loved, cooperates with his sexual advances. From the beginning, the reader knows that the two rivals must inevitably confront each other and that the weaker of the two, Andre, must lose. Both Guillermo, a Communist friend of Andre's, and Toni have premonitions of Andre's forthcoming death and both tell him that he will be killed.

But the Kraus--Andre confrontation is very much more complex than that of two men fighting over the same woman. When Kraus faces Andre, he realizes he is afraid of him because Andre looks at him with eyes of shock and Kraus remembers other shocked eyes of the past and his own feelings of bewilderment which are assuming the shape of guilt. "Andre, perhaps, was his accuser."[2] After six years of non-army life,

Kraus is rediscovering himself. He recognizes in the shape of Andre, the enemy.

At this point, Kraus is torn apart. Though he sees in Andre the many victims of his past and needs to justify his past actions to himself, he is plagued by guilt, by the thought that, perhaps, he was not right. His cry of anguish to his sister, Theresa, is: "I don't want to kill. Not any more" (p. 155). But Theresa, like her brother, is desperate for love and at the moment of this outcry is drunk and completely frustrated. Her attempt to seduce Luis, the bartender at the Mocambo, has proven futile. She, the rationalistic, intelligent, unemployed Ph.D., has made a fool of herself and is conscious of it. She must get even with the male sex. She goads her brother on: "They hate us. You must kill him, Roger. You have no choice" (p. 155).

Thus, when Kraus confronts Andre on a bridge, the reader knows what the outcome will be. Andre, who has just decided that he will not fight Kraus, that he does not want to die, does fight. Kraus, who does not want to kill anymore, easily overpowers Andre and throws him over the bridge onto the pavement. He thinks to himself afterwards that he might even at that point have saved Andre were it not for Andre's look which "conveyed to him that he was ugly and didn't matter" (p. 193).

In the final analysis, survival has become the issue for all involved. Andre dies physically, but Guillermo describes the expression on his dead face in terms which indicate his end was existentially satisfying: "It was exhausted but still somewhat eager. As if he was waiting for something which had not yet arrived but could be expected shortly, an abysmal something perhaps" (p. 189). Theresa has not fared so well. While Andre dies, having found some reason to continue to live

and having reaffirmed his interest and belief in life and love, Theresa does not survive either physically or emotionally. After killing Andre, Kraus finds Theresa hanging from the chandelier and a note indicating her utter despair. Though she always seemed sure of her beliefs, in contrast to Andre who continually faced the void of nothingness in his existence, she dies not with Andre's final transcendence but in a state of abject loneliness and disbelief. She tells Kraus in her note that she never believed in the German cause and the rightness of Hitler's actions. Her efforts were only an attempt to justify to herself the betrayal of a long ago boyfriend on whom she had informed the police.

The note has its desired effect. Kraus is crushed. All along Theresa's certainty has upheld him through his own periods of doubt. To be faced with the fact that Theresa's hold on the truth was just as fragile as his, that the meaning which he attached to his life and actions because of her no longer holds, is more than he can handle. Looking at Theresa's one eye which refuses to shut, Kraus says: "It's a lie. You believed. You always believed. . . . I have to believe" (p. 193). And, indeed, unless Kraus is to follow his sister, he must catch at whatever straws of belief remain. Kraus, then, physically survives but at the cost of great mental anguish and upheaval. The roots of his existence have been shaken.

The subplot of The Acrobats revolves around the American Barney, his wife, Jessie, and her expatriate brother, Derek, who are holidaying in Valencia and meet Andre at a cafe. One sign of Richler's competence as a novelist, even at this point, is that many of the major issues of the novel reappear in the subplot. Barney, Jessie and Derek are, like

Andre, lost individuals searching for a cause to direct their lives. Each is essentially alone, fighting for psychic survival against hostile forces which continually threaten to overpower him. Each wants to be loved but does not know how, himself, to love.

Richler's principal shortcomings in both the plot and the subplot are due to a seemingly contradictory set of circumstances. He is both too derivative and too personal. The influence of the writers of the lost generation is pervasive and direct in the novel. Hemingway, who epitomized the response his generation made to World War I, particularly appealed to him. There are countless instances in The Acrobats where theme, language or technique rely on Hemingway's manner.

The scenes which involve Barney, Jessie and Derek are in many ways reminiscent of Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises. The fact that a fiesta is in progress in both novels allows for many directionless bar scenes. The Americans of the 1950's are the lost generation of their time but the intervening years have made a difference. The superficial gaiety one finds among the English and Americans of The Sun Also Rises is missing in The Acrobats.

Jake and his friends take part in the festivities of the fiesta of San Fermin which begins on Sunday, July 6 and continues for seven days. They eagerly watch the crowds rushing through the streets followed by the bulls who are taking the path from the corrals to the bull rings. They sense the joyfulness of the occasion and give themselves over to it. Jake says: "There was a close, crowded hum that came every day before the bull-fight. The cafe did not make this same noise at any other time, no matter how crowded it was. This hum went on, and we were in it and a part of it."[3] All are in one way or another affected by the bull-

fighting. Jake says: "We had that disturbed emotional feeling that always comes after a bullfight and the feeling of elation that comes after a good bull-fight" (p. 164). Jake is unique because unlike most foreigners he truly understands what is involved in bullfighting. Juanito Montoya, owner of the hotel, recognizes this aficion and so is more willing to forgive Jake for the foolishness of his friends. In short, Jake's group joins in the fun and makes the most of the activities surrounding the fiesta. Their own troubles are just below the surface but they usually manage to forget them in the joys of the moment. Jake comments just before the fiesta begins: "Under the wine I lost the disgusted feeling and was happy. It seemed they were all such nice people" (p. 146). And when the rockets explode, the pipes shrill and the drums pound to mark the opening of the fiesta, Jake reflects the attitude of this expatriate group of English and Americans when he says: "It seemed out of place to think of consequences during the fiesta" (p. 154).

The fiesta of San Jose held on Monday, April 19, 1951, in Valencia has similar fireworks displays, dancing and music but Barney, Jessie and Derek never become an integral part of it. They sit on the outside as observers of the festivities but do not feel a part of the excitement around them. In a bar on fiesta day Barney feels miserable as he looks at the others: "If he could join these men for a drink, if he could share their jokes. No, always he was the outsider" (p. 111). Nor can one imagine Jessie playing the role Brett does. When dancers wearing wreaths of white garlic around their necks form a circle around Brett, she acquiesces to their wishes. She and the others join the people's dancing and drinking in the wine shop. In contrast, after Andre refuses Jessie's advances, she roams the streets aimlessly and alone,

oblivious to the fiesta surrounding her. Derek is the third member of this lost, joyless group and probably the most Hemingwayesque of Richler's characters. Since the Spanish war his life has been without direction and in a drunken stupor he reveals his innermost secret to Juanito, the fact of his sexual impotence as the war victim: "Drunk, Derek clutches the crotch of his pants in his fist and says 'I was wounded three times. The last time--Here!'" (p. 133). Jake Barnes too was rendered impotent by a war wound but his attitude towards it is different. He is even able to see some humour in it as he recalls the words of the liaison colonel who came to visit him in the hospital: "You, a foreigner, an Englishman (any foreigner was an Englishman) have given more than your life" (p. 31).

It is perhaps not fair to compare Richler's craftmanship to Hemingway's but it is inevitable that one do so. Underlying the differences between the characters of The Acrobats and The Sun Also Rises is the difference in the level of artistry of Hemingway and Richler. Jake Barnes, for example, suffers from his infirmity as much as Derek does but Hemingway's method of understatement is more effective in conveying this to the reader than is Richler's more direct, overly dramatic treatment. In The Sun Also Rises the gaiety of Jake Barnes and his companions underlines the desperate quality of their existences. Richler is less successful at depicting this quality because he makes it too obvious and so less poignant. He is a bit too conscious of the rotteness of the bourgeois, and the world he creates seems artificial.

Hemingway's superior handling of technique is again seen in his use of symbols. The bullfighting of the fiesta is central to the novel's meaning. Coming to terms with and accepting the dangers of involvement

in life is typified in the actions of Pedro Romero: "Romero's bullfighting gave real emotion, because he kept the absolute purity of line in his movements and always quietly and calmly let the horns pass him close each time" (p. 168). This confrontation with death and the control of fear it demands are part of the Hemingway hero's code. Moreover, the characters often talk in terms of bullfighting. One example is when Mike asks Robert why he follows Brett around like a steer all the time, the implication being that the rest of them are bulls.

The Acrobats possesses no organizing principle as all embracing as the bullfighting in The Sun Also Rises. The Valencian carnival figures, straw figures on wood bases called fallas, represent the externalization of human terrors that have to be exhibited and burned in order to be exorcized. The symbol is a good one, but Richler does not always submerge it below the surface of the story. He has his characters, even the materialist Barney, philosophize on the significance of the fallas just in case the reader should have missed the point. He does, however, use the symbol significantly at Andre's death. When Andre's moment of truth takes place, the falla in a blaze of glory is burnt. Perhaps this signifies Andre has succeeded in purging himself of the evil Toni recognized within him and of the exterior evil he struggled so valiantly against. His state of almost constant darkness has, even though only momentarily, been alleviated. In a flash of brightness, symbolized by the light of the fire, Andre achieves a sense of direction, a knowledge of where his life is going. The heat of the fire could, perhaps, symbolize the new heat of love burning within him for Toni. The glory of his achievement is represented in the sky shot through with the

sparks of the dummy figure. But, as the falla disintegrates into ashes, so Andre's intentions come to nothing and his life returns to the ashes from which it proceeded. This is possibly how Richler, at this period of his career, viewed man's state--as a lengthy struggle with only transitory moments of success.

Though Richler always seems a less polished craftsman than Hemingway, he does amazingly well in adapting certain Hemingway techniques to the Valencian festival world. Quite different and a true fault is the fact that The Acrobats is too technically derivative. Richler sometimes resorts to imitation rather than adaptation. One can see Hemingway's manner in the wording and in the sentence order and length of a passage such as the following:

> In the summer they would take us out in the boats, and we would jump overboard and swim. The water was very cool, and there was always the taste of salt in our mouths. The priests said it was evil because we all swam and played together and were often naked. My father laughed at the priests. He said they had filthy minds. At night there was always dancing on the quays, especially when there was a good catch. That night there was only the noise of the shooting." (p. 112)

The simple pleasures of the water and the attitude of the father toward the priest are also not unlike what one might expect from Hemingway. George Bowering points to another instance in which the young author Richler turns to Hemingway

> . . . when Andre is preparing in his drunkenness to poke his fist at the Nazi Kraus, Richler sees him through the literary trick (Hemingway's word) that comes via Hemingway's "Up in Michigan" from the advice of Gertrude Stein: "Andre laughed. He laughed and laughed and laughed. He laughed because Chaim was a useful man and he laughed because Kraus was a brute. He clutched the banister and doubled up laughing. He laughed because Ida was dead and he laughed because he was drunk. He laughed and laughed. he laughed because he was feverish and he laughed because the doctors said he would go mad. Tears rolled down his cheeks, and he laughed."[4]

These are obvious attempts on Richler's part to copy the style of a literary idol. The second example is less successful because it appears overdone.

Richler gives to his protagonist, Andre Bennett, an obsession with Hemingway not unlike his own. Andre realizes as Richler did in Paris that it is impossible to relive the experience of another generation. This does not stop Andre from speaking as if he were Frederic Henry. When Toni tells him to love her, his thoughts are a direct echo of For Whom the Bell Tolls: "Love, he thought. That is one of the words that is no longer any good. Like courage, soul, beautiful, honour, and so many others. Words that have become almost obscene because of the whoring of the hack writers" (p. 47). Some of Andre's thoughts about Hemingway are on a more conscious level, as when he states: "'As a matter of fact,' Andre said, 'I'm not really a painter at all. I came here to study life in its entirety. One day I hope to write a book about it. You know, like that Who do the Bells Toll for'" (p. 62).

Hemingway's influence upon Richler can be explained in two ways. The first is that Richler's early reading and the spirit imbued in him during his Paris days made it natural that he should turn to a writer of the lost generation. The second is that the time period during which Richler wrote was in many respects similar to that during which Hemingway wrote. Each postwar period saw a fatigue with ideology and a preoccupation with survival. Eisinger states:

> The 20's emerged from the innocent idealism of Progressivism and the Wilsonian new freedom, from the public avowal of public acts based on principle, to a reality quite suddenly and shockingly different in its unprincipled chaos. Ideals and principles so recently found to be inadequate and inapplicable nevertheless lingered in the consciousness of the writer of

> the lost generation and gave to his sense of disenchantment the force and pain of a real and anguished loss.[5]

Writers of the 50's did not usually have the initial excitement of their predecessors but they too felt they had been let down. Intelligent men in England and America were struck by an acute sense of disillusionment because their gods had failed them and there now seemed a dearth of causes for which it was worth fighting. This emphasis on the disintegration of traditional values Richler sees as the major problem in the contemporary world, one to which he continually returns in his books. As early as 1958, he said: "We are living at a time when superficially life seems meaningless, and we have to make value judgments all the time, it seems in relation to nothing." He continues: "What I am looking for are the values with which in this time a man can live with honour."[6] Andre Bennett's search reflects Richler's.

Philosophically, this interest in values places Richler within the existentialist tradition. This influence is lesser and more subtle than was Hemingway's. It does not directly involve the imitation of a particular writer. Rather it is a mode of thought that Richler shared with a large body of writers. Richler and the group of expatriate writers with whom he associated in Paris were familiar with the works of Sartre and Camus. They were also aware of the basic tenets behind their writings. The world, as seen in existentialist terms, is a hostile place in which man is lost. He has only himself to depend upon and knows that only the man who chooses freely to be himself, who is his own work, can ever hope to truly exist. This choice is a continual one and involves an absolute freedom as well as an absolute responsibility. Camus's concern was with ". . . the man sufficiently strong to sustain

a disproportion on the level of values, a man who persists in his demands for truth in a universe that says truths are impossible."[7] In a sense the struggle for truth becomes truth.

Through most of The Acrobats Andre struggles to achieve self definition and truth in a society which makes this difficult. His problem is also that for a long time he does not make a choice and he does not accept the responsibility which comes with the freedom he desires. He recognizes the problem and its solution on an intellectual level but only shortly before his death does he decide to act upon it. He has an epiphany of engagement in which he clearly sees that he must act in accordance with the way things are. Neither escape nor despair solves anything. Andre dies at peace with himself because he has made an affirmation of his involvement with the world of men.

In The Acrobats, then, humanistic rather than nihilistic impulses are dominant. This places Richler in the category of optimistic absurdist. Galloway includes Updike, Styron, Bellow and Salinger in this group and says of them:

> Rejecting nihilism and orthodoxy they end by affirming the humanity of man. The absurd novelist, like Camus, . . . does not attempt to establish a specific ethical system, but he does point toward a homocentric humanism which may well serve the function of prolegomena to a future ethic.[8]

One example of this occurs in Bellow's Seize the Day. Tommy Wilhelm, the protagonist of the novel, is pushed into a funeral procession and finds himself standing over a coffin crying for another human being. This experience achieves the oneness with humanity which had been the object of his quest. All Bellow heroes begin, like Andre, by trying to throw off responsibility and the chaotic weight of the world, but love

for mankind finally brings them back to the business of living in the real world. Richler has Andre state a similar humanitarian ideal:

> It is the man who is unusual--the man who rises above the restrictions of his own class to assert himself as an individual and humanitarian. It's pretty damn elementary to be aware of social injustice and poetic truth and beauty but to be capable of empathy, to understand the failings of a man--any man--even as you condemn him, well . . . Look, every human being is to be approached with a sense of wonder. The rest is crap or incidental. (p. 73)

Love for mankind, for Toni in particular, brings Andre, like Tommy Wilhelm, to the realization that involvement not isolation is the direction one needs to follow.

Richler's reliance on Hemingway and on existentialist philosophy is, then, both an asset and a defect in The Acrobats. It is to Richler's credit that he can adapt the work of others to the problems of his own novel. But too often he relies on mere imitation and this detracts from the originality of his own work. Moreover, the extent to which he is influenced in theme, language and technique, particularly by Hemingway, makes The Acrobats a very derivative novel.

The second principal shortcoming of the novel is that it is oversubjective in point of view. Because Richler tends to write from within his characters, the narrator is not sufficiently distinct from his hero. Scott says of Richler's protagonists that "They are, some would say, too important, his motives for creating them too serious, for the down-to earth medium and style in which he works. . . . there is a tendency for them to move, not according to their pattern, but to the simpler destiny of Richler's own."[9] Too often the reader has the feeling that Richler is merely venting his own personal grievances through Andre's mouth. One example occurs when a Canadian gallery offers to

carry Andre's paintings. Andre echoes Richler's contempt for Canadian culture when he says:

> The Canadian artists! Mediocrity draped in the maple leaf! Sonnets by the ageing virgin grand-daughters of Tory tradesmen evoking the memories of rather un-Presbyterian passions, slick paintings by sophisticates with a shrewd eye turned towards New York. Kultchir, ladies! Step right up and get your goddam Kultchir while it's real hot! (p. 79)

Many times also the reader senses that he is listening to a spontaneous overflow of emotion rather than a considered argument. Andre, like the young Richler, denigrates everything North American. In one of his several enigmatic and incomplete statements, Andre tells Toni: "The sky isn't like this in America, ... It is like a prison roof painted blue. Here, it's different. Unfinished like a Goya. There's always something more important than anything in it. But it's missing" (p. 53).

Perhaps Richler was too close to Andre Bennett's artistic and existential conflicts to be able to deal with them with the objectivity necessary to the novel. Richler himself started as a painter but had facility rather than talent. From what we know of his early life, his feelings and actions rather closely parallel those of his protagonist and his philosophical ideas were as unstable and imprecise as Andre's.

Despite these weaknesses, The Acrobats contains much that is distinctively Richlerian. In its treatment of time and geography it prefigures Richler's later novels. The Acrobats is a carefully planned book. Like Son of a Smaller Hero it is divided into parts and subdivided into numerous sections. These are dated and time references are frequent. Its action covers the span of three days, a Saturday, a Sunday, and a Monday. Parts I and II, which take place on Saturday and Sunday respectively, prepare for the fiesta. The reader is introduced to the major

characters of both the plot (Andre) and the subplot (Barney, Jessie and Derek) in the first section of Part I. By section nine of Part I the reader has come in contact with all the characters who take part in the drama. The geographical scene and the tone of despair have been established. Part II develops the characters but only in the penultimate section do Andre and Kraus confront each other for the first time. This fight, broken up by Toni, foreshadows the death fight of the final section of Part III which takes place on Monday. Part IV, which occurs at 3 a.m. of the morning following Andre's death, shows how each character reacts to the death. The Afterwords takes us to Paris where Chaim, Richler's spokesman and the philosopher of the novel, comments on the meaning of what has occurred and gives us Richler's final vision of hope.

The progression that takes place from Parts I to IV is very similar to that of the traditional dramatic piece. The first two parts of the drama build up to the climax, Andre's death, in Part III. Part IV and the Afterwords form the denouement and resolution of the conflict. Within this framework, one strength Richler demonstrates is his ability to interweave plot and subplot. An analysis of the thirty-four sections which make up the novel reveals the numerous interrelationships Richler develops. In Part II, the shortest of the parts, we see Kraus alone, Andre alone, and Barney alone. Toni and Kraus meet as do Guillermo and Andre and Andre and Kraus. Two scenes involve a larger group: the first: Barney, Jessie, Derek, Juanito, Chaim and Andre, the second: Derek, Andre, Jessie and Barney. The characters are acrobatic in their relationships and Richler is the primary acrobat manipulating them towards and away from each other. Bowering explains it this way: "The different people cross each other in different places, the whole acrobatic routine,

and snippets of knowledge are exchanged with handholds." Because of this "We watch not the performance of one man's life, but the tumbling pattern of the human condition."[10]

This universality is underlined by several references to the world outside Valencia. Part II, for example, opens with the words: "Madame! consider for a moment the world at large" (p. 55). It goes on to recount Mr. Peter Kalowski, milkman, killing his wife and events in China and New York. The transition to 11:30 a.m. Valencia time and Roger Kraus standing in front of his mirror is unexpected but smooth. Kraus and the Fascist cause for which he fought, we are to understand, are but part of an evil which is everywhere. Frequent changes in locale, in time and in characters will continue to be a method Richler uses to achieve timelessness.

Richler is keen enough to use time not only as a structual tool but as an important thematic element. The time-related problems of generational divergences, of the present's lack of belief, and of the many adverse effects a person's past have on him, will continue to interest him throughout his career.

In 1951, the year in which the novel is set, Richler would have been twenty years old, about the age one imagines Andre must be. He would have been, like Andre, an expatriate artist in Europe. Richler has always felt that his generation has been left out of major world happenings because they were either too young or too old. The Acrobats takes place fifteen years after the Spanish war and six after the world war. Richler's feelings were probably similar to those Andre describes:

> Two worlds--worlds, to neither of which he owed true allegiance--would collide and crush him. That, he often felt, made his doom

> inevitable. Often it appeared to Andre that he belonged to the last generation of men. A generation not lost and not unfound but sought after zealously, sought after by the propagandists of a faltering revolution and the rearguard of a dying civilisation. (pp. 32-33)

If Andre represents the postwar consciousness of the West, as it seems he does, Richler is depicting in this first novel his own disillusionment in a post war world which he had nothing to do in making.

Both Richler and Andre are very aware of the past, particularly the Spanish experience, and long for the certainty of belief which prevailed then. Andre is disgusted by his failure of committment but cannot find a source of order by which to regulate his life. Chaim explains it to Toni this way: "It [Andre's problem] is that he knows and understands all the things that he is against but he still doesn't know what he is for. Andre has the temperament of a priest but none of the present churches will do" (p. 36). Andre and, it would seem, Richler think the precepts upon which they were formed are lifeless and inapplicable to a large segment of today's population. Traditional religion, culture and politics have failed to satisfy the modern world. Moreover, they have not only proven inadequate but often corrupt. Andre understands the relativity of truth and the harsh facts which belie the truths. When Guillermo tries to convince him to join the Communist party, Andre thinks: "Yes, there were truths! The Communists had one and so did the Christians. Even the bourgeois had one and for a long time they did pretty good with it. But you could not paint, not really, so long as men were killing each other so often" (p. 61). The leaders of previous social revolutions can no longer be worshipped either. Richler explains: "His [Andre's] intellectual leaders had proven either duds or counterfeits--

standing up in the thirties to cheer the revolution hoarsely, and in the 50's sitting down again to write a shy, tinny, blushing yes to capitalistic democracy" (p. 32). Self interest motivates their followers. Andre tells Guillermo: ". . . their [workers] tremendous concern with social justice is directly related to their own poverty and as much expected of them as is the puerility and such that we get from the bourgeois" (p. 74).

Andre's personal past haunts him as much as does his obsession with the ideals of a bygone time period. He has lived as an outsider both in Canada and in Spain. Waking one morning in bed, he tells Toni of his university days, of how he was ostracized because he came from the Westmount Bennetts. To the native of Montreal, this geographical bit of information is significant. Westmount is the opposite end of the spectrum to St. Urbain Street, the ghetto area Richler will use as setting in Son of a Smaller Hero and The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. It is the private haven of the wealthy, white, Anglo Saxon establishment population. In youthful rebellion against this WASP, moneyed background, Andre took up with the notorious campus Jewess, Ida Blumberg. Their relationship, however, ended disastrously, for Ida died as a result of an abortion and Andre remains guilt ridden, because he feels he is responsible. At this point, trying to escape both Ida's death and the traditional lifestyle his parents expected of him, Andre sells everything he owns and sails for Europe.

Europe represents to Andre as it must have to the young Richler, the life of freedom. The artist in exile is almost a commonplace in North American literature. Henry James, Edith Wharton, Ezra Pound and

T. S. Eliot shared a dislike for the crass materialism of the New World and a liking for the artistic and historical heritage of the Old World. Richler himself left Canada because he regarded it as a cultural wasteland.

Not only is North America a cultural wasteland, but its inhabitants are wasteland figures. The North Americans in the novel are morally stagnant. The Spanish native population is vital; society has defeated these people but their humanity is "wonderful". The contrast is very effectively developed in a passage describing the activities of the fiesta. On the one hand there is the street dance with its frenzied music and dancing. On the other is the ball which is held in honor of the Fallera Mayor at which a twenty-five piece orchestra plays "The Merry Widow Waltz". While in regular print the goings-on of the ordinary, suffering, sweating, pleasure-crazed crowd dancing itself into oblivion are described, in italics is recorded the stilted, pointless, ennui-ridden conversation between Mrs. Ira Birks, her husband, a visiting U. S. dignitary, Cardinal Megura y Paenz, Archbishop of Valencia, and the Ambassador. Richler's superb use of stereotypes conveys the kind of person Mrs. Birks is as well as her pretensions and supercilliousness:

> Mrs. Ira Birks--visiting dignitary from the United States, wife of a Harvard Law School graduate, applecheeked, native of Little Oak, Conn., aged fifty-three, sexually incompatible with Mr. Birks, anti-vivisectionist, Vassar, class of '22, member--D.A.R., S.P.C.A., wrote poetry from 1920 to 1924 and still does the occasional watercolour, virginity lost in the back seat of a '19 Ford, favourite poet--John Keats, said, turning to Cardinal Megura y Paenz, Archbishop of Valencia, 'I simply adore your fiesta! If only I weren't obliged to attend the bull-fights . . . .
> (p. 41)

The life of the street, of the Valencian carnival world is also in direct contrast to Andre's world of inactivity. Richler describes it

in jumpy, staccato rhythm: "Eyes of burning coal. Sweat, beating, beating. Head in a coma, head in a spell. Fluid body swaying. Twangy guitar sending up a burst of metal song" (p. 75). For Andre the sweat and the beating are associated not with a dance of life but with his recurrent nightmares of Ida's death. In a state of delirium he imagines his room to be overrun with rats and experiences excruciating pain as he feels the sensation of one crawling up his body. Horrifying images, such as a decapitated rat, head still bleeding, obsess him. Quite obviously these delusions reflect Andre's inner turmoil.

Richler also parodies typical American attitudes. Barney and Jessie think money can buy anything, even the approval of other people. When Jessie hears that Andre cannot support himself with his painting, she says Barney will buy a few. Andre refuses because Barney, he says, would not understand his work. Jessie fails to see the point. In another scene Barney tries to mask the evil of his desires through feigning an interest in culture. Before Luis brings him to the brothel, Barney says he would like some pictures. When Luis says they charge extra to take pictures Barney appears offended and says: "I don't mean those kinda pictures. I mean pictures! I'm interested in all this from a sociological point of view. I'm making an album of my European tour" (p. 102). But, shortly afterwards, Barney reveals his true nature when he asks Luis: "Do they do anything you want? You know what I mean?" (p. 102). Richler portrays all his characters as having the same basic needs but he feels that North Americans try to deny or submerge those needs they regard as base or ugly. They are also extremely concerned about their personal appearance. Andre comments about Jessie: "She is

an American woman, he thought. No dental odours, armpits shaven, no facial hairs, birthmarks removed in early childhood. No possibilities of human smells" (p. 90). Because the North Americans are so much concerned with appearance, their humanity suffers. The Spaniards who are described in terms of physical repulsiveness are, in contrast, truer representatives of humanity.

Though Richler makes unfavourable comments about America and Americans, he does not regard expatriation as an automatic solution. Europe does not hold the answer to Andre's problems. It is cut and old and bruised. Because he was not part of the Spanish war experience, Andre had come to Valencia to try to understand it. He finds neither Hemingway nor the Spain of Hemingway's novels. The epigraph to Part I of The Acrobats makes this clear:

> It was a time of lies, of infamy. They put our Spain,
> That sorely wounded Spain, in Carnival dress,
> And then they made her poor, squalid and drunken,
> So that no hand should touch the open wound. (p. 7, by Antonio Machado)

Richler dwells on the seedier aspects and representatives of life in present day Spain. The physical ugliness of their bodies and the grime of their surroundings is continually emphasized:

> Old men who had been searching the gutters for butts, pick pockets, beggar children, plump mothers nursing bawling babes in their arms, pimps, ragged soldiers far away from home, aged cripples, and the blind sellers of lottery tickets, unemployed workers and young girls, all the discarded junk and wonderful humanity of the slums joined hands for the dancing. (p. 41)

The contrast between the glories of the past and the disintegration of the present is developed in the river passage of the novel. As a novelist, Richler is more concerned with the evil within man than with the evil without. He allows one to reflect the other. He makes quick shifts of

focus from a character's words indicating an interior state of evil to a description of a seemingly unrelated but ugly physical scene. At one point Andre, very upset, asks Toni how in God's name she can be a whore. Immediately following is a powerful description of the river: "A belly of yellow weeds and burnt grass, anaemic sands and stones, trickling mosquito-ridden streams. O Turia, o turbulent river! How you had once been proud!" (p. 51).

The discrepancy between past and present involves not only physical deterioration of a once beautiful sight but deterioration in the quality of living and belief. The glorious past and figures associated with the river, the Cid and James the Conqueror for example, are no more. The modern world offers a life of relentless purposelessness. Richler describes the river and its inhabitants in this way:

> Starving workers, bellies bloated big with grief form splotches on your dessicated bed. Dead debauched giant! Rendezvous for pauper lovers! Unemployed newly weds beget children in the niches and apertures at the bottom of your concrete sidings, lost men cook dead rats over twig fires, talk of life and death and revolution, finally crawling into the damp dark caves to huddle against the cold of night. (p. 52)

If the scene and characters are distasteful and abhorrent so too is Andre's attitude towards Toni. Earlier when Andre had been talking of his uncertain parenthood and his mother's many lovers, Toni had told him that he was ugly when he discussed such things. Richler, using the same method as in the river passage, interposes again into the conversation of his characters to expose another piece of ugliness outside, seemingly unconnected to their lives: "An old, stooping man made his way down the street picking up cigarette butts from the gutter. He found a piece of bread and bit into it" (p. 49).

Europe, as Richler depicts it, has problems of its own. Andre is no more able to paint in Spain than he was in Canada. Until he is existentially satisfied, it will not matter where he is. As Jake Barnes says to Robert Cohn who wants to go to South America: "Listen, Robert, going to another country doesn't make any difference. I've tried all that. You can't get away from yourself by moving from one place to another. There's nothing to that" (p. 11). Before he dies, Andre recognizes the truth of this statement. He thinks: "First off, they [he and Toni] would have to get back to Canada. There had been enough of this, now he had work to do. He would work with what he knew, that would have to do. Jesus, he wanted to talk to her!" (pp. 172-73). Andre now sees that the escape from Montreal to a supposed freedom in Europe has proven itself impossible. He must return to his original environment and find order and purpose and freedom there. And it is to be found only when one recognizes the limitations within which one is forced to act. Freedom is not the completely open realm of possibility Andre once thought it to be. He must start, he now understands, with the given facts of his prescribed existence, with what he knows, and through the exercise of his faculty of choice, make the most of his personal limitations. Andre has painfully learned the lesson so many a modern protagonist must learn. He is like Jack Burden of Robert Penn Warren's All the King's Men who eventually learns that he cannot escape his past and must come to terms with it before he can leave Judge Irwin's house. Joseph in Bellow's Dangling Man discovers that the corollary to accepting one's past is learning to live in the present. Andre discovers, like Joseph, that there is no freedom without choice and no choice without commitment, that while

he lives as an isolate, his spiritual quest is a fraud.

Not all the characters of The Acrobats are as successful as Andre in coming to terms with the past. Derek too lives in the past of Hemingway's Spanish experience but, unlike Andre, he had taken part in the fighting. Despite his war wound, he looks back fondly to his days of involvement in a cause. "And he realised now and for ever that those days at the front constituted the only moment of truth he had known" (p. 133). But deep within himself Derek knows what Andre does, that geography is not the crucial element in the satisfaction of one's existential needs. In one of his rare moments of honesty he explains this to Barney:

> It had nothing to do with Europe or Spain. It all happened inside me, companero. Slowly. It wasn't dramatic so I fabricated the drama. I hated America so I joined the picket lines, I loved Spain so I fought in a war. But I didn't truly love Spain or hate America, I decided to feel these things. I keep telling myself that some day I'm going to snap out of it and produce something. A play, one poem, a thought, an act, anything. Meanwhile I keep on drinking and hating myself and waiting for death. The truth is I'm bored. I can enjoy nothing. Barney, I'm an impotent man. (p. 160)

Barney, however, cannot respond to this openness and grasp this opportunity for closeness to another human being. His reply is casual and to the effect that we all have our troubles. The only out for both of them now is to return to their previous, comfortable, accepted, antagonistic roles. Derek refuses to help Barney keep Jessie's attentions and tells him to get out as he has a boyfriend coming. Barney calls him a "goddam queer" on his way out. Derek never succeeds in his search for belief, for intimacy on the human level. He has the artistic potential of Andre, it seems, but like Andre cannot work given the conditions within and without himself. At the end of the novel he meets the Spaniard, Juanito,

in the Tango Club and they talk of the disappearance of Andre. Derek feels for others and he has a depth of understanding about himself: "The past could not truly be erased. It was there, a shape in the darkness, lurking there always, waiting to leap up at him. He did not have the strength to resist Juanito or the love to help Barney but his heart still went out to Andre and the others" (p. 184). Nevertheless, one feels Derek will continue to go through life unfulfilled and essentially alone. In the last view the reader has of him, he and Juanito are playing the role of lover to each other, each for his own end, and talking of going to America together. The positive choice to act to achieve one's goals has not been made. The escape to another geographical location will again prove futile.

Time and geography, then, are important elements to an understanding of The Acrobats. The personal and geographical past of each character has helped to make him what he is in the present. The political and social past has helped form his attitudes towards the present. The generation in which he was born has decided to some extent which goals and ideals are viable in his life.

If the past seems glorious but inapplicable to the present and the present is ugly, the future, in Richler's terms, promises death and destruction. There are many passages which dwell on the eventual disintegration of the human body. The epigraph to Part III of The Acrobats is one example:

> What is it you feel
> In your red, thirsty mouth?
> The taste of the bones
> of my big skull. (p. 109, from F. Garcia Lorca)

An awareness of the slowness of this process is evidenced in another

example, also appropriately from Part III, the section in which Andre dies: "Sweating, the tourists felt the gas and acids contained in their bellies. And in their mouths were yellow teeth and stuck bits of meat; an awareness of small deaths, many of them, rotting their bodies bit by bit" (p. 127). The civilization they have built is also rotting. Notice, once again, the explicit vocabulary Richler chooses. Andre, drunk, thinks of his arrival in Paris in the Metro at Saint Germain des Pres: "Paris is skeletons copulating on tin roofs and the culminating corpse of a dead civilization dying and raising a stench to jeering heaven while toasting on the wicked flames of wanton ennui and sin. Intellectual maggots crawling, sucking, impervious to their own horrid secretions" (p. 166).

But, despite a keen awareness of death and all the environmental influences of time and geography, it is the character's own response to the existential crises of his life that is important. In Richler's terms salvation involves a choice and the decision in regard to life's ultimate questions is a personal one. Andre ends his life at peace with himself because, like Herzog, he has a faith in the power and glory of the human spirit. Richler has this faith as well, for in the closing sentence of the novel he has Chaim say: "There is always hope. Always. There has to be" (p. 204). This reminds me of Asa Leventhal's final vision in Saul Bellow's The Victim: "Possibly there was a promise, since so many felt it." Both statements are optimistic but fragmentary and vague. Richler will continue to explore the same problems and search for a more satisfying solution.

CHAPTER TWO

SON OF A SMALLER HERO

The Acrobats (1951) and Son of a Smaller Hero (1955) have much in common. Both are influenced by existentialist thought and are novels of exile. Both deal with a hero who is searching for his self-identity and is in opposition to a society which he perceives as stifling. Both trace this young man's initiation into the harsh realities of adulthood. Richler uses geography and time as major thematic and structural tools in both books.

But in Son of a Smaller Hero Richler chooses to focus much more intensely on his protagonist's, Noah Adler's, background and development. Son of a Smaller Hero is the first novel in which he traces the cultural and religious influence of the Jewish ghetto of Montreal on the mind of a developing personality. As a young adult, Noah leaves this world for the world of the goyim. He must then choose from the values of both worlds those which are applicable to his own existence. When he does so, he becomes a human being in his own right, guided by a set of rules that are uniquely his own. Unlike The Acrobats, then, Son of a Smaller Hero is a true representative of the bildungsroman or apprenticeship novel, a "novel which recounts the youth and young manhood of a sensitive

PROTAGONIST who is attempting to learn the nature of the world, discover its meaning and pattern, and acquire a philosophy of life and 'the art of living.'"[1]

The novel is the story of a Jewish youth, Noah Adler, and his search for freedom and identity outside the confines of the ghetto world in which he was brought up. In the opening pages of the novel he leaves the home of his parents, Wolf and Leah Adler, and rents a room on Dorchester Street in Montreal. Soon after this he enrolls in night classes and meets a professor, Theo Hall, and his wife, Miriam. Theo immediately takes Noah as his protege of the moment, insists he move into their apartment and spends many long hours teaching the youth from St. Urbain Street. Though Noah looks up to Theo, from the very beginning he and Miriam are fascinated with each other. After their first date, an event which does not take place for quite some time, Miriam is fearful of losing the security Theo represents to her. She sends Noah away and he moves back to his old room.

It is not long, however, before Miriam is once again drawn to Noah, the vital, energetic, passionate lover who is the complete opposite of her temperamentally cold, intellectual husband. When Theo unexpectedly returns and finds them in the bedroom, Noah forces Miriam to make a choice between them. She and Noah take a cottage in St. Adele where they are idyllically happy for a short while. But Miriam, who comes from a poverty-stricken, unstable background, finds she cannot accept Noah's lack of direction. On his side, he begins to feel as hemmed in and suffocated by Miriam's reliance on him as he had by his mother's. Their relationship reaches a crisis when Noah's father, Wolf, is killed.

The death brings to light the truth about many characters in the novel. Wolf had run into the fire in the scrapyard to retrieve the iron box which he believed contained his father Melech's riches. Earlier in the novel he had unsuccessfully attempted to kill his father during a fit of anger caused by Melech's continual refusal to acknowledge his worth and make him a partner in the business. The box actually contains some handwritten scrolls, photographs of a Polish girl and letters to her. These represent Melech's dreams for his life and help explain his authoritarian behavior, a behavior which was partly responsible for Noah's departure from the Jewish ghetto. Melech had been in love with Helga, a goy, but had given her up because of his family's disapproval. Throughout his life he wrote her letters, almost none of which were posted. He had also dreamed of being a great religious figure, a scribe, but had been forced to work to support his family and spent only his spare time on the scrolls. Because these scrolls are found in the box, Wolf is taken for a saint who died for the Torah and attains in death a stature he could never have reached in life.

Noah, who now knows the truth about his grandfather's life, learns the truth about his father's through his diary which records the minutiae of a very mundance existence. He must decide what to do. Max, his father's brother, is running for political office and using Wolf's celebrity to advance his campaign. Noah threatens to reveal how unheroic Wolf's action really was if Max does not stop exploiting Wolf's name. Noah then leaves both Miriam, who becomes a nymphomaniac, and his mother, who is sickly and says she will die while he is gone, and departs for Europe. He now understands that he cannot completely cut himself off from

his past, that his family and the Jewish traditions they represent will always be a part of him. Yet as he tells his grandfather at their farewell meeting, he has become a human being with rules of his own and must try them in a new environment. The world of the Jewish ghetto and the world of the goyim, of Theo and Miriam Hall, have both hindered and helped him to arrive at this point.

Many of the same influences are at work in both The Acrobats and Son of a Smaller Hero. Richler's outlook in these two early novels, for example, is clearly shaped by existentialist conceptions. Noah Adler, like Andre Bennett, is a priest with no religion. Neither church, politics, nor traditional ideals provide him with an answer that is satisfactory. He searches for a unifying value which will safeguard his identity against destruction by the dehumanizing forces he sees everywhere. Because he is seeking the whole meaning of life he must reject the restrictive interpretations which those around him offer. Like Andre, Noah realizes that choice is crucial and that it involves not only a negation of a past which is seen to have no validity but a positive commitment. Though Noah is tempted to give in to nihilism and alienation he comes to see that what he needs is the courage to accept and live in terms of the tension between apparent meaninglessness and a transcendent view of man's fate. This provides Noah with a soberly useful way of apprehending experience. Richler's negation of nihilism and his insistence that man embrace life positively despite its apparent meaninglessness place him once again within Galloway's category of optimistic absurdist.

The second and perhaps the most important influence on the novel is Richler's Jewish background. Richler shares many of the thematic

concerns of Jewish writers. While no specific Jewish writer seems to have directly influenced Richler, his work has many affinities with theirs. Exile, for example, has always been a preoccupation of the Jewish writer. Noah is, like Andre, "the sensitized outsider who performs a spiritual passage for his own salvation."[2] But unlike The Acrobats, which is a novel of modern Europe, Son of a Smaller Hero takes place in Montreal. Only at the end of the novel does Noah decide to go abroad and this exile to the old wisdom and artistic riches of Europe is merely secondary. Noah's self-imposed exile from the community and heritage of his Jewish birth is central to the novel's meaning.

Noah's Jewish birth and upbringing reflect Richler's own and Richler is interested in seeing that the pattern of living is much the same in other cities besides Montreal. Bellow, for example, evokes the urban Jewish world in several of his novels. Speaking of the characteristics common to Jewish American novelists in general, Richler says:

> They find the aspiring Jewish middle class ugly or, at best, a target for excoriating satire and they are inclined to look back on the days of tenement poverty with nostalgia. If Jewish-American writers have escaped the ghetto, they have, to their credit, never quite put it behind them, and recently they seem to have begun to worry more and more about their origins.[3]

Richler's own novels satirize the upwardly mobile Jewish middle class and in Son of a Smaller Hero, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and St. Urbain's Horseman he uses his own ghetto background as setting.

This urban Jewish ghetto is of utmost importance to any discussion of Son of a Smaller Hero. In "The Uncertain World" Richler uses Orwell's essay "Why I Write" to expand on his own reasons. One of the reasons given is historical impulse, a desire to see things as they are, and Richler says in this regard: "No matter how long I continue to live

abroad, I do feel forever rooted in St. Urbain Street. That was my time, my place, and I have elected to get it exactly right."[4] Richler's intimate knowledge of the Montreal Jewish ghetto is everywhere evidenced in Son of a Smaller Hero. If one compares the veracity of background of The Acrobats and of this novel, there is no doubt that here Richler has come into his own. His descriptive passages ring truer and he is less self-conscious in his prose than he had been. One is given the feeling of actual, lived experience in Son of a Smaller Hero, with the result that statement of purpose, character, and action coalesce. There is less blatant prose exposition and more reliance on action to make the point.

Some understanding of this St. Urbain Street background is necessary to an understanding of the predicament in which Noah Adler finds himself at the opening of the novel. In one of the most often quoted passages, the narrator informs the reader that: "The ghetto of Montreal has no real walls and no true dimensions. The walls are the habit of atavism and the dimensions are an illusion. But the ghetto exists all the same."[5] Richler describes the ghetto in rich detail. Its center or aorta is St. Lawrence Boulevard and it is here that the immigrants buy and pray and agitate and sin. In The Street, a semi-autobiographical account of his youth, Richler explains the many facets of St. Lawrence Boulevard or the Main as it is called by local inhabitants:

> Rich in delights but also squalid, filthy, and hollering with stores whose wares, whether furniture or fruit, were ugly or damaged. The Main, with something for all our appetites, was dedicated to pinching pennies from the poor, but it was there to entertain, educate and comfort us too. Across the street from the synagogue you could see THE PICTURE THEY CLAIMED COULD NEVER BE MADE.[6]

The Main encompassed much of their daily lives. Richler recalls that after their errands were done, the boys returned to the Main for part-time jobs or to study Hebrew. Later they would wander the streets in small groups smoking Turret cigarettes and telling jokes. On shabus it was back to the Main and the Young Israel synagogue.[7] The narrator of Son of a Smaller Hero expands on the more lurid aspects of the street:

> All day long St. Lawrence Boulevard, or Main Street, is a frenzy of poor Jews, who gather there to buy groceries, furniture, clothing, and meat. Most walls are plastered with fraying election bills, in Yiddish, French and English. The street reeks of garlic and quarrels and bill collectors: orange crates, stuffed full with garbage and decaying fruit, are piled slipshod in most alleys. Swift children gobble pilfered plums, slower cats prowl the fish market. After the water truck has passed, the odd dead rat can be seen floating down the gutter followed fast by rotten apples, cigar butts, chunks of horse manure, and a terrifying zigzag of flies.
>
> Every night St. Lawrence Boulevard is lit up like a neon cake and used-up men stumble out of a hundred different flophouses to mix with rabbinical students and pimps and Trotskyites and poolroom sharks. Hair tonic and water is consumed in back alleys. Swank whores sally at you out of the promised jubilee of all the penny arcades. Crap games flourish under lamp posts. You can take Rita the Polack up to the Liberty Rooms or you can listen to Panofsky speak of Tim Buck the the Worker. (p. 15)

The attention given to particulars and the vivid vocabulary used to depict the ugly is typical of Richler's method. The contrast between the events of the day and the events of the night is effective as well, for each reveals a different aspect of the people's lifestyle.

Not all of the streets of the ghetto are like St. Lawrence Boulevard. Richler, speaking in the person of his narrator, explains that while to a casual observer the five streets between the Main and Park Avenue are interchangeable, each represents subtle differences in income. Again, Richler's choice of detail to explain a nuance is exemplary. He focuses, for example, on the different techniques of walking of different

income groups. "The Queen Mary Road Jews walked like prosperity, grinning a flabby grin which said money in the bank." The aspiring, whose street was Park Avenue, " . . . walked without certainty, pompous and ingratiating by turns." The poor and the elderly keep to St. Lawrence Boulevard. Many of them are bearded and they walk with their heads bent and hands clasped behind their back. (p. 17)

Despite these differences in income, there is an amazing sense of cohesiveness among the population. In The Street Richler explains some of the reasons. Religious orthodoxy and a common cultural tradition knitted the people together. In the years leading up to World War Two this self-contained world became even more tightly knit because neo-fascist groups became extremely active and threatened the Jewish population's security. Richler says that he recalls seeing swastikas and 'A bas les Juifs' painted on the Laurentian highway. There were country clubs, suburbs and hotels in the mountains where Jews were not wanted, beaches with signs that read Gentiles Only, quotas at the universities, and occasional racial altercations on Park Avenue.[8]

At the same time this was happening, there was also a movement in the opposite direction. Parents pressured their children to get out of the ghetto. While the Main was good enough for them, they had struggled so that their children might have a better world. Inevitably, this caused problems. Children were caught in a paradoxical situation. Their only bases of certainty existed in the rigidly circumscribed area of ghetto life but they were being forced into new milieus where their former rules were inapplicable. When they did leave, often they came home to find their parents' habits embarrassing. Richler says that "In those days there began

the familiar and agonizing process of alienation between immigrant parents and Canadian-born children."[9]

This urban ghetto world is the world in which Noah grew up and it is the world against which he rebels. He turns to the world of the goyim in search of the freedom and identity for which he is desperate, the world represented in the novel by Theo and Miriam Hall. At first it seems to Noah that Theo's world is an exciting, satisfying one filled with an order, beauty and knowledge which he would love to win for himself. Though he finds college a disappointment, he feels challenged by Theo's talk and readily agrees to move into the Halls' study and grade papers for Theo instead of driving his cab. When he first meets Miriam, he is awed because he thinks she is perfect. She reminds him of the goy women on the beach at Lac Gandon when he was a child. He had at that time been struck by the differences between their beach area and that of the Jewish population: "The men were tall and the women were awfully pretty, lying out in the sun there, just like that, not afraid of anything. There was no yelling or watermelon peels or women in bloomers. Everything was so clean. Beautiful, almost" (p. 54).

But once he sees goy society from within, Noah's perceptions change. He feels lost and alone in his new environment. His conscious isolation from his past has brought him freedom but he is unable to cope with it. As the narrator explains to the reader:

> Noah had renounced a world with which he had at least been familiar and no new world had as yet replaced it. He was hungering for an anger or a community or a tradition to which he could relate his experience. He began to understand that God had been created by man out of necessity. No God, no ethic: No ethic--freedom. Freedom was too much for man. (p. 64)

Perhaps because he feels so disoriented in the goy world, Noah does not realize that his expectations of Theo and Miriam are unrealistic. When he begins to see them as ordinary human beings he becomes disenchanted. He has little understanding or sympathy for their shortcomings.. Noah thinks that the goy world shares none of the characteristics of the Jewish world and he is crushed when he finds the same deceits and evils in both. The new world to which both Andre and Noah turn offers no easy solution to their problems and is, in actual fact, as hostile and damaging to them as that from which they fled.

Theo's beliefs are as stifling to a developing personality as are Melech Adler's, the difference lying in their content rather than intensity. The description of Theo aptly compares him to Jesuit missionaries in his zeal. Time and again Theo brings home prodigies and time and again they turn out to be "ordinary spirits" who do not appreciate what he is trying to do for them. His ambition is to mould his students into living replicas displaying his own pedantic qualities. "Armed with the texts of Wilson, Trilling and Leavis, he hoped to wrest Montreal from the grasp of the philistines" (p. 42).

The life he and Miriam lead is indicated by the fact that they are in the process of listening to Beethoven's symphonies one by one in order and after that will turn to the concertos. Ever since Theo could remember his days had been ordered. When he was young, this ordering was done by his mother. Since the age of ten he has kept sheets of paper tacked over his desk--one a chart of things to do, one of books to read, and one of music to listen to. "Through boyhood and adolescence and into manhood he had hurried through his days trying to catch up with his self-

imposed schedule" (p. 72).

Miriam understands from the beginning the forces which have shaped her husband and though attracted to Noah she is afraid of the ruthlessness she sees in his eyes. She feels for Theo because:

> Poetry had been denied Theo. Love also. But the long frugal years of study and scholarships, of frayed jackets and hand-rolled cigarettes, were behind him. He had consumed the books. But who knows at what cost?
>
> . . . . . .
>
> She looked at him and despised him for his simplicity. He's happy, she thought. He doesn't know what's happening. Theo had struggled, and this impudent boy will pick his brains for a few months and walk away with Theo in his pocket. (p. 47)

Theo is rather pitiful, then, as representative of the rational, ordered, scholarly life, for except momentarily he cannot see through the hollowness of it and of himself. Emotionally he is another one of Richler's cripples. His associations with people remain on the superficial level; he does not allow himself to get involved with them personally. Nor will he do or say anything which indicates disapproval of them or their actions. He is, so to speak, too perfect at the cost of his humanity. Noah is suspicious of Theo "because although Noah believed that you could love one man or two men or ten men he did not believe that you could love man. Not man, and not mankind. Such generalities, such loves, were the tormented inventions of those who loved with much facility and no truth" (p. 68).

After Noah's admiration for Theo has disintegrated, Noah is left with his love for Miriam. This relationship cannot be enduring either. Noah wants to keep Miriam on the pedestal he has created for her. He becomes upset when he sees her as an ordinary spirit involved in the every-day affairs of ordinary spirits. When he sees Miriam darning socks, for

example, he turns away because he does not want that kind of contact, the kind he had with his mother.

Moreover, Miriam has too many of the same needs as Noah himself. Miriam too comes from a poor background and is haunted by her past, especially by the picture of her father, Sunday suit on, rushing, with fists clenched angrily, at an oncoming truck. She tells Noah of Queen Street and the ugliness in which she grew up. Her father was a night watchman who spent his time drinking and working on model ships. But he had a little garden in the midst of the junk yard where he used to sit and talk to Miriam. One might say that after his death Miriam tries to wall herself into such a garden away from the junk of the world. This is why she married Theo. She does not love him. She likes him and wants to be respected. She is unable to cope when this respect is taken away because she suspects she has no identity of her own and no inner strength: "All those trappings that had become her identity had been washed away with Theo and for the sake of love. Pop! Her security, all that she had striven for, had burst like a balloon. Miriam was terrified" (p. 125). In the end she chooses the life of outward conventionality represented by her marriage to Theo.

The themes of geography and time encompass the novel's main issues, and link Son of a Smaller Hero both to its predecessor, The Acrobats, and to Richler's succeeding novels. Geography and time are also used to organize the novel's content. Part I of the novel is dominated by a description of the Jewish ghetto which forms Noah's background. Parts II and III trace Noah's development in the world of the goyim. Wolf's death at the end of Part III brings these two geographical locations and all they

represent into conflict. In parts IV and V Noah bids adieu to the characters of both these locations and sails for Europe. This geographical movement is not complex, but it serves to outline the main progressions in the novel and the order in which they occur.

Richler does not describe Theo and Miriam's world in geographical terms as he did that of the Jewish ghetto. Instead he gives us a picture of their lifestyle through their own and others' actions and dialogue. He organizes these reflections and traces Noah's development in his associations with both the world of his past and the world of his present by means of a carefully worked out time frame. The novel is divided into five major parts. Part I takes place in summer 1952, Part II in autumn and winter 1952, Part III in spring 1953, Part IV in summer 1953 and Part V in autumn and winter 1953-54.

As in The Acrobats, the framework of rising action, climax and denouement of a traditional dramatic piece are applicable. Part I introduces us to Noah's family and Jewish background. Part II focuses on the world outside the ghetto and traces Noah's beginning relationship with Miriam Hall. Part III contains Noah and Miriam's happiest moments together as well as the signs of the eventual severing of their relationship. The last section of Part III recounts Wolf Adler's death, the climax of the book. It is this event which precipitates a new understanding on Noah's part of what he must do. His relationship with his family and with Miriam is re-examined. In Part IV he leaves Miriam to go to his mother. In Part V he leaves his mother to sail for Europe.

Throughout this development, Richler keeps the reader aware of the passage of time and of seasonal changes. The seasons serve a thematic

as well as a structural function. They correspond to some state of a character's consciousness. An example of this occurs the first autumn after Noah leaves home. He is lonely, a stranger in the world of downtown Montreal. He misses the certainty and security of the ghetto world and his new environment is cold and uninviting. His perceptions of both his past and his present have changed. All this is reflected in Richler's description of the city: "Montreal is cleanly defined on cold autumn nights. Each building, each tree, seems to exist as a separate and shivering object, exposed to the winds again after a flabby summer." "The mountain, which all summer long had seemed a gentle green slope, looms up brutal against the night sky. Streets seem longer, noises more hard" (p. 49). In contrast, when Noah and Miriam move to St. Adele together it is spring. The warmth of their relationship and the flowering of their love is symbolized in nature's new life budding around them. But the novel ends in winter. Leah dies and Melech is waiting for death. Noah leaves them behind and expects to find a new hope in Europe in the coming spring.

In his feelings Noah is representative of the third generation Jewish immigrant. He can no longer accept his grandfather, Melech's, iron authority over the family nor the traditional orthodoxy which Melech continues to uphold against the flux of values in a changing world. Nor can he be like his father, Wolf, the weak son who acquiesces to the rule of the previous generation, but cannot play the same role to the succeeding generation. Noah's problem is shared by many immigrants to the new world but it is also the problem of each generation which must sift through and assimilate or reject the assumptions of its elders.

For Noah, as for Andre, this involves a stage of total rejection,

of total negativity. But it does not take long before Noah realizes that now that he is alone all he has is anguishing and he is not the bigger, freer man he had expected to be:

> At home his indignation had nourished him. Being wretched, and in opposition, had organized his suffering. But that world, that world against which he had rebelled so vociferously, was no longer his. Seen from a distance, it seemed full of tender possibilities, anachronistic but beautiful. It's not enough to rebel, he thought. To destroy. It is necessary to say yes to something. (p. 29)

But it will take Noah a long time, as it did Andre, to transfer this cognitive knowledge to the experiential level. He will have to come to terms with his past. Moving from one place to another provides no automatic solution.

Meanwhile, rejection and rebellion dominate Noah's life. A primary figure in this regard and one who retains an emotional hold over Noah throughout the course of the novel is his grandfather, Melech. Melech's conservatism, religious orthodoxy and authoritarianism cause Noah to react defiantly. The standards which Melech tries to impose on his children are the standards of traditional Judaism, which he brought with him from the old world. These allow no compromise and take no account of the many changes which have occurred in the outside world.

Parallel scenes in Parts I and V accentuate the changes that take place in Melech's authority during the course of the novel. They also reveal Noah's increasing maturity. In both scenes a family meeting is held at which Noah is not present. After both meetings, Noah goes to visit his grandfather. At the beginning of the novel, Melech has for the most part succeeded in getting outward submission from his children. He calls the meeting because he has found out that his boys are getting around the sabbath by buying at Panofsky's on Saturday but only paying him on Sunday.

Ida, Melech's unmarried twenty-eight year old daughter, knows what will happen:

> They would say that they hadn't actually violated any law. But Mr. Adler would reply that buying on credit was only one step away from buying and if a Jew bought things on the sabbath he might as well go without a hat and if a Jew went without a hat he might as well miss the evening prayer, and if a Jew missed the evening prayer . . . . (p. 21)

Her prediction is accurate. The great hold Melech has over them is seen by the fact that after he leaves the room they become immediately frivolous and gay like children.

But even at this early point in the novel Melech complains to his wife, Jenny, of the changing times. He does not understand what is happening around him and can only look to the past as superior to the present. Melech recalls that a man used to work hard but he always had his children's respect. How he asks, can a "squirt" like Noah try to tell him what to do and not do. As for Wolf, his son, he regards him as half a man because he is unable to make Noah conform. Melech has one solution: punish the offender. Noah should be strapped, he thinks, but he knows he will not because Leah, not Wolf, rules that household. But Melech still believes in his own position of authority: "This is my house and I am the boss. First, last, and always. The head of de family is de fodder" (p. 23).

Noah defies Melech. Their relationship had at first been a special one, unlike that of Melech with his own children. Noah, his first grandchild, born in his forty-second year, he approached with love rather than authority. Melech's credibility is smashed, though, when the boy is eleven years old. Noah sees one of his grandfather's employees and his father cheat a customer at the scrapyard when they are weighing his sacks,

but Melech does not listen when Noah tries to tell him this. Throughout the novel Melech feels that his relationship with his grandson might have been different had he handled this situation in the proper manner.

Indeed, one sees Melech's softer side and weaknesses almost exclusively in his associations with Noah. When Noah comes to visit him after having missed the first family meeting, Melech indicates that he is willing to talk. Noah is tempted to give in because he has never seen his grandfather this mellow. But his belief in his own desire for freedom makes him impetuously declare:

> Can't you see how everything is falling apart around you? Your sons are Canadians. I am not even that. Don't you think . . . I can't be something, or serve something, I no longer believe in. As it is, well . . . I'm sort of between things. I was born a Jew but somewhere along the way . . . I think it's freedom that I want. I - I no longer have any rules to refer to the way you had. I . . . (p. 38)

Confronted with what he regards as Noah's open defiance, Melech can only retreat; he finds he is unable to tell Noah of the girl actress he had loved as a youth. As the narrator says: "Each man creates God in his own image. Melech's God who was stern, just and without mercy, would reward him and punish the boy. Melech could count on that" (p. 40).

The reader cannot help but feel a strange mixture of dislike and pity for this old man who, to all appearances, rules with a hand of iron and has little regard for the feelings of others. His life has been warped by a very early experience of love. Helga, the goy Polish girl whom he remembers as clapping her hands joyously, and whom he gives up for his family's sake, haunts him throughout his manhood. It is as if having denied himself happiness in order to follow an external law, he spends the rest of his life imposing the same strictures on his dear ones,

wishing to deny them the joy he missed. His only moments of peace, moments when his face takes on a beautiful expression, are when he writes his letters to Helga.

After the encounter with Noah, when Melech comes near revealing this love, Jenny, his wife, realizes that he is shaken. She offers him some raisin buns just after Noah leaves. Though a seemingly insignificant gesture, it is infused with much meaning. The narrator explains that Jenny is a simple woman who has borne Melech thirteen children and she is afraid that he will alienate them from her. Because she thinks she possesses neither wisdom nor riches to give her children she bakes them raisin buns, extra ones when they are in trouble. When Melech is offered the buns, then, he is alarmed by the possibility that he may need the same comforting.

The change in Melech's authority is gradual, but it is complete by the end of the novel. The children's open disregard of Melech is apparent in the second family meeting scene in Part V. The meetings are no longer held at Melech's home but at his son, Max's. Because Max is out of town, his wife presides over the meeting which has been called to announce Ida's engagement to Stanley. It is noticeable that Melech has not even been consulted. Moreover, the grandchildren now group around Max, hoping to get one of the many dollar bills he hands out. At home again, Melech asks Jenny if she is happy, if she would not sometimes like a movie or a talk. Completely unused to seeing this aspect of her husband's personality, Jenny thinks he is sick when actually he is both mellow and somewhat bitter. One cannot imagine the Melech of the opening pages of the book saying: "There is no justice in this world. God don't listen always. Not like He should, anyway" (p. 198).

Noah also misses this second meeting, but he comes to see his grandfather before leaving for Europe. They come very close to touching each other's lives profoundly, but as before the union is imperfect. Because Noah has examined the contents of the box for which his father died, he knows about Melech's past. Because he has examined his father's diary and knows that Shloime, Melech's youngest son, was responsible for the fire in the scrapyard and the phone call informing his father of it, he understands Wolf's motivations. He is touched by the gift of Melech's lie when Melech says that Wolf did not know what was in the box. Still, he feels the compulsion to state his beliefs clearly and tells his grandfather: "You said you wanted me to be a Somebody. A Something. I've come to tell you that I have rules now. I'll be a human being. I'll . . . " (p. 203). Richler's use of ellipsis here parallels that in the earlier scene between Melech and Noah. Richler understands that in any discussion many thoughts are not completed. Moreover Noah is nervous and has difficulty expressing himself. At the same time, these words indicate a maturity on Noah's part which was lacking in his first discourse with his grandfather. They are not merely words of rebellion said by an unthinking youth. Noah is enunciating the humanitarian ideal put forth by Richler in The Acrobats. The message once again is that the best one can do is develop one's humanness, recognizing all the time that limitation is, of necessity, an adjunct to freedom.

But the old man cannot understand and tells Noah to go ahead and join the enemy, the goyim. Nevertheless, he gives Noah one of his hand-copied scrolls and Noah bends, kisses him and says he is sorry. Melech, representative of the old generation and its laws, has been effectively

crushed and his point of view changed as evidenced in the change of wording in this repetitive passage: "Each man creates God in his own image. Melech's God who was stern, sometimes just, and always without mercy, would reward him and punish the boy. Melech could count on that" (p. 205). This time when Jenny says she will get him some buns Melech does not protest. The last words of the novel perhaps indicate that it is only a matter of time before Melech and the tradition he upholds so vociferously, a tradition which in effect ruined his life, pass on: "He picked up his prayerbook and began to read. And why not? Hadn't the Angel of Death passed over King David because he was at his prayers?" (p. 205).

The problem of generational divergences is not limited to the differences between Melech and Noah. Noah feels, as Richler does, that the generation in which he was born has accomplished little of any value. Like Andre, he yearns for a cause large enough to which to devote his life. He admires Panofsky, the owner of the corner store, who is a zealous communist, but he cannot believe in the communist solution to the world's ills. As he tells Panofsky: "Nothing is absolute any longer, Mr. Panofsky. There is a choice of beliefs and a choice of truths to go with them. If you choose not to choose then there is no truth at all. There are only points of view . . ." (p. 88). He also admires Aaron, Panofsky's son, who lost his legs fighting for the Spanish cause. Noah compares Aaron's generation to his own:

> A previous generation, that of Aaron Panofsky, had produced a number of brilliant scholars and had gone out on strike when the Protestant School Board had raised school fees. Students during the depression, that generation had not only rebelled against authority but had fought for what it considered to be the political truth. Noah and Shloime had gone to school during

> the war, when their fathers first began to earn a decent living. They didn't produce many scholars and never took any political or moral action. They resented authority, and reacted against it by aggressively doing everything forbidden. They smoked and gambled and drank. Aaron Panofsky's Baron Byng apprenticeship had led to the loss of his legs; Shloime, a student of the same teachers, was a petty thief with still grander prospects before him. Noah was still doubtful of his directions. (pp. 83-4)

Noah never does find an equivalent to communism or the Spanish cause, but he does develop a sense of morality. This morality grows out of his disappointments with both Melech's imposed Judaic authority and with the morality he perceives in the world of the goyim. He comes to see that goy society has as little veracity as the one he left behind. This strikes him most closely when Theo returns unexpectedly and finds him and Miriam in the bedroom. Noah refuses the role which is offered him at this point, a role which would allow him to continue with the surreptitious affair. All he has to do is apologize, admit that they had been drunk so that Theo can save face and then it will be permissible to continue as before. When Noah reacts in disgust to this offer, he begins to realize that he is no longer only a rebel but that he is developing a morality of his own.

Noah's developing sense of morality is seen once again in his relationship with Miriam. His carefree, irresponsible stance is abandoned when he becomes aware that he is playing with a human life. Noah worries that he has "stripped her, another and lovelier human being." And "What do you do with used people? Send them to the laundry like soiled shirts?" (p. 129). When Miriam begins to bore him, he is struck by the vulgarity of their predicament: "As long as they had been truly lovers there had been nothing immoral about their relationship, but now that they had begun to bicker, they had become simply another sordid adulterous couple" (p. 131).

Noah's character has certainly evolved from the position of total negativity from which he began.

Richler's employment of the seasons and of the genrational divergences within the Adler family helps to organize the novel. A third method of patterning is his use of a central scene, in this case Wolf's funeral, which occurs in the first section of Part IV. This scene is pivotal because it brings together all the major characters from Noah's past and precipitates a new understanding on Noah's part of what he must do in the present. In the opening pages of the scene the pomp of the funeral is described. Passages from the Old Testament are interspersed between the lines of this description and serve to underline the vulgarity and commercialism of this supposed religious event. The second half of the scene gives us the personal reflections of a cross section of people. Again Old Testament passages are used to accentuate the worldly nature of the characters' thoughts. Max, for example, is not a religious man. He sees things in business terms:

> Me, I put my trust in Dow Jones. I don't go for all that hocus-pocus about God being such a big deal and being shipped downstairs --COD, I'll bet--just for laying somebody else's goods on the q.t. Anyway, it's kind of nice for the family. Publicity for me, too. Hey, I wonder how much I'm gonna have to fork out for Milty's speech? Aw, chicken-feed." (p. 148)

Still Max is shaken by the idea of death and quite accurately judges Wolf's life: "Wolfie didn't have enough brains for a quarter of a headache but he never short-changed a guy in his life and offhand I can think of two hundred other bastards who I'd rather see cashing in this morning" (p. 148).

Samuel Panofsky, in contrast, sees the death in global terms. He thinks of the history of the Jewish people. They have always been tenants who suffered at the hands of their goy landlords. Still, they have produced

some great men, one of whom is certainly not Wolf Adler. Panofsky understands what Wolf's death and consequent adulation means: "But you go talk to the Goyim. You go if you want and tell them Marx and Spinoza, tell them Trotsky too, tell them Einstein and Freud, tell them, tell them that a small man died for nothing in a fire in a time from big, big bombs and made for us a smaller hero than we usually put up" (p. 155). Noah is the son of this smaller hero.

The funeral scene is important because of its centralizing function in the novel. Everything previous to it leads up to it. Everything after it unwinds the conflicts that have developed. The scene is noteworthy too because it prefigures a technique Richler will use even more effectively in later novels. Bernie Cohen's bar-mitzvah in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and the Hampstead heath baseball game in St. Urbain's Horseman are two examples.

If Richler's organizational abilities have improved in Son of a Smaller Hero so have his abilities in managing point of view and language. Like The Acrobats, Son of a Smaller Hero is narrated by an omniscient narrator. In The Acrobats this narrator often obtruded into the story to explain the significance of a symbol or of a character's words or actions. In Son of a Smaller Hero, Richler relies more heavily on dialogue and action to explain itself. More is left to the reader's judgment and imagination. When the narrator does interpose his comments into the story, these are usually necessary to the reader's understanding. Most are reflections on the nature of the Jewish ghetto and long realistic descriptions of the city and people. Richler still tends to explain too much but Son of a Smaller Hero is a more subtle work than The Acrobats.

Richler also experiments more in his narrative method than he did in The Acrobats. Sections of Son of a Smaller Hero use a stream of consciousness method. One example is the funeral scene already discussed. Another occurs at the end of the novel when Leah is thinking about Noah's departure. She is sick and heavily sedated. She recalls her father asking her about a light before he died. She is convinced that she will die while Noah is gone and her thoughts go backward and forward in time: "Oh yes. Yes. Years, years, years. Noah was no picnic I can tell you that much, but . . ." (p. 204). The narrator then describes the onset of Leah's heart attack. The last words Leah speaks are: "A light . . . If you should see . . . If--Boyele . . . " (p. 204). The reader is left to assume Leah has died alone and the impact is much greater than if the narrator had taken over and explained the reference to the light, as he very well might have done in The Acrobats.

But Richler has not solved all of his problems related to point of view. He still lacks the objectivity necessary to a good novelist. He is uncomfortably close to his hero's anger and confusion. If anything, Noah is more like the young Richler than Andre was. The verisimilitude Richler achieves by using his home environment as setting is partly offset by his obvious involvement with all that setting represents. As Scott says: "His background seemed to come alive at a glance, while his intuitions of his hero were sometimes incoherent, sometimes unconvincing, sometimes embarrassingly personal."[10] By the time he comes to write The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and St. Urbain's Horseman, novels which also use the Montreal ghetto as setting, Richler has achieved the necessary distancing from his protagonists' problems. The reader's reactions to

Duddy Kravitz and Jake Hersh are complex because there is a mixture of the bad and the good both within them and in the environment surrounding them. In Son of a Smaller Hero Richler is still the angry young man writing directly from his own experiences.

Richler's use of language also prefigures much of what he will do in his mature novels. He is a master of dialogue even at this early point in his career. He captures the rhythms and accents of speech of each of his characters. Max, the businessman, quoted in the funeral passage, does not sound like Noah or Melech. Melech's speech, for example, reveals the fact that English is his second language and because he learned it as an adult his command of its syntax and accentual patterns is poor:

> What for a men do they make in Canada? Sons they make, not fathers. Gimme, gimme, gimme. You know what my paw gaime. A prayer shawl. Phylacteries. But I'll tell you plain we had a respect that was respect. Wolf says I should make him by me a partner. Why? 'I'm you son.' That's a reason! Leah puts him ideas in the head." (p. 23)

In contrast, Rabbi Milton "Pinky" Fishman who speaks at Wolf's funeral has a perfect command of English:

> The President of the United States, Mr. Eisenhower, prays every Sunday. A great man, and a great friend of our people. Is anyone too big to humble himself before his Maker? Atheism leads to disrespect for our parents and to treason. Weren't our people sufficiently shamed by the Rosenbergs? (pp. 153-4)

But his words are hollow; they lack the sincerity of Melech's. The narrator informs us that the rabbi "believed in God as an insurance salesman believes in Prudential" (pp. 151-52). His use of platitudes and his appeal to figures such as Eisenhower reveal a small mind that reaches erroneous conclusions.

Richler sometimes uses language in a humourous way. The humour might be of an intellectual sort as when Mrs. Mahoney, Noah's landlady,

sees a copy of The Naked and the Dead in his room and asks if he is a medical student. It might be of the ribald sort as when Mort yells up to Wolf from the yard: "Wolf! HEY, JEW-BOY. What, tell me, is de definition of an Eskimo with a hard on?" When Wolf says he does not know, Mort replies: "A rigid midget with a frigid digit" (p. 32). More often the humour is at the expense of the upwardly mobile Jewish middle class. People flocked to Wolf's funeral for many reasons. The narrator describes one of them:

> Estelle Geiger, who had been up in Ste Agathe with the children--wasn't it better to spend money on enjoyment than on doctor's bills?--and who had been elected Queen Esther by a landslide at the YMHA Purim Ball of 1949, was there with six other wives. Seven ripe peaches with black hair. After the funeral they were going to see The Robe at the Palace and then Normie had promised to take them out to dinner at Ruby Foo's." (p. 144)

In comparison to Richler's later novels, Son of a Smaller Hero is a very serious book. But the elements of humour which will earn him a reputation as a satirist in Cocksure are here. Starting with The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, Richler will capitalize to an increasing extent on his abilities as humourist and satirist of people's tics and foibles.

The way in which Richler uses a particularized detail to create a setting or give a picture of a person also prefigures a quality which will become attached to his name. His descriptions of the city and of the seasons have already been discussed in the section on geography and time. Parallel scenes of Leah in her living room and Wolf in his den reveal how Richler can use the particular to sum up the main aspects of someone's personality. Leah has always wanted to be a lady. Her marriage to Wolf has not given her the place in society she expected. Because she thinks her husband is common, she continually turns to her past when she was the daughter of the respected hassidic scholar Jacob Goldenberg. The description

of her favorite room and her actions in it convey all this and more about her:

> Leah was particularly proud of the parlour, which was restricted to guests and meetings. A deluxe chesterfield set, end-tables and antique chairs, a Persian rug and wine drapes, two bookcases with glass doors, and a breakfront, which had taken two years to pay for, was a kind of solace to her. She polished it often and felt every scratch like a wound to her own person. The shelves swarmed with tiny china figures and gold-trimmed plates and silver trays and china flowers. She arranged odd cups and saucers. She enjoyed looking after these possessions even more than she did watering the Japanese gardens on the various end-tables, something that she did every day. (p. 30)

In contrast, Wolf's den reflects the simple, earthy person he is. He is not concerned with outward show but with functionality and he feels at home only in these surroundings:

> It was a clean, well-ordered room with many shelves and a nice smell to the wood. One corner was devoted to his hobby. Woodwork. That wall was lined with tools. The cabinet, which had been nailed to the wall, had many drawers. The drawers were all labelled and contained various sizes of nails, screws, and blades. He had made the cabinet and work-bench and tool-chest himself. He knew a lot about construction. Whenever he visited a house that was new to him he asked for a glass of water and set it down on the floor. Later, he would glance at it surreptitiously. That's how he could tell whether the foundation had settled in a level way. One wall of the den was completely taken up by his bookshelves. Here he kept his old copies of Life, Popular Mechanics, Reader's Digest, True Crime, and several volumes of scrapbooks. (pp. 33-34)

Wolf's penchant to organize and categorize things, for example his nails, screws and blades, reveals a mind caught up with petty detail. The entries in his diary reveal the same thing and remind one of Leopold Bloom. Richler devotes over two pages to a reproduction of the journal and its facts and figures. In his coded diary, Wolf has such things as thoughts on walking, computations which indicate that he walks across the earth every twenty years. His thoughts on time wasted, with a note that all figures are approximate, read:

> We sleep approx. 8 hrs per day--122 days per year. I spend about a half-hour daily* in the toilet--182 hours per year--8 days--therefore I waste 128 days per year
>
> * regular day (diarrhoea, constipation, balance out)
>
> OBSERVATIONS:
>
> If I live until 90 I will have actually lived only (approx) 57 years--having wasted the rest of the time sleeping or in the toilet. (p. 178)

Richler's inclusion of this data is a technique he will use in later novels. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz contains several pages of script from Virgil's newspaper for epileptics. St. Urbain's Horseman contains a copy of the Mensa questionnaire sent to Jake Hersh. Besides introducing novelty to the narrative method, these passages serve as indicators of personality in a way straight exposition would not.

Son of a Smaller Hero is, then, an essential book in the study of the development of Richler's career. It is a less derivative novel than The Acrobats but is, like The Acrobats, a novel of exile influenced by existentialist thought. Richler will use the Jewish cultural and religious tradition he describes here in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and St. Urbain's Horseman. He will continue to use the themes of geography and time to illuminate the situations in which he places his characters. Many of the stylistic characteristics one distinguishes in Son of a Smaller Hero prefigure techniques Richler will improve upon in his mature novels.

CHAPTER THREE

A CHOICE OF ENEMIES

Mordecai Richler's third novel, A Choice of Enemies (1957), displays qualities indicative of his increased maturity as a novelist. Some of the weaknesses of the earlier books are still evident. Richler remains influenced by Hemingway, though to a lesser degree than in The Acrobats and Son of a Smaller Hero. His plot construction still needs improvement--the novel relies too heavily on coincidence for the advancement of plot. But Richler has come to terms with the chief weakness that beset his earlier work. In A Choice of Enemies he is is able, for the first time, to distance himself from the issues and problems facing his protagonist. This increased objectivity in the use of point of view makes A Choice of Enemies a necessary book in the development of his career even if it remains a minor one in the canon of his work.

Thematically, A Choice of Enemies has much in common with The Acrobats and Son of a Smaller Hero. Richler is still preoccupied with the issue of values and their role in contemporary society. His characters, like those in the previous two novels, compare the past's certainty of belief to the present's unbelief. In their search

for a personal code many of them become expatriates. In A Choice of Enemies, though, these themes of time and geography are intimately linked to Richler's study of the political process. His characters are political expatriates, most of whom form a community held together by their belief in Marxist ideology.

Several critics have discussed A Choice of Enemies as a strictly political novel. This, I think, falsifies Richler's purposes in writing it. The political content of the novel, which forms the background against which Richler embodies his main concerns of time and geography, is important but secondary. Richler admits in an interview that he is interested in politics and is a socialist. However, he does not agree with those critics who think he has much in common with the socialist novelists of the thirties who idealized and glorified the common man.[1] He traces his interest in communism from the time of Pansky, the store-owner communist of the Montreal Jewish ghetto. Richler's family was anti-communist but there was a confusion about what or who actually was a communist. During his high school days Richler made friends with Danny Feldman, a communist student, because he had heard his own father and uncle discussing free love at communist youth parties. When the party to which he goes turns out to be a folksinging get-together he is disappointed and disenchanted.[2]

In a more serious discussion of his involvement in politics, Richler says:

> It was after the war, at the university, that we discovered the writers of Kazin's generation and they seemed to speak directly to us. We were politically conscious students. We had nothing so urgent as Spain to excite us, but even in Montreal we read PM and the Nation, we signed the Stockholm Peace Appeal, protested against McCarthyism, and still later demonstrated for the Rosenbergs.[3]

This involvement was peripheral and compared to that of many post-war writers who became disillusioned with Marxism but I think Cohen is unfair when he says that

> What counts is that writers like Koestler and Orwell and Silone and Wright and Fast speak from experience. They espoused the Communist movement because their countries were convulsed by revolution, or because the depression convinced them of the need for a planned totalitarian economy, or because it seemed to them to be the only workable alternative to the threat of Fascism.[4]

Cohen does not seem to realize that while Richler and his generation lacked this direct experience, many of them became just as involved in the issues of their time and just as disenchanted with the ensuing results. A Choice of Enemies is based on Richler's own experiences with Marxism. He reveals in an interview that his characters reflect real people, a group he knew in England. His ideological stance in the novel reflects his changed evaluation of these refugees from McCarthyism:

> Well, the people who have been blacklisted and who have left the States protested that this was a violation of freedom of speech and democracy, and I signed petitions and I believed this. And now it seems to me that it was an argument of power. . . . in reality they are just as intolerant as the people who are in power, without the authority, which makes them a little worse, a little less magnanimous. . . .[5]

The protagonist of the novel, Norman Price, is a Canadian university professor teaching in the United States. When he refuses to answer the questions of the McCarthy committee, he is forced to leave the country and emigrates to London. In London he joins a Marxist colony of North American producers, directors and filmscript writers. Norman is happy in this self-contained world until he meets Sally McPherson and Ernst Haupt. Sally is the daughter of a friend,

and the two are immediately attracted. Norman's peaceful existence is interrupted because, despite his apprehensions, he finds himself becoming emotionally and physically intimate with a woman. The fact that Sally is so much younger than he increases his fear of involvement. When he learns of his half-brother's, Nicky Singleton's, death he escapes both the shock of it and his relationship with Sally by fleeing to the continent. During his absence Sally meets and befriends Ernst Haupt, a refugee from East Germany. Ernst has no papers and has fled Munich after accidentally killing Nicky Singleton. When Norman returns he realizes that Ernst has replaced him in Sally's affection but he nevertheless tries to introduce Ernst into his company of friends. This proves to be a disaster; Norman's allegiance to the Marxist cause is called into question and his close association with the group is weakened.

Sally finds Nicky's identity papers in Ernst's suitcase and urges him to flee with her. Karp, landlord to Norman, Ernst and Sally, also sees the papers and informs Norman of their meaning. When Norman confronts Ernst with the truth and says he is going to call the police, Ernst runs. After a long and fruitless search for Ernst and a return of an amnesia attack during which he meets the British vivian, Norman decides to forget Ernst and though not deeply in love, settles for a quiet life married to Vivian. Sally, now mistress to Bob Landis, one of Norman's expatriate friends, attempts suicide hoping in this way to convince Bob to allow her to have the child she is expecting. Unfortunately for her, Bob, who is with Norman, never arrives to play his intended role of savior and Sally dies.

The plot line of A Choice of Enemies suffers from a lack of plausibility. Richler uses the pattern of the love triangle as he had in The Acrobats. In the earlier novel the reader could too easily predict the outcome of the struggle between Andre and Kraus. Andre's death is foreshadowed from the beginning. A Choice of Enemies avoids the simplicity of such a design but in using a more complex arrangement Richler creates a new problem. It is unbelievably coincidental that after killing Nicky in Munich to protect his own life, Ernst should meet and become close to Norman in London. This lack of credibility is compounded when one considers the odds against both Sally and Karp discovering the truth and one of them revealing it to Norman. It is never explained why Ernst should have kept Nicky's identity papers in the first place since these are the only proof of his guilt. Richler's design necessitated a confrontation between Norman and Ernst. He chose to manipulate both character and action to achieve this end but sacrificed verisimilitude in the process. The chain of events described in A Choice of Enemies leaves the reader too conscious of the hand of the designer.

A Choice of Enemies suffers from a second weakness. Richler is still unduly reliant on Hemingway as a model. Norman, the functional amnesiac, is a pure Hemingway figure, a soul who has realized the irrationality of war and the randomness of death. He is still haunted by the memory of Hornstein, the fighter pilot who knowingly crashed his plane in wild pursuit of the enemy in order to avoid landing among civilians. Norman is traumatized by his memory of the event because he realizes that he lacks the courage to perform such heroic action. As a result of this experience ". . . Norman had resolved to keep his life free of disturbance."[6]

When Norman decides, at the end of the novel, to stop looking for Ernst and to marry Vivian, he is, in effect, making a separate peace. Like Lieutenant Henry in A Farewell to Arms he symbolically resigns from society and stops his mind from thinking. He wants to forget the immediate past and live totally in the present. Lieutenant Henry has misgivings about his decision that he can forget only in Catherine's arms. He has deserted, saving himself through anger and for love. He can make such statements as: "Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, . . . the numbers of regiments and the dates" but his conscience bothers him. As Sheridan Baker points out: "Henry is enough of an undefeated man of action to leave him, and us, uneasy about his defeated inaction at the end."[7] Catherine's death leaves him alone and directionless in the rain. Richler, I think, makes a better case for Norman's withdrawal from the conflicts surrounding him. In his comments about faith, honour and courage, Norman sounds like Henry but his disillusion is tempered by a desire to make the best of the present, as illustrated in the following passage:

> . . . Norman recalled something he had once read in an Atlas somewhere. Off Vancouver Island there was a vast area of sea known as the zone of silence. No sound penetrated this sea. A stillness prevailed. And since no siren or bell warned ships of dangerous reefs the floor of the zone of silence was strewn with wrecks. This time of opinions, battle-stations, and no absolutes, was also a time to consolidate. This time of no heroes but hyperbole, where treason was only loyalty looked at closely, and faith, honour, and courage had become the small change of crafty politicians, was also a time to persevere. To persevere was a most serious virtue. (pp. 214-15)

Richler's ability to handle Norman's decision to make a separate peace is one example of his increasing objectivity as a novelist. He

does not tell the reader what to think but trusts him to make a personal judgment based on what is presented through dialogue and action. The angry young man who wrote from within his characters has changed to the more mature novelist who tends now to describe his characters as they appear and behave. Passion is the very substance of Richler's fiction but in A Choice of Enemies the reader does not feel that this passion is a mere personal venting of wrath. In the opening passage of the novel, for example, Richler introduces us to both Ernst Haupt and Nicky Singleton. Rather than giving the reader a long authorial commentary on Ernst's unhappy experiences in East Germany and his consequent need for approval and acceptance by those around him, Richler reveals that need through action. When Nicky meets Ernst in a bar he is kind to him and introduces him to his soldier friends, Frank and Malcolm. Ernst, who wants to make a gesture in return, steals Frank's wallet intending to return it and so ingratiate himself with Nicky. But Malcolm, who is Jewish and hostile to Ernst from the beginning, finds out. Ernst, unable to defend his action, is made to look like a thief. Consequently, when they all go to a party and Malcolm says Ernst is upstairs going through people's coats, Nicky is incensed. Seized by a sudden and uncontrollable anger, he starts up the stairs with a broken beer bottle. Ernst had in fact been with a girl but has no time to explain before Nicky lunges at him. In the struggle Nicky is injured and later dies in the hospital. Ernst, who has no papers and fears the police, flees, allowing everyone to believe he has committed murder. This scene is central to the novel because it both introduces Ernst as the man on the run and sets up what will become a primary cause of contention between Ernst and Norman. In

an earlier novel, Richler would probably have used long authorial passages to explain Ernst's background and motivation. He would have had much to say about the irrationality of a world where people are forced to act violently in order to survive. Instead, he has learned to let a situation speak for itself.

Even when Ernst does comment on his beliefs, his sense of disillusionment is less frenzied and his philosophical speculation more sophisticated than that of earlier characters. At the party to which Norman brings him, for example, Ernst tries to defend his involvement with the Hitler youth by explaining the nature of changing loyalties: "Those who joined the Nazis to get privileges are now members of the SED for the same reason, Ernst said. You took off your Hitler Youth badge and put on an FDJ one" (p. 83). No doubt Ernst is stating Richler's own perceptions but at no time can any character in A Choice of Enemies be identified as the simple projection of Richler's propria persona. Andre, one always felt, was an extension of the young Richler, the confused but idealistic artist. Noah represented the Richler who broke away from the stifling environment of St. Urbain Street to seek his identity in Europe. Norman and Ernst, on the other hand, are successful fictional creations whose designer has finally managed to dissociate himself from his characters' lives. As Birbalsingh says:

> What he [Richler] gains from the experiments in the first three novels is a more articulate voice and a more stable outlook, which together allow him to speak out his discontents with no less bitterness but with greater coherence and cogency and, ultimately, to better artistic purpose.[8]

Closely allied to this increased objectivity is Richler's continuing use of detail in characterization. From the beginning of his

career Richler's strength has been in character portrayal. This strength is more evident in A Choice of Enemies than in previous novels because there is less authorial interposition to blur its effect. Karp is a good example of Richler's ability. He is a complex person and Richler is able to convey his many-sidedness to the reader. Like Kraus, Karp is a warped figure of evil. A Nazi concentration camp survivor, he paid a high price for survival. As Norman tells his former girlfriend, Joey: "Karp's condition is psychotic, Joey. He teases people the way a boy pokes at snakes with sticks. He's a kind of provocateur" (p. 127). Karp is successful in raising Norman's ire and prejudice against Ernst when he reveals Ernst's involvement in Nicky's death. This breaks his promise to Ernst and Sally to keep quiet and precipitates both Norman's amnesia attack and Ernst's flight to Canada.

Because of what he suffered, Karp is unable to empathize with others. He has become a hedonist, wrapped up completely in himself and his own gratification. In a superb descriptive passage Richler demonstrates this through his astute choice of words:

> With manifest skill Karp injected a ham with a hypodermic of brandy, massaged the ham's surface with honey, stuck cloves in here and there, and eased the pan into the oven. He hadn't had anything to eat all day; he was famished. Karp decided to begin his meal with an artichoke and to eat the ham with sweet potatoes and corn fritters. Following that, perhaps, he would have a Chinese lettuce with lemon sauce and cheese cake and coffee. Karp washed his hands and rubbed them with cold cream. He slipped into his dressing gown and sat down in his living room with a glass of sherry. (pp. 123-24)

Words like massaged, eased, and slipped indicate the gentleness and high regard Karp has both for his food and for himself. His attention to details is represented by the care with which he injected the ham with a hypodermic of brandy. The fact that he washes his hands and rubs them

with cold cream is one example of his personal fastidiousness. Even his choice of menu and his attire seem to be an attempt to emulate the aristocratic man of leisure. The reader recognizes that in choosing a ham Karp is trying to deny or at least escape from the Jewish heritage which had caused his suffering. But Richler does not spoil his effect by explanation. Rather, throughout the next few pages several references are made to the ham such that Karp and it become closely identified in the reader's mind. During this time Sally and Ernst arrive and the conversation reveals what low esteem Karp has of himself. He is conscious of his looks, a "short, fat Polish potato-eater" as he describes it. But he too, he tells Ernst, would like a pretty mistress like Sally. Sally makes the unforgiveable mistake of asking him if he is not homosexual and, in revenge, Karp sneers at their supposed love for each other.

After this episode Karp is evidently upset. He has been rude and overbearing to Ernst and Sally. He has insinuated to them that Norman is unstable and if exposed to over-excitement is prone to an amnesia attack. He has gone so far as to suggest taking advantage of Norman's condition. The reader is convinced that he is a despicable character. Just at this point Richler decides to let us see Karp's humanness. Again he uses the ham as an indicator of character. When Norman goes up to Karp's flat for dinner, Karp is not there:

> There was a huge ham, untouched in the garbage pail. The kitchen reeked of burnt potatoes. In the living room Norman noticed the empty bottle. The door to the upstairs bedroom was shut. Norman put his ear to the door and, although the sound was muffled, he could tell that a man was crying out in pain. This had happened before. The last time Karp had not emerged from his bedroom again for three days. (p. 131)

Like Kraus, Karp is capable of great feeling. Richler is very careful

not to stereotype his characters into molds of good or evil. As Sheps says: "Richler's ability to make his characters sufficiently complex and humanly ambiguous, in a perfectly plausible manner, and to supply enough information so that we understand how they got to be the way they are is one of his most striking achievements."[9]

Richler's growing skills as a novelist extend to his treatment of theme. Time and geography and their related concerns are as important to A Choice of Enemies as they were to The Acrobats and Son of a Smaller Hero. Because of a more objective point of view, Richler is able to present them more cogently and to better purpose. His characters, like those in the previous two novels, desperately need a set of values by which to live. They look to the past and its certainty of belief but view the present as a time in which the only certainty lies in the fact that there is no certainty. The impossibility of belief in the traditional norms of peace, love and honor, given the conditions of the modern world, is one of Richler's recurrent themes.

In the opening pages of the novel and against the background of a war-ruined Munich it is stated: "You could believe in nothing these days. Nicky sensed that, Ernst knew it" (p. 16). When Nicky asks Ernst if he is a communist he replies he used to be, but adds, "Now I have no politics" (p. 17). Ernst has lived the political life and experienced the corruption of more than one regime. He is well aware how much ideological belief is based on selfish motivation, on the desire to get ahead in the system. He knows that the masses are fickle, that one set of beliefs can easily transplant another when this becomes expedient. Moreover, he has witnessed and felt the cruelty and lack of concern for

human life which accompanies the so-called good life that is supposed to be forthcoming. The hard realities of day to day existence overshadow and belie the political promises. Ernst tells Sally early in their relationship that she cannot possibly understand the forces which have shaped him. While to her and to those North Americans who profess Marxist ideology communism is a pretty word, to him it is much more. He takes off a sock and holds a burning match to his foot: "A whole winter without shoes. All our food went to Russia. That's communism" (p. 57). Ernst visualises his father wandering from zone to zone suspected by all sides. Karl Haupt objected to Hitler slightly but not enough. Ernst recalls that when the old man was finally picked up for questioning in Saxony the communist police official turned out to be the same one who had used to question him for the Nazis. The cell had been an old gestapo cell. At this time Ernst's doubts had climaxed. Ernst is determined not to be like his father.

The ideals by which Norman's friends live are incomprehensible to Ernst. To him the problem, for example, of whether there is a God does not exist. There is no right or wrong, he tells Sally when she finds Nicky's identity papers and she realizes Ernst is responsible for the killing. He exemplifies this by telling her the story of a brother and sister who distributed pamphlets against Hitler during the war and as a consequence were shot as traitors. After the war they were resurrected as heroes and today they are traitors again. He tells her: "There are conditions, rewards, punishments, and sides but that's all" (p. 108).

Ernst reiterates this to Norman when Norman says he is going to

turn Ernst over to the police on principle. Ernst tells him that he too once had principles:

> Then one day an American soldier gave me a Babe Ruth chocolate bar and told me that Hitler was dead. Kaput! Finished principles. Two weeks later I earned two packs of Lucky Strikes for spending the night with an American army colonel. O.K. Bravo. Beginning of new principle. Truth equals Lucky Strikes." (p. 185)

Like many another Richler character and Hemingway hero Ernst maintains that ideals have become so debased that they are meaningless. Ernst tells Norman that yes he has heard of such things as dignity, honour and love mentioned on the radio on Sunday mornings. This is as much life as Ernst will allow them.

As does Noah of Son of a Smaller Hero, Ernst discovers that the people of principle are often not able to live by it. All goes well as long as morality is discussed on an abstract level or conerns someone else's life but when they become personally involved in a difficult situation their beliefs disappear and they act like those they would otherwise blame. This is what happens to Sally. Her love for Ernst takes precedence over her loyalty to Norman and she blocks out the reality that Ernst is guilty of a killing. She wants them to flee to safety but Ernst argues that he feels a responsibility to Norman who is one of the first friends he has ever had. He says to her: "To you the fact that I killed Nicky is no longer--It has become an inconvenience, no more. But me, he shouted, I'm the Hitler Youth scum. Oh, you big, wonderful moral people. Is this what I've been missing?" (p. 176). Noah and Ernst, the rebellious, amoral characters, are shown to have a truer sense of morality than those characters who profess but do not act according to a set of principles.

While Ernst professes no belief in any sort of exterior system, Norman Price, when we first meet him, is certain that he has a virtuous, satisfactory code. His Marxist beliefs are supported by his fellow refugees from McCarthyism. And his lifestyle allows him to concentrate on his belief in the value of the academic life. Norman is the contented man of letters, devoted to scholarship for its own sake. In The Acrobats Chaim refers to Andre as a priest with no religion. Bob Landis views Norman in a similar fashion:

> It gave Bob pleasure--as his own life came to be more and more dominated by the weekly Nielson ratings--to stop and think of Norman writing calmly at his desk, sitting there each afternoon in a jacket with leather patches or in an old sweater, his walls bulging with well-thumbed Oxford editions of the poets, copies of Les Temps Modernes, the pages of which had been cut, and coffee stains and cigarette burns everywhere. In another age, he thought Norman would have been a monk. (p. 30)

The book, The History of John Dryden and His Times, is a secret and a work of love. Norman and Richler, it would seem, view the Restoration and eighteenth century as a sane period during which dignity, stateliness and the light of reason flourished. Despite controversies of all kinds, intellectual, artistic and literary achievements were valued. In contrast to the present, the basic principles of life were agreed upon. So it is that after ten years Norman continues to return to his book with hope again and again. As the narrator explains: This was to be ". . . his special contribution to scholarship. Meanwhile, the book was fun. A private world. A little source of sanity for Norman Price" (p. 70).

Norman's idyllic, contemplative life disintegrates when he meets Sally and his brother dies. His doubts flourish. He runs away to the continent to escape reality. In Spain it seems to him, watching the indifferent young stroll by, that the best blood of his generation had

been spilled on these same meadows. Like Ernst he thinks of his father, the surgeon Max Price, who had given up his practice and been killed during the defense of Madrid. He recalls his father as a man of action, quite unlike himself. But like most Richler heroes he ponders the fact that time has made the issues unclear, that this generation could no longer lay claim to the certainties of the past generation:

> But in those days, Norman remembered fondly, the choice of enemies had been clear. Today you were no longer sure. You signed the petitions, you defended Soviet art to liberals, and you didn't name old comrades. But your loyalties, like those of a shared childhood, were sentimental; they lacked true conviction. (p. 62)

Norman wishes he were a better, warmer person, more able to give the little kindnesses that mean so much to people.

One morning looking at the sea and the gift of the morning, Norman's despair mysteriously lifts. He is suddenly happy to be alive and returns to his earlier dreams of happiness:

> He and Sally were married, they had three children, and they were uniquely happy. They did not hang impressionist prints on their walls. Sally, like him, enjoyed making love in the morning. But when the kids came that was seldom possible. The kids woke them early each morning, jumping up and down on their not-Swedish Modern double bed. (p. 41)

Sally was the answer and his hope and he intends to marry her when he returns. The bubble bursts when, back in London with the presents he has for Sally, he realizes that the situation has changed. Ernst is living with Sally and Norman is the outsider. Nevertheless, he tries to help them and brings Sally and Ernst to Sonny Winkleman's party. Ernst is intent on making a good impression and the more hostile his reception the more he tries to please, only succeeding in being the more obnoxious. He, like Norman and most Richler characters, has his dreams and he sees the party as the beginning of a new life: "For years he had

dreamt that one day he would be introduced into an intelligent society of artists and professional people. In this fantasy he saw himself as a man with a faithful wife and children, giving small dinner parties and being invited to others" (p. 77). Instead the group of expatriates put him on the hot seat and use the same line of questioning that had been used against them at home. Norman ends up hitting Colin Horton, the distinguished guest for the evening, and he, Sally and Ernst leave.

The next morning Norman realizes the implications of what he has done: "Although he hadn't been a party member for years he remained a Marxist yet. This gave him the benefit of a code, a system of responses, that was of singular value to him. Helping Ernst was contrary to that code" (p. 95). The result is that Norman comes under suspicion by his expatriate friends, especially after he is seen coming out of Canada House where he had gone to see about the possibility of Ernst emigrating. Sonny Winkleman wants Norman to work on a script but asks for an explanation of his doings at Canada House first. When Norman refuses, Winkleman tells him: "Look, Norm, in this world you've got to make a choice of enemies or you just can't live. The boy stands for everything you and I are against. Haven't we suffered enough for our beliefs without bending over ass backwards for the other side?" (p. 105). When Bella Winkleman defends her husband to Norman, explaining how Sonny gave up being in charge of production for a large Hollywood studio, all for the principle of freedom of speech, Norman says that Sonny's principle is the same as the enemy's, each reserving it to apply only to themselves: "I'm beginning to see for the first time that the argument was not one of principle but of power. Right now they're inside and Sonny's out" (p. 106).

Norman here seems to speak for Richler. The novel is a witness to the fact that no political ideology has all the answers. Might decides the winners and expediency and self-interest motivate most of the members. In the shuffle, Richler would probably say, humanness is forgotten.

Norman now finds himself in a dilemna. He is not trusted by his old friends, he has lost Sally, and the system of belief which had given stability to his life has been shaken. He makes a statement to Joey similar to those which Andre and Noah both made: "We seem to belong to a world of broken promises and angers valued like valentines. A world that's done" (p. 129). He sees Ernst as the new generation struggling to be born and it is their generation who is responsible to him. They came from an ordered world out of which they created chaos by mismanagement. People like Ernst are the result of that chaos and it is they who must suffer. But Norman's sense of responsibility and his new understanding don't make him any less lonesome now.

When he decides to marry Vivian, Norman is opting not only for release from his isolation but for a return to his old, peaceful life. He understands now the price he must pay for this and he is willing to pay it. His wedding day illustrates the problems he will continue to encounter. He hates Vivian's friends who come to the wedding and the generation gap so often pointed to in Richler's fiction is vivid in this scene. A social scientist, Haig, gets Norman to say he was in Spain, a pilot and was decorated but instead of praise tells Norman physical courage is a form of ignorance. And ". . . Norman grasped for the first time that he was a character, an ageing pinko, ineffectual and a bore, and, as far as Haig's crowd could see, the fossil of a sillier age, like

the player piano" (p. 214). Vivian, on her side, is taken up by Norman's theatre connections and his career as a writer. She wants him to help a friend of hers and wonders if he will take her to the Cannes Festival. She does not believe that he really wants to teach and write of Dryden.

Somehow, the reader feels Norman will persevere and survive the stresses of his new life. His thoughts indicate an understanding of the issues involved in his choice:

> If there was a time to man the barricades, Norman thought, then there is also a time to weed one's private garden. The currency of revolution is invalid as long as both tyrannies bank big bombs. Each age creates its own idiom. This was a time to drop a nickel in the blind man's box and to recommend worthwhile movies to strangers, it was a time to play <u>their</u> game but to make <u>your</u> own errors, a time to wait and a time to hope. The enemy was no longer the boor in power on the right or the bore out of power on the left. All alliances had been discredited. The enemy was the hit-and-run driver of both sides. The enemy, no longer clear, could still be recognized. His cause was just. He knew what was good for you and he was above small virtues. Charlie who hadn't talked and Jeremy who had, Karp inside and Ernst out, Joey, the Winklemans, all moved unknowingly through the same ogre-like zone of silence, which made a necessary sacrifice of the Nicky's and Sally's, leaving the less beautiful behind to pick at the bones of their discontent. So in this time of wrecks, Norman at the age of thirty-nine, chose at last to lead a private life. Ernst was, as he had once told Joey, the creation of their own idealism. So wherever he is let him go in peace. Let him be. (p. 215)

This quotation, though long, is I think important for it should be taken as Richler's final statement on the situations presented in <u>A Choice of Enemies</u>. Critics have had difficulty in their analysis of the closing of the novel. Some have seen it as an evasion. Many have been puzzled by Norman's sudden marriage to a girl who so obviously does not understand his deepest needs and with whom he is not deeply in love. Norman himself wonders if a year or two of the life she wants will satisfy Vivian and so he agrees to wait before having a child and does not press her with his real desires. His choice, like Andre's, is the return to the simple call

of a wife, a child and work. But while Andre had an epiphany of enlightenment before he dies, Norman's choice is displayed in primarily negative terms. He chooses from what is available and expects to make the best of it, though it seems to me that he is quite aware that his choice is far from perfect. He and, it would seem, Richler believe that this imperfection is the reality and that the correct choice involves much perseverance. The time for collective ideologies has passed, for the enemy is not any particular political party but all sides who use power as their tool and destroy the most fragile, beautiful people. The time calls for individual ethics, for a return to the private life in the face of a wrecked and uncertain world. Norman opts for this withdrawal from the mess but I do not think Richler sees this as escapist on his or on Norman's part. It is merely the best choice available in the situation. But he leads one to believe that the future might hold better things. This world picture is a gloomy one but I think a more satisfying one than that offered by Hemingway at the end of A Farewell to Arms. It makes A Choice of Enemies a more realistic even if a more pessimistic novel than either The Acrobats or Son of a Smaller Hero.

Richler also treats the theme of geography in a more objective and realistic manner than he did in his two earlier novels. Rather than categorically making a case either for or against expatriation, Richler examines it in reference to a particular character. For Norman Price expatriation was the correct choice. He left Canada because he felt it was a cultural wasteland. Canada had ". . . no equivalent of the American dream to boost or knock. The Canadian dream, if there was such a puff, was how do I get out?" (p. 4). When Norman was forced to leave

the United States he chose to join many of his colleagues in London. London, he discovers, suits his temperament. The narrator explains:

> Norman, unlike the other emigres, had taken London to his heart. It didn't yield itself to strangers with nearly so much ease as Paris, but in the end the city's beneficence, its quality of being used, feasible, sane, took you prisoner. New York was more spectacular, but London, perhaps because you were not the saint or irrestible lover you longed to be, was the more reassuringly human. Greatness and power and youth had passed: the city, like you, was relieved. (p. 5)

This picture of the city closely correlates with the main attributes of Norman's personality. All he asks for is a sane, human life and in choosing London and Vivian he hopes to attain this. He realizes that his flight to Paris and to Spain was merely an escape from reality. His problems are personal ones which require the acceptance of responsibility.

In contrast to Norman, who chooses to become a part of London and its inhabitants, is the group of expatriates with whom he had at first associated. They remain aliens, tourists in a strange city. They had come to England with high expectations. The narrator explains:

> The Canadians had come to conquer! They were the prodigal offspring of a stern father. Coming home again, however, they had not counted on the old man having grown feeble while they had prospered overseas. They were surprised that the island was great only in terms of memory or sentiment. The choice of coming to England, where the streets were paved with poets, . . . bespoke of a certain spiritual superiority, so they were appalled to discover that this country was infinitely more materialistic than their own . . . (p. 133)

Those who remain come to know little of the true life of London because they never seek it out. In reaction to their initial disappointment with London, they form a self-contained universe of their own. They could be living anywhere with little perceptible difference to their lifestyle.

Sally comments on this inbred quality of their existence and its underlying viciousness:

> There was plenty to be said for a group of men who, though they were naturally competitors and professionally jealous of each other's success, still did the utmost to share out the available work. But what astonished her was the ways in which the 'enlightened' left was similar to the less intelligent groups it despised. The loyalties, the generosity, like those of the Rotary, lost in purity by being confined to the group strictly. You didn't wear a badge with your first name on it, you weren't asked the name of your 'home town,' but your contributions were 'concrete,' your faith 'progressive,' and your enemies 'reactionary.' (p. 42)

Expatriation has meant little to these men. Their life remains unchanged except for the fact that now they are in closer proximity to each other and even more zealous in their efforts to protect themselves from outside examination.

Most of the other characters in the novel are also expatriates, and each reacts differently to his new life. Ernst is a man on the run. For him, expatriation is a matter of survival. He leaves the Eastern zone of Germany and travels to Berlin and then to Munich. In Munich he is impressed by the city's efforts to rebuild after having been almost totally destroyed by Allied bombings. Nevertheless, the reality of war is apparent and the reconstruction leaves the inhabitants with a feeling of uneasiness:

> Everywhere there were busy bosses and busy workers, but the new shops of the Theatinerstrasse had the ephemeral quality of a carnival big top and one could never be sure that the circus would not be dismantled and pulled out of town during the night. Men of a certain age were scarce. The cafes were too thick with unaccompanied women. (p. 16)

Ernst is but one of the many lost people frequenting the bars where "Bodiless heads and hands gripping beer bottles appeared through punctures in the eye-stinging haze" (pp. 17-18). When Ernst reaches out for human

contact, he meets Nicky. This association ends with Nicky's death and Ernst is once again forced to run. For a time London and Sally seem to promise him happiness. He is able to dream about a future married to a woman he loves and surrounded by people who respect him for his achievements. But when Sally finds out about Nicky, she leaves him and in utter despondency, he goes back to his old life. All cities, he decides, are essentially the same to a man such as him:

> The West End, it seemed to him, would yield better pickings, but once loose on the streets again Ernst was immediately struck by the brutalised faces of the spivs and whores who worked the different corners. Berlin, London, Paris, it was all the same: squalor under the winking neon. These were his people. Night squeezed them like blackheads out of the face of the city. (p. 114)

Despite a brief reconciliation with Sally, and because of Norman's intention to call the police Ernst is obliged to flee once again in order to survive. The last the reader sees of him, he is in Montreal about to be married to Inge Kramer, the widow of the man whose identity papers he bought. He is a hero for having saved a man's life and Inge Kramer threatens to reveal his true identity if he will not marry her. The reader has the feling that Ernst might soon take up the life of wandering again.

In contrast to Ernst, Sally and Karp choose expatriation. Sally comes to London a liberated young woman on her first European adventure. When she meets Norman and then Ernst she decides to stay. Her experiences with these two men change her from an optimistic but naive idealist to a disillusioned, despairing adult who takes her own life. London is not the city of promise she thought it to be. She misses her family, her comfortable home and most of all her bath. Missing these conveniences

makes her feel even more wretched as she had often accused other American tourists of being so middle-class. When she runs out on Ernst he realizes that: "Something was dying inside her. A hope, perhaps, or a child's faith in the impossible" (p. 111). She returns to Ernst but they both know their time of dream castles is temporary. Sally can no longer uphold the traditional beliefs in God, right and wrong and a sense to life. She is crushed when Ernst leaves her after his confrontation with Norman. Her isolation and loneliness make her accept Bob Landis as a substitute lover. He is kind but he cannot offer her either enough or the right type of companionship. Sally fights her depression with phenobarbital, gin and double features. Her last plea for help is her suicide but it goes awry because Bob is not there to save her.

Karp's expatriation does not lead to his death but its consequences for him are just as disastrous. Karp, like Ernst, tends to see things in terms of his personal survival. He plans to escape the next time the Jews are rounded up. The narrator explains:

> Most Jews are remarkable deficient in a knowledge of nature. Karp was determined to remedy this and any other traits, like an emotional distaste for sea food and a tendency to tell self-deprecating jokes, that might brand him. This was neither self-hatred nor the idle fancy of a social climber. Karp had already paid an exorbitant price for being a jew. (p. 69)

He has gone so far as to learn about Catholicism and intends to convert if this ever becomes necessary.

Karp is an extremely lonely person who cannot accept his identity for fear it will cause him more suffering. His life is a wreck on the floor of the zone of silence. He is despicable but pitiable in his conniving. This is evident in the scene where he tells Ernst and Sally to flee and offers them two hundred pounds. When asked why he would help

them he replies: "'You and I,' he said to Ernst, 'we two, we're survivors " (p. 181). "'I'm a German,' he yelled, 'like you'" (p. 182). Ernst rests his hand gently on Karp's shoulder and says he will take the money. This he never does. The last the reader hears of Karp, he is in Israel. But even here he has not found the acceptance he so dearly wants. He remains isolated, not trusted even by his own people. He survived and I think Richler would say at too high a price. Expatriation will not erase a past which has warped him into a twisted, paranoid figure of evil.

Richler, then, handles expatriation in a somewhat different manner than he did in The Acrobats and Son of a Smaller Hero. A Choice of Enemies is peopled with expatriates all of whom are individuals who react quite uniquely to their change or changes in locale. Some of them move by choice, some for reasons beyond their control. None manages to escape his personal problems in another city. Because of their backgrounds Ernst and Karp will continue to be tormented souls. Sally's torment ends with her death. Norman, on the other hand, comes to terms with himself and so with acceptance if not elation marries and makes London his home. Through his experiences he has become a wiser if not a happier man. He alone has the correct motivation to make a success of expatriation.

A Choice of Enemies is an important novel in Richler's career because it is a stepping stone without which he could not have proceeded to the success of The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. Its twin concerns of time and geography link it to his earlier works. As a craftsman, though, Richler has been able to remedy the one outstanding weakness of his two previous novels. His increased objectivity in the use of point of view will allow him to go on and write the novels upon which his reputation has been built.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE APPRENTICESHIP OF DUDDY KRAVITZ

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, published in 1959 and now a major Canadian movie, remains probably Richler's best known and loved novel. Many see it as a pivotal point in his career. The three novels preceding it are realistic and sometimes melodramatic. The two novels succeeding it are satirical and comic. In The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, a unique blend of these two styles, Richler seems to have come into his own as a novelist. His use of realistic setting and dialogue creates an immediacy of impact and a strong reader identification with his characters. As in earlier novels Richler draws heavily on his own personal experience. But these realistic aspects of the novel are modified and complemented by the comic-satirical devices Richler employs. Stylistically important in themselves, these devices herald much of what Richler will do in his subsequent works.

Thematically, Richler's interests remain constant in this novel but he approaches them from quite a different angle of vision. As McPherson says: "The theme of Duddy Kravitz extends the quest for values of the earlier books, but this time Richler dares a hero whose background is hard knocks and whose only capital is his ability to charm, twist,

dream, calculate and work."[1] In The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz too Richler narrows his scope. Warren Tallman says of Richler's characters: ". . . all live tangled lives in a world where they do not know themselves. But they are caught up by personal disorders rather than world disorder, family strife rather than international strife, individual conflict rather than ideological conflict."[2] At the same time Richler's ethical considerations are deeper here, because he delves into the very fibre of our existence and examines the assumptions by which we live.

Duddy is a character in the picaresque tradition. He ranges through a broad spectrum of his society exposing its vices and follies. The novel flashes back to the time of Duddy's childhood when as a seven year old boy his grandfather, Simcha, tells him: "A man without land is nobody."[3] Duddy never forgets this advice and reiterates it to many of the other characters during his journey to success. As a young man Duddy's aspirations are rather vague, but when Yvette, a French Canadian girl he meets while working in the Laurentians, takes him on a picnic to Lac Saint Pierre everything crystallizes. This is the place: "Before him spread a still blue lake and on the other side a forest of pine trees. There was not one house on the lake. Some cows grazed on the meadow near the shore and over the next hill was a cornfield and a silo. There were no other signs of life or ownership or construction" (p. 98). All Duddy's energies now become focused on acquiring the land. He works incessantly. When his father, Max, sleeps Duddy drives the taxi. During the day he sells soap supplies to factories and in the early evening

goes to a course in business administration. He grows a moustache, begins to take Reader's Digest and works hard on "How to Increase Your Word Power". At Wellington College he meets Peter John Friar and approaches him with the idea of making films of weddings and barmitzvahs. The two of them along with Yvette go into business. They are soon joined by Virgil, an epileptic Duddy met during a trip to New York.

With the proceeds from making and renting films, Duddy is able to buy the parcels of land on Lac Saint Pierre as they go up for sale. His fortunes change, however, after Virgil has an accident driving the truck to deliver rental films to Duddy's hotel customers. Yvette tells Duddy he is responsible because he knew it was dangerous to let Virgil drive. Virgil's spine has been smashed and he will never walk again. Yvette leaves Duddy and the office and moves to Ste. Agathe to care for Virgil. Duddy is racked by guilt and unable to perform. His depression deepens and he sees virtually no one. He is forced to go into bankruptcy.

When a letter from Virgil arrives asking him to come and visit, Duddy jumps at the opportunity and it is not long before he has moved in with Yvette and Virgil. But when a new piece of land goes up for sale, Duddy's obsession with Lac Saint Pierre overrides any feelings of loyalty he has towards Yvette or Virgil. He forges Virgil's signature on a cheque and buys the last parcel of land with the money. When the transaction is completed, Duddy and Yvette return to find Virgil twisted on the floor beside his overturned wheelchair. Duddy runs away. He sees Yvette one more time but she will have nothing to do with him and says his presence alone could cause Virgil to take another fit. Duddy brings his family to see the land which is now completely his, the fulfillment of his dream.

Duddy's final moment is one of triumph. When his restaurant bill arrives and he has no money to pay it the waiter, calling him sir, says he will charge it. Duddy's reaction indicates he understands the significance of this gesture: "And suddenly Duddy did smile. He laughed. He grabbed Max, hugged him and spun him around. 'You see,' he said, his voice filled with marvel. 'You see'" (p. 316). Duddy is now a somebody and the novel ends on this note of comic triumph. But what price has Duddy paid and was the price too high?

At first glance The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz might seem like Son of a Smaller Hero to belong to the tradition of the bildungsroman. It does treat the growing up of a young man to the point where he is alone and must make his way in the world. His new lifestyle will be quite different from that of his youth and it will demand the rejection of many of the values and ties he has from the past. But Duddy is a character quite unlike Noah and quite unlike the traditional hero of the bildungsroman. If one compares him to Stephen Dedalus or Paul Morel, for example, the differences are striking. Stephen leaves Ireland and all it represents to him to become a writer. At the end of Sons and Lovers, Paul Morel walks away from his dead mother towards the lights of the city. Both men have matured and are now ready to accept responsibility for their own actions. The reader feels that they have made a wise decision based on much thought. They have opted for life and vitality, and they are aware of their motivation for doing so. In contrast, Richler's novel ends with no such affirmation. Duddy has weighed the consequences of his actions only in material terms--he is less alone in a physical sense but less of a man then Stephen and Paul.[4] While Duddy does change in the course of

the novel one can not say that he matures.

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz also seems, at first glance, to follow the pattern of the traditional realistic novel. Structurally, it is not unlike Richler's previous novels. In form, Richler is a conventional novelist. The chronology of the novel is fairly straightforward. The one exception is at the beginning of the novel when after meeting Duddy as a nasty fifteen year old we go back to his childhood. At all times, though, we see everything through Duddy's eyes. Duddy makes his way like Stephen and Paul from point A to point B despite the hostile forces surrounding him. Richler infuses this pattern with much realistic detail. The setting, as in Son of a Smaller Hero, is the St. Urbain Street Jewish ghetto community but this novel lacks most of the authorial social comment and long, descriptive passages of its predecessor. Richler seems able here to distance himself from his old environment and to view the life of his characters in a more objective fashion. Instead of the description of streets, buildings and scenery which he used in Son of a Smaller Hero Richler here evokes a sense of what a particular community is like. Many of the events of the life of the ghetto are illustrated through example. An early passage recounts the march of the Fletcher's Field Cadets. Their haphazard and disorderly marching indicates that the parade is an imposed obligation. Some take it in fun and make a travesty of it: "Skinny, lumpy-faced Boxenbaum took it out on the big white drum and Sergeant Grepsy Segal, who could burp or break wind at will, sang,

> BULLSHIT, that's all the band could play,
> BULLSHIT, it makes the grass grow green" (p. 41).

Others have their thoughts focused elsewhere. Mel Brucker is one example.

He lowers his eyes as he passes his father's fire-gutted store. He is not surprised to see it in ashes because every time he and his brothers are sent to sleep at grandma's there is another fire and another store. Still others escape the cold, wintry day by abandoning the parade for the shelter of a pool hall or corner restaurant. An incident such as this march says more about the St. Urbain Street lifestyle and more effectively than many pages of authorial commentary would.

Richler captures other sections of the population in a variety of ways. Sometimes he uses generalization to achieve his end but it is a generalization marked by an astute choice of the particular word. Richler paints a vivid picture of the Jewish middle class who frequent Ste. Agathe: "The short husbands with their outrageously patterned sports shirts arm in arm with purring wives too obviously full of slacks, the bawling kids with triple-decker ice cream cones, the squealing teenagers, and the trailing grandfather with his beard and black hat" (p. 71). Sometimes Richler uses an individual to represent a group. He depicts Hugh Thomas Calder, the father of the girl on whom Duddy's brother performs an abortion, to indicate what his feelings are towards the well-to-do WASP Westmounters. In this passage Richler both tells us what Calder is like and exemplifies Calder's characteristics through his actions. Calder, we are told, is a rich man but an unhappy one. He is usually bored and seldom speaks as he feels most of the things he says are asinine. He thinks his daughter will grow up to discredit him and he does not really care. Even though he senses Sandra is in trouble of some sort: "Sandra was, to his mind, a shallow little bitch and unless it was absolutely necesssary for him to know he'd much rather not get involved in what was

bound to be sordid" (p. 194). Calder is not interested in power and amuses himself by performing shameful little experiments with money. Once he had accidentally dropped a hundred dollar bill in a urinal and then tried to guess who had stooped for it. He then began doing this on purpose for his own entertainment. Needless to say Richler has little respect or admiration for the rich goys.

The range and authenticity of the conversations in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz also give a tone of realism to the novel. The pace of the dialogue is quick and the language often reflects Duddy's ghetto background. One example occurs at a musical evening given by Mr. Cox, one of the teachers at the high school. Mrs. Cox tries to do something about the boys' language:

> 'I know very well,' she said, 'that you only use those words for their shock value and that's silly, because you can't shock me. You know the correct words, anyway. We can begin by naming the parts of the body. Do you all know what a penis is?'
> 'Sure,' Duddy said. 'A penis is a guy that plays the piano.' (p. 21)

This ends the language lesson but not the boys' interest in anything sexual. When the boys detect a black lace brassiere under Jane Cox's white cotton blouse, Duddy observes:

> 'A broad who wears a black brassiere means business.'
> 'Maybe it wasn't black, smart guy. Maybe it was just a dirty pink one.'
> At this Duddy howled derisively.
> 'O.K.,' Tannenbaum said, 'it's black, let's say, but she could wear it only for her husband's sake.'
> 'She wouldn't need it for Cox, you jerk, because he can see her completely naked any time he feels like it.' (p. 21)

Max and his mates use colloquialisms similar to those of their sons. One example occurs at Eddy's Cigar and Soda when Max is telling the story of how the Boy Wonder, Jerry Dingleman, first reached success. His friends have heard the story many times before but they continue to

listen and to provoke Max. Max begins:

> 'He was broke, . . . and he hadn't even made his name yet. He was just another bum at the time.'
> 'And what is he now? The gangster.'
> 'I'm warning you, MacDonald, if the Boy Wonder knocked off his mother Max here is the guy who would find an excuse for him.'
> 'I mean you could say that,' Max continued. 'We're like this, you know, and I'd say it to his face even. The Boy Wonder was just another bum at the time. Funny, isn't it? I mean his phone bill alone last year must have come to twenty G's (he's got lines open to all the tracks and ballparks all day long, you know), but only ten years ago he would have had to sweat blood before he coulda raised a lousy fin.'
> 'No wonder.'
> 'How that goniff manages to keep out of jail beats me.'
> 'It's simple,' Debrofsky said, 'the whole police force is on his payroll.' (p. 23)

Max ignores the comments, sucks a sugar cube and continues. Richler has managed to capture a life situation in all its authenticity. The reader can imagine this group of men sitting on chairs with their coffee cups by their side and day after day carrying on an endless procession of small talk.

While the largest proportion of the dialogue in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz is like that of Duddy or Max with their friends, Richler by no means limits himself to this. His range encompasses all social levels. Uncle Benjy's wife, Ida, uses a psychological jargon picked up through her many years of visiting analysts and her association with rich people who are impressed by such talk. Richler aptly counterpoints her comments to those of Duddy's and succeeds in satirizing both her pretentiousness and Duddy's lack of educational finesse:

> 'I used to think there was something noble about Benjy. That he told his father he was impotent because he loved and wanted to protect me.'
> 'You mean Uncle Benjy can have babies?'
> 'But his relationship with his father was never what it appeared to be. The father-figure has dominated Benjy since he was a child. He was always afraid that if he did something wrong the

> old man's love would be withdrawn and he grew to hate him for it. So he hurt him the worst way he could. He told him he was impotent.'
> 'Maybe I'm stupid, but--'
> 'At the same time,' Aunt Ida continued, 'he was protecting himself. As long as he stayed with me there would be no children. Benjy never wanted a child. He wanted to be the child. (He always slept in the foetal position, you know.) He was scared stiff that if he had a child your grandfather's love would be projected onto it and he would be forced to cope for himself. Benjy has a castration complex.'
> 'Listen, he's got cancer. I don't know what complications there are, but--Please let's go.' (p. 237)

The reader is amused but at the same time recognizes Duddy's desire to help his uncle and Ida's entrapment in a world of illusion. Richler's dialogue reinforces his dual comic-realistic purpose. In contrast to his earlier novels, dialogue is more important than description and commentary. If Richler had made greater use of his obvious talent to recreate conversations in his first books, he would have achieved objectivity sooner. While the quality of the dialogue in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz is better than in his early work, the large proportion of it is even more significant.

Richler is adept in creating the feeling of a realistic community life in this novel because he is writing from personal experience. Not only is the geographical setting intimately familiar to him but he draws many of the incidents of the novel from his own youth. While Richler and Duddy should certainly not be identified, Richler's non-fiction attests to the fact that there are similarities between him and his hero. In one of his essays[5] Richler recalls his own sexual adventures from the time he was eight. Like Duddy, he was short, pimply and generally unsuccessful with girls. He describes the various stages he went through from hanging around with a gang downtown to accepting blind dates. Duddy follows the

same pattern. In another essay Richler reveals the importance of comic books to his generation: "Superman, The Flash, The Human Torch, even Captain Marvel, were our golems. They were invulnerable, all conquering, whereas we were puny, miserable, and defeated. They were also infinitely more reliable than real-life champions."[6] It is natural then that when Duddy wants to make money he turns to renting and selling comics. He expands his stock with such items as Dick Tracy's Night Out and Gasoline Alley Gang Bang to take advantage of his companions' interest in their sexuality. Richler's description of his high school days in The Street are also reminiscent of scenes from The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. Richler, like Duddy, was in room 41 of Fletcher's Field High School (in actuality Baron Byng High School). Though the school again and again led the province in the junior matriculation results, the students at the commencement of the program, gave no indication of what they would turn out to be. Like Duddy and his friends, they were ". . . scruffy and spiteful, with an eye on the main chance."[7] Richler tells a story about how he and his friends used to set pennies down on the tracks to be flattened by passing freight trains. Later they would convince the rich children in Outremont that the Royal Train had gone over the pennies and so get a nickel for each. One can imagine Duddy doing the same thing.

While Richler's use of familiar geography and incidents adds a sense of verisimilitude to The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz it would be wrong to assume that he sacrifices the objectivity of A Choice of Enemies in order to achieve it. Perhaps because he had been living in London for several years, Richler was able to use similar personal material to that in Son of a Smaller Hero but present it in a more detached

fashion. His experience is now shaped by memory. Another reason that one does not feel the presence of an intruding author is that the novel's realism is tempered by a strong comic-satiric element. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz is not the strictly realistic novel Son of a Smaller Hero was.

The comic-satiric thrust of this novel demands objectivity on Richler's part and represents an important change of direction in his career. Novels subsequent to The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz will employ and develop many of its comic-satiric techniques. Sheps draws attention to one of these techniques: "Richler frequently employs set-pieces of burlesque and grotesquerie which interrupt the naturalistic flow of the narrative and grind with apparent dissonance against the tone of realism."[3] Sometimes Richler uses italicized print directly copying a script or some other medium to reinforce the break from realism. Virgil's preoccupation with his epilepsy is one example of how Richler can use the grotesque for comic effect. The first night he shares a room with Duddy, Virgil talks and talks about the plight of epileptics. He tells Duddy:

> 'You know, Mr. Kravitz, you're a Jew and wherever you go other Jews will help you. I'm not speaking against that. I think it's swell. Why, you could turn up tomorrow in Kansas City or Rome or--well maybe not Tokyo. But my point is other Jews there will lend a helping hand. You're sort of international. With the fags it's like that too. You know, they have their special little faggoty night clubs in every city. But epileptics? No. Nothing. A lot of them, plenty, won't own up to it, that's why. You think there's shame attached to being an epileptic?'
> 'Certainly not.'
> 'Some of the greatest men in the world were epileptics.'
> 'No kidding?'
> 'Julius Caesar.'
> 'Yeah?'
> Jesus Christ, even. Dostoievski. Charlie Chaplin.'
> 'Charlie Chaplin is a jew,' Duddy said snidely.
> 'A guy can be both, you know.' (pp. 208-209)

But it is Virgil's magazine, The Crusader, which underlines even more clearly the ridiculous and misguided nature of his zeal. Richler devotes a five page chapter to reproducing an edition of it and his intention is no doubt to offer the reader a good chuckle as well as to satirize any group which sees things solely in terms of one personal variant. From the biography of Julius Caesar to the A Short Story with a Moral, the writing and content of the magazine are mediocre and insipid. One letter to the editor reads:

> Sir: Everyone in the asylum thinks your mag is the mostest. A couple of suggestions however. How about a special supplement for paraplegics? What about some pin-ups?
> The Guys of Ward Six
> Watch for news of our Miss Health Handicap competition - - ED.
> (pp. 270-71)

Richler is obviously having great fun here satirizing how all people are the same and how the popular magazine caters to their similar interests. The travesty which the popular magazine makes of good literature is reflected in the obituary column which plagiarizes Tennyson's "In Memoriam:

> IN EVERLASTING MEMORY
> OF
> MRS. EDNA PLUNKETT
>
> Break, break, break at the foot
> of they crags, oh sea,
> But I would that my tongue could
> utter the thoughts that arise
> IN YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS (p. 271)

Richler's interest in pop culture in minor here but in his next three novels he will capitalize on his undoubted gift to satirize the media and its practitioners.

A second comic episode, one more typical of Richler's method in this novel, is his description of the graduation ceromony at Fletcher's Field High School. This four page scene, like the March of The Fletcher's

Field Cadets, is set off from the regular text by a large capitalized title. Richler has always enjoyed poking fun at his own people and in this passage he mixes narrative and dialogue to achieve his end. The proud parents who come to the gym do not know how to behave on this supposedly solemn occasion. The narrator tells us: "They arrived by fives and eights and threes. A surge of mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters and grandparents to a hot sticky gym. They came with smiles and jokes and embarrassment, the men pulling at their ties and the women choked by their girdles. . . " (p. 63). He continues: "They arrived too soon and thirsty and proud, and immediately shamed their sons and daughters by waving and whistling at them" (p. 63). Their conversation indicates the importance of money and prestige to them:

> 'Well, well, if it isn't Tannenbaum in the flesh. You got a son here?'
> 'Why not?'
> 'Is yours going to the nightclub afterwards? I gave mine a ten spot. Aw, what the hell I said to myself. Next week he goes to work in the store.'
> 'Mine's going to McGill to be a lawyer.'
> 'The way you operate, Tannenbaum, you'll need him.' (p. 63)

When it comes to culture, though, the group is shown as sadly lacking. When Martin Abromovitch strides across the platform to play a Chopin Polonaise someone remarks: "I know that. It was in A Song to Remember" (p. 64). The audience mistakenly applauds at the end of the first section, the second section and the third section. Martin's grandfather loudly comments that the boy is not wearing a hat and can not speak Yiddish. This makes him a failure in the old man's eyes. As for the speaker he realizes too late that he has brought the wrong speech with him. He talks feelingly about the Indian and the first British and French-Canadian settlers to the country, about Jacques Cartier, La Salle, and

General Wolfe. He provokes a response from an outspoken voice in the audience proclaiming: "You see that red nose he's got? That comes from too much Johnny Walker" (p. 65). The humour in this commencement episode is even more blatant than that about Virgil's magazine but it lacks the elements of the grotesque and the ridiculous of the former passage. In both passages Richler uses exaggeration to achieve his satirical end but here the exaggeration is tempered so that some degree of verisimilitude is maintained.

The film showing of Bernie Cohen's barmitzvah is the central scene and comic centre of the novel. It too is set off from the text through the use of a large capitalized title. It is a scene much like Wolf's funeral in Son of a Smaller Hero because it brings together so many of the characters and themes of the book. John Ferns points out its thematic significance: "In a novel of apprenticeship a ritual of initiation for a young man would naturally seem to gain . . . strategic relevance."[9] The film is, in effect, Duddy's barmitzvah for the business world.

Richler's description of the film is superb and is interspersed with the audience's ignorant and humourous comments. It is a monument to Richler's ability to capture a situation in its most bizarre, comic and serious aspects:

> Narrator: . . . in all those years, the Hebrews, whipped like sand by the cruel winds of oppression, have survived by the word . . . the law . . .
> 7. A close-shot of a baby being circumcised
> 'Lock the doors. Here comes the dirty part.'
> 'Shame on you.'
> 'Awright, Sarah. O.K. You've seen one before. You don't have to pretend you're not looking.'
> Narrator: . . . and through the centuries the eight-day-old Hebrew babe has been welcomed into the race with blood.

> TOM TOMS BEAT IN BACKGROUND. HEIGHTENING
> 8. [MONTAGE] Lightning. African tribal dance. Jungle fire. Stukas diving. A jitterbug contest speeded up. Slaughtering of a cow. Fireworks against a night sky. More African dancing. Torrents of rain. An advertisement for Maiden-Form bras upside down. Blood splashing against glass. A lion roars.
> 'Wow!'
> 'Are you alright, zeyda?' (pp. 153-54)

This short section from the eight page screening exemplifies several characteristics typical of the whole novel and of Richler's future work. Its form indicates both Richler's experience with scenarios and his desire, as in Virgil's Crusader, to break the naturalistic flow of the novel through the use of italicized print directly copying a script, newspaper or some other medium. The overly dramatized verbal and pictorial content of the barmitzvah film undermines the seriousness of the topic just as the content of Virgil's newspaper undermines the seriousness of the plight of the epileptic. The addition of audience conversation in this scene has a similar effect. The solemnity of the occasion stands in opposition to the trite, superficial dialogue of the viewers. But Richler's comic exaggeration is never vengeful or mean. His preoccupation in this and his succeeding novels is with ". . . general mankind's overwhelming taste for buffoonery, vulgarity, corn, never a super-subtle soul around but instead a more or less endless procession of schlemiels."[10] It is a high comedy of lowlifers marked by a gentle but not subtle satire.

Thematically, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz seems at first to represent a departure from Richler's early work. But Richler's concern is still the issue of values and their role in contemporary society. It is his point of view which has changed. Instead of studying the rebel, he studies the conformist to society's standards. Because of this and because of the unique blend of realism and comedy-satire in the

novel, the reader response to Duddy is more complex than it has been to any earlier Richler protagonist.

Duddy is a comic figure and so Richler must beware of cultivating for him either total sympathy or judgment. William New explains this well: "If there were a total identification between the reader and the central character, the comic effect would be destroyed, for it is the sense of apartness, of differentiation between the character perceived and the concept the reader has of himself, that is part of the ironic comedy."[11] Much of what Duddy does is due to his own naivete. Because he trusts others, like Linda Rubin and Irwin Shubert, he gets into situations which because of their incongruity excite laughter. Many of his pranks are done more out of youthful playfulness than cruelty. The reader is impressed by Duddy's ingenuity and laughs at its consequences on others. Moreover, the exaggeration of the comic set scenes discussed earlier leave the reader in no doubt that this is not a strictly realistic novel. Richler's ability to maintain a comic tone while at the same time not completely destroying the sense of verisimilitude is a major indicator of how far he has progressed as a novelist. The balance between reality and fantasy is a delicate one which demands both the gifts Richler displayed in setting and characterization in his early novels as well as the objectivity of point of view for which he had to struggle so dearly.

As a realistic figure, Duddy is a character quite unlike previous Richler heroes, for from the beginning he lacks their nobler virtues and aspirations. Even as a schoolboy Duddy has the reputation of being shrewd, crafty and a troublemaker. As president of room 41, reputed to be the toughest class in the school, Duddy is the ringleader

in giving Mr. MacPherson a hard time. A middle of the night phone call from Duddy causes the ill Jenny MacPherson to get up and as a result of her exertion to crumple in the hall and soon afterwards die. When MacPherson walks to Duddy's desk and says: "You killed my wife, Kravitz" (p. 39), Duddy hides behind his usual screen of brashness and yells to the others in justification of himself: "What does he mean I killed his goddam wife? I didn't mean nothing all the time. Nothing. We're all in this together, you understand?" (p. 39).

Duddy's other school activities are more commercial. It does not take him long to learn how to make the most of situations. He begins to sell stamps and dealing with seven mail order companies under a variety of pseudonyms works each of them up to the truly expensive kit for which he never pays. He knew a minor could not be sued, especially by an American company.

Duddy realizes he has to fight to survive in his environment but he fights society in order to be a part of it rather than through principles of any sort. He accepts rather than rejects the emphasis contemporary society places on money, fame and "making it" in the eyes of others. His eventual achievement then becomes a more serious comment on our way of life and our values than is the case in previous novels where the hero for the most part rejects the attitudinal and ethical structures he sees around him. Duddy only rejects anything which stands in his way and he uses the most pernicious means to reach his goals. His treatment of Virgil, in particular, strikes the reader as viciousness of the worst sort. His treatment of Yvette, while not consciously mean, shows what little regard he has for the human person. He works Yvette hard, shows

no appreciation for her efforts and is too embarrassed to introduce her at social gatherings. Though he depends on her for physical intimacy he is insensitive to her needs as an emotional human being and seems completely unaware of the deep love she feels for him. After he has made love to her on one occasion he passes a callous comment of this sort: "Imagine guys getting married and tying themselves down to one single broad for a whole lifetime when there's just so much stuff around" (p. 192). When Yvette replies that people do fall in love Duddy brushes this aside by saying that planes crash too. Later, after Friar leaves for good, Yvette says he did so because he loved and wished to marry her. Duddy laughs in her face in disbelief.

But Richler at no time has created a simple figure of evil. At least in Duddy's dreams of his land one sees the fine side of his personality:

> There could have been his grandfather on the farm and everybody saying how Duddy was the easiest touch in town, allowing ten St. Urbain Street boys into the camp free each season, helping out Rubin with his mortgage after the fire there, paying a head-shrinker fortunes to make a man out of Irwin Shubert, his enemy of old, building a special house for the epileptic who had been hurt working for him in those by gone days of his struggles, and giving so many benefit nights for worthy causes. They would have said that he was cultured too. 'A patron of Hersh in the early days.'" (p. 281)

Many complex forces enter into Duddy's formation and go some way to both explain and mitigate his behavior. Duddy sees in Mr. MacPherson the fate of the idealist in the contemporary world and it is not surprising that he does not choose this path. Mr. MacPherson belongs to the age group of Norman Price and his friends. He would be very much at home in the world of A Choice of Enemies. Like the members of Norman's expatriate socialist community in London, he had begun as very much of

an idealist. Like them too he ends up disillusioned, discontent and tired. When he had started teaching twenty years earlier he had day-dreamed about the potential heritage of his later years. He had imagined former students who had made it coming to nostalgic get-togethers in his parlour. Instead he finds himself at the beginning of the novel with an ill wife and a drinking problem. As representative of the decay of the liberal consciousness, he is a pitiful personnage. At a party to which he goes on the night of Duddy's phone call, he realizes that his old associates think he has not changed: "It was clear that they still took him for the freshly scrubbed idealist who had left McGill twenty years ago. They had no idea that he was exhausted, bitter and drained and that given the chance to choose again he would never become a teacher" (p. 31). But it is Duddy who crystallizes all of MacPherson's troubles and causes his final breakdown. Duddy goes out of his way to tempt Mr. MacPherson to use physical punishment. Long ago Mr. MacPherson had vowed not to use the strap: "The principle itself, like the dream of taking Jenny on a trip to Europe, keeping up with the latest educational books, or saving to buy a house, was dead" (p. 17). "That he no longer believed in not strapping was beside the point. As long as he refused to do it Mr. MacPherson felt that he would always land safely. There would be no crackup. He would survive" (p. 17). But, when Mr. MacPherson returns to school after his wife's death, Duddy succeeds in provoking him to a strapping. Mr. MacPherson was correct in his appraisal of himself. He ends, as Hersh tells Duddy much later in the novel, in a mental asylum. The idealist can not survive in the modern world.

At the opposite end of the spectrum and in the same age group as

Mr. MacPherson is Mr. Cohen for whom the barmitzvah film is made. A successful businessman, Cohen has learned to overlook the moral implications of his actions. He is the prototype of what a Duddy could become. One night Duddy picks up Mr. Cohen in the taxi and after a few drinks at Cohen's house tells him about Virgil and says it is all his fault. Cohen tells Duddy stories of his own young days, how he had let a partner go to jail and how a goy had been killed by a faulty derrick of his. Duddy does not respond except to say Virgil is crippled. Cohen tries to explain how it is all only a matter of survival:

> It's a battlefield, he thought, it sure is. But you and I, Duddy, we're officers, and that makes it even harder. . . . . We're captains of our souls, so to speak, and they're the cabin boys. Cabin boys, poor kids, often get left standing on the burning deck. . . . . It's a battlefield. I didn't make it. . . . . I've got to live, that's all. (pp. 266-67)

This philosophy is one which I think Richler sees as rampant. It helps to explain the influences on a character like Duddy but in the end it proves unfulfilling. It is ironic that Cohen who has worked so hard for his fifty thousand dollar house is only at home in the kitchen and with his wife away could even keep smoked meat in the refrigerator.

But the influence of Duddy's own family upon him is perhaps the most debilitating. As a young child, he feels compelled to invent a big brother Bradley and to tell the other school children about Bradley's exploits in order to raise their opinion of him. The truth of the matter is that Lennie pays little attention to Duddy whom he regards as a nuisance interfering with his medical studies. Moreover, Duddy learns later Lennie has never even mentioned him to his friends and told them he lived on Cote St. Catherine Road, Uncle Benjy's address. Duddy continually takes second place to Lennie in both his father Max's and his Uncle

Benjy's eyes. While Max is proud of Lennie's achievements he continually belittles Duddy. At Eddy's restaurant he tells the others: "Duddy's a dope like me. Aren't you kid?" (p. 22). When Duddy returns home from his summer at Rubin's he asks Max why he never answered his letters. When Max off-handedly says that he is not one for letters, Duddy remembers that when Lennie was a camp councillor Max wrote him every week and visited twice. When Duddy wants an interview with Boy Wonder, Max at first thinks Duddy will make a fool of him. Duddy asks him: "Why are you always afraid I'm going to embarrass you?" (p. 109). Duddy's self-esteem is certainly affected by his father's negative attitude towards him. Even when Duddy is beginning to find success and is excited by it, Max is not interested in hearing about his work. But is is, perhaps, Max's lack of emotional support for his son that most affects Duddy. It seems that Duddy is never sure of his father's affection for him and that this has an influence on his own inability in later life to form intimate attachments of his own.

His mother had died when he was six and though she is mentioned but three times in the course of the novel each is a touching scene. Duddy remembers her laugh and kisses and hugs and Max says everyone loved her. Duddy is tempted on one occasion to ask his father if Minnie had liked him, but he can not bring himself to risk it. In Toronto Duddy asks Lennie to tell him about "Maw" and does ask the question which is so important to him. But Lennie's answer that sure Duddy was her kid so she liked him is unsatisfactory. Duddy wants to be loved for himself and this Lennie fails to understand. Minnie is mentioned a third time at Uncle Benjy's funeral. Duddy lingers at his mother's grave and suggests

to Lennie that they begin to come once a year. This softer side of Duddy's personality is rarely seen but I think the reason is that other people rarely treat him sympathetically. No one seems to have enough time for Duddy and his emotional development is, as a consequence, severely hampered. He is always aware that Lennie receives more attention and concern. When Uncle Benjy, after years of neglecting Duddy and treating Lennie like a son, offers Duddy a fifty percent partnership if he will take over the factory Duddy refuses. He reminds Benjy how he always came to the house with a surprise for Lennie and says: "I could have been born dead as much as you cared" (p. 241).

It is ironic, though, that Benjy comes to have the clearest insight into Duddy's character. In a letter which is forwarded to Duddy after his uncle's death, Benjy writes:

> There's more to you than mere money-lust, Duddy, but I'm afraid for you. You're two people, that's why. The scheming little bastard I saw so easily and the fine, intelligent boy underneath that your grandfather, bless him, saw. But you're coming of age soon and you'll have to choose. A boy can be two, three, four potential people, but a man is only one. He murders the others.
> There's a brute inside you, Duddel--a regular behemoth--and this being such a hard world it would be the easiest thing for you to let it overpower you. Don't Duddel. Be a gentleman. A mensh. (p. 279)

Duddy chooses to let the brute overpower the gentleman and so gains material success but at the cost of the respect of the two people who mean most to him, his grandfather, Simcha, and Yvette.

The final scene of the novel sees Duddy's closest relationship, that with his grandfather, ruptured. He brings his family to see the land which is now completely his, the fulfillment of his dream. When Max comments that it is a wilderness Duddy jumping up and down, yells: "Sure,

a goddam wilderness and remember it, goddam it, take a good look, goddam everything to hell and heaven and kingdom come, because a whole town is going up here" (p. 308). But Simcha does not respond as expected. Instead he slinks off to the car alone and will have no part of the celebration. Even the arrival of Dingleman and Linda Rubin does not really dampen Duddy's spirits. Dingleman tells Duddy that Simcha does not want any land; he would not know what to do with it. He is frightened for he never thought Duddy would make it and he, like all the elders, just want to die in the same suffocating way they lived. When Dingleman says he could raise the money for development and they could be partners Duddy runs him off the land. Duddy dances with Lennie and says they are in the middle of Kravitz town. Back in the car Simcha says he does not want a farm here and the girl came and told him everything. Simcha knows that Duddy would damn everything to hell to get what he wants and he understands the methods Duddy would use to justify his actions: "I can see what you have planned for me, Duddel. You'll be good to me. You'd give me everything I wanted. And that would settle your conscience when you went out to swindle others" (p. 312). Perhaps one could say of Duddy as of so many other novelistic heroes that, given the money, they would have been fine and generous men. Instead Duddy feels he can repay his wrongs with money after the deeds have been performed. He fails to grasp the fact that relationships are not bought and sold, nor mended by money. At the close of the novel he is both victor and victim. As John Ferns states: "In the end we both pass the necessary judgment here and feel the kind of sympathy that is felt for someone irrevocably locked in a state of illusion. The winner of land becomes a moral and

human loser."[12] Duddy consoles himself as he goes off by himself: "The land is yours, he thought, and nothing they do or say or feel can take it away from you. You pay a price" (p. 313).

Duddy's relationship with Simcha recalls that between Melech and Noah in Son of a Smaller Hero. Both grandfathers represent the old Jewish traditions and are respected members of their own communities. While Simcha does not rule with the iron hand Melech did, both have a tremendous influence on their grandsons. As figures of authority, both overshadow their sons. Wolf and Max lack the strength and character of their fathers and neither forms as intimate a relationship with his son as their grandfather succeeds in doing. To Duddy and to Noah the most devastating result of the way of life they have chosen is that they have not been able to make their choice with their zeyda's approval. In each case the relationship with the grandfather which is viewed by each as the most important relationship, is severely shaken and causes consequent grief. In both novels the first generation represents tradition and strength of character, the second generation weakness of character and ideals and the third generation a search for a new way of life.

Though characters and situations in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz are similar to those in earlier novels, this novel, I think, represents a change of direction in Richler's career. The absolute seriousness of the early works is modified by a strong infusion of comedy and satire. Richler becomes very much the objective onlooker to the predicaments in which he places his characters and because of this is able to view them with humour. And this shift from pure realism is reflected in the unique vision of the world which encompasses this novel. It

represents another step in the progression of Richler's understanding of his environment. In The Acrobats and in Son of a Smaller Hero Richler seems intent on searching for a new ideology capable of replacing the old. His protagonists are idealists and while there is a glimmer of hope for the future neither Andre nor Noah attain their dream in the course of the novel. A Choice of Enemies is concerned with the end of ideologies. Norman must settle for a private and imperfect world quite unlike that he envisioned for himself. Duddy is the first Richler character to realize his aspirations. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz can be seen as perhaps heralding a new ideology, the accepted ideology of the contemporary world--materialism. Instead of trying to find substitute values Richler here scrutinizes the values he sees around him. Instead of studying the idealistic rebel, he studies the pragmatic realist. Duddy in contrast to previous Richler heroes, accepts the way things are and sets out to make his mark in this world.

One cannot help but ask what Richler thinks of the adventures and eventual success of his picaresque hero. Undoubtedly he has taken great enjoyment in the creation of the comic and satiric dimensions of the novel. There is a certain light heartedness of attitude surrounding Duddy's activities which prevents outright moral condemnation by the reader. Indeed, until near the end of the novel Duddy can be viewed as mischievous rather than malicious. One admires his ingenuity even if one lacks respect for his methods. The wheel of fortune has swung both for and against him and he has responded to both with increased determination. But Duddy allows the beast within him to overshadow the fine person he might have been. Richler in the end allows Duddy his moment

of triumph but he has already asked the key question of the novel: What price has Duddy had to pay and was the price too high? I believe Richler would judge the price too high. In all his novels he stresses the importance of human relationships and the possibilities for goodness inherent in men. Duddy chooses to deny both. While environmental and personal reasons can be brought forward to explain and mitigate this behavior, Richler leaves the reader certain that Duddy is responsible for his choice. What is perhaps most frightening, though, is the picture of our society as Richler views it. Even though he stands at a distance and uses the satirist's eye here as in his treatment of Duddy, there is no doubt that Richler is the concerned spectator. Duddy has merely accepted the values of this world. Is this the world a human being would or should desire to pass his life in? What would a world of Duddy Kravitzes be like? Or do we already have one? Perhaps The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz should be seen both as a mirror of what is and a warning of what might yet be. In this regard it is by far the most effective of Richler's novels discussed to date. And it is so, I believe, because of its unique blend of realism and satirical comedy. Richler has outgrown his dependence on earlier writers such as Hemingway and has found the medium to express his message.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE INCOMPARABLE ATUK AND COCKSURE

No reader who omits The Incomparable Atuk (1963) and Cocksure (1968) from a study of Richler's work has a true picture of the changes his writing has undergone. These two novels, in many ways, stand apart from the main body of his work. While all his novels previous contained major comic scenes, they were firmly rooted in the traditions of realism. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz heralded this change with its heavier reliance on comedy and satire but its underpinnings remained true to life. With The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure, however, Richler shifts to black comedy and satire and gives up any attempt to make either his characters or situations believeable. The characters are self-evident stereotypes who do not really change in the course of the novel. The reader feels little involvement with them and responds cerebrally rather than emotionally to the predicaments in which they find themselves. The worlds of both novels are as bizarre and zany as the creatures who inhabit them.

The experience of working exclusively in the comic-satiric medium gave Richler the foundation he needed to create his masterpiece,

St. Urbain's Horseman. Viewed from this perspective The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure are necessary transition novels. Richler had been working on St. Urbain's Horseman for two years and he felt unable to to complete it. After writing Cocksure he was able to return to St. Urbain's Horseman with renewed vigour. It seems likely that in order to achieve the blend of realism and comedy-satire he desired in St. Urbain's Horseman he first had to achieve a mastery of the comic-satiric medium itself. The Incomparable Atuk represents his first attempt. In Cocksure Richler remedied many of the former novel's weaknesses and produced a novel worth reading in its own right.

Nevertheless, the astute reader would probably recognize these novels as Richler's. Several of the techniques he employs to achieve comic and satiric effects he has used before, especially in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. In his earlier works the comic episodes, the humour and the use of the grotesque were usually relegated to a minor role. They stood in opposition to the seriousness of the whole. In The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure they are, in effect, the whole. Richler proves that he is a master in the use of understatement, exaggeration, cliches, grotesquerie and horror.

One might expect a radical alteration in Richler's themes because of the formal changes his work has undergone. Because he no longer needs to create a realistic setting, there are no descriptive passages of geographical locales. But geography itself remains important--Richler continues to set his novels in either Canada (The Incomparable Atuk) or London (Cocksure)--and time and values continue to be the primary concerns of his work. Only his angle of vision has changed. If

anything, the satirical method Richler now employs underlines more clearly than the realistic the lack of values in contemporary society. While the worlds of both novels strike the reader as ridiculous and often humorous, he recognizes the underlying truth of Richler's satire of culture and the media, family and school life, sexual attitudes and attitudes by and towards minority groups. He realizes just how frightening the prospects for our future could be if we allow current trends to continue.

Richler himself and many others have tried to explain the shift of interest and emphasis in The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure. Richler had no doubt reached a point where he was having difficulty using the traditional novelistic methods of realism. Speaking for himself and other expatriate writers, Richler says:

> After all, the writer who opts out of the mainstream of American experience, self-indulgently luxuriating in bohemia, the pleasure of like-minded souls, is also cutting himself off from his natural material, sacrificing his sense of social continuity; and so when we swung round to writing about contemporary America, we could only attack obliquely, shrewdly settling on a style that did not betray knowledge gaps of day to day experience.[1]

St. Urbain Street was no longer the St. Urbain Street of Richler's childhood and Montreal and Canada were no longer the cultural desert from which he had escaped. The ever increasing tempo of change had left him with few impressions vivid enough to base his work on. This was probably the major motivating factor in Richler's decision to use the comical-satirical approach rather than the realistic.

Several other reasons can be advanced for Richler's change of outlook. The absurd movement was a major literary force of the nineteen fifties and Richler and many others were influenced by it. Richler says in an interview with John Metcalfe that most of his expatriate

contemporaries were reading Nathanael West, Henry Green, Evelyn Waugh, and Louis-Ferdinand Celine. And ". . . the feeling was also in the air that everything had become just too absurd to report on."[2] Richler agrees with Metcalfe that the invented world became at that time the only possible one. He also agrees that Cocksure fits into the general genre of A Cool Million, Miss Lonelyhearts, The Day of the Locust, The Magic Christian and Candy. The Incomparable Atuk Richler sees as a gentler book, more of a spoof.

The Incomparable Atuk and especially Cocksure also come out of a very old satirical tradition. Richler agrees with Metcalfe that in some ways Cocksure is almost an eighteenth century novel. David Sheps says that in Atuk and Cocksure Richler ". . . revealed a spirit far closer to that of Congreve, Swift and Shaw than one might have guessed from his earlier novels."[3] Woodcock notes that The Incomparable Atuk is a light satire whose model is Voltaire's l'Ingenu. Voltaire tells the story of a Huron Indian, nature's child, who is brought into the corrupt world of eighteenth century Paris. But Richler's satire in both his novels is not of the polished, urbane sort one usually associates with the eighteenth century. Neither is Richler enough of an objectivist to create pure satire. As Woodcock says: "He cannot, even when he is most impatient with individual men, achieve the dissociation from humanity that enabled Swift and Lewis to create plausible monsters out of bits of human folly like sculptors creating nightmare figures out of junk."[4]

Despite these differences, Richler's attitudes are in many ways similar to his eighteenth century counterparts. Like them he is very much the moralist concerned with the disintegration of traditional values.

Several of his pieces of non-fiction about the pop trends he perceived in London reflect a point of view similar to those of The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure. According to Richler the New Age is pop, swinging, interested in glittering but short-lived phenomena and journalistic in origin.[5] Like Cocksure and The Incomparable Atuk the tone of the articles is light and humorous as two titles indicate: "The Look: Where It All Began: Has the Swing lost its Zing?" and "Fashion News: Trendy Mordy Reports from Mod London." Like Cocksure and The Incomparable Atuk, though, these articles comment on the ephemeral, amoral qualities of contemporary life. In his interview with Richler, John Metcalfe mentions that Cocksure and St. Urbain's Horseman savage the faddish, the modish, the trendy. Swift attacked the same kinds of targets, and like Swift, Richler battles for 'high culture' or 'elitist culture', an unpopular attitude these days. Richler admits that in many ways "I'm an old fashioned man."[6] He says of Mortimer in Cocksure: "Yes. An honourable man trapped and really the novel to a large degree makes the case for Mortimer Griffin--for, if you like, the square."[7] Fiedler is perhaps right when he says that Richler's satire, however deliciously gross, is "an anti-genteel defense of the genteel tradition."[8]

To Richler, it would seem, the genteel tradition has its origins in the neo-classical period. When he wanted to depict Norman Price as the true academic, he chose The Life and Works of John Dryden as his life-interest. In St. Urbain's Horseman Jake says, with Richler's apparent approval, that what is important to him is whether or not he would have been asked to sit at Samuel Johnson's table. Richler obviously admires the great literary figures of the neo-classical period and his views on

culture and morality have many affinities with theirs. Though his choice of language is quite different from theirs, the anger which motivates his satire is due to many of the same circumstances.

Richler's satire, then, reflects both the old eighteenth century tradition as well as contemporary black satire. Igoe comments on this mixed influence when he says of Cocksure:

> Were Kafka and Nathanael West contemporaries, living at this hour, and they collaborated to write a prose comic strip, something like Cocksure might emerge. And yet it is a highly original concoction, a sort of Pop Pilgrim's Progress written by a Jewish Bunyan.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Were he not quite so obviously sane one might drop another name by writing that Mordecai Richler evokes Dean Swift brooding over Soho at high noon.[9]

Richler is too much of a mature novelist by this point in his career to slavishly use any model for his work.

While the same influences are at work in both The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure, The Incomparable Atuk is by far the less successful of the two books. It is to Cocksure what Son of a Smaller Hero is to The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. In the two minor novels Richler perhaps allows himself to get too involved in his subject. Despite this drawback, Richler has much to say in The Incomparable Atuk about Canadians and Canadianism as well as the North American wasteland. The story line is simple. Atuk, virgin poet from Baffin Island, is discovered by Buck Twentyman Enterprises and flown to Toronto for a gala party celebrating his first book of verse. Dazzled by "the streets paved with gold" he perceives in Toronto, he decides that he cannot return to the North. Instead, after an initial period of loneliness, he brings his relatives to the city to produce the much coveted Eskimo sculpture and painting.

He comes to know the important personalities of the media and arts and moves in their elite circle. In short, he is very soon corrupted. His poetry loses its arctic innocence and even his relatives, whom he keeps locked up in an airless basement apartment, begin to create "perfect" figures like those they see represented on television. Accepting the standards and values of those around him, Atuk is easily conned into being the first participant on Buck Twentyman's "Stick Out Your Neck." The title reference is literal, for when Twentyman does not flash him the answer to the million dollar question and Atuk is unable to reply, he is guillotined. He is made a Canadian martyr by Twentyman who blames the show's American sponsor, his arch competitor in another field.

The main problem with The Incomparable Atuk is that it is organizationally weak. The novel is made up of a number of loosely related segments. It is almost a book of personalities. The reader is given long portraits of the individuals Atuk meets on his journey to success and ruin and a story of the life of each. Each portrait allows Richler to satirize some aspect of modern culture that displeases him but in trying to include as many satirical targets as possible Richler fragments his efforts. Richler seems to feel that the personalities whom we choose to elevate to fame reveal much about the sort of people we are. And The Incomparable Atuk is replete with the oddities of fame. Rory Peel, the advertising executive, warns Atuk to take care not to offend Seymour Bone, Canada's leading drama critic, who sets the cultural tone of Toronto. Bone had come from the west to Toronto thinking himself quite the rebel and was surprised to find his ideas lacked shock value in the metropolis. Depressed, he ate prodigiously and began to spend his time with another

rebel, Ruthy Rosen. In protest against their families and the establishment they married. Seymour, who liked plays and sleeping in late, decided to become a drama critic, but remained unnoticed until he was ridiculed in Time and the London Spectator. But most Canadians thought one of theirs had been lauded and when Seymour overate so much before the first play he was to review that he had to leave before the end of the first act, his reputation was cemented. To keep up his image of being a tough critic he was forced to continue leaving plays on a regular basis. This was a personal sacrifice, for Bone liked most plays and often returned disguised to see their endings.

Norman Gore, the university professor who had encouraged Atuk's first poetic efforts, is not so crude a representative of Toronto's elite as is Bone. In him Richler parodies the academic liberal. Gore is concerned that Atuk has associated himself with the big business tycoon, Twentyman. He asks if Atuk does not realize that Twentyman is one of the biggest shareholders in the company that exploits Atuk's people. But Gore is as patronizing as his adversaries and his effect on Atuk is potentially as deleterious. He tells him: "To these men you are not a noble savage, a thing of beauty, but something else to exploit and murder."[10] The truth is that Gore is an exploiter of a different sort. For years he and his wife had given an annual buffet dinner which was the cultural and intellectual event of Toronto. But with the advent of television his famous and highly paid guests' conversations became dull unless they were speaking to a producer. It was then that Gore got the idea of televising the dinner: "The cameras zooming in and out not only relaxed the guests, but an invitation to Gore's became an even more enviable thing: everybody

collected a fee" (p. 121). Rather than selling shares, Gore sells culture.

These two portraits are interesting in themselves but they and all the other portraits are related only because of what they have to say about the Canadian cultural climate. Taken as a whole, they do not give enough of a sense of unity to the novel. Because Richler has too much to say and employs a myriad of characters to exemplify his arguments the novel in its entirety lacks a focus.

A second weakness from which the novel suffers is one that the reader recognizes because it appeared in Richler's early work. In The Incomparable Atuk Richler's personal feelings are so much vented that the novel lacks the fine distancing and perspective of its counterpart, Cocksure. It seems as if, having changed to the satiric medium, Richler once again had to face the problem of subjectivity. His scathing comments about the Canadian cultural scene reflect his own experiences with Canada's cultural elite. He has many personal scores to settle with the well-known Torontonians who had once attacked his work. This personal dimension is probably lost to most readers and if known perhaps mars their appreciation of the book's broader satirical scope. It is unimportant to know the real life identity of Harry Snipes, editor of the magazine for "cool canucks." What is noteworthy is his strategy. He takes a 1940 copy of Colliers and tells Atuk to reset one of its western short stories in Moose Jaw in 1850, being careful to alter any significant details. This recycling of American material is of concern to many Canadians and might lead one to believe that Richler is anti-American.

While at first glance The Incomparable Atuk might be taken as both anti-American and anti-Canadian, this is not, I think, the case.

The Canadian cultural and economic scene is harshly satirized but not because of the American influence that permeates it. Richler quotes from Richard H. Rovere's article in Macleans (Nov. 5, 1960): "Cut off from American junk, Canada would have to produce her own junk." Richler is definitely not one of the Canadian nationalists who would try to exclude American "garbage." Rather he thinks such rulings as those on Canadian content are farcical. Twentyman, director of many inter-locking companies, had bid for a television franchise

> by freely promising a schedule with fifty per cent Canadian cultural content. Prominent among his indigenous offerings were Canada Hit Parade With the Three Gassers of Galt and a Girl (all Canadian born), Trans-Canada Amateur Drama Night, a national ping-pong competition, Wednesday Night Wrestling and Championship Bowling. (p. 157)

But not to worry, he informs the agency, for these would form the Early-Early Show from five to eight in the morning. Better time slots would have such shows as Perry Mason with Canadian born Raymond Burr. Also farcical in Richler's view is the narrow-mindedness of many Canadians in the sports or artistic spotlight. Dr. Burt Parks, a physical fitness fanatic in The Incomparable Atuk proclaims that he is world famous all over Canada and the reader laughs. To Richler the problem is not the infiltration of American cultural standards but the whole North American milieu from which the "junk" blossoms forth. Over-zealousness on the part of Canadian nationalists accentuates rather than alleviates the problem. Richler's point is well taken but the way in which he embodies it seems too limited. The references he uses are meaningful to Canadians who lived through the 1960's but these references seem destined to eventual oblivion.

In Cocksure, which has broader satiric aims, Richler proved his

adeptness in handling the satiric medium. The world of Cocksure is as shocking and absurd a fantasy world as that of The Incomparable Atuk. The setting is London and the protagonist an expatriate Canadian, Mortimer Griffin. The company for which he works, Oriole Press, is taken over by the famous Star Maker. As Mortimer finds out more and more about the methods Star Maker uses to control his vast empire, he is aghast. Star Maker, whose very sex is disputed, owes his longevity to the continual replacement of malfunctioning organs of his body with organs surgically removed from the bodies of others. Mort realizes that he too is slated for an untimely end but his efforts to escape like his efforts to release the true story are futile. In addition to problems at work, Mort is besieged by personal problems. He believes he is sexually inadequate and later, inpotent. His wife, Joyce, has an affair with his best friend, Ziggy Spicehandler. And Jacob Shalinsky, who insists Mort is a Jewish anti-Semite, makes life difficult for him both at home and at the office. Mortimer does have positive values, but lives in a world where these values are considered obsolete and old-fashioned.

In contrast to The Incomparable Atuk, Cocksure is unified both thematically and formally. There is an identifiable plot and subplot. The plot focuses on Mort's public life and his relationship with Star Maker. There are no equivalents to Seymour Bone or Norman Gore in Cocksure, but culture and the media remain among Richler's primary targets. Nowhere does one feel that Richler is trying to even a personal score or has become so emotionally involved in his subject matter that he cannot distinguish major from minor concerns. The impersonal distancing of the author allows a more objective point of view, one which gives a more universal

perspective to this novel. Moreover, by choosing to focus on one personality, Star Maker, Richler does not fragment his efforts.

The opening scene of the novel displays Richler's increased objectivity and the planned nature of this work. Dino Tomasso's visit to Star Maker in the opening scene is both chilling and puzzling to the reader. The wrought iron gates have coupling snakes woven into them. Star Maker, "The ageless, undying Star Maker reclined in his customary wheelchair. Behind, sending a shiver through Tomasso, yet again, there loomed the familiar portrait of the pernicious Chevalier d'Eon, at once the Star Maker's hero and heroine."[11] When Dino goes to see one of the box-office stars residing on the grounds of the villa, he finds him resting, hanging in a cupboard. He pokes and punches him and tells the guard he looks great. Richler makes no further comment. He does not tell the reader the story of Star Maker's life, as he would have done in The Incomparable Atuk, nor does he explain the oblique reference to the star in the closet.

The significance of this scene is revealed only much later in the novel when Mort is sent to bring a file to the Star Maker. He steals into the studio and sees black-suited motorcycle riders moving from door to door and locking all but one. A party is in progress and the Star is begging his guests not to leave. When all depart a seven foot black box is wheeled in along with a machine with a pump-like device. At this point Mort is apprehended and brought to Star Maker who explains what he has just witnessed. He tells Mort that he is Greek-born and that in the 1930's the big studios were owned almost exclusively by non-Americans. They had power and met once a year to decide what they could do for the

populace. They tried to do "Anything to prop up the myths of the American heartland" (p. 138). But soon the stars became hard to handle and rather than be dependent on their whims Star Maker brought in a group of scientists to create a star. After a few experiments it was decided that the star must have the air let out of him and be locked in a mothproof box between pictures to prevent wear and tear. Thus, many of the idols of the movie world are shown to be as artificial as the roles they play. Star Maker is a literal appellation but the media make and break performers continually. As Star Maker tells Mort "there was nothing more vacuous, no shell emptier than a movie actor."

Star Maker's methods for success in the world of publishing are as gruesome. Again Richler makes use of suspense and leaves the reader to draw his own conclusions about the meaning of the described events. When Dino Tomasso announces an Our Living History series after the take-over of Oriole Press, Mort is sure it will fail. But, only ten days before the book's appearance, the dreary Labour politician who is the subject of the first biography hangs himself "with a black silk stocking from a chandelier in a room replete with two-way mirrors, rhino whips, dildos, and other erotic paraphernalia" (p. 104). Three days before publication, the second subject takes an overdose of heroin, leaving a note explaining he had impregnated his fifteen year old granddaughter. Later, when Dino purposely leaves the Our Living History file open on his desk, Mort and the reader are appalled to learn that the deaths are prearranged. Careful planning and publicity assure a large market and Richler exaggerates this aspect of our culture. Sensationalism sells and Mort guesses in the closing pages of the novel that his life will form the subject

matter for The England Now series.

The subplot of Cocksure focuses on Mort's private life and his relationship with Jacob Shalinsky. The sub theme of minority groups, in particular the Jew, occupies an important position in Cocksure as it does in so much of Richler's work. Mortimer gives a series of "Reading for Pleasure" lectures as a public service. At the end of the first evening Jacob Shalinsky, a "lachrymose little man," comes up to him, asks why he changed his name and proclaims that Mortimer is Jewish. Mort says he is mistaken and tells the story in a joking fashion at Hy and Diana Rosen's. Hy takes it the wrong way and is offended and angry. Mort's subsequent efforts to repair his friendship with the Rosens are unsuccessful. Moreover, Shalinsky returns to the lectures with a group of Jewish partisans who spend their time cross-questioning Mort on Jewish affairs, insisting all the while that Mort is Jewish. When Mort is unable to convince them otherwise, he loses his temper and cancels part of the series. News of his treatment of Shalinsky reaches the office and Mort is branded as an anti-Semite. Soon afterwards he begins receiving mail from Shalinsky and letters from several lunatic fringe groups offering him support and asking him to make guest appearances at their meetings. Even his wife, Joyce, suggests that if he were truly Jewish, she would still love him. The result of Shalinsky's harassment is that Mort is shunned by former friends and associates. In desperation, he brings all his personal documents to Shalinsky as proof of his WASP background but Shalinsky remains unconvinced.

The irony of Mort's relationship with Shalinsky appears only when Mort is in fear of his life. Mort has typed a document revealing

the hidden truth behind the Our Living History Series in the hope that this will prove enough of a deterrent to Star Maker's designs on him. He wonders to whom he can trust the envelope and he realizes that Shalinsky is the only possibility. He comes to some understanding of Shalinsky in this, their last meeting, when he sees Shalinsky in his poor and cluttered surroundings. Shalinsky sends parcels to writers in Iron Curtain countries and is editor of a journal, Jewish Thought. In order to support his endeavor, he sits outside important people's offices until they give him a donation. His printing bills are paid by a Mr. Levitt whom he has named beneficiary of his life insurance policy. When Mortimer tells Shalinsky that his life is now a wreck and insists once again that he is not Jewish, Shalinsky responds in one of the important statements of the novel: "A Jew is an idea. Today you're my idea of a Jew" (p. 211). The Jewish race has traditionally been regarded as an oppressed, long-suffering people and in this respect Mortimer is certainly a symbolic Jew. The irony of this scene is compounded when Shalinsky reads the manuscript after Mort's departure and thinks the document is just a story: "Naturally it was about publishing, his world. Well, he had read better stories. . . . For a fantasy, the language was too dry, even legalistic, and then of course the names would have to be changed. Shalinsky was willing to publish the story, he was loyal, but a libel suit, he thought, I can do without" (p. 212). Thus the symbolic Jew, Mortimer Griffin, is undone by the actual Jew, Jacob Shalinsky. Given the pervasiveness of the media discussed earlier, Shalinsky's reaction to Mortimer's tale should come as no surprise.

While the Shalinsky plot is a constant thread appearing and

reappearing throughout the novel, numerous other small episodes, most of them intentionally humorous, concern minority groups. Hy Rosen and his Jewish pugilistic stance offer the reader such comedy. Hy, whose physical stature is far less than giant, walks around his home impersonating some famous sports star. Occasionally, he gets carried away and his wife, Diana, recognizes the onset of his "Jewish-avenger" mood. In this state, Hy goes out and accosts strangers, looking for those who will respond to his anti-Semitic baiting. Most ignore him but he does manage to get into a few brawls.

Mort's own reaction to minority groups is related to his feelings of sexual inadequacy. In a world where everyone seems sexually liberated and "cocksure" Mort feels like an outsider. While not a primary focus of the novel, Mort's fears about his sexual capacities form an important sub theme. After seeing his friend's, Ziggy's, film Mort begins to wonder if he is a homosexual. He would leap up in a dream revealed to the world as such. Unlike Ziggy, he has never had a homosexual trauma and this worries him. Perhaps, he thinks, the very fact that he finds the idea of it disgusting is an indication that he has suppressed tendencies. And he was very choosy about barbers since he had had an erection while being given a shampoo and massage. There is a trial he has never dared take except in a dream. In his dream he is orally stimulated by a male and a female and finds he can not tell a man's mouth from a woman's. Mort's fears then extend to his relationship with Joyce. It might be that he just imagined he satisfied her. As he thinks about it, he realizes that these feelings of inadequacy had begun in high school upon encountering Motke Shapiro, the only Jewish boy in the school:

"Right there, Mortimer felt, was planted the corrupting seed of his discontent, his suspicion that minority-group pricks (Jewish, Negro) were agressively thicker and longer than WASP ones" (p. 87). "His fear of derisory size, lying in wait in his unconscious for years, was released by literary experience" (p. 88). Mort becomes obsessed by the problem, even more so because he only suspects and has no way to prove that he is indeed lacking. When he is unable to manage an erection after one of his bouts with Shalinsky, he thinks that he has now become impotent. He explains Joyce's unfaithfulness to himself by saying that of course she turned to Ziggy who had "a fat Jewy one." In his search for oricular proof, Mort encounters the black librarian, Rachel Coleman, and decides to ask for her judgment about the size of his penis. Their one night affair is, however, a humiliating experience. Rachel makes him pay her. She then comments that she hopes there is no truth to the rumour that Mort is Jewish but that in the nude there is no hiding it. Mortimer, whose mother had had him circumcised for hygienic reasons, flees without making love to Rachel and with no answer to his dilemma. He never does get the answer he seeks.

At the same time that Mort is assailed by these feelings, his reputation among the working class men at the Eight Bell's pub is skyrocketing. At first his presence is inhibiting to the regulars and they regard him as a prim gentleman and change their conversation when he enters. This alters after he buys a tube of vaginal jelly for Joyce one time at Rapani's, the pharmacist down the street. When Rapani wants to know if it was satisfactory Mort, unable to find an adequate reply, says that he needs another one. Soon he is trapped into his role and has

trouble secretly disposing of his ever increasing number of sexual supplies. The men imagine that he is involved in every sexual scandal in Britain. Richler is certainly having fun while at the same time satirizing the emphasis and importance as well as the stereotypes our society places on sex. Because of the media and the whole milieu in which we live, individuals become over concerned with sexual technique and physical stature at the expense of the emotional and spiritual relationship which underlie them. Factual knowledge of details, sexual devices and fears of inadequate performance in lovemaking become obsessions. An individual like Mort expects of himself what he sees in film and reads in books without taking into consideration the uniqueness of the relationship in which he is a partner. It is ironic that while he perceives himself as outside the sexual mainstream the men at the pub perceive him as "cocksure."

Not only is the interrelationship of plot and subplot and the organizational structure of Cocksure superior to The Incomparable Atuk, but Cocksure is technically superior as well. The actual techniques employed in both novels are similar and are reminiscent of techniques Richler has used before, most notably in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. As early as Son of a Smaller Hero Richler was using comic scenes that were central to a novel's meaning and which stood as almost complete self-contained units. Bernie Cohen's barmitzvah film in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz was another scene of this sort. In it Richler began the practice of using italicized print and presentation in the form of the medium being imitated, in this case a filmscript.

In both The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure Richler includes a

scene from a television show. Both scenes, of course, are apt because of the thematic importance of culture and the media in both novels. But the panel show "Crossed Swords" in The Incomparable Atuk plays a less central role and is more weakly tied to the novel's essential meaning than is its counterpart in Cocksure. On "Crossed Swords" the distinguished guests of that evening, Rabbi Glenn Seigal, Harry Snipes, Rory Peèl and Atuk are asked to identify and discuss the quotation "Blessed Are the Meek: For They Shall Inherit the Earth." Guesses of Hemingway, Herman Wouk and Boris Pasternak are made. All agree the quotation lacks appeal, for as the Rabbi says: "Nobody today wants to be thought of as weak, a shmo, if you'll pardon me. We like to think of ourselves as lions" (p. 92).

In Cocksure the validity of Mort's self appraisal is underlined in the scene where he appears on the television program "Insult." The purpose of the show is to ridicule the participants in order to give the audience pleasure. A previous guest had been Sister Theresa who had ended up sobbing when Digby Jones refferred to her as a "sexually diverted nymphomaniac. A pornographer of the do-good" (p. 103). Mortimer is insulted because he is a holder of the Victoria Cross, awarded for valor in battle. Jones gives an incriminating biography of Mort's life, for example saying he was a Queen's Scout (in the U.S.A. an Eagle Scout) and then flashing on the screen the image of another Queen's Scout who atop the University of Texas Tower shot everything in sight, killing thirteen and wounding thirty-one. Digby belittles Mort's physical courage in much the same way that the social scientist did Norman Price's in A Choice of Enemies. When Mort is asked if he does not recognize our lives as absurd, he replies: "No, I believe in the possibilities within each

of us for goodness" (p. 190). This statement reaffirms what I think is the crucial point in all of Richler's novels. If there is a message which permeates his work it concerns the necessity for humanness in the struggle to survive. "Insult" is a more successfully realized comic scene than "Crossed Swords" because it brings together so many of the novel's primary concerns.

Richler's use of language to achieve comic-satiric effect has its roots in his earlier work as well. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz exemplified what Richler can do with exaggeration, understatement and cliche. In The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure Richler improves upon his techniques and because of the nature of these novels employs them to a much larger extent. Atuk, for example, aches for his home and family and for the hunt, but does not want to return a failure and have the elders replace their pride in him with scorn. Instead he allows himself to be drawn further and further into the maze of modern existence. He becomes obsessed with media competitions: "Atuk kept his radio tuned to CJFD all night, just in case Night Owl phoned to find out if he was listening and offered him a free television set, washing machine or wrist-watch with automatic calendar and built-in alarm" (p. 37). Advertising and the ever-present ploys of the industrial complex make him an exemplary consumer: "Although he had no purchase to make, Atuk zigzagged in and out of the magic eye doors of supermarkets, chain drugstores, and department stores, all the way home, just in case he should be the One Millionth Happy Customer to pass through Those Friendly Doors and therefore be showered with munificence" (p. 39). While the reader laughs at Richler's exaggeration, he can not miss the point. Materialism and the values it

fosters are rampant and when Atuk takes these values to himself he becomes like their proponents.

Just as satirically effective and probably even more humorous is Richler's use of understatement in The Incomparable Atuk. When Atuk meets the incorruptible Bette Dolan, the first woman to swim Lake Ontario in less than twenty hours, he is immediately attracted to her. Bette tries to encourage the depressed Atuk into believing in his own abilities. Atuk tells her he lacks confidence because he is unable to make love. Richler, a master in the effective use of understatement, says very succinctly: "A plea for help was something Bette Dolan had never taken lightly" (p. 20). So Bette "helps" Atuk and he wonders if she suspects she has been seduced. Soon Bette is calling at all hours saying she feels the urge to "help" him. When, later in the novel, Atuk begins seeing Goldie Panofsky, Canada's Darling Bette is reported to be luring men at the King Edward Hotel. At the time she first met Atuk Bette had told him that she had never allowed a man to even hold her for she belonged to the nation, "Like Jasper Park or Niagara Falls" (p. 21). In the end she apparently belongs to everyone.

The exaggeration and understatement used in Cocksure is not often of the amusing sort one finds in The Incomparable Atuk. Richler's purpose has become more serious and the implications of his humour more frightening. The influence of black comedy upon Richler's manner is seen in the exaggeration and understatement of the scene where Miss Fishman, Mort's secretary, attacks Fraulein Ringler, a member of the Star Maker's efficiency team from Frankfurt. To the surprise of everyone Miss Fishman says that the Fraulein's necklace once belonged to her mother

and grandmother. All of Miss Fishman's family had been killed at Treblinka. In the usual matter of fact way black comedy uses when describing horror, Richler states: "Miss Fishman's mother was in fact the one-millionth Jew to be burned, not counting half or quarter Jews or babies who weighed under nine pounds before being flung into the ovens" (pp. 30-31). "Thus, the burning of the one-millionth was one of the most ring-a-ding nights in the history of the Third Reich and to this day . . . it is commemorated by survivors of that sentimental barbecue wherever they may be" (p. 31). Just as gruesome is the reaction of Lord Woodcock, the head of Oriole Press, to the situation. He is appalled by the secretary's behavior, for his motto has always been "We must love one another or die" (p. 30). Richler, whose use of understatement is generally superb, cannot help but get in his usual attack on the liberal consciousness. He says of Woodcock:

> Soon after the war Mr. Woodcock, as he was then, had collected case histories and compiled a book, elegantly produced if necessarily slender, about all the charitable little acts done by Germans to Jews during the Nazi era. Here a simple but good hearted sergeant offering spoonfuls of marmalade to Jewish children before they were led off the the gas chambers . . . . (p. 30)

The reader responds to such humour only because to face the ugliness of the reality underneath would be painful. He becomes, so to speak, anaesthetized by the recurring horror and violence and only upon reflection is he shocked at the nature of the material he has been taking light heartedly.

Richler's use of cliche also underlines the difference in tone that the reader notices between The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure. In The Incomparable Atuk the conversations between Atuk and The Old One, for example, are more humorous than horrifying. The Old One had told

Atuk: "For an Eskimo boy to make his mark in this world, Atuk, he must be brighter, better and faster than other boys" (p. 53). And Atuk had taken this precept, one which rings a note of familiarity, as a model for his life. When the Old One refuses his blessing on Atuk's marriage, Atuk employs the same sort of language when he tells Old One: "You're a bigot. You've never overcome your igloo mentality" (p. 83). But the Old One insists that assimilation starts with something as simple as taking a bath. Moreover, Goldie belongs to a monotheistic religion and this upsets the Old One who maintains that it is the Eskimo belief in many gods that has held them together: "We are the chosen pagans, my son. We have a message for the world" (p. 86). He goes on to say that it is hard to be an Eskimo, that theirs is the only culture in the land and that one day they shall rise again and claim what is rightly theirs. Obviously Richler is having fun here. While his primary purpose is to parody the zealousness of Zionism he is no doubt aware that many minority groups, notably the French Canadians and the American blacks, have used arguments displaying similar reasoning to Old One's. The way in which Richler can take an old cliche and turn it to a new purpose is not only effective satirically but humorous.

In Cocksure Richler's use of cliche is more grotesque and horrifying. In the opening pages of the novel Dino Tomasso, in a state of anger, tells Star Maker "Go fuck yourself." Rather than punishing Dino, Star Maker thanks him. The reader is puzzled until towards the end of the novel he finds out that Star Maker has taken Dino's outburst literally. Star Maker, the ultimate in self-sufficiency, has had surgery to enable him to impregnate himself. While his idol, the

Chevalier d'Eon, had lived for many years as a woman and many as a man Star Maker has achieved the unthinkable. He has both male and female organs and as he loves no one but himself, he makes love to himself. Richler has taken an obscene expression from the language of the day and reinstilled into it the surprise and shock value it once had. The method is effective in making Star Maker the ultimate figure of nightmare in Richler's novels. The fact that Star Maker as representative of the great, impersonal state has power to manipulate other people's lives is frightening enough but this final action of his turns him into a monstrous superhuman.

As novels, then The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure stand together. Both Atuk and Mortimer are killed by scheming businessmen, the former by one with local interests only, the latter by one with defensive and agressive tendencies to protect his empire and to secure Mort's lymph system. In addition, Mortimer is doomed because Shalinsky mistakes fact for fiction and because his other ally, Polly Morgan is so saturated in the world of pop movies that she fantasizes a happy ending while Mort is being killed. In both novels, then, the forces of evil are triumphant and largely external. But the satiric point of The Incomparable Atuk suffers because of Atuk's greed. Cocksure is a stronger satiric novel because Mort's innocence stands in opposition to the evils of the world about him.

Thematically, the question of values has interested Richler throughout his career. Andre and Noah were on an existential search for some belief able to regulate their lives. Norman Price discovered he must live with the imperfect. Duddy and Atuk merely accepted the standards

of those around them and worked within this framework. Mortimer is more like the early protagonists in his beliefs but the milieu in which he lives is hostile in quite a different way. Andre and Noah are rebels against the traditional structures of family and religion. Mort, on the other hand, is surrounded by rebels who regard his traditionalism as distasteful. Perhaps this distinction underlines a major difference in Richler's point of view and goes to explain why Cocksure is so much more a contemporary novel than are its earlier realistic predecessors. The rebels have taken over and the people like Mort are outside the mainstream. Perhaps Richler attempts a glimpse at a future where present conditions are merely exaggerated and Cocksure can in part be categorized as a futuristic novel.

Technically, The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure draw upon Richler's past work but the satiric-comic approach they employ makes them unique. The main drawback of The Incomparable Atuk is that perhaps its scope is too large and as a consequence the end product is too much made up of interesting fragments rather than forming a cohesive whole. Richler, in trying to say too much, leaves the reader with the impression of a succession of tales rather than with one tale. But the moments of each tale are exciting and memorable and as such the book must be judged as a successful first effort into the domain of satire. Cocksure is a much more sophisticated novel both in the way the themes are developed and in its stylistic technique. In Cocksure Richler becomes a more subtle craftsman able to take his varying interests and weave them into a cohesive whole. Rather than a series of gems loosely related to each other, the reader distinguishes a well-thought out plan. The satire itself is less crude

and while there is abundant comedy in Cocksure it is less farcical.

Like The Acrobats and Son of a Smaller Hero, The Incomparable Atuk provided Richler with the opportunity to experiment and find his own voice in a new domain. Cocksure is a superior novel largely because Richler was able to identify and correct his earlier weaknesses. But both The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure are also preparatory novels for St. Urbain's Horseman. Only when Richler had mastered the comic-satiric medium could he, perhaps, blend his realistic and comic-satiric abilities to create the major work of his career, St. Urbain's Horseman.

CHAPTER SIX

ST. URBAIN'S HORSEMAN

St. Urbain's Horseman is Richler's best novel because both in technique and in blend of comic-satiric elements it is his most complex and mature achievement. Published in 1966, the novel is in many ways a recapitulation of Richler's earlier works. Richler is still interested in the themes of time and geography and in the role of values in contemporary society. In St. Urbain's Horseman, however, Richler chooses as protagonist a character quite unlike his previous heroes. Jake is not the young idealist who views the future as a land of promise and fulfillment. He is a middle-aged, successful film maker who is very aware that his life has not measured up to the expectations he had as a youth. Rather than looking forward, he looks backward and examines his past. The universality of Jake's concerns is something new in Richler's work. Generally Richler's protagonists struggle against what they deem is a hostile world, but seldom do they consider their lot in comparison to those less fortunate than they. Jake is in many ways the modern man fearful of what is to come but powerless in the face of the overwhelming injustices he sees in the world around him. He cannot be content to make his separate peace and withdraw into a private world as did Norman Price

His awareness of himself and his shortcomings and his insight into the state of the world cause him deep personal anguish. Other Richler personnages suffer nightmares, Ernst for example, but it is because of what they have done rather than what they have failed to do. St. Urbain's Horseman considers the problem of morality on the universal as well as the personal level. As John Metcalfe points out: "In its concern with purpose, suffering, and death it seemed to be a religious book."[1]

Technically, St. Urbain's Horseman is much more sophisticated than any of Richler's previous efforts. A significant difference in narrative structure is that here time for the most part moves backward and Richler consequently relies heavily on the use of flashback and interior monologue. The novel is divided into four parts and Richler skips back and forth from one period to another in a skilful and subtle fashion. In contrast to his earlier work too, St. Urbain's Horseman is a more carefully ordered novel. Richler's use and placement of key phrases gives a structured pattern to the novel as a whole. In addition, the novel combines Richler's two narrative styles--black comedy and naturalism are fused in a way in which they never were before. The actual techniques, for example the use of a central comic scene, are often techniques Richler has employed before, but their blend to achieve a realistic-satiric whole is unique. Both thematically and technically, then, St. Urbain's Horseman should be viewed as completing a line of development that began with The Acrobats.

The novel's protagonist, Jake Hersh, is a happily married man with three children. He is good at his work as a film director, but feels he has made no lasting contribution to humanity. As Jake becomes more

dissatisfied and uneasy in his present state, his life becomes more and more ruled by his fantasies about St. Urbain's Horseman, his cousin Joey Hersh, and the Horseman's supposed mission as protector of those in need. If there is an organizing principle in Jake's life, it is the Horseman. Because of this association with Joey, Jake meets Ruthy Flam and through her, Harry Stein, the malcontent pervert who is responsible for the criminal charges laid against Jake in the opening pages of the novel. The trial, which is only sketched in this beginning section, triggers Jake's memory and causes him to recall his younger days in Montreal, Toronto and London. In the second trial scene at the end of the novel we learn what actually happened. Using Jake's identification Harry lures Ingrid, the German au pair he meets in a bar, to Jake's home for the supposed purpose of reading a filmscript. Jake, returning from his father's funeral, comes upon the two of them and forces Ingrid to leave. She is stopped by a cruising police car and tells a story of sexual assault. Harry is charged with sodomy, rape and the possession of cannabis; Jake with rape, aiding and abetting sodomy, and the possession of cannabis. Jake is found guilty on one charge, a lessened charge of indecent assault, but is fined rather than imprisoned. Harry is found guilty of sodomy and rape and sentenced to seven years. These two trial scenes occupy a mere twenty-six pages of the novel but they form its central action and because of their placement make the ending of the novel an aspect of the beginning.

The themes of time, geography and values have plagued Richler throughout his career and his constant return to them seems to indicate that the conclusions he reached proved unsatisfactory. In St. Urbain's Horseman Richler grapples with these same problems but from the more

mature point of view of middle age. Jake Hersh, like Richler, was born in 1930 and at the time of the novel is thirty-seven. Richler was thirty-six when he published it. Like Andre, Noah and Norman Jake feels he is part of a peripheral generation, a generation which has nothing to show as its accomplishments. But while former protagonists still believe they can influence the future, Jake, like Richler, feels time is closing in on him and thinks to himself:

> Wrong place, wrong time. Young too late; old too soon was, as Jake had come to understand it, the plaintive story of his American generation. Conceived in the depression, but never to taste its bitterness firsthand, they had actually contrived to sail through the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the holocaust, Hiroshima, the Israeli War of Independence, McCarthyism, Korea, and, latterly, Vietnam and the drug culture, with impunity. The whirlwind elsewhere.[2]

Harry Stein, on the other hand, has experienced the horrors of war and Jake is fascinated by him partly for this reason. At ten years of age Harry was taken to Buckinghamshire during the blitz. Insolent and dishevelled, he was not among those picked by the gentry and was forced onto a family who arrived late by an irate billeting officer. When he returned home, his father took him out to see all the anti-Semitic sights. Like Jake, Richler experienced little of the war and was attracted by the stories of those who had. He says: "For my generation the war was hearing of death and sacrifice but seeing with our own eyes the departure from cold-water flats to apartments in Outremont, duplexes and split-levels in the suburbs."[3]

What little one learns of Jake's early background resembles that of Noah Adler, Duddy Kravitz and Richler himself. Jake grew up in the Jewish ghetto of St. Urbain Street and despite his attempts to escape this milieu, its influence is never eradicated. Like Andre and Noah too, Jake

is somewhat of an intellectual and a creature in search of a goal for his life. All three find their environment stifling and look beyond Canada for the fulfillment of their dreams. In 1951 Jake desired to go to New York. He had quit McGill because as he told his father, Issy Hersh, he was bored and did not like it there: "It no longer suits my Weltanschauung" (p. 89). "It's time I found out who I am" (p. 89). Richler also quit university to seek a new identity and one can imagine that he was similar to Jake who " . . . cultivated a New Statesman outlook, . . . wore a tweed jacket with leather armpatches, crammed his shelves with Penguins, and let his hair grow long" (p. 91). Jake felt that in New York he would find a spiritual home, one in which other people thought as he did. His brother-in-law Herky gives him the money for the venture but only after Jake pulls a Duddy Kravitz-like trick on him and says that he (Jake) needs to move to another city because he is a homosexual. Jake's first adventure is abortive, however, because he is mistaken for his cousin, Joey Hersh, and refused entry into the United States. That same year Jake moves to Toronto and from there to London.

As a youth Jake's views of Canada quite closely resemble those of the early Richler protagonist. To Jake Ottawa and Quebec city were ". . . bush league towns where you went to pay off a government goy for a contract or a building permit. They were the places the regulations came from, not life's joys" (p. 97). As a young man Richler also felt that Canada was an uninspiring, provincial place to live. His youthful judgment of the Canadian cultural and literary scene was probably similar to Jake's. Jake tells his troubled relatives that their city is a ". . . cultural dessert, a colonial pimple, and he was off to nourish himself at the imperial fountainhead . . . " (p. 178).

The older, more mature Jake looks at his past and sees things quite differently. He wishes that the cultural standards of London were as high as he had thought them to be. He remembers how he and Luke Scott, a writer and friend, had shared their mythical views of London during the time they lived and worked in Toronto. Both had been raised to believe in the superiority of the mother country, in much the same way as Sally MacPherson (A Choice of Enemies) and Miss Ryerson (Cocksure). But when Luke's first play was accepted Jake found that Timothy Nash, its director, did not deserve the praises he received and was merely a flashy newcomer on the glory path. Jake knew that the best touches in the play were his own, but he received no credit for the advice he had given Luke. Disappointed by London, Jake is assailed by feelings of loss, melancholy and nostalgia for the country which he no longer really knows. During the trial proceedings he cannot help feeling that if he were in Canada he would be at ease now. ' He remembers how with "soaring enthusiasm" he had left a homeland characterized by "Thousands of miles of wheat, indifference, and self-apology . . . . And no more" (pp. 4-5). And yet ". . . . he felt increasingly claimed by it, especially in the autumn, the Laurentian season . . . " (p. 5).

Jake recognizes his youthful stance for what it was, an effort to recapture in his own life what he imagined as exciting based on the writings of others. He recalls his time in Spain (1957) and the orgy which he had regarded as living. But he had found that he could not take part and had gone out on the terrace to drink. "Remember this," Jake had thought, ". . . cherish it, and he felt very ghetto-liberated, very Hemingway as he raised a bottle to his lips, drained it, and flung it into

the sea. A moment later he was sick to his stomach" (p. 11). Much of this seems at least semi-autobiographical. Richler too left Canada joyously expecting a very different world across the seas and his early work is proof of the influence the writers of a previous generation had on his writing, if not his life. The middle-aged Richler, however, has learned much about the price one pays for expatriation and he shares his new insights with the reader through the middle-aged Jake. Jake learns that the self-identity he tried to forge for himself in youth was artificial because he never considered whether the assumptions upon which it was based applied to him. In addition, he comes to a more realistic picture of what both Canada and England have to offer him. He remains in London at the end of the novel but with a new understanding of himself that does not rely on geographical location for its validity. A few years after the publication of this novel, Richler will return to his homeland, having decided that expatriation had cut him off from his natural subject matter, his own people and their lives.

In St. Urbain's Horseman Richler once again searches for an answer to the role of values in contemporary existence. In some ways his treatment of this theme recalls his earlier work but its global nature in this novel marks a change in outlook. Baumbach says that "Since 1945 the serious American novel has moved away from naturalism and the social scene to explore the underside of consciousness (the "heart of darkness"), delineating in its various ways the burden and ambivalence of personal responsibility in a world which accomodates evil."[4] He points to the large number of gifted Jewish writers who share this moral preoccupation--Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, Herbert Gold, Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth,

J. D. Salinger. Richler himself says in "The Holocaust and After" that

> There is more than the Talmud on one side, and Leslie Fiedler's prescient jokes not withstanding, gefilte fish on the other, to the Jewish heritage. There is also the holocaust: the holocaust which is at the very core of most serious Jewish writing since the war. It is what binds Malamud to Bellow, the one having made the moral gesture of The Fixer and the other continuing to write the novel of the survivor's reflections and self-justification.[5]

Richler adds that "By 1966, only twenty years after the holocaust, we had already witnessed the astonishing emergence of the Good German." He continues: "The Germans are still an abomination to me."[6]

St. Urbain's Horseman analyzes the problem of personal responsibility for the evils of society. Jake Hersh, like Asa Leventhal in Saul Bellow's The Victim, suffers real and imaginary persecution because he believes his suffering is deserved yet he cannot recognize what serious wrong he has committed to cause it. In many ways Harry Stein has an influence on Jake which parallels Allbee's on Leventhal. As Baumbach says: ". . . Allbee is not the cause but the occasion of Leventhal's victimization--the objectification of his free-floating guilt." "Their mutual repulsion, an objectified self-repulsion, evolves, or rather inverts, through their sense of likeness, into a grotesque attraction."[7] Because Jake feels guilty he too is very open to victimization. At the same time he resents Harry's threats, letters and phone calls to get back the money Ruthy loaned the Horseman, he is attracted by Harry's unconventional methods. When Harry, for example, purposely burns a hole in Jake's new wing chair, Jake admires his nerve. Perhaps because Harry's actions represent behavior Jake could never allow himself to indulge in, he feels responsibility for helping Harry to escape its consequences. Though he is repulsed by the crudeness and ruthlessness Harry is capable of , he

is strangely attracted to him. When his son, Ben, is born Jake realizes that he wants to share the event with Harry. More than this attraction-repulsion, though, is Jake's feeling that he deserves all of what Harry is doing to him. When Jake thinks about the trial, sometimes it is getting off that alarms him rather than going to jail. Instead of finding this a depressing time Jake finds it exhilarating. It is as if what he has always expected has come to pass: "After years of waiting somebody had at last come to ask him, Jacob Hersh, husband, father, son, house owner, investor, sybarite, film fantasy-spinner, for an accounting" (p. 82).

Why is Jake so debilitated by guilt that he feels relieved when there is a possibility he will be punished for wrong doing? In many ways his very contentment causes his uneasiness. As a sensitive person concerned with the injustices of the world, he has always ". . . expected the coming of the vandals. Above all, the injustice-collectors. The concentration camp survivors. The emaciated millions of India. The starvelings of Africa" (p. 81). Richler, like Bellow, evokes the reality of intellectual anguish. Jake's anguish takes the form of a nightmare which he labels his Jewish nightmare. It strikes

> . . . only on those rare evenings when he brimmed over with well-being, a sense of everything having knit mysteriously together for once, his wife, the children they had made, so that he could even contemplate his shortcomings, his failures, his own rot and dying and all things considered, it was tolerable. (p. 65)

Then in his nightmare the extermination officers enter his house: "Ben is seized by the legs like a chicken and heaved out the window, his brains spilling to the terrace" (p. 67). The other children suffer as terrible a fate.

In his fears and his insecurity Jake is a personification of

modern man. He feels his guilt will not be assuaged until he finds some system of belief which can accomodate the all important questions of evil, death and suffering. But he seems unable to find a source of belief. The narrator tells us: "Jake craved answers, a revelation, something out there, a certitude, like the Bomb before it was discovered" (p. 282). When Nancy, early in the novel, asks him what is really important to him he replies that Dr. Samuel Johnson is. Would he, Jake, have been asked to sit at Johnson's table? Luke, much later, asks him a similar question and Jake says he believes in "Praising those who were truly great, those who came nearest the sun. I believe in theirs and ours. Dr. Johnson, yes, Dr. Leary, no" (p. 283). These two references to Dr. Johnson serve to underline the kind of man Jake is. He longs for the kind of cultural milieu of the eighteenth century where ideas and their proponents are given the status worthy of them. He perhaps views Samuel Johnson's England in the stereotyped fashion in which many students of literature still do, as a society in which all was ordered, structured and regulated. Jake is very much an old fashioned man.

For Jake, though, as for Andre, Noah and Norman, no certitude is possible within the traditional structures of religion or nationality. When his father, Issy, dies and he returns to Montreal, it strikes him with vivid clarity how far removed his life has become from his family's. Day and night he sits with the Hershes and feels so cradled by their presence that he is unable to truly mourn his father. He also feels ". . . like Rip Van Winkle returned to an innocent and ordered world he had mistakenly believed long extinct. Where God watched over all, doing His sums. Where everything fit" (p. 371). While his relatives are

ignorant in many ways, there is a happiness in their self-contained world which Jake envies. Jake cannot return to this cocooned environment but neither does he fit into the trendy London environment.

The London world of St. Urbain's Horseman is quite similar to that of Cocksure. Culture and the media are satirically treated and there is an exposure and indictment of the modern, materialistic, self-serving society we have evolved. Jake's Jewish background and the sense of continuity it represents is set against the fast-moving, amoral, quickly changing lifestyle of London. Jake's friends in the film industry think of him as square. In contrast to their failed middle-aged marriages Jake is, after ten years, still very happy with Nancy. Physically he still desires her and mentally he is still compatible with her. He is almost ashamed to admit that he even enjoys talking to her and has never been unfaithful. But sometimes he wishes that he were like the others who seek solace with vacuous girls, punishing themselves as it were. Everything Jake sees and reads in the mass media makes him aware that he is, like Mortimer Griffin, different, almost an anachronism. Books, films and plays ". . . celebrated delicious angst. Empty sex in the afternoon with strangers. Existential couplings in parked cars. 'Now' people lonely even at the most crowded orgies. Only the bores and the baddies, the dopes, the characters given all the bad lines, continued to stay together" (p. 278). Jake is, like Mortimer Griffin, decent, tolerant, honorable and liberal in a world in which these are no longer regarded as good qualities.

The more Jake examines his life and beliefs and finds them lacking, the more he turns to his internal world of reverie about St. Urbain's

Horseman. He recalls the first time he met his cousin Joey at Uncle Abe's cottage. It was 1937. Hanna had come with her children Joey, Jenny and Arty and the rest of the family had immediately quietened. Joey, in his detention home work shirt and faded dungarees, smiles scornfully. Uncle Abe sets them up in one of his cold water flats on St. Urbain Street and because Joey is supposedly sickly, he does not work. Jake, a boy of seven years, learns that they are Baruch's bunch, his second cousins, and later that Baruch is the black sheep of the family. After four months Joey leaves home and is not heard from again until 1938 when Hanna gets a postcard from Toulouse, France. In 1939, she receives a postcard from Mexico.

Joey returns in the spring of 1943. To the boys Arty, Jake, Duddy, and Gas, Joey's fire-engine red MG ". . . could have been a magnificent stallion and Cousin Joey a knight returned from a foreign crusade" (p. 119). This is no doubt the seed of the older Jake's Horseman reverie. Joey seems no longer of St. Urbain Street. He has style and dresses as coldly and correctly as a Westmount lawyer. He spends prodigious amounts of money. Beautiful, high-quality girls sip martinis and watch him exercise in the gym he builds in the yard. Intimations are given even at this point, though, that Joey is involved in illegal activities. An RCMP officer inquires after him as does a tall and elegantly dressed man who later offers Joey a brown envelope which he refuses. To the boys, though, Joey has all the accomplishments they dream of: he rides horses and has a commercial pilot's licence. When he brings the youngsters on the street to a professional baseball game, he is recognized by one of the players and reveals that yes, he played pro for a while. When trouble erupts

between the Jewish community and the French Canadian, Joey brings the boys to the park and protects them. And when a St. Urbain Street boy is beaten up at the Palais d'Or dance hall, Joey incites the men to revenge. A French Canadian boy ends up unconscious in an alley and the situation is so serious that Uncle Abe and a delegation promise to find the wrong-doers. The next morning Joey is gone and his car is found burned along the road to New York.

This early history of the Horseman, though sketchy, is important, for it is on these few impressions from Joey's past that Jake builds up his cousin to myth-like proportions. Though he never sees Joey after 1943, he pieces together a story from the fragments of information he is able to collect. Postcards to Hanna from around the world indicate that Joey is involved in many current events. Jake tracks Joey to Israel and meets his wife Chava and ten year old son Zev and agrees to support them. He receives letters and phone calls asking him to live up to his cousin's obligations. He meets Ruthy Flam, the woman from whom Joey had borrowed seven hundred pounds and whom he had promised to marry and, in the end, pays off this debt. All the reports which Jake receives of his cousin's character are uncomplimentary. Wherever Joey went he was disliked and stirred up trouble. On the kibbutz Yosef ben Baruch, as he was called, drank heavily and was involved with hashish smuggling. As the western singer, Jesse Hope, he ran card games on American bases in Germany and always emerged as the winner. He supposedly became embroiled in the internal political troubles of Spain, Mexico and Israel.

It is perhaps strange that given this information, Jake should choose such a person as hero. The fact that much of it is sketchy and

none of it firsthand, however, allows Joey to remain a shadowy, romantic figure in his cousin's eyes. The life which Joey seems to have led, his many travels and engagements, makes him an almost legendary-type person. To Jake who sits by his fireside choking with self-disgust, the Horseman seems an exciting man of action, someone who, unlike himself, is doing something about the state of the world. Jake spends much time contemplating the Horseman's journal which he gets from Chava. The inscription in the journal reads: "The Horseman: Born Joseph Hersh in a miner's shanty in Yellowknife, Yukon Territories. Winter. Exact date unknown" (p. 30). The journal describes the activities of Josef Mengele, philosophy student and chief doctor at Auschwitz. Mengele becomes in the course of the journal the symbolic scapegoat for all the atrocities perpetrated upon the Jews by the Germans. Each time the reader comes across the oft-repeated phrase "Mengele cannot have been there all the time" and its reply "In my opinion, always. Night and day" (p. 163), the significance of it penetrates deeper. Mengele was responsible for being the first to rid the women's quarters of lice. He simply gassed the entire block and had it disinfected. Richler's descriptions of the sufferings of his people are as vivid as they are ugly. One picture has women drinking water next to the latrines, the same stream serving to wash away the excrement. In another the human desire for survival is seen in the pile of bodies reaching to the ceiling of the gas chamber. The stronger men grasping for the air of the higher regions clawed the weaker women and children who were always found near the ground.

Using the journal as a prop, Jake begins to fantasize about his cousin's activities. In a recurring dream from which he always wakes up

perspiring, St. Urbain's Horseman is roaming the countryside in search of Mengele. He takes the Doktor by surprise at his walled villa "with the barred windows off an unmarked road in the jungle, between Puerto San Vincente and the border fortress of Carlos Antonio Lopez, on the Parana River" (p. 2). Richler's reiteration of key phrases such as this one is of utmost importance in explaining both the effect of alarm and recognition which the reader feels. As Jake becomes more and more enmeshed in the aura of the Horseman so too does the reader. In his attic aerie Jake looks at the clock which has been adjusted to show the time in Paraguay--the Doktor's time. Maybe, Jake thinks, the Horseman is out riding somewhere now. The increasing control the Horseman has over Jake's mind is hinted at in the closing lines of Parts two and three of the novel. Before going to London, Jake had gone to say goodbye to his family and had accused them of abandoning Baruch, a lonely old man, to death in a squalid rooming house and of treating Joey shabbily. If he ever came across Joey, he said that he would help him as much as he could. The last sentence of Part two reads: "Without realizing it, Jake had become Cousin Joey's advocate" (p. 159).

By the end of Part three Jake's relationship to the Horseman has altered: "Once Cousin Joey's advocate, he was now his acolyte" (p. 290). Jake turns down a filmscript in Israel because it is against everything Joey stood for. He accepts or rejects scripts based on what he thinks the Horseman's standards would be. And in his productions it is the Horseman who is somewhere watching and judging whom he tries to please. Gradually, he spends more and more time sifting through the Horseman's papers. He realizes that for years now he has been insinuating tales

". . . of St. Urbain's Horseman between his bedtime stories about Rabbi Akiba, the Thirty-six Just men, Maimonides, the Golem, Trumpeldor, and Leon Trotsky" (p. 290). Joey takes on an almost religious role in Jake's life. Jake is oddly convinced that somehow Joey has answers for him. He tells the soldiers at the American services base in Germany where Joey had been a singer that his cousin is a real soldier, not a toy one like them. Joey, he says, is the Golem and goes on to explain: "The Golem . . . is the body without a soul. He was made out of clay by Rabbi Judah Ben Bezalel, in the sixteenth century to defend the Jews of Prague from a pogrom and, to my mind, still wanders the world, turning up wherever a defender is most needed" (pp. 252-53). Jake has found in the Horseman the source of belief which had previously eluded him.

Given this religious role which the Horseman plays in Jake's life, the news of Joey's death in an air crash while supposedly smuggling cigarettes comes as a shock. Jake takes out the journal and writes "died. July 20, 1967." He weeps the tears which had not come at his father's death:

> He wept for his father, his penis curling out of his underwear like a spent worm. His penis, my maker. Rotting in an oversize casket. He wept for his mother, who deserved a more loving son. He wept for Harry, fulminating in his cell and assuredly planning vengeance. He wept for Nancy, whose stomach was seamed from childbearing. Who would no longer make love with the lights on. He wept because the Horseman, his conscience, his mentor, was no more. (p. 433)

All the threads of Jake's life merge in the figure of Joey and he mourns the disappointments and evils he and others close to him have experienced. Because of Joey, he develops an empathy for other human beings and the pent up emotions of his life are released.

Jake goes so far as to consider taking on the role of St. Urbain's

Horseman. A skeptical voice from inside him questions whether there ever was an avenging St. Urbain's Horseman in the first place. Perhaps Jake's thought on this matter is the most lucid explanation of Joey's role in the novel and in Jake's life: "What if the Horseman was a distorting mirror and we each took the self-justifying image we required of him?" (p. 433). Jake's picture of the Horseman answered his needs. Jake can say that after many years, he now knows who he is: "I'm Aaron maybe" (p. 434). In an interview Richler said that very few people picked up this strong religious note with which the novel ended. No one seemed to realize that the Horseman is a Golden Calf which Jake makes for himself.[8] Because Aaron tried to make a visible representation of deity he was refused entrance to the Promised Land. But his devotion was recognized when the office of high priest was bestowed upon his children and their progeny. The significance of this can only be surmised. Perhaps Richler is saying that modern man is pushed into creating false gods, that each of us in his own way creates an equivalent figure of reverence, a figure who lives in actuality what we only live in our imagination. In this sense there is some truth to Cuddon's statement that the Horseman ". . . seems to be Hersh's alter ego, his better half. He is committed and not corrupted."[9] And perhaps, in Richler's view, our children will be priests of a true god and allowed entrance into a promised land, whether it be seen in human or religious terms.

The novel's ending is ambivalent. Jake accepts the offer to direct one of Luke's scripts and both Luke and Nancy are delighted, for they believe this signals a return to the land of the living. But Jake in his mind is still riding with the Horseman. He believes, like Hanna,

that it is possible that Joey staged his death because he was in some kind of trouble. That night, in Jake's nightmare, he is the Horseman on the white stallion seeking Mengele. He wakes and crosses out the "died" reference in the journal to "presumed dead." Then ". . . he returned to bed, and fell into a deep sleep, holding Nancy to him" (p. 436). David Sheps believes that Jake decides Joey is not really dead because he never wanted to become Joey, just to live vicariously through him: "His [Jake's eyes] have been riveted on the glamor of the avenger, the redeemer of the insulted and injured. But the suffering of the holocaust and other modern catastrophes is real and unglamorous."[10] George Woodcock, on the other hand, thinks that Jake, in the end, is released from perils and obsessions and that for once a Richler novel ends happily.[11] Neither view is, in my opinion, completely correct. There is an element of vicariousness in Jake's dealings with the Horseman but the fact that Jake becomes the avenger in his nightmare leads me to believe that perhaps he will now be able to act positively, to be in control of his own life and to accomplish some of the goals he had set for himself. He will not be able to entirely give up his reliance on the Horseman, as evidenced by the "presumed dead" reference. But his fantasy world will no longer overpower the real situations in which he finds himself. Holding onto his much loved wife, he will be able to sleep peacefully. Yet, as Audrey Thomas points out "Jake will always pay--his terrible self-awareness will see to that."[12] The Horseman will continue to live and Jake will have recurring moments of obsession and fear. The effort to give up a false god is perhaps futile when no replacement has been found. And the fact that Jake has achieved a sense of self-identity and an understanding of himself

and others perhaps points to the value and necessity of some god, even a false one. Jake is a more contented individual but the ending of the novel is not traditionally happy.

While the Horseman's role as symbol, then, is central to any thematic consideration of the novel, its structural role is just as important. Jake's two lives, his present in England and his past in Montreal and Toronto, are united by his abiding obsession with his cousin, Joey Hersh. This is particularly important because St. Urbain's Horseman does not use the linear plot to which the reader has become so accustomed in Richler's fiction. The novel is divided into four parts but flashbacks are ordered psychologically rather than chronologically. Sometimes objects trigger Jake's memory. When he picks up a copy of Haig's Spanish Self-Taught in chapter two of Part I he remembers with an ache his villa on Ibiza and the experiences he had in Spain (1957). Sometimes an event from Jake's present recalls memories of past time. Standing in the dock at the Old Bailey in chapter I of Part II Jake remembers that his "ride to ruin" with St. Urbain's Horseman was no more than an immigration officer's clerical error (1951). Being mistaken for Joey in the past causes Jake to try to recall what he actually knows about his cousin. Chapters three and four of Part two thus go back to 1937 and 1943. Jake goes on to think about what happened to Hanna and her children and by chapter seven of Part two has returned to 1951 when he got a job in Toronto through Jenny's husband, Doug Fraser. In chapter eight Jake leaves for London (1955). Parts three and four of the novel use a similar pattern to Part two but the time references are scantier and the sequence of events consequently harder to follow. Part three for example opens with

a two page chapter where Jake dreams of the Horseman and Mengele. Surfacing from the dream returns Jake to the present (1967) and the fact that his lawyer, Ormsby-Fletcher, will soon be arriving. In his mind Jake traces his relationship with Ormsby-Fletcher and recalls a particularly humiliating experience he had at the Fletcher's dinner party. This causes him to wonder what he is doing in England: "What have I got to say to these nutty, depraved people?" (p. 175). By chapter three Jake is considering his early days with Luke in London and how the city did not measure up to their expectations. The organization here is chain-like. One thought follows another as layers of association are explored. Only in part four does the reader arrive at a complete picture. Tallman perhaps exaggerates when he speaks of the "magnitude of his [Richler's] attempt to create a symphonic novel"[13] but the comparison is not inexact. As in a symphony the fourth movement here recapitulates and resolves the many themes woven into the first three. The superstructure is as elaborate as that of a symphony but it would be difficult to correlate the four musical movements to the four parts of the novel.

If Richler's use of symbol and careful structuring indicate a new technical maturity, so too does his blending of realism and comedy-satire. These two styles of writing have interested Richler throughout his career but in only one other novel, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, did he make any attempt to reconcile them and that only partially. By the time of St. Urbain's Horseman, though, Richler's aesthetic vision has progressed to the point where he is able to see an important relationship between realism and comedy-satire. In fact, he now understands, it is very difficult to separate realism from fantasy in contemporary

existence. In an interview with John Metcalfe Richler says: "Yes, I do find the real surreal."[14] Fantasy can be rendered in the style of the realistic novel precisely because it can no longer be isolated purely as fantasy. Fantasy is very real for the characters of St. Urbain's Horseman. Jake's reveries about the Horseman probably form the most important part of his reality. As Sheps says: "When the mental and emotional lives of individuals have thoroughly assimilated the contents of fantasy it becomes artistically appropriate to represent such characters within the format of the conventionally realistic novel."[15] He continues: "The very adoption of the conventional form of the novel becomes itself an effective satirical instrument in revealing to what extent to unreal or inauthentic has become the norm in contemporary life."[16]

On the level of content, St. Urbain's Horseman is closer to the conventional "bildungsroman," Richler's early mode, than it is to the implausible satire of the two novels previous to it. Speaking to Donald Cameron, Richler indicates that identifying with the hero is a precondition of liking either The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz or St. Urbain's Horseman. He also stresses the novelist's latterly neglected role as "loser's advocate":

> But something almost nobody has grasped is that running through all my novels, I think, there has been a persistent attempt to make a case for the ostensibly unsympathetic man. The hero of one novel is a Hitler Youth kid, Duddy Kravitz is superficially coarse and venal, and Mortimer Griffin is another case; and in my most recent novel, Harry Stein.[17]

For the reader to identify with characters, particularly unsympathetic ones, the novelist must delineate them in more depth than is usually done in the satiric mode. Harry Stein, for example, comes to life because of the attention Richler pays to detail.

Harry reminds the reader of the realistic figure of evil, a Karp or a Kraus, whom Richler is so fond of portraying. He is described in the ugliest of terms as are they such that one wonders if Richler does not equate physical appearance and personality characteristics:

> Sneering, ferret-like Hershel. A Londoner born, a Londoner bred. National Health had been enacted in time for the steel-rimmed glasses, but too late to mend the crooked tartar-encrusted teeth. Harry's brown hair was thick and dry, his skin splotchy and almost as gray as his mac, and there were little tufts of hair spurting out of his ears. (p. 57)

His background, like that of the previous villain-types, helps to explain his present condition. He is intelligent as evidenced by his membership in the Mensa organization. This only serves to exacerbate his discontent and make him very fully aware of the opportunities which will never be his. His work as accountant going over the fanciful expense accounts of film stars causes deep feelings of jealousy and resentment. In his tiny cell of an office ". . . he consumed his days, increasingly busy and acrimonious days, vengeful days, sipping lukewarm milky tea with his chocolate digestives" (p. 205). As he tells Jake: "I had nothing, mate. Sweet fucking nothing and grand expectations of more sweet fucking nothing. And the years were slipping by. Only I knew it, see, not like the others. I knew what I was missing and that's always been my trouble" (p. 341). This pitiful but human side to Harry is one which Richler always gives in his realistic novels to otherwise despicable characters. A small touch such as Harry's ordering of champagne at Ben's birth is all that is needed. But Harry's destructive, vengeful side is seen through his actions as well. During a walk to the local pub he passes a Rolls Royce and taking the knife in his pocket runs it the length of the car on both sides. One of Richler's greatest gifts has been in

character portrayal and his treatment of Harry is reminiscent of the painstaking care he has always taken.

Complementing the straightish reportage and emphasis on character are Richler's comic-satirical devices. As Sheps says: "Such an admixture of tonalities has become perhaps the most distinctive feature of his [Richler's] prose style and one of his most characteristic rhetorical and structual devices."[18] Ever since Son of a Smaller Hero Richler has used a central comic scene which incorporates the broad concerns and recurrent motifs of the novel. In St. Urbain's Horseman the competitive, cut-throat nature of the industry in which Jake works is clearly seen in the delightful comic vignette of a softball game on Hampstead Heath. During the summer, the show business expatriates come together for a Sunday morning game of softball. Each thinks of the possible repercussions of any move he makes. Manny, for example, is anxious. As it is the beginning of the game he feels that maybe it would be a good idea to strike out and thus flatter the pitcher, Lou Caplan. It is Lou's first game since his Mexican divorce and Manny has heard that Lou is arranging a three picture deal with Twentieth. Moreover, he does not want to be stuck on first with that "stomach-turning queen" Jason Storm or on third with Bob Cohen, "strictly second features-ville." When Moey Hanover sees his wife flirting with Fielding he recalls the Old Testament story where David has Uriah set in the forefront of battle so he may die and convinces Lou to send Fielding to Rome. Not only does he plunder the Old Testament for his Rawhide and Bonanza plots, but he figures his hard-bought Jewish education is useful in his private life. Such examples, while humorous, underline the

quality of life of the motion picture world of which Jake is a part. Even here he feels left out for he has no former wife to sit on the sidelines and pass snide comments about his manhood. Audrey Thomas points out how this scene also has a darker echo in the description of the Jewish prisoners trying to flee the gas of the death chamber. The scramble to reach the top takes on a much blacker tone when life itself rather than just success is the goal: "Thus against the wildly comic main plot of the story is set the dark theme of those who died to feed a nation's paranoia and lust for power."[19]

St. Urbain's Horseman also abounds in burlesque passages. Fragments of film scripts, newspaper items, songs, letters, and an I.Q. test break the naturalistic flow of the novel. Richler has used this technique before, most notably in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz but this is the first time he has used it extensively. Richler comments on its purpose when he tells John Metcalfe: "I think any day's newspaper yields a number of outlandish stories and I do enjoy them. And in St. Urbain's Horseman, I did put them to some use. I had been collecting them for some years--not as really plots or possible ideas for stories but simply as concrete examples of the absurd."[20] An advertisement for a television program for example mocks the state of religion in contemporary society:

> 2:30 p.m. (12) Medicine and the Bible. Modern endocrinology used to interpret the scriptural events. Could Esau have been suffering from low blood sugar and that's why he sold his birthright? Could Goliath have had a pituitary gland imbalance? Dr. Robert Greenblatt, author of Search the Scriptures, offers some of his theories. (p. 133)

A newspaper article on marriage helps explain why Jake feels his relationship with Nancy is strange and, perhaps, unknown to them inadequate:

"HAPPY MARRIAGES" MAY BE JUST DULL
PSYCHOLOGIST SAYS

> Washington--A lot of "happy" marriages may be merely dull, says a psychologist at the National Institute of Mental Health. Dr. Robert Ryder, who directed an institute research project involving 200 young, middle-class couples, warned about the "unexamined idea that compatibility is a good thing." (p. 280)

The darker theme of the novel is exemplified by a poster Jake reads in Germany:

> DASCHAU-
> BUS LEAVES EVERY SATURDAY AT 1400
> VISIT THE CASTLE
> AND THE CREMATORIUM. (p. 246)

The atrocities of even the recent past have become tourist attractions and the large, capitalized presentation emphasizes the absurd horror of the situation better than a mere statement would. The immediacy of the impact large print and actual rendering of examples of popular culture has accounts for the effectiveness of Richler's technique. These "concrete examples of the absurd" reinforce some of the novel's main themes and as Tallman explains serve a double duty: ". . . musically, they occur as a kind of running scherzo, sounds of life's whirly birds crooning through crazy days. Thematically they explore and present the public level of Jake Hersh's life, just what kind of wacky modern wonderland it is to which he (and all the rest of us) are more or less Mad Hatters."[21]

When one looks at Richler's body of work, St. Urbain's Horseman emerges as the most complex and comprehensive piece of fiction he has undertaken. Thematically, it attempts a mature resolution to the problems of expatriation and the lack of values in contemporary existence. The solutions, if they can be called such, are not facile. Jake achieves a self-knowledge, understanding and identity which he did not previously

have but it seems he will continue to muse on the basic questions of life. Expatriation has not resulted in the automatic fulfillment Jake, Andre, Noah and Norman expected. Richler's own life made this abundantly clear to him. But neither can Jake withdraw from life's struggle to an individualistic life style as Norman Price did. One pays a price for social and personal self-awareness but Richler is too much of a humanist to consider isolation preferable to community. Jake may need to believe in a false god (the Horseman) in order to perform in the outside world but his life of fantasy will no longer overshadow the reality of his day to day existence. Given the modern milieu, Richler seems to say, we may all need some equivalent to the Horseman to sustain us. He does not deny the possibility of some absolute god on which people can base their lives but it will be another generation's task to rediscover that god.

Technically too, St. Urbain's Horseman should be seen as completing a line of development that began with The Acrobats. Throughout his career Richler has used both the realistic and the comic-satiric modes. In St. Urbain's Horseman he is able for the first time to reconcile them into a unified whole. He presents fantasy in the style of the realistic novel because in the world of St. Urbain's Horseman fantasy is virtually real. At the same time the real often appears to be fantasy because of the absurdities of contemporary existence. Each manner supports and complements the other and Richler is able to utilize all his gifts--a crackling sense of humour, a feel for the grotesque, an eye for physical detail, and an awareness of the importance of minute action in portraying character.

It would seem, then, that St. Urbain's Horseman incorporates much of what is best in Richler's career. As Woodcock says:

> It is a long and complexly structured novel, dense with memory, the kind of slowly and accurately crafted work that seems appropriate to end a period in a writer's life and also to recapitulate it. For among other things, the Horseman is a recapitulation, rather like the last scene in an opera where all the characters reappear to take their place in the final dance.[22]

Richler agrees: "I don't feel I have anything more to say about that now. I might feel differently, ten years from now."[23] Meanwhile St. Urbain's Horseman is his masterpiece.

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to demonstrate both the cohesiveness of Richler's work as well as the development in stylistic technique and treatment of themes which makes him today one of Canada's major novelists. Thematically, Richler's interests have remained constant. Time and geography have concerned him throughout his career. Most of his novels are set from about the late 1930's to the 1950's. This corresponds to approximately his own first thirty years of life. Richler has always felt that his own generation has accomplished little. Too young for the activist thirties, they were advancing into middle age in the activist sixties. Many of Richler's protagonists (Andre Bennet, Noah Adler, Norman Price, Jake Hersh) feel the same way. This sense of powerlessness is accentuated for the Jewish protagonists Noah Adler, Duddy Kravitz and Jake Hersh because of the generational divergences within their families. Richler takes us through the generations--the orthodox grandfather, the father who is uncomfortable in his role as dominated son, and the grandson who seeks liberation.

Richler's use of geography in his novels also reflects his own life. All of his novels are set either in Montreal or in London. The confining qualities of the Jewish ghetto area surrounding Saint Lawrence Boulevard led Richler as a young man to Europe. Most of his writing career has been spent in London. It is not surprising, then, that in five

of his seven novels the protagonists become expatriates and seek in Europe what they could not find at home. Andre Bennett, Norman Price, Mortimer Griffin, and Jake Hersh are, like Richler, involved in a career in the arts and at first, anyway, believe in the cultural superiority of the motherland. Noah Adler sets sail for Europe at the end of Son of a Smaller Hero and he too thinks of Europe as the land of opportunity. Even Duddy Kravitz rejects the ghetto influence which formed him and tries to enter the world of the gentile population of Montreal.

But Richler is very aware of the problems facing the expatriate. The new world his characters embrace proves disappointing and underlines to them that their problems are caused as much by their own inner confusion as by a hostile environment. All of Richler's characters seek a value system by which to regulate their lives. They desire the certainty of belief past generations seem to have had, but they think the traditional structures of religion, home, and family have little validity in the modern context. As Harper says: "The encounter with nada is a commonplace of contemporary fiction. Man, his society, and his universe have no fixed nature, but are seen instead in terms of possibilities which shift constantly as man makes his existential choices."[1]

The choices Richler's characters make and the solutions they arrive at underline the fact that Richler's career ". . . as a novelist has undergone some interesting alterations in terms of his moral attitudes towards his favorite preoccupations."[2] In The Acrobats, Andre ends by affirming his belief in life and love but dies immediately afterwards. Chaim, the philosopher of the novel, tells Toni in the closing pages that there is hope, but the hope is for future generations. In Son of a Smaller

Hero Noah Adler chooses to direct his own destiny. He comes to an understanding of himself that includes the acceptance of his past. Still, we leave him before he has tested his conclusions in the world of experience. Norman Price, like Andre and Noah, begins as an idealistic rebel. Unlike them, he espouses a cause, Marxism, and for a time it meets his needs. But A Choice of Enemies is a novel about the end of ideologies and Richler's primary focus is on how Norman adjusts to his world once he realizes the vagaries of power. When Norman chooses to marry Vivian, he knows that his choice is an imperfect one and he accepts the limitations it will impose on him. He believes that the time calls for individual ethics, for a return to the private life in the face of a wrecked and uncertain world. I do not think Richler sees this as escapist on his or on Norman's part. It is merely the best choice available in the situation.

In The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz Richler chooses as his protagonist a character quite unlike his previous heroes. More than anything else, Duddy wants to belong to the society he sees about him. By creating a character who accepts the materialistic values of contemporary life, Richler is able to demonstrate how these values can lead to ruin. In the end Duddy realizes his goal of acquiring Lac Saint Pierre, but he is a moral and human loser. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz can be seen both as a picture of what our society is and a warning of what it might yet be. In contrast, The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure exaggerate the amoral qualities of the modern lifestyle. Atuk, like Duddy, accepts the standards of those around him and he too is ruined, but in a much more literal sense. Mortimer Griffin is more like the early heroes in his idealism. Like Andre, Noah, and Norman he is a rebel, but not because

he perceives the traditional structures of his society as confining. In the pop London world in which he must function, it is his traditionalism which is viewed as obsolete. In Cocksure Richler studies a future where because of the total disintegration of any system of morality, society is in a chaotic state.

In St. Urbain's Horseman Richler once again grapples with the problem of values. For the first time he examines the reactions of a middle-aged protagonist. Jake Hersh, unlike Richler's earlier heroes, seems to be a successful man. But he is dissatisfied and feels he has not realized the goals of his youth. Jake is in many ways the modern man who is overwhelmed by feelings of powerlessness. His awareness of himself and his shortcomings and his insight into the state of the world cause him much anguish. In St. Urbain's Horseman Richler considers the problem of morality on the universal as well as the personal level. How much is any individual responsible for and how much can he do about the evils in the world? Richler's solutions, if they can be called such, are tentative. Jake achieves an understanding of himself which will allow him to act positively in the outside world. He accepts Luke's job offer and he turns to his much loved wife, Nancy. He may still need to believe in a false god (the Horseman) but Richler seems to be saying we may all need some equivalent of the Horseman to sustain us. Man needs a god even if this god is not absolute.

One might say of Richler what Harper says of Bellow: "He offers neither easy optimism nor unearned bitterness; and his honest, inspired and relentless examination of the human condition has given his work an interest which is both timely and timeless."[3] Like Bellow too, Richler

seems to believe that ". . . the serious, significant novelist is always one whose aim is to express a belief in the existence of human beings as such."[4] Most of Richler's characters begin by viewing the world as meaningless but conclude with a gesture of affirmation about the value of human relationships. Perhaps as Galloway says: "The love stance edifies because it reaffirms a belief in human beings as such, and it is this belief which promises to generate values to replace those which are lost as the traditional sacred society disappears."[5]

Stylistically, Richler's work has undergone many changes as well. The most dramatic of these changes has been the shift from a dominant mode of realism to a dominant mode of comedy-satire to a blending of the two. The Acrobats, Son of a Smaller Hero and A Choice of Enemies followed the pattern of the traditional nineteenth century realistic novel. Richler strove to achieve verisimilitude in character and action. The progression of his protagonists towards their goals assumed a society in which mobility and perfection were possible if not always realizable goals. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz was a transitional novel. Though its underpinnings remained true to life, Richler infused it with much comedy. In The Incomparable Atuk and Cocksure Richler turned to comedy-satire and gave up any attempt to make either his characters or situations believable. St. Urbain's Horseman, Richler's masterpiece, draws upon the best qualities of both the realistic and comic-satiric manners. Richler is able to use his undeniable gifts in the areas of characterization and dialogue. His characters are complex and humanly ambiguous and their dialogue is notable both for its range and authenticity. At the same time, though, St. Urbain's Horseman satirically attacks the amoral qualities of contemporary existence.

As in earlier novels, Richler uses burlesque passages and a central comic scene. St. Urbain's Horseman, then, should be seen as a recapitulation and reconciliation of the themes and techniques Richler has used throughout his career. A comparison of The Acrobats and St. Urbain's Horseman reveals the extent of Richler's development as an artist. As a young man his work was overly subjective and technically derivative. As a mature novelist, he has been able to overcome these problems to produce works which are thematically and technically significant.

Because St. Urbain's Horseman seems like the culmination of a line of development that began with The Acrobats, one wonders where Richler will go from here. During his period of expatriation in Britain, he produced his best work, possibly because this allowed him to distance himself from the Canadian environment about which he writes. But as he himself recognizes, he paid a price for expatriation. Feeling that he had lost touch with the realities of Canadian existence, he returned home. He tells John Metcalfe: ". . . I've come back here in search of some kind of renewal. To once more experience a larger community of people who are not writers. And not to live in such a sheltered society as I have."[6] Since his return home in 1974, Richler has published many magazine articles. At the moment, he is working on a new novel, Gursky Was Here, which he hopes to see published in 1978. Only an excerpt entitled "Manny Moves to Westmount"[7] has appeared thus far. It would seem that Richler will continue the interest in middle age which he displayed in St. Urbain's Horseman. But his setting and characters will be in Montreal. Like The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz this novel promises to be a piece of comic fiction. In fact, based on the excerpt, Richler's new novel appears to be a continuation of

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. Richler takes a look at what happened to Duddy and his friends once they grew older. No longer children of the ghetto, many have moved to Westmount, the traditional enclave of the well-to-do WASPS. It will be interesting to see how the middle-aged Richler treats the success of members of his own generation.

NOTES

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